

Silicon Valley explores TV Next

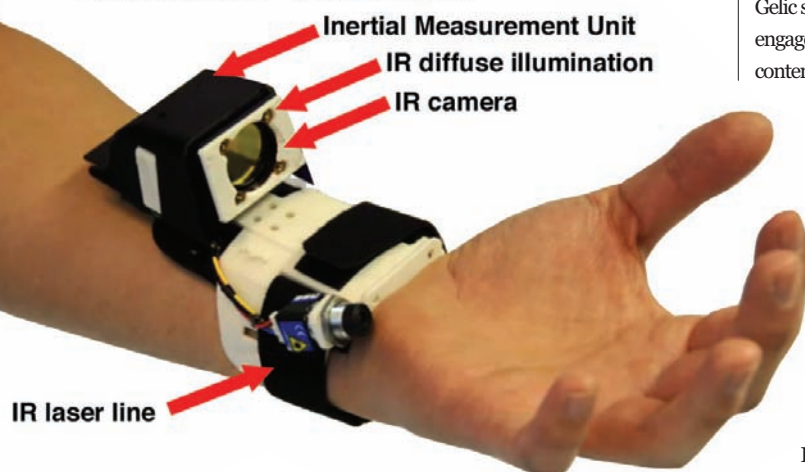
Howard Greenfield reports on three interactive video forces driving the on-going convergence stampede.

Two source from USA Network (NBC) and CBS broadcast executives speaking at this month's 11, 2012, and the third from an intriguing new TV user interface breakthrough showcased at the same time in Cambridge, Massachusetts during the ACM User Interface Conference.

"Smart phones and tablets are exploding," and new media business revenues are dwarfing traditional media in the business of entertainment and broadcasting according to Digital USA Network and NBCUniversal SVP Jesse Redniss at the TV Next conference in Silicon Valley in October.

Asked what this meant for the year ahead, Redniss remarked that the "single biggest development in 2013 is going to be a year of major explosion in the 'open web' with people and brands getting a lot more comfortable with putting themselves out there." I take that to mean

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that the divide between service providers and audiences will shrink as broadcasting itself becomes a channel for connecting the two through new social interactions.

Internet video usage is at an all time high, with 37.7 billion online videos watched in August 2012 by 188m US Internet users. Ad views that same month totalled 9.5 billion, according to Comscore. Android growth in the US continues its dramatic increase, says Redniss, pointing to recent Nielsen and other recent reports of US smart phone purchases the past three months being comprised of 58.6% Android and 33% iOS.

"We had 13 million social comments in our interactive 54th Grammy Awards," said Rob Gelic, CBS's general manager, digital platforms speaking to the TV Next audience. "It set a new record –

bigger than the Superbowl – 25 times bigger than last year."

Americans talk big. If it's big, it matters. The thing is, CBS really is big online and so are these developments. CBS is second in the world only to the BBC. What's new is that prior to this year's Grammy's, a three-day, live CBS event had a million unique viewers preview related content before the broadcast itself. It was the second highest rated Grammy of all time according to Gelic who honestly asks: "Do these digital initiatives lead to more popularity?" He is empirical in answering his own question by saying "the uptick in social conversation tied to broadcast popularity was evident."

This is a new social media magnet, and you can it is setting the bar for what will emerge in short order for all broadcasters around the world. A special app spotlights technology being used during the show – a kind of 'behind the scenes' production approach from previous years, says Gelic. He calls it the "anatomy of a hit". These so-called web series extensions have delivered 130m streams for CBS, 10m of them being followers of the global travels of a three time *Survivor* winner.

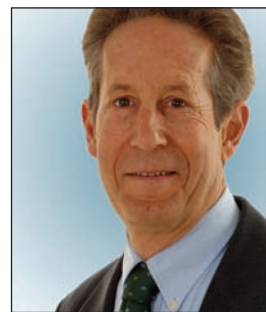
"We are focused on facilitating dialogue within those social spheres," says Gelic who believes that people want to contribute to a social media conversation where there's meaningful fan engagement.

This happens when fans can talk online with the actors and producers, so CBS schedules events such as video chats, tweeting, video responses that feed off the instinctive needs by fans to understand the shows and have an authentic voice. Gelic speaks of CBS' 'flock to unlock' crowd sourcing effort that gets more people to engage in the social channel to provide, or unlock, "further exclusive background content on the show if enough people show up to watch it."

What's still missing in all these developments is an elegant interface. One response I noticed that tackles this frontier is the 'Digits' freehand interactive glove developed by Newcastle University in the UK and Microsoft Research as shown at the ACM UIST Symposium. Rather than wave my own hand to describe it, the best communicator is their slick video demo (go to YouTube and search "power in the palm of your hands").

The latest North American projections are that by 2016, 515 billion minutes of video traffic will traverse the Internet, around three trillion minutes globally, comprising 55% of all Internet traffic, as Octoshape's US GM Scott Brown related in his TV Next presentation. The interface to this new form of TV viewing is not sufficient: smart phone buttons and remote controls were not invented for watching the convoluted mix of video, music, phone, text, and web messages.

In broad brush, TV Next thought-leader speakers proclaim New Media (\$1,089 billion market) now dwarfs 'Old Media' (\$366 billion) according to *Business Insider*. But like a puppy falling all over itself, overly affable, paws too big, the round figures and proliferating new television developments are still in search of social manners and polish. Today's interactive services from broadcasters and researchers are powerful and lead the way, but they are not smooth or uniformly engaging. On the other hand, there's no point in criticising or analysing too much. The changes in services are so striking, it's amazing just to watch as they inevitably combine into a bold new medium.



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