

WatchESPN comes to Comcast's video customers

May 8 2012, By RYAN NAKASHIMA , AP Business Writer

(AP) -- WatchESPN, the online and mobile version of Disney's popular sports TV network, was activated Tuesday for most of Comcast's 22 million video subscribers.

It's one of the perks being offered to [cable subscribers](#) to convince them to keep paying for TV. Getting online or mobile access to shows you already pay for is known in the industry as "TV Everywhere."

The new offering results from a 10-year deal between [Comcast Corp.](#) and The [Walt Disney Co.](#) that was announced in January. It doubles the number of customers able to access WatchESPN to about 40 million.

"We think that's a fantastic start for only being at this a year and a half," said Matt Murphy, ESPN's senior vice president of digital video distribution.

WatchESPN offers live feeds of four pay TV networks: ESPN, ESPN2, [ESPN3](#) and ESPNU. It also offers on-the-go access to feeds of ESPN Goal Line when college football is underway or ESPN Buzzer Beater during college basketball season.

Its predecessor, ESPN Broadband, later renamed ESPN 360 and then ESPN3, was a separate channel started up in 2001. ESPN3 was only available online and offered streams of games that were a bit off the beaten path. WatchESPN gives users access to the regular ESPN channel, including shows like Monday Night Football, and its spinoffs.

Customers of [Time Warner Cable](#) Inc., Bright House Networks, and Verizon FiOS also have access to WatchESPN. Its app, available on iPads and iPhones, has been downloaded about 8 million times.

For now, the online and mobile versions come with few or no ads as the Disney subsidiary experiments with interactive advertising. During TV commercials, the online version often puts up a message that says "Commercial break. We'll be right back."

"It's not a television platform, it's an (Internet protocol) based platform," said Murphy. "There are different and engaging things and we wanted to take advantage of that."

Users must prove they are subscribers to use the website or the [mobile apps](#).

WatchESPN also can be viewed on Comcast's XfinityTV service, a website and app that gives its subscribers access to some, but not all, of the programming they pay for on their regular televisions.

Matthew Strauss, Comcast's senior vice president of digital and emerging platforms, said at least a quarter of Comcast's customers have tried its digital offerings. About 5 million Comcast subscribers per month check out its XfinityTV.com website. The app, available on [iPads](#), iPhones and Android devices, has been downloaded 5 million times.

He declined to say whether the online features have helped keep subscribers from leaving. Comcast lost about 37,000 video [subscribers](#) from a year ago to finish the quarter to March at 22.3 million.

Adding WatchESPN adds a substantial live sports presence to the XfinityTV platform. Previously, the service had live games during the March Madness college basketball tournament but hasn't offered NBA

games online despite its relationship with Time Warner Inc.'s TNT network.

"We're still just scratching the surface of what this can become," he said.

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Citation: WatchESPN comes to Comcast's video customers (2012, May 8) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-05-watchespn-comcast-video-customers.html>

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