

Interactive Television via Internet Begins in Belgium

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Following several months of successful testing in 1,000 Belgian households, the network operator Belgacom is pointing the way to the future of television — with interactive, digital TV via Internet protocol (IP). For reception, viewers need only a DSL connection and a conventional television, which are linked by means of a set-top box that converts digital data into flawless TV signals.

Siemens is offering a complete solution for Internet television, providing the network operator with everything from the server technology and user software to data encryption, devices for the reception of satellite data and the set-top box for the consumer — all from a single source. For viewers, operating the menu and using the set-top boxes is very simple and user-friendly. And Belgacom is offering an exciting and exclusive attraction — transmission of the soccer games of Belgian and Italian soccer leagues. If a fan misses a game, a server digitally stores a recording of the game.

Belgacom customers can enjoy video telephone calls via their television, download their favorite films from the Internet, surf the web, e-mail and chat. A Dutch provider, KPN, has also selected Siemens Communications to be its partner. The contract will take effect beginning in October 2005 — exclusively for the first 500,000 participants.

Siemens plans to further minimize the bandwidths needed for transmission by the end of 2005. This will ensure reception of live TV

broadcasts at 1.8 megabits per second, which is about the same as the average rate of today's DSL standard. The factors that will make this possible include the new MPEG-4 video data compression. This will dramatically reduce the technical requirements for the consumer while making digital television almost universally available.

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