

# Interactive TV Services for IPTV

*IPTV will deliver live and on-demand content over broadband. John Withnell takes a look at what interactive TV services can be expected to support the growth of IPTV.*

IPTV (Internet Protocol Television) is a method of distributing television content over broadband that enables a more customised and interactive user experience. IPTV will mean a fundamental change in viewing habits. Viewers will be able to watch what they want, when they want to. Interactive TV services will be a key differentiator for the multitude of IPTV offerings that are emerging. Interactivity via a fast two-way connection will lift IPTV ahead of today's television.

IPTV brings together the television, internet and telephone. Much like cable or satellite television, IPTV uses a set-top box (STB) that allows viewers to watch hundreds of channels and order movies through video-on-demand (VOD). IPTV uses broadband ADSL, the same technology that delivers high-speed Internet to the computer. This opens the door to much more interactivity and the potential for thousands, as opposed to hundreds, of channels.

## **Find What's On**

All IPTV services will offer basic interactivity to support navigation and search of the vast amounts of content. An electronic programme guide (EPG) will allow viewers to browse the linear and on-demand content that is available.

EPGs are likely to allow viewers to look at programme listings up to two weeks in advance, and also look back over programmes from the previous seven days broadcast schedule. A powerful search facility will allow viewers to look for programmes by title, genre and keywords. Filters will allow viewers to display lists of movies, music, pay-per-view events and high definition programmes.

The EPG will be customisable by viewers, who will be able to create their own line-up of favourite channels and content. As well as full-screen layouts, EPGs will have a mini-overlay mode which will allow the viewer to keep watching the current programme while browsing the schedule.

## **Personal Video Recorder**

Many IPTV set top boxes will incorporate a Personal Video Recorder (PVR) that will allow programmes and interactive content to be recorded. Viewers will be able to watch one programme while recording another. They'll also be able to use interactive services or video on demand while recording in the background. While watching linear TV programming, viewers will be able to pause and rewind live television.

The PVR will be programmed via the Electronic Programme Guide. Intelligent series linking will allow programme episodes to be recorded based on preferences; first-runs, repeats, or all occurrences. Programme and movie trailers will contain interactive links that can be selected to schedule a recording. Remote scheduling of recording will also be possible using a mobile phone or the web.

### **Enhanced TV**

With IPTV, viewers will be able to watch a lot more television at the same time. Sports fans will be able to keep an eye on six games at once, on the same screen, or study one game from multiple camera angles. Viewer involvement will be encouraged through voting, competitions and messaging services.

### **Advertising**

Interactive advertising will extend traditional linear advertising. It will allow advertisers to give product information in the form of an on-screen interactive brochure. This will re-enforce the brand messages and encourage viewer involvement with the product. It will also allow a direct element to be added to any TV campaign, with responses being captured from viewers.

### **Communication Services**

The two-way nature of an IPTV connection makes it ideal for providing person-to-person communication services. Instant messaging services will allow viewers to 'chat' via text messages while continuing to watch TV. Video conferencing over television will allow virtual family gatherings when family members are spread across the world.

Services will be used both as stand-alone applications, and as add-ons to programming. Friends will be able to chat while watching a programme 'together' in different locations. Phone-in shows will be able to display callers, linked directly from their home.

### **Community Services**

IPTV will provide many feeds of news, entertainment and information. Viewers will be able to personalise their 'feed reader' to match their particular interests. This will then collect up-to-date information such as news headlines, sports results, share prices and travel updates in a single place.

Dating services will allow subscribers to set up a profile and find compatible 'matches' to communicate with. Messages will be exchanged quickly, cheaply and safely, without the security concerns of meeting in the real world.

## **Betting & Gaming**

IPTV will offer a range of betting and gaming on demand services. These will include sports betting services, where bets are placed on both live and virtual sports. The betting will be closely linked to the TV coverage, and will include in-running betting. There will also be a range of casino style games including roulette, blackjack, slots and poker. Some of these will be stand-alone games, others will be linked to programming with either live or virtual presenters.

## **Personal Content**

IPTV will enable the secure sharing of video recordings, photos and music. Users with a home network will be able to share digital content with other devices such as PCs and portable media players. IPTV will be a key component in the connected home.

Users will also be able to share content with family and friends across the Internet. Effective digital content protection with consumer flexibility will be essential for such sharing to flourish. IPTV could even allow users to have their own television channel where they could share their views, photos and videos with the rest of the world as a video podcast.

## **Conclusion**

Interactive television will provide genuinely useful applications that enhance the overall user experience of IPTV. Interactive services must be seen as part of the overall infrastructure of delivering television – not just a bolt on.

To get the right interactive services to meet consumer demands will require experimentation. Content providers, broadcasters and network owners need to develop, trial, refine and roll-out interactive services. A lot has been learnt over the past ten years about interactive TV. This knowledge can help inform the design of interactive services for IPTV.

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