

New Microsoft patent to pause TV shows

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Microsoft's long running request for an interactive TV patent has been granted, reports The Register. The patent, which Microsoft originally applied for in 1993, enables the company to develop and market technology that allows television viewers to pause programmes to follow on-screen hyperlinks and participate in games, chat rooms and other interactive services.

The invention also solves the dilemma that confronts people when interrupted by a phone call while watching TV. When a programme is paused, the system records the time-sequential signal, delaying the display until the viewer is ready to resume watching.

Given that 12 years have elapsed since the original application, the patent is certainly not new. Nor, not being exactly suited to today's market, is it quite ready for use at Microsoft. For this reason, Microsoft

is interested only in the ‘pause’ clause of the patent.

The corporation believes that programmes such as sporting events will be able to incorporate hyper-links to internet sports pages and chat rooms, the additional content being displayed in a split screen alongside the main broadcast event. Microsoft also claims that no matter when, for how long or how often pauses are taken, the viewer can still enjoy the entire event.

Dubbed Patent #6,973,669, the document describes an invention using the vertical blanking interval (VBI) of analog broadcasts, technology that Intel once had great plans to exploit. However there are problems with bandwidth. Inter-casting delivered data at around 10kbit/s while modern digital TV streams at 19Mbit/s per channel.

Patent #6,973,669 has a total of thirty-five claims. In 2004 Bill Gates, predicting a drop in broadcast TV revenues, offered broadcasters his company's split screen featuring Google-style ads. Despite being six times more expensive than its competitors, Microsoft has already won BT, SBC and Swisscom as customers for its interactive TV.

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