Internet TV more accessible in U.S.

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Customers of one of the United States' three largest telecommunications service providers will now have access to high-quality Internet Protocol television services, following a deal signed this week by the service provider and gateway software firm Jungo.

"IPTV will be much more of a generally available and widely adopted technology" in the near future, Jungo Vice President of Marketing and Product Management David Messina told UPI.

Messina predicted that IPTV will catch on over the next two years. The world will see "significant deployments" of IPTV technology and services in 2007, he said, but it will become a "broader phenomenon, with bigger-scale deployments in 2008."

Under the terms of the deal, Messina said he could not reveal which service provider was making the deployment, and that naming the geographical region affected by the agreement would give away the company's identity.

For those confused about what it's all about, you're not alone.

Though IPTV technology is already available around the world, and though San Jose, Calif.-based Jungo already has deployments in North and South America, Europe and Asia, many consumers don't know what IPTV is, a study by management consulting, technology services and outsourcing firm Accenture found.

"Large proportions of the respondents in all six countries surveyed -- 46 percent overall -- say they do not know what IPTV is. Even in the U.S., where respondents have the highest awareness of IPTV, more than one in four (28 percent) are uncertain what IPTV is; this is dwarfed by the lack of awareness in Europe, which reaches 58 percent in the UK," the study said.

Even those surveyed who said they did know what IPTV was disagreed about how to define it, according to the study.

IPTV is broadcast and video content that arrives to you via broadband Internet connection, rather than through traditional television cables or broadcast waves.

Companies that push the technology say it will offer viewers total control over their entertainment: Viewers choose what to watch from a potentially limitless library of content, when to watch it, and even choose whether to watch it on a television, PC, Internet-capable portable DVD player or third-generation mobile phone.

"A major shift has occurred. Twelve to 18 months ago telecommunications companies were working to install a base for broadband service, which was high-speed Internet with basic functions," Messina said.

"Now there are more attractive services for the consumer, including IPTV, video home surveillance ... the consumer is more engaged with the service provider.

"The model is to add more and more services to a solid open architecture."

IPTV is still a relatively young technology, however.

Technology research firm Gartner tracks emerging trends on what they call "The Hype Cycle." This cycle dictates that new technologies go through several stages: After the Technology Trigger, industry hype raises the technology's visibility to the Peak of Inflated Expectations. This is followed by a sharp drop into the Trough of Disillusionment when expectations don't pan out.

The technology recovers along the Slope of Enlightenment, before arriving finally at the Plateau of Productivity, according to the Gartner model.

Gartner's latest evaluation of "Key technologies (that) will (affect) the industry," in August 2005, placed IPTV rising along the Technology Trigger line.

After rising to a peak and then falling into the Trough of Disillusionment, IPTV will join technologies such as WiFi 802.11a/g and business VoIP on the Plateau of Productivity sometime between 2010 and 2015, Gartner predicted.

The research firm also predicted that video on demand, a service currently offered on cable TV, will eventually "be embedded in IPTV."

Jungo's innovation in this revolution, Messina said, is called a "stateful quality of service mechanism." Because IPTV is usually offered as part of a telecom's bundle of some combination of Internet, VoIP telephone and cellular services, customers use broadband for several different things at once.

Stateful quality of service prioritizes IPTV when it's being used: A larger portion of bandwidth is dedicated to the TV transmission, so viewers get a higher quality of transmission -- "the true TV experience," Messina said.

The prioritization will not affect normal Internet and VoIP functions, Messina added, saying that a large download might be the only service to slow down if the user was trying to perform the download while watching IPTV.

Jungo software also enables service providers to monitor home networks. "Our philosophy of IPTV services is that the role of the residential gateway is extremely important," Messina said.

"(If there arise) issues affecting the quality of the broadband experience, the service provider can step in to resolve the issues ... (because broadband has become) an essential part of the home entertainment experience," he continued.