

iWay Newsletter

Perspectives on Interactive TV



Getting to Scale: Cable's iTV Advancement

Steve Heeb, Vice President of business development, Comcast

As president of Conditional Access Licensing (CAL) and vice president of business development for Comcast, **Steve Heeb** has a birds-eye view of many things interactive, including IPGs, video on demand, enhanced TV, advanced advertising initiatives and more. Here, he talks about the progression of the CableLabs EBIF specification and its role in fostering a new generation of iTV applications.

What's your view of how interactive television will develop over the next year or so?

The objective is to provide a new service for customers, and to add some revenue on a business model that does not burden the customer.

What's the role of EBIF in those efforts?

EBIF provides a ubiquitous solution people can count on and develop on prior to working with the MSO. So I think it can spur development and bring new capabilities. Everybody can start working with this, and some folks can be faster or slower, but we have a platform - a known - that we're going to use.

What messages would you convey to developers?



From the Editor

Thanks to new technology specifications and a renaissance of creative development, a new era of interactive television on cable has officially begun. In this premier issue of iWay, the itaas online newsletter that covers creative and business issues behind iTV, five executives who are deeply involved in the sector share opinions and ideas about what's now and what's next.

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Developers need to figure out where they fit in there, and where they can provide value to the MSO. And if you're providing value to the MSO, you need to figure out the business model to make some money in this new world.

That's the one caution I would offer to developers. I think people have to let the business model develop, and not force a model when you're bringing in a new app. The worst thing you can do is have a take-it-or-leave it model that says, 'here is the revenue split for the next six years.' We really don't know how it's going to develop. So my advice is, you have to let the model develop and then adapt. And if you have cool apps that provide value, you'll be in the chain.

Where are we in terms of introducing iTV to the mainstream consumer?

The industry has coalesced on something that gives people basically a common ground to work towards. That wasn't there in the past. It was almost like the vendors battling it out, and the MSOs having to choose which one, and having to forecast who was going to win. So that's taken out of the picture, which I think is dramatically beneficial for the whole food chain. So the thing that is good is there's a general focus on how to get this done. The second thing pushing this is that our two-way networks are very mature. We've been streaming VOD, and have had a lot of things

going on in our software platforms. We're mature enough to handle putting an interactive platform on our networks. And now we have volume.

So the false starts of the past are just that...past?

I've been involved with iTV for a fair bit, and we've been almost there a few times. So what I don't want to be is the preacher who stands up on my soapbox and says, 'All the other times were just a warm-up, and this is it' -- because

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we've even heard that a few times. I think the proof is going to be the MSOs deploying this EBIF platform. I truly believe it's going to happen, but that doesn't mean all the applications and interactive TV get turned on instantaneously.

Last question: what's fun about what you're doing?

I think it's neat to change television. A couple of years ago, we had linear TV. And then digital TV, which was a better way to do. Then came video on demand, then high-def. And then came the DVR,



and after that there was a fairly good lull. But since then our networks really progressed. So what's cool, I think, is that we're having another wave of video products for the customers. And as long as we're not intrusive, where we block their core functionality, which is watching their best programming, as long as we do it correctly, and it's an enhancement, and people can turn it on and turn it off, I think it's going to be a pretty neat solution.



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