

TV executives crave viewers who watch 2 screens

February 3 2012, By Glenn Garvin

Forget the small screen and the big screen. The hottest new thing in television is the "second screen" - the one on the tablet computer or cell phone that an increasing number of viewers keep an eye on while they're watching TV. And figuring out how to corral all those second-screener and make money off them was the hottest topic at a recent convention of 5,000 television executives in Miami Beach.

"This is really the hottest thing in [television](#) now," said Trevor Doerksen, founder of the Canadian online marketing company Mobovivo.

"Everybody - advertisers, producers, TV networks - everybody wants to grab those second-screener."

Doerksen spoke at one of several panel discussions of the second-screen phenomenon at the convention last week of National Association of Television Program Executives. The convention has traditionally been a swarming marketplace for the sale of syndicated [TV programming](#), but this year much more of the buzz has been about how viewers watch television rather than what they see.

Nowhere is television's simultaneous convergence and competition with the Internet more obvious than it is in second-screen. By some industry counts, as much as 30 percent of Web-surfing is done while [watching TV](#). If those viewers are drifting away to check their email or gaze idly at breaking [news sites](#), that's a threat to the [TV industry](#). But if they're using their computer to enhance their [TV viewing](#) - by learning more about the show or chatting it up with friends - it's an opportunity.

Much of the talk at the NATPE convention was about how to direct viewers to second screens using new [computer applications](#), a process the industry calls "social television."

"If you're a network or a producer, you want to keep those second-screeners watching your show rather than going off in some other direction," said Doerksen. His app Previw - which will launch on networks in the United States and Canada later this year, he says - pulls together material from various websites as well as Facebook and Twitter so a user can quickly look up the history of any character appearing on-screen at a given moment as well as biographical details of the actor playing him and any recent tweets or other Internet postings he's made.

Like other television apps, Previw is "audio-synched" - that is, it listens to your television through the microphone in your computer, uses audio fingerprints to figure out what show you're watching, and then synchronizes itself to the exact point in the episode that's on your TV screen. The audio-synch function makes Previw work even with shows recorded on a DVR or watched on a DVD.

Another new app, Get This, tells viewers how to buy stuff they see during TV shows. "It's all about Rachel's blue sweater from Friends that everybody wants," said Lisa Farris, the company's founder. A viewer watching 'American Idol' who's smitten with a young performer's guitar could use her app to discover, 'Oh, it's a \$2,000 guitar. But, oh, there's a \$400 version.' "

Shawn Cunningham's YapTV.com allows users to see what's being said on Twitter or Facebook about whatever shows are on TV at the moment - all of them. And it compiles data from its users' clicks to constantly post lists of what's hot or what not. "On the last seven episodes of 'American Idol' last season, we successfully predicted who was going to get kicked off," he said.

TV networks and producers were initially cool to the idea of cooperating with social-television apps, the developers said. "A lot of them own a bunch of Internet sites of their own, and they aren't wild that you might be pulling in stuff from somebody else's site," said Doerksen. "I get real resistance to Wikipedia from some people. It's crazy because everybody knows Wikipedia is out there and everybody uses it, but we have to move slowly with a lot of these people."

Farris said many television executives she approached are initially nervous that her Get This app will undercut their commercials. "The last thing they want to do is compete with an ad that's on the second screen," she said.

But some networks have embraced the concept and set up their own shops to devise social-television apps. Kristin Frank, general manager of digital video at MTV and VH1, said her network uses apps to "eventize" its shows, turning each one into a major occasion. During the last Video Music Awards telecast, an MTV website featured an app called Hot Seat, a seating chart of the auditorium where the show was staged. A user could slide his computer mouse across the chart to see what celebrity was sitting there, along with all that celebrity's tweets during the event.

Television, Frank said, has nothing to fear from social television. "All the platforms are a (transmission) pipe," she said. "They're the telephone, and we're the conversation."

If anybody in the interlinked universes of television and streaming video had any doubts about the overwhelming power of Internet social media, they ended on a Saturday afternoon last October when, during a concert in Los Angeles, the singer Usher broke the laws of fashion physics with a dance move that completely split the front of his pants.

Within minutes, fed by "Oh my God!" messages on Twitter and

Facebook, the live video stream on Yahoo! had swollen from 1 million to 20 million.

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