

Free live TV is coming to your smartphone and tablet

May 17 2012, By Maria Halkias

Would you like to watch live network TV on your smartphone or stream a movie? The answer is probably yes to both.

Later this year, watching live [television](#) on mobile digital devices will become a reality for more than 90 stations in 35 markets.

Thanks to Netflix, Hulu, iTunes, [YouTube](#) and a host of other websites, people already watch video on various-size screens.

As looming broadband shortages worry wireless carriers, government officials, manufacturers and retailers, the stalwart 70-year-old broadcast television business believes it's got it covered.

"We produce local news and information and already have the licenses to spectrum. We don't need more to broadcast from one station to many viewers," said Belo Corp. chief executive Dunia Shive.

Besides, broadcast TV airways are still free to consumers, she said. All that's missing to make mobile TV happen is a version of rabbit ears for phones and tablets.

Manufacturers such as Belkin International, [LG Electronics](#) and Samsung are working on that. Belkin has a USB attachment that it plans to start selling later this year for iPhones and [iPads](#).

Dallas-based Belo owns 20 television stations nationwide. It spun off its

four daily newspapers, including The Dallas Morning News, in 2008 to create a new company called A.H. Belo Corp.

Belo and 11 other major broadcast companies are teaming up to create mobile television strategies that don't require access to more spectrum. The Mobile Content Venture partnership includes Cox Media Group, E.W. Scripps Co., Gannett Broadcasting, Hearst Television Inc., Media General Inc., [Meredith Corp.](#), Fox, Ion Television and NBC.

An agreement between Dallas-based MetroPCS Communications Inc. and Mobile Content Venture will also allow the wireless company's customers to watch live local broadcast television on phones that Samsung is making.

All of a sudden, television stations have found themselves with an asset that not so long ago was considered old school.

The Consumer Electronics Association and CTIA-The Wireless Association, a trade group that represents carriers led by Verizon Wireless and AT&T Inc. , are lobbying Washington to do something about the forecast "spectrum crunch." When AT&T tried to buy T-Mobile last year, part of the reason was to acquire its spectrum.

In February, Congress approved auctions of unused television airwaves for use by wireless services in an effort to alleviate future shortages. But the rules haven't been written yet.

Congress has said it's going to be voluntary, said Shive, who is also on the executive committee of the National Association of Broadcasters.

Independent television operators may want to cash out of their spectrum assets, but the business model is different for a network-affiliated station, she said.

Belo is already on the record as saying that it probably won't sell its spectrum licenses. "We want the opportunity to innovate and build new business models around it that support free live TV," Shive said.

But not knowing how the auction rules will work, it's hard to put a value on the television station licenses, Shive said. ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox will probably build their own mobile digital businesses instead of turning over spectrum they aren't using to others. As the number of smartphones and tablets keeps rising, more video content streaming will create shortages.

"I can't predict the spectrum crisis. But [broadcast TV](#) can be part of the solution by mitigating one-to-one streaming," she said.

To watch mobile live TV, a phone will need one of the new antennas that plugs into the power charger. The antenna will be embedded in the Samsung phone that's under development.

The smartphones will need an app to access the channels and display a program guide. The app includes program listings and shows what channels are available in each city. Mobile Content Venture is branding its app Dyle Mobile TV.

The only time Wi-Fi is needed is to download the app. "Watching Dyle TV won't eat into your data plan," said Todd Cadley, a spokesman for Mobile Content Venture. "Some cities may only have a couple of stations, a Fox and Univision, while some cities could have all the channels available in that market."

Stations are still deciding whether to offer the service, so the list may change by the time Dyle TV launches, Cadley said. The timing is not final yet, "but I can tell you it's still later this year."

Other stations scheduled to participate are in Austin, Houston, Tulsa , Chicago, Boston, New York, San Francisco, Miami and Seattle.

Dallas-based research firm Parks Associates has said that more than 25 percent of video viewing in U.S. broadband households now occurs on platforms other than the television, such as PCs, smartphones and tablets.

Each week, roughly 25 percent of U.S. broadband households watch video on a mobile phone, and the average broadband user watches 36 minutes of video on a tablet, said Parks director of research Brett Sappington.

"One-third of U.S. broadband households streamed a TV show in the past 30 days, and these consumer viewing habits are raising expectations for new service offerings," he said. "Proliferation of connected CE (consumer electronics) is both an opportunity for and a potential threat to traditional pay-TV services."

Some Americans still watch TV without cable or satellite subscriptions.

About 46 million viewers, or 17 million households, receive television exclusively through broadcast signals from 1,781 broadcast television stations in the U.S., according to the National Association of Broadcasters. According to Nielsen, there are 421,700 broadcast-only homes in the Dallas-Fort Worth market, or 16.4 percent of area households.

The broadcasters group notes that 95 of the top-rated 100 shows in the 2010-11 season were on broadcast television.

In written testimony submitted to Congress, Belo and other broadcast companies emphasized their public responsibilities.

Shive said over-the-air television plays a vital role in providing free local news, sports, weather and up-to-the minute emergency information.

At home, Shive has one TV in her dressing area that's not connected to her satellite provider.

"I watch it every morning, and when there's bad weather, it's the only TV in our house that's receiving programming," she said. "And if there's a tornado, like we just had in Dallas, we don't run our commercials."

WHAT IS SPECTRUM?

Spectrum is the range of electromagnetic radio frequencies used to transmit sound, data and video. It is what carries voices between cellphones, television shows from broadcasters to TVs and online information from one computer to the next.

There is a finite amount of spectrum and a growing demand for it as consumers buy more Internet-connected devices and want to use them anywhere, anytime.

The FCC and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration share responsibility for managing the spectrum. The NTIA manages spectrum used by the federal government; the FCC is responsible for spectrum used by others.

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