

Google TV options have kinks to work out

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Logitech Revue

When it comes to getting content from the Internet on their TVs, consumers have a growing number of options, from Internet-connected TVs to game consoles to an assortment of digital set-top boxes.

Unfortunately, most of these options have a big flaw: They offer only a small slice of the movies, [television](#) shows, pictures and music you'd be able to access on an Internet-connected PC. In recent weeks, though, some new products have hit the market that promise to bring a much bigger slice of [Internet content](#) to the TV set.

Among the most notable are a collection of devices that include a repackaged version of Google's Android smart-phone software. Branded

as "[Google TV](#)," they include a line of Sony TVs, a Sony Blu-ray disc player and Logitech's Revue set-top box. I tested the Revue, but the Google TV software works similarly on the other devices.

The aim of Google TV is to integrate the Web with the traditional television experience. The software allows users to search both television listings and Web-based video for programs. It also allows users to browse television listings by categories, rather than by a grid of time slots and channels.

When you connect the Revue to your TV, it gets daisy-chained to your set-top box so that both are plugged into the same port on your television. That means you don't have to change inputs on your TV to switch between traditional and Internet content. It also allows Google TV devices to offer a picture-in-picture feature that lets users surf the Web on their TVs while watching a television program.

Like other Internet-connected living room devices, Google TV gadgets allow users to watch videos, listen to music and view pictures streamed over the Internet. Users can rent and buy movies and TV shows from Amazon.com, listen to Internet radio from Pandora and watch slide shows from Google's [Picasa](#) service.

But unlike most other digital living room devices, Google TV supports apps such as Twitter that allow users to access specialized content and online services. Consumers also can use it to access Web video streams directly from providers such as CNet and CNBC.

And there's more content to come. Google plans to bring the Android application marketplace to Google TV next year, allowing users to add to the handful of apps the devices ship with.

But as promising as Google TV is, it feels half-baked. Unless you have

pay-TV service from Dish Network, its integration with traditional television is limited at best. While you can use the Google TV software to search for and tune in programs that are airing right now, you can't use it to set up a recording on your DVR or to search for and view an on-demand program from your pay-TV operator. Instead, you'll have to switch off the Google TV interface and switch back to using the one for your set-top box.

Similarly, when you use the picture-in-picture feature, the traditional television programming shows up as a small box in the corner of your screen that you can't enlarge or move around. That makes it almost useless, because the images within it are so small they're hard to discern.

Also disappointing is the search feature, which is often confusing. When searching on the home screen for a particular program, you have to choose where or how you want to search. The search feature doesn't allow you to search across multiple options at once - such as the TV programming guide, Amazon's list of on-demand programs or a general Web search. The default is to search just the videos that are available on the Web, which is not particularly helpful if what you are really looking for is a live program.

The biggest drawback of Google TV, though, is limited content. The big Hollywood players, such as ABC, NBC and CBS and their associated cable networks, as well as Hulu, have generally blocked Google TV devices from accessing the videos they make available on the Web. So in terms of video content, you are left with far less than what you can get through Roku's digital media players, the top-end of which costs just \$100, or one-third the cost of the Revue and one-fourth the cost of Sony's Google TV Blu-ray player.

You can't get general Web pages on Roku devices, but you may not care. Surfing the Web from the couch - even on a big-screen TV - is not an

enjoyable experience. The type's too small to read comfortably, and links are hard to click on from a distance. Web surfing is much more suited to the PC on your desk or the smart phone or tablet in your hands.

So at least for now, Google TV is underwhelming and overpriced. But stay tuned; it's sure to get better and there are plenty of other companies trying to come up with the long-awaited ideal solution for connecting the TV and the Internet.

LOGITECH REVUE (GOOGLE TV):

-Troy's rating: 3.0 out of 5

-What: Internet-connected set-top box

-Likes: On same input as regular TV, so don't have to switch back and forth between them. Searches through TV listings, online content. Organizes TV listings by subject. Allows access to Web videos.

-Dislikes: Pricey. Clumsy interface and search feature. Poor integration with most TV services. Web browser not optimized for TV.

-How much: \$300

-Web: www.logitech.com/smartTV or google.com/tv
target="_blank">www.google.com/tv

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