

Google hints at TV service for ultra-fast broadband test

February 23 2012, By Scott Canon

Google Inc. has sent an ever-clearer signal that it could be bringing a TV service to the Kansas City market.

The company's subsidiary, Google Fiber, recently filed applications in Missouri and Kansas to operate a [video service](#).

Those filings mark the strongest indications so far that, besides bringing fastest-in-the-country Internet service to Kansas City, the search and advertising behemoth also intends to compete with [cable companies](#) on TV service.

But they are still only hints. "We're still exploring what products will be available when we launch Google Fiber," Google spokeswoman Jenna Wandres said in an email.

Last spring, Google chose Kansas City, Kan., over 1,100 other communities as its first large-scale [test bed](#) for ultra-fast Internet. It added Kansas City, Mo., to the plan a month and a half later.

Google has been decidedly mum about what might be teamed with its one-gigabit-per-second speed Internet service. It's expected to debut in at least one unspecified Kansas City, Kan., neighborhood early this summer.

Records show that Google filed applications Friday with both the Missouri Public Service Commission and the Kansas Corporation

Commission to clear the way for a TV service.

In the Kansas application, Google said it "will utilize national and regional video headend facilities" - essentially programming collection points - "to send IPTV" - a television-over-Internet technology like that used in AT&T's Uverse service - "across a private (Internet protocol) network to subscribers."

The key now, analysts say, is whether Google can corral enough of sportscasts and high-end television programming to lure customers.

But the company's various filings with state and federal regulatory bodies are beginning to suggest that a range of services might be bundled with the Internet hook-ups. In addition, some news reports last year suggested that Google was in talks with Disney, Time Warner and Discovery about distributing their content. Disney owns ABC and ESPN, the most popular of cable television networks.

In December, Google filed an application with the Federal Communications Commission to set up commercial-scale satellite dishes at a facility in Council Bluffs, Iowa. That could serve as the same kind of "antenna farm" that cable companies use to capture video signals and transform them into channels for consumer use. The company has also been testing Wi-Fi transmitters from the home that could move data at the same [gigabit](#) speeds as its fiber optic cables - suggesting a holistic system for blanketing homes with Internet service 100 to 1,000 times quicker than the U.S. average.

Council Bluffs is also home to a large Google data center, or computer "server farm," where it stores and transmits enormous amounts of data that support everything from Internet searches to YouTube videos. Google owns YouTube.

A recent analysis by Bernstein Research speculated that Google could be braced for "Cloud TV," which would make digital video recorders such as the TiVo obsolete. Rather than record programming on a device in the home, the report suggested Google could simply store a seemingly endless amount of video in its data centers.

Retrieving video from that cache with today's Internet connections would quickly become unmanageable. Most connections are far too slow to stream programming to multiple televisions in a home, or even in a neighborhood. But with vastly increased ability to move data - if data were water, the change with Google's service will be like moving from a straw to a fire hose - that bottleneck disappears.

"We could call this the 'YouTubization' of linear TV," the report said. "Expect Google to store (and make available to consumers) the content across all or most TV channels it will provide ... Storing the content of hundreds of TV channels for days, weeks or longer and serving them on-demand to individual users requires large amounts of storage and processing capacity. Of course, this is only possible if homes are connected to the cloud through very high-speed connections."

Google would be uniquely able to do that, because it plans to be the sole company running fiber optic cables - hair-width wires capable of moving data far faster than the copper lines of cable and telephone companies - directly to Kansas City homes.

So the Council Bluffs data center might become a giant, virtual DVR for all the customers subscribing to a [Google TV service](#).

"Watching TV almost becomes like watching YouTube. You search for something and you watch it," said Carlos Kirjner, the Internet analyst for Bernstein who authored the report. "I'm skeptical that they'll be able to get all the content owners to agree to that, but they might get enough."

We'll see."

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