

Channels everywhere, channels for everyone. That's what's ahead, according to companies such as Magnify and Ustream.

In the good old days, television channels carried a succession of linear programming that viewers could watch each hour. Today, TV programming is available online from the likes of Hulu, NBC, and BBC iPlayer. 'Channels' are being re-defined as always-on web video destinations. But will there ever be an audience large enough to tune into so many channels and give everyone their 15 minutes of fame? And how long can the Internet handle the exploding video traffic load before ISPs begin metering transmission costs to viewers?

YouTube has proven there is a massive audience for individual clips – from catapulting squirrels to movie trailers to political rants. Now Magnify and Ustream are among companies making it possible for anyone to create a channel featuring on-demand or live video streams with built-in social networking features.

Magnify provides user-generated video channels for web publishers, media companies, and video bloggers. Ustream's broadcast platform lets you cut and paste its live viewer player's HTML code into any website (Facebook or MySpace page) for private or public showing.

Both Magnify and Ustream are classic start-ups with an urgency to grow fast and convert their free offering into revenue—before they run out of funding and have to switch off their servers. Each has an important story to tell about the future.

The world according to Magnify is one where adding video to your website is easy and powerful. It currently enables 41,000 websites to include a video channel as a subset of their existing URL. And in the near future RSS will enable that same content to "appear with ease" over your cell phone, laptop, or web-enabled TV, according to Magnify CEO Steve Rosenbaum.

I don't know if we really need more channels, but Magnify is growing by 20% a month, and Rosenbaum is bullish about the market. "There is a measurable shift from linear television to non-linear, user-programmed experiences," Rosenbaum says. "As those behaviours shift, the advertising will follow it."

## Channels for everyone



**About the Author**  
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**Get ready to watch thousands of new Web video channels - and hope the resulting bandwidth crunch doesn't raise our ISP rates, says Howard Greenfield.**

Providing a live video platform to the masses is a scalability challenge that even Google has been reluctant to tackle. But many start-ups such as Justin.TV, Stickam, and Mogulus are filling a niche to make it easy to go live online and deliver an interactive experience.

Then there's Ustream. "We're similar to YouTube, except we're live," says co-founder Brad Hunstable. With \$22m in venture funding and over 10m visitors in June, Ustream's latest coup is its selec-

tion as exclusive provider of live streaming video for the upcoming US Republican National Convention. With six cameras in six different locations, Ustream will deliver interviews, speeches, live-action party caucus antics, and lofty political moments to the entire planet.

According to CEO John Ham, Ustream's live channels are not just for watching: They're for connecting. The interaction between broadcaster and audience is key.

"Ustream is not a destination," says Ham, "it's a platform for 'live moments.'" The power of live Web channels will only increase, according to Ham, who says that in the future live, web-based video interactivity will be a common social networking foundation.

But do I really *want* a zillion more channels? Magnify's Rosenbaum told me to get over this question, that business and personal channels differ from broadcast channels. They are essentially communities where "viewers are submitters, viewers are voters, viewers are makers". In the same way, Ustream's John Ham challenged me to imagine a mobile world where live content will create connected roaming communities.

OK. I'll buy all that. But what about bandwidth saturation? As carriers' costs increase, will a metering fee be passed on to the consumer or even crush free services such as Magnify and UStream? The economics vary from country to country, where average Internet speeds differ considerably. For identical service fees, compare 2.35 Mbps in 15th ranked US to 63.6 Mbps in Number One ranked Japan, according to the CWA in August 2008.

Fibre could mitigate the bandwidth crunch, but most carriers must push the envelope of existing copper. Alcatel-Lucent's 'SmartDSL' squeezes out an extra 25% of DSL performance. New chips, network protocols, and line bonding capabilities such as SharedBand address the challenge, but it will be a while before bandwidth pressure is eased. In the US, the Federal Communications Commission recently protected consumers by preventing Comcast's selective slow-down of P2P traffic. Will they stick up for the Web channel audiences when ISPs want to slap on higher fees for higher-volume streaming?

Too many questions for my crystal ball. For now, it's time to start watching some of these new channels. Watching and watching ...

