Fox Entertainment and IBM to Enable Next Generation Digital Broadcasting

April 19 2005

First-of-a-Kind Technology Enables Easy, Secure Access to Digital Content

Fox Entertainment Group and IBM today announced a collaboration on a first-of-a-kind technology intended to dramatically simplify home entertainment networks and provide consumers with more flexibility in the ways they can view content.

The broadcast flag, a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) mandate, will be embedded in digital broadcasts beginning this July to help prevent unauthorized redistribution of content over the Internet. Until now, the only way of reducing the unauthorized distribution of flagged content was to measure the time it takes the data to travel to another device in the network, dictating that the devices be close together, potentially impacting consumer flexibility in viewing of content.

Building on IBM expertise in broadcast encryption and content protection, Fox is working with IBM Research to co-develop metro coding technology, a new and breakthrough method that enables content protection based on Defined Market Areas (DMAs), not on physical location of devices. This innovative technology is intended to allow consumers to view flagged digital content easily and securely on home network devices regardless of their physical proximity -- as long as all devices are associated with the same DMA. IBM's first-of-a-kind program brings IBM research scientists and industry leaders together to

apply innovative technologies to solve real-world challenges.

"The fact that Fox and IBM are collaborating on this new technology is as important a development as the innovation it represents," said Andrew G. Setos, President of Engineering for the Fox Group. "Making the home network simpler yet simultaneously more robust will not only benefit consumers, but every industry involved in the creation and distribution of broadcast content as well."

Typically, broadcast content adheres to a television station's designated geographic market area which enables local broadcasters to air and/or customize programs, like sporting events and commercials, for specific viewing audiences. The new metro coding approach enables viewers to receive digital programming and watch it on any device within the home network as defined by its DMA, eliminating the need for parameters-based definitions of the network. And the technology will work in conjunction with other FCC-certified storage and link content protection technologies and with IBM xCP broadcast encryption technology.

"Protecting content in a way that also provides flexible use for consumers is an industry imperative," said Steve Canepa, vice president, IBM Media & Entertainment Industry. "Usability is a critical success factor for the widespread adoption of digital content distribution and protection techniques; IBM and Fox are developing an innovative business solution that benefits viewers and broadcasters alike."

Metro coding uses information embedded in the digital broadcast stream to identify the DMA and tags the content indicating its original DMA when it is redistributed within a home network. Because metro coding doesn't attempt to limit the reach of the underlying transmission protocol, it is a flexible solution that will scale to work with future technical advances in home networks. The companies expect to complete the development by 1Q 2006.