

The Web: IPTV in 10 percent of homes soon?

May 24 2006

Major venture-capital investors -- like Daniel Rosen, who spoke at last week's "Future in Review" conference -- are now saying that Internet TV will be in 10 percent of homes in the next five years. The only barrier to entry, he and other financiers believe, is service quality.

Technology companies like Deutsche Telekom, Alcatel, Microsoft, IBM and HP are working to improve the level of service in an array of pilot projects here in the United States and in Europe and make that prediction a practical reality, experts tell UPI's The Web.

"The best assessment is to proactively test the actual, human perception, rather than to rely on stats to determine arbitrary figures," a spokesman for Psytechnics Ltd., a maker of testing software based in Suffolk, England, told The Web.

One pilot program starting in Hungary is being led by T-Online Hungary, a group member of Deutsche Telekom. Working with Paris-based Alcatel, Microsoft is launching an Internet Protocol Television test with three phases -- including a technical lab trial, a pair of field tests and a public market trial.

The first field trial included 18 broadcast channels, a video-on-demand service and a personal video recorder service. The second field test includes 500 users and more than 18 channels, and it continues today.

The public trial begins this summer, as the firms test network infrastructure, software platforms and services integration. The hope is

to "evaluate these new services quickly," said Andras Tudos, chief information officer for T-Online Hungary. "This trial is an important first step."

Another goal is to offer so-called personalized TV experiences for customers -- the ultimate expression of individualism in today's go-it-alone, wall-yourself-off-from-communal-experiences ideology of the iPod-driven culture.

This week Alcatel and Microsoft announced a new partnership that will join the two companies together to create the "ecosystem" on a global scale for IPTV. The project will use servers from HP, with Microsoft's TV IPTV Edition software, and Alcatel's "triple play" architecture, which can deliver voice, video and data over the same network. The venture includes not just technology bundling, but joint marketing. "By leveraging HP's proven server solutions, we can provide deeper levels of integration throughout each piece of the triple play value chain," said Monika Maurer, president of Alcatel's fixed solutions division, based in Paris.

As a result of pacts like this, the momentum for IPTV is growing, said Christine Heckart, general manager of marketing for Microsoft's TV division. There are now 15 major service providers around the world using early-stage Microsoft TV software, including AT&T, BT, Slovak Telekom, Swisscom, TDC, Telecom Italia, Verizon and others.

Sometimes, the testing gets down to the switching level, as these firms want to leave nothing to chance with their massive investments in IPTV networks.

"For service providers, characterizing and comparing switch and network QoS performance under realistic IPTV/IP Video loads, before deploying, reduces the risk of engineering a solution that will not scale

with the IPTV/IP Video service. It also helps identify unforeseen quality issues in the switch design," said Marc Todd, president and chief executive officer of IneoQuest, a technology maker based in Mansfield, Mass.

Collaboration among technology developers, meantime, continues to increase. Reacting to a recent survey demonstrating a powerful need for "open standards" to propel the IPTV market, the Internet Streaming Media Alliance is hosting a global symposium focusing on end-to-end system interoperability. The June 8 ISMA International IPTV Summit in Chicago will enable industry leaders to dialogue on growing the IPTV market by establishing open standards and to influence the future work of ISMA.

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