

USA Network taps Yap.TV for viewer chats

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Cable television's USA Network on Monday said it has enlisted Internet startup Yap.TV to tap into the hot trend of people "chatting" online while viewing shows. Yap.TV software for Apple iPad, iPhone, and iPod touch devices lets people engage in real time on Twitter, Facebook or the firm's own social network.

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Yap-powered applications will let people take polls, dish about actors and more in online forums with friends watching programs at other venues.

"Yap.TV gives our fans an innovative platform for personalizing their interaction and engaging with content in ways that allow us to continually evolve our Social TV experience," said USA vice president Jesse Redniss.

San Francisco-based Yap.TV believes that whether shows are streamed over the Internet, airwaves, or cable lines, people will always want to talk about what they are watching.

Yap.TV software for [Apple iPad](#), [iPhone](#), and [iPod touch](#) devices lets show watchers engage in real time on Twitter, Facebook or the firm's own social network.

"We mated the television program guide with the

Twitter stream and social networks to basically allow you to see what everyone in the world is talking about right now," Yap.TV co-founder Shawn Cunningham told AFP in an interview earlier this year.

"So when you zap into a show, you are immersed in the experience."

Yap.TV backers include former Apple executive David Austin, and Apple co-founder [Steve Wozniak](#) is an advisor to the startup.

"We thought we could create a social world for television content, which people love to talk about almost more than anything else," Cunningham said.

"It was really things like the iPad that opened the gateway," he added. "A second-screen device perfect for this type of activity."

Yap software gathers "[tweets](#)" and comments from [Facebook friends](#) watching the same shows. A custom Yap social network also lets viewers share what they enjoy or hate about what they are watching.

Yap.TV was crafted to be a "virtual living room" where people in different locations could essentially watch shows together and chat in real time.

"We re-invented the TV Guide and made it social," Cunningham said. "With iPads and social networks, there is a perfect storm right now to enable this."

Since kibitzing about shows takes place on "second screens," television lovers aren't pestered by text boxes or other distractions.

Yap.TV allows viewers to take spot polls on burning questions such as whether a certain character will fall in love with another.

Yap.TV for iPhone and iPod touch launched in December, while the iPad version was released a few months earlier.

Yap.TV and USA Network, a division of NBC Universal, will unveil their new Social TV application in November, making the software available as a free download to all Apple mobile devices.

The USA Network app will feature social forums for the cable service's programs such as "Burn Notice," "White Collar," "Suits," "Psych," and "Covert Affairs."

"We are seeing an explosion in this phenomenon," Bluefin Labs co-founder Deb Roy said of television viewers using Twitter or other online forums to comment on what they are watching.

"Television content is driving conversations on the social Web," he added, during a presentation at a Web 2.0 Summit in San Francisco.

Bluefin specializes in tracking blogs, Twitter and other online chatter to map how engaged viewers are with television shows and commercials.

"All the conversation is affecting what people decide to tune into and, more importantly, how they interpret what they see," Roy said.

"With the elections and Olympics coming up, we are really thinking social media is going to take off in TV."

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