

Comcast's new iPad app to show TV listings

November 17 2010, By Bob Fernandez

It's the newspaper TV grid on electronic steroids.

Comcast Corp. said Monday that it was releasing immediately for its cable-TV subscribers an [app](#) for Apple's fast-selling [iPad](#) that lists 1,000 channels vertically and two weeks of programs horizontally. Those channels and days can be scrolled by finger touch on the iPad tablet - similar to scrolling through songs on Apple's iPod.

While functioning as a channel guide, the "Xfinity TV App" also serves as a channel-changer remote in an elegant use of the iPad, [wireless technology](#), the Internet, a cable switching station, and the Comcast digital set-top box.

That means customers can change their TV channel with the iPad - and they don't even have to point it at the set-top box. The signal is caught in a home's WiFi system and routed to the Comcast network that does the channel change.

The cable giant expects to add enhancements so an iPad can be used to watch streamed TV shows and movies. Those enhancements could be released in December.

Comcast Chief Executive Brian L. Roberts demonstrated a prototype of the iPad application at a cable trade show earlier this year. The Xfinity TV App was announced Monday during an annual Internet forum in San Francisco, the Web 2.0 Summit. The app is available for free to Comcast digital subscribers from the iTunes store and can be

downloaded to Apple's iPhones. The Xfinity TV app will customize the TV listings by ZIP code for the subscriber - because, for instance, the TV show on Channel 100 is not the same in Philadelphia as it is in Chicago or San Francisco.

"The beauty of the app world is that we are in Web-like development, and we are no longer bound by the set-top box," said Neil Smit, the new president of Comcast's cable division.

Comcast, the nation's largest cable company, plans to release about one app a month over the next several months, Smit said, noting that an Xfinity TV app was being developed for the Android technology that competes with Apple. Electronics manufacturers expect to sell about six million electronic tablets this year and Comcast officials believe that people will use the tablets for both reading and video entertainment.

Electronic tablets such as the iPad, it seems, could help solve one of Comcast's more vexing problems: how to modernize its channel guide without alienating millions of customers who would protest the changes. Tablet apps could allow those Comcast subscribers who would like to improve the channel guide to do so, without forcing changes on all Comcast subscribers.

Comcast doesn't operate its own national wireless service. But its cable-TV subscribers can use an iPad to access Xfinity TV through AT&T or Verizon, cable officials said. Comcast recently launched Xfinity TV, which provides Comcast subscribers with TV shows and other entertainment on the Internet for free.

In a stab at extending to its customers some mobility, Comcast is experimenting with free Wi-Fi hot spots in the Philadelphia area so subscribers can tap into the Internet outside their homes. So far the company has equipped 2,000 public places, such as train platforms and

suburban ball fields, with Wi-Fi.

Comcast said that it had an app-development team at its headquarters in Philadelphia and that its billions of dollar in investment into its Internet backbone had enabled the expected steady flow of apps for iPads and other mobility devices.

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