

Comcast to sell Skype box for video calls

June 14 2011, By PETER SVENSSON , AP Technology Writer

(AP) -- Comcast subscribers: In the future, believing that the TV is talking to you might not be a sign of insanity. You may be getting a Skype video call.

Comcast Corp., the country's largest [cable company](#), is set to announce Tuesday that it plans to bring [Skype](#) calls to TV sets later this year.

Subscribers will then be able to rent a kit from Comcast that includes a webcam and an adapter that plugs into the TV. A new cable box remote will include a keyboard on the back, for typing chat messages.

Philadelphia-based Comcast hasn't yet figured out what to charge for the kit, according to Catherine Avgiris, general manager of communications and data services.

Financial terms of the partnership between Comcast and Skype were not disclosed. Comcast wouldn't say whether Skype would get some of what Comcast charges for the kit.

Subscribers will get notifications of [incoming calls](#) on their TVs and will be able to answer calls with full-screen video or in a window while watching TV.

Comcast plans to start trials of the system in the next few months. It has 17.4 million [Internet subscribers](#).

Many high-end TVs already come with the ability to conduct Skype

calls. Buyers usually have to add a Webcam for \$150, but neither the TV maker nor Skype charge a monthly fee.

"We've seen an explosion, already, in the use of Skype in the living room," said Neil Stevens, general manager of consumer services at Skype.

[Cisco Systems](#) Inc. launched a home [videoconferencing](#) device and service last year, but quickly had to cut the \$599 price and \$24.95 monthly fee, apparently because of weak demand. It later scaled back its marketing plans too, as part of a companywide shift away from consumer devices.

Comcast's Skype adapter won't work with Skype services that let users call phone numbers, or receive calls to a phone number. Instead, Comcast plans to bundle a limited version of Skype's offerings with its own phone service, for which it charges \$20 per month and up, to the adapter, so subscribers can place and receive phone calls through the TV set. That's a feature it plans to add later, according to Comcast spokesman Peter Dobrow.

Skype, which is based in Luxembourg, has agreed to be bought by Microsoft Corp., the world's biggest software maker, for \$8.5 billion in a deal expected to close by the end of the year.

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Citation: Comcast to sell Skype box for video calls (2011, June 14) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-06-comcast-skype-video.html>

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