

'Widgets' are hot at gadget show

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An attendee chooses internet content from a computer at the 2010 International Consumer Electronics Show on January 8, 2010 in Las Vegas. All of the top television manufacturers at the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES) here are offering Internet-enabled TV sets and most of the popular Web brands have built the programs known as "widgets" to run on them.

Spend a lot of time on the Web while watching television? Maybe not. But a lot of companies are betting you will. All of the top television manufacturers at the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES) here are offering Internet-enabled TV sets and most of the popular Web brands have built the programs known as "widgets" to run on them.

Amazon, [eBay](#), Facebook, [Netflix](#), Twitter and [YouTube](#), to name just a few, are among the Web titans which offer the miniature windows that pop up on TV screens while shows are on.

"They're really popular," said Jeila Foroozani of US television maker

Vizio. "If you want to keep up with your [Facebook](#) account or your [Twitter](#) account you can just call it up anytime while you watch your shows.

"Right now we have 25 to 30 widgets," she told AFP. "By the end of 2010, we should have about 100 and then we'll just go up from there."

Vizio, [LG Electronics](#), Samsung and Sony use the Yahoo! widget platform for their TV applications and Yahoo! used CES as a stage to announce widget partnerships with Hisense, ViewSonic, MIPS Technologies and Sigma Designs.

ViewSonic's VMP80 media player will allow high-definition TV owners to view movies, TV shows, Web videos and photos and go shopping and play games with TV widgets.

"Consumers can enjoy the greatest Internet content while simultaneously viewing their favorite programming," said ViewSonic Americas vice president Jeff Volpe.

Jean-Pierre Abello, director of product management for Yahoo!'s connected TV group, said Yahoo!'s widget gallery is "very much like the iPhone app store."

"We've done a lot of research to see what usage models work on television and what don't," he said.

"On TV, what we've found out is that a simple widget doesn't take too much attention away from the TV and it's easy to navigate with a remote," he said.

"It's off to the side and covers no more than a third of the screen," he said. A viewer also has the option of seeing the widget and a full TV

picture.

Christopher Rayner of Yahoo! partner LG said the growth of Web-enabled TV sets is going to make widgets a "huge, huge hit."

"It's going to be a growing category because home theater and computer online capabilities are just merging so fast," Rayner said.

"The customer's going to be expecting to see this," he said. "The reason this hasn't grown so fast before is because in the past you had to have a set-top box or a hard line to get it."

LG offers Web-enabled TVs across its range of LCD, LED and plasma sets and analyst Rob Enderle of Silicon Valley's Enderle Group said "it won't be long before every TV is Web-connected in one shape or form."

He noted that much of the growth has been spurred by Microsoft's Xbox 360 Live, which allows users to play each other over the Internet on Web-enabled TVs but also allows them to rent movies through services such as Netflix.

Yahoo!'s Abello said being able to access the Web through your TV has some distinct advantages.

"You can now buy or rent the same movies from Amazon that you buy or rent on your PC," he said. "The difference is that you can watch them on a TV where you have immensely better video capabilities than you have on your PC.

"The image is not only bigger, it's better," he said.

With Web video on demand, social networks, games and online shopping now available, Scott Steinberg, the lead technology analyst for

DigitalTrends.com, said the TV is becoming "an interactive medium that everyone uses."

"TVs are turning the living room back into the hearth of the home," he said.

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