

# Super Triple-Play (The Next Big Thing)

Despite there being content and devices galore, no coherent user experience is in sight, suggests Howard Greenfield, who explains why perfecting three-screen delivery is key to the new media market.

**Y**ou heard it here first: The next big thing is Super Triple Play. What, you ask, is Super Triple Play? Call it the delivery of seamless, easy-to-access content that makes it a pleasure to surf across three different screens: TV, PC, and Mobile (i.e. smart phones and tablets). Think iPad UI.

What's still sorely needed to get us there are:

- A uniform dashboard (user-interface) – one look-and-feel across the three displays
- Easy book-marking to smoothly glide between the same content on different devices
- Social connectivity with your online community of choice

Achieving this will take time, but because the consumer retention rewards are so big, the media industry will find soon find itself on a new mission to bridge these hardware gaps and streamline new media programming. TiVo General Manager David Sanford (above right) told me during XMediaResearch's Over the Top Video conference in San Jose, that "we not only expect to see a TiVo user experience for every room of the home in a cost-effective way, but you'll also have access to all your content over every device with a consistent interface."

The engine is ready (devices connected to the Internet, Cable, or Satellite), and there's plenty of fuel (video content as the IDG chart below shows), but no steering wheel, or dashboard to drive with.

As the two premier industry shows have shown so far this year, (CES in January, in Las Vegas, and February's Mobile World Congress in Barcelona), there is no shortage of technology enablers. Dozens of new smart phones and tablets are being introduced accompanied by thousands of new apps all aligned with advances in adaptive streaming, HTML5, and digital rights management that play into the new picture.



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Services such as NBC/Fox Mobile Content Venture (MCV), DECE's UltraViolet, and Comcast/Time-Warner's TV Everywhere are adding momentum to a three-screen paradigm. Consumers are also beneficiaries of an iOS - Android war that's increasing choice. While Steve Jobs just introduced the iPad2 on the back of 90% tablet market share (15 million iPads sold in 2010 for \$9.5 billion), Nielsen analysts simultaneously announced that Android is now "the top smart phone OS in the US." Android's latest Honeycomb release is designed specifically for tablets.

iPad and iPhone are "only one example of a compelling interface," and other devices will proliferate, according to Sanford. "In a large percentage of our installed base, we're going to want to



give people access to that content – beyond just the set-top or TV," he states.

Cable, satellite and other content providers are finding themselves competing with a range of these portable devices running apps and media players that deliver over the top (OTT) content. "That's where the rush is," says Sanford. "If you are a Comcast or a DirecTV, you are trying to create value for your subscriber service," and cross-platform is a tremendous value. "As you see the proliferation on a range of

devices, you've got to be there too because it reinforces the value for the subscriber. That's why you're increasingly going to see portions of the Comcast-on-demand library available on Xfinity."

Sanford believes delivering to all the devices is an economic driver that adds value to the \$150 subscribers put down each month, because they will lose customers if they do not provide access to the content, or at least a competitive amount of the content on a range of devices.

Many believe there are different use cases for each screen. "We've seen this in how our content is consumed," Justin Eckhouse, senior product manager of emerging media platforms at CBS Interactive explained. "At home and work we've found that audiences like to consume little titbits of info—a two or three minute video is great for that." But when you're sitting on your couch at home," says Eckhouse, "you're accustomed to watching thirty minute programmes, so we can produce long-form content that works on the couch with your 50-inch TV with your TiVo or Google box connected to it. Whereas on the Web, we have tried that off and on for years, and it just doesn't work very well."

Innovative things are also happening when programming is customised for devices, rather than pushed uniform over all of them, says Eckhouse. There are entries into this market by Xfinity and TiVo apps to control different devices, but Eckhouse believes we'll soon see "media companies like ours taking that to the next level. Not just using my \$600 iPad as a remote control," he laughs, "because that's not that interesting. But making sure one device really complements the other with metadata and value-added content instead of just whiz-bang tricks we're seeing right now."

"Television' as we know it is breaking out of the box. In an age of information overload and excessive choice, those content providers that can launch an efficient, elegant "super triple play" interface will thrive. Innovative, superb programming is still king. But for now, we've got abundant digital media – what's missing is clear access.