

The future of gaming technology

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Associate professor Magy Seif El-Nasr explores how Xbox Live compares to traditional cable services. Photo by Mike Mazzanti.

Microsoft, creator of the Xbox Live -- an online multiplayer video gaming and digital media delivery service -- has announced it would offer mainstream television programming to its subscribers, creating direct competition with traditional cable services. Magy Seif El-Nasr, associate professor of game design and interactive media with joint appointments in the College of Arts, Media and Design and the College of Computer and Information Science at Northeastern, explains the new features and how they might impact traditional cable offerings.

What features of the new Xbox Live will challenge traditional cable boxes?

Microsoft's Xbox is really setting the stage to compete with cable television providers since it announced that it would allow users to watch

television programming from its Xbox 360 console, including content from HBO, Verizon FiOS and Comcast's Xfinity. Unlike traditional cable boxes, video game consoles like Xbox have evolved by adding innovations that improve the user interface. Xbox has added voice recognition and Kinect — a gestural interface that allows the consumer to interact with the device through voice commands and movement — rather than using a remote control.

Are cable companies offering any innovative services to compete? What can cable companies learn from Xbox?

While cable companies such as Verizon and Comcast are aligning themselves with alternative delivery methods, like streaming via Xbox, they've been offering other innovative delivery models for years. Comcast's On Demand channels, for example, provide instant content, as do Apple TV and Netflix via Xbox or PlayStation 3. Also gaining momentum is the addition of iPad and iPhone apps to enable cable customers to search for shows and view them through devices other than the regular cable box.

Although cable boxes offer a range of channels, the ability to quickly search for content and programming is still clunky. The user has to hunt through several menus and manually type search words through a screen-based keyboard, which can be cumbersome. Integrating sophisticated search tools similar to [Xbox](#)'s voice commands or adding other console-based interfaces to traditional cable boxes could definitely improve the user experience.

Media of all types, including video games, continue to integrate interactive technology into their interfaces.

What's the “next big thing” in gaming technology?

Mobility and access are key in today's fast-paced world. We are likely to see more cross-platform delivery models in which content is being delivered on demand on different devices — making it easier for people to synch accounts between platforms like cell phones, computers and televisions. We will continue to see more interactive features like voice and gestural interfaces in video games and other media, too.

Provided by Northeastern University

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