



TV Moves From Living Room to Phone

by Scott Fybush

When consumers want access to video content of their choice on mobile devices, the industry had better not stand in their way.

That was the message of Monday's Super Session keynote address at the "Portable! Digital Media Content Anywhere, Anytime," delivered by Blake Krikorian, co-founder, chairman and CEO of Sling Media Inc.

VIEWING ANYWHERE

"Appointment-based viewing is dead," Krikorian said, recounting the long historical move toward consumer-driven media, beginning with the Supreme Court ruling that legalized the Betamax and continuing through today's DVRs and his own company's Slingbox.

That product enables "place-shifting" by allowing consumers to watch their own local programming from wherever they may be.

Like those earlier technologies, Krikorian said DVRs and the Slingbox have faced legal threats from content providers worried about losing money.

"We have to be careful we don't use copyright to protect business models," he said. "It's better to be using that to protect content."

Krikorian says consumers don't care about content producers' bottom lines. "They don't understand that stuff," he said. "They want their content wherever and whenever they want it." That increasingly extends to in-home viewing, using the Slingbox to extend TV to laptops around the house.

Krikorian said technologies such as Slingbox can actually benefit broadcasters. By turning every computer into another TV, he says the device has actually tripled or quadrupled the number of places consumers can watch TV content.

He said the company's newest offering, a video-sharing service called Clip+Sling, will offer TV networks more opportunities to sell advertising and reinforce network branding surrounding the video content on the computer screen.

Krikorian said broadcasters need to understand that challenging new technologies and trying to fight them with legal action doesn't work in today's world, when consumers won't be dissuaded from adopting the technology they want.

"The alternative [to embracing new technology] is, people are going to be doing this, people are going to be stealing it, people are going to be sharing it, and nobody's going to make any money," he said.

Following Krikorian's keynote address, CNet editor at large Brian Cooley led a panel discussion about portable media with Maureen Fitzpatrick of Atomic Wedgie/Fremantle Media, Larry Gerbrandt of Nielsen Analytics, Kamil Grajski of the FLO Forum, Stuart Lipoff of IP Action Partners, Daniel Tibbets of GoTV Networks and Scott Goodwin of NAB.

"I think we have reached the moment in time where there are no barriers," Lipoff said. He said the technology and content needed to make mobile video work now exist. "What's missing is a business model," he said.

One key to that model is simplifying the user interface, panelists said. "There needs to be a level of quality [to programming] and an interface people are familiar with," Grajski said.

WHAT THE PEOPLE WANT

As for the programming, panelists said consumers seem to want many of the same things on portable devices that they're already watching on their TV sets.

"What may work on a category basis on a cable device is what works on radio," said Gerbrandt, saying programming where words are more important than images, such as sports play-by-play or drama, works better on a small mobile screen than image-centric would programming such as nature documentaries.

So far, Nielsen's measurement of mobile TV viewing shows that consumers look at most of the same hit shows on their phones and PDAs that they watch on their TVs, rather than dipping deeper into the vast sea of content out there.

"If it's a hit, it's going to be a hit on pretty much every device," Gerbrandt said.

Simplifying consumer access to that content is critical, panelists agreed. Gerbrandt cited the Web as an example of successful standardization, where multiple forms of content can all play in a single browser.

www.tvtechnology.com/pages/s.0096/t.5322.html

20.04.2007