



It's Ctrl+Alt+Change for broadcast

K.A. Srinivasan, co-founder of Amagi, believes OTT services have the power to break down geographical barriers by putting power in the hands of viewers

At one of last year's big trade shows, a senior industry leader quipped, "You are no longer watching TV. The TV is watching you!" Though the concept seems straight out of a sci-fi movie, we are indeed the closest we have ever been to "two-way television."

The ability of set-top boxes to relay information about viewer behavior to broadcasters enables content and advertising to be more addressable, adding a new dimension to delivering custom and targeted content on TV. While this phenomenon is prevalent in the US, and to some extent the UK, most other parts of the world are yet to catch up.

This is set to change as viewers shift to OTT multiscreen viewing. Networks face an unprecedented challenge led by shifts in technology and behaviour. Only those that can adapt to the new democratisation and personalisation will be rewarded with continued business, content loyalty, and unit monetisation opportunities.

SWITCHING TO AMBIENT CONTENT

The 2016 US elections, and the ensuing political drama, have demonstrated the effectiveness of social media compared with TV. Increasingly, audiences are relying on social channels, as opposed to TV, for daily news. As social media platforms evolve into the primary information source, viewers will no longer switch to a specific program, channel, or "destination" on traditional TV or OTT channels. They will expect all relevant content to be a part of their social feeds.

TV networks will need to find and deliver preferred content to audiences in an ambient fashion. As an expansion of ambient content, viewers will eventually get targeted content across their entire online presence.

BREAKING DOWN GEOGRAPHICAL BARRIERS

Cloud technology has become ubiquitous in the last decade, bringing tremendous opportunities for content distribution. With cloud technology, owners can deliver content to fan bases, anywhere in the world, without having to set up a heavy CAPEX model. All media files can be simply pushed to the cloud and delivered on multiscreen devices. This format is also likely to cross over into an area that has so far remained dependent on traditional broadcast methods — live sports broadcast.

Platforms like Facebook Live have seized upon the opportunity that live broadcast brings to OTT for both sports and news coverage. Does this mean that traditional broadcasters have nothing to gain from these platforms?

BROADCAST IN 2017 AND BEYOND

Disruptive technologies tend to level the field for everyone. However, if the market leaders are willing to adapt, they can maintain competitive positions throughout the market transformation.

For example, as cord-cutting continues with millennials, companies such as Dish Network have launched their own OTT services. Sling TV, the service offered by Dish, has close to 760,000 subscribers, and is adding more channels soon. Live sports broadcast using Facebook Live or other cloud-based services could also see appropriation by the existing live broadcast ecosystem in near future.

Breaking down geographical barriers could be the biggest game-changer as far as content creation is concerned. In the future, cloud-enabled collaborative platforms will simplify playout management for user-generated content.

For example, a football match could be produced using a live streaming platform such as Facebook Live. By integrating important functions such

as commentary and graphics on a single cloud dashboard, the platform makes it unnecessary for service providers to be geographically co-located.

A match being played in London could be streamed to Norway, with commentary from Manchester, and graphics done in Malaysia.

With cloud, TV networks can move to a completely reimagined workflow, accessing the best resources in the business at a pay-per-use cost. Such cloud-enabled MCR will completely revolutionise playout management, benefitting content producers and broadcast companies alike. However, consumers will be the biggest beneficiaries of these technological advances.

As democratisation of live content takes place, users can create their own sports channels and choose events that they are interested in. What's more, they can eventually set up preferred camera angles and receive personalised feeds. Personalisation of this magnitude is likely to be a boon for account planners, media agencies, and advertisers, granting them deeper insights for more targeted advertising.

“Audiences are relying on social channels, as opposed to TV, for daily news”

As control shifts to viewers in this new broadcast world, existing TV networks need to beef up their technology, delivery, and monetisation platforms to be accessible to viewers and advertisers. Their competition will not necessarily be other TV networks, but rather evolving content and social platforms that are becoming an integral part of audiences' lifestyles. In this context TV networks need to ask themselves, "Are we watching the watcher?" ■