

Google bridges the gap between internet and TV

Yesterday, Google launched the much anticipated Google TV platform, a collaboration with Sony, Intel and Logitech, which attempts to bridge the gap between the internet and the TV. After months of speculation, Google announced that Google TV is in fact an open source platform which not only brings the web to the living room, but also empowers audiences to experience TV with the added capabilities of the internet.

The platform is a smart TV service that delivers a variety of functions, with the fundamental one being its ability to run an integrated content search throughout all TV channels and the internet. Audiences are able to experience content from instantaneous searched results from Pay TV, Free-to-air TV, leading web-content platforms, streaming videos, personal content libraries and mobile applications on a Google Chrome web browser. The user's favourite channels, programmes and content can then be viewed on multiple browser screens and organised via shortcuts on a personalised home page.

Google TV can be accessed through a 'Companion Box' by Logitech, or via a new Sony TV set, both devices powered by Intel technology. Running on the Android platform, the service can be navigated with an Android phone via a mobile application, or by a Logitech remote control.

This innovation is an experience that not only TV audiences would applaud but also Cable, Satellite and Telco TV providers. With an increasing amount of TV content, the current clumsy programme guide interfaces would soon require an upgrade to more user-friendly systems. With this platform, Google has just solved their problems and saved them many dollars in R&D.

On the flip side, there is continued speculation about the success of this platform, with a number of key concerns which Google would need to address quickly. The foremost concern is how this integrated search engine will affect Google's core search model, in particular for SEO. With both TV and internet integrated in one search engine, two different types of content are in effect aggressively competing for page rank priority. Large content TV broadcasters could possibly be overshadowed by an amateur video gone viral on YouTube, but, if TV results were ranked first, consumers may feel that Google TV was bought out by large media companies.

There are also concerns over consumers' choice of watching illegal rather than legal content. Although Google responded confidently that they are able to control what audiences can or cannot watch, this may lead to further concerns about intrusion of internet users' freedom, privacy and protection of large media companies.

On the technical side, the failure to demonstrate the platform without having to ask all audiences to switch off their Wi-Fi devices does initiate a bandwidth concern. No matter how much innovation is injected into the platform, without high speed internet connection infrastructures in place, the adoption rate would grind to a halt before it even begins. Perhaps this is the reason why Google has invested in their own hi-speed internet infrastructures.

Google TV, which will launch into market in the second half of this year, is undoubtedly an unprecedented innovation that would offer TV audiences entertainment experiences like no other before. However, Google and partners do have a few more hurdles to jump before they take the world to the next era of TV-watching.