Internet Television Zaps Its Way into Households Worldwide!

By David Pecaut

You walk in the door after an exhausting day and are greeted by a beaming plasma TV display, which promptly asks how you're feeling. It then updates you on the staggering availability of new or old programming and entertainment and education possibilities.

Myriad choices are instantly available at your fingertips, covering everything from popular TV to the latest in foreign language courses—complete with fellow classmaters in 16 time zones.

There’s interactive gaming, offering games from simple mini-moves to 14-hourly individualized sitcoms, produced by Internet TV loners as well as the traditional networks all struggling to offer compelling fare to an increasingly nuanced viewer demographic. And it’s all tailored to meet your wildest cravings or most exacting professional needs—all this before you even have time to sit down.

A dream from some geeky hardy, it is the soon to be reality of IPTV, or Internet TV. This new medium played at a conference held May 23 at Columbia University, it’s just around the digital corner.

There is widespread belief that the future of the TV is now, but whether this medium is ready for what promises to be a great leap in entertainment, education and commerce will depend on how well the tech industry, media firms, the tech and Internet community and government Regulatory issues associated with Internet TV were discussed during a special evening session at the ABCNY.

IPTV 2 was preceded by the industry’s first attempt, IPTV 1 (Columbia called the name). That first version, plagued with poorly designed hardware and all kinds of technical nightmares, failed to attract any real audience.

This time, industry visionaries believe the situation is different—there were plenty of comparisons between the Internet TV’s current potential and the halcyon days of radio in the 1920s or CB radio of the 1940s.

Elano, professor of finance and economics at Columbia’s Business School and director of CITI, says the benefits of the conference are two-fold. First, he encourages the public to think ahead. TV 60 years ago began as a commercial operation and became a huge source of entertainment, developing socially and economically. Twenty years ago the Internet started to do the same thing—put the two together now and you will have a great opportunity for new audience.

To be successful, the conference organizers plan to attract leading minds involved in Internet TV and the propagation of their ideas to as wide an audience as possible.

It’s fair to say that CITI and the Business School have been at the forefront of analyzing the economics and policy of this new medium, and of the larger changing media environment and the implications for communities (see copyright page for more).

This conference is the third in the series of conferences (IPTV 2, and related research publications, help to ensure the progress of this work, the inclusion of the thinkers involved and the dissemination of these ideas).

One reason for the enthusiasm of the conference attendees is what Internet TV stands for today, an entertainment event, an offering that combines extraordinary advances in video transmission technology along with enhanced economic and consumer models.

On the technology front, according to speaker Galo Emur, manager of digital technology research at NBC Universal, one need only look at broadband penetration rates into the home to gauge subscriber potential. "In 2001, the rate for some was roughly nine percent. Today it is 35 percent, he explains."

Increased access is possible in part because broadband capacity, the so-called "pipe" carrying images to the home, is growing larger and faster daily, allowing more content to move in increasingly less time to a larger audience. Broadband Internet TV has finally become a more viable contender for the delivery of broadcast-quality video in time frames consumers will appreciate.

Economically, Internet TV is poised to offer an open-ended video universe of entertainment variety and dimension that will force current television and pay-per-view offerings to change the way in which they serve customers. That’s because, as Broadband TV promises an irresistible entertainment triumvirate of interactivity (simultaneous and multiuser mass communications, videos and gaming, etc.) along with the collaborative as well as the reconfigurative advantages included in the rise of so-called "Me-TV" in which subscribers can customize and combine programming or services when they want, where they want and with whom they want.

As the owner of a startup business in the developing medium (online file sharing), Mitchell Reichgut frequently attends Internet TV conferences around the country. For Reichgut, the CITI conference met two key needs: first, to learn about advances in the field and to keep abreast of what competitors are doing. Second, make contacts that can help grow one’s business. The best conferences achieve both of these goals by bringing together industry leaders today. The CITI crowd was composed of well-connected professionals from the field, the event that was covered by the New York Times, and the sessions I took part in had some terrific spontaneous interactions," he said.

For a look at upcoming conferences and events, go to theColumbia Law School’s Tenet Legal Services for Community Residents

By Lana Zak

At the launch of the Columbia University—Legal Services for New York (LSNY) Harlem Community Advocacy Partnership, a new alliance aimed at strengthening tenant advocacy services, Violet Rittenhour, a former Columbia student and a former client of Legal Services for New York City (LSNY), explained the need for legal representation services for the residents of West Harlem.

“I was a student at Columbia facing an eviction, which LSNY helped me beat, as a result of a rent rise that I was unable to pay at the time,” said Rittenhour. “I’m a single-divorced mother trying to get an education,” she added.

Mr. David Schizer, dean of the Law School; Mary McCune, new project attorney, West Harlem Community Advocacy Partnership; Andy Scherer, Legal Services for New York City (LSNY); Robert Jackson, councilmember, District 7; Jordan Reyes-Montblanc, chair of Community Board 9; Lee C. Bollinger, Columbia president; and Cornell Lowers, chair of the board of Harlem Legal Services, attended the event.

“This is a great opportunity that Columbia has offered the community and that we are very proud to accept,” Mr. Schizer said.

“The partnership aims to protect long-standing community residents and economically vulnerable populations, such as seniors, citizens, the disabled and recent immigrants,” said community activist Joseph A. C. Williams.

Mr. Bollinger emphasized the importance of Columbia’s partnerships with the community. He said, “in so far as Columbia can use its resources, in this case young people, to help people in need and help be part of this community, there just can’t be a higher activity for us than that.”

Columbia law students will be able to apply their work with the community partners that made the program possible. “It’s a great honor to be a part of Harlem Legal Services and Legal Services more generally,” he said. “I had my very first legal experience as an intern for the Legal Aid Society in the South Bronx and I still recall vividly the experiences I had there.”

Said Councilman Jackson praised the partnership for tackling the problem of housing. “I am pleased to join Columbia and Legal Services in announcing this new resource, which will help defend the rights of low-income residents of Manhattan. When Columbia asked me a year ago what services were needed in the community, I told them legal services for tenants. I am pleased that they have moved so quickly in making this happen,” he said.

This new partnership builds on the success of the Columbia-Goldman-Sachs River Basin Tenant Advocacy Program and the Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights. Like those programs, Columbia Law School will be able to supply their work with the partnership toward fulfilling their pro bono service requirement.

“I have great enthusiasm for our partnership with LSNY,” said Dean Schizer. “Our students will do important work in our community while learning from very gifted and public-spirited lawyers.”

“Our community is substantial—poor, substantially working poor, but so the number of cases requiring legal assistance on housing issues is tremendous,” said Jordi Reyes-Montblanc. “This is a great opportunity that Columbia has offered the community and that we are very proud to accept.”

Andrew Scherer, the executive director and president of LSNY, expressed his pleasure at the new partnership and program attorney. “We are fortunate to have Mary McCune, who brings a wealth of experience and skill, as our project attorney. LSNY is very grateful to the Columbia Law School for this important project and to Columbia law students for volunteering to help us to serve more clients.”

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