

Internet TV strides forward in Germany

March 21 2006

Internet television took another step forward Tuesday following Deutsche Telekom's announcement that it would join forces with software behemoth Microsoft to develop Internet protocol television services to its clients across Germany.

The German telecommunications group said that the alliance will allow it not only to offer television programs online, but also to allow interactive services and other entertainment products on broadband networks. While the two companies did not disclose financial details of the agreement, they said that the German carrier will be using Microsoft's TV IPTV software, and the two companies will work together in marketing the service in Germany as well. This will be Microsoft's single-largest European Internet television internet contract to date, and its second-largest IPTV deal in the world. In addition, this will be the largest European endeavor to make broadband television become the mainstream way of watching TV. Granted, there have already been several attempts across Europe to get Internet TV to take off, including France Telecom's launch of MaLigne TV, which is available in about 10 million homes since its launch in 2003, and Fast Web offers similar services in Italy, while Home Choice and Kingston Communications are some of the IPTV providers in Britain. But the latest Deutsche Telekom deal will be by far the most scrutinized by industry analysts not just in Europe, but worldwide as well given its sheer scale and ambitions.

"Working together, Microsoft and Deutsche Telekom will help create a revolution in TV entertainment for consumers across Germany and France. With its rapidly growing customer base, and the power of next-

generation technologies like IPTV, Deutsche Telekom has the potential to deliver exciting new connected-entertainment services across the range of consumer devices in the home," said Steve Ballmer, chief executive officer of Microsoft in announcing the deal.

Some of the features that will be available on broadband-based television that is not accessible on terrestrial TV networks include having interactive functions to respond to polls and other services on programs. By introducing interactive television on broadband, viewers will have access to applications such as voting on programs that are actually on air, get details of sports scores and league tables, and take part in competitions to win prizes.

In addition, viewers will be able to digitally record programs and have access to video on demand, to enable them to select films or television series at a touch of a button without having to look at TV guides and wait for their favorite show to start at a pre-established time. They will also have access to pay-per-view television, and have the ability to pause live shows.

The broadband service will be delivered through a VDSL network that is currently being extended across Germany, and it should allow a bandwidth of up to 50 megabits per second. The plan is to launch the service in a few months' time in ten major German cities including Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, and Munich.

"In recent months, the experts at T-Online have run the Microsoft TV platform through extensive tests and we are convinced that we will be able to offer excellent quality IPTV services that will expand as we need them to," said Kai-Uwe Rieke, chairman of the board of management at Deutsche Telekom. "IPTV delivered via VDSL will enable better, more service oriented, more interactive and, above all, more customized television. With this advanced television service, Deutsche Telekom and

Microsoft are writing another chapter in our longstanding cooperation, tapping new markets and together exploring exciting new growth opportunities," he added.

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