

TV Dream – or Nightmare?

TV Everywhere can boost the value of bulk video services. But the dream may go unrealized for many communities or become a nightmare for others.

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Asset Campus Housing and Suddenlink recently announced what is apparently the first bulk deployment of TV Everywhere, or multiscreen video services, to five purpose-built student communities in Texas. Residents of these communities currently receive Suddenlink high-speed Internet access and cable television as part of their rental packages; beginning this summer, Suddenlink will add Suddenlink2GO at no additional charge, giving residents access to more than 120,000 TV episodes, video clips and movies, accessible anywhere in the United States on any computer with a high-speed Internet connection.

Suddenlink can offer multiscreen access at no additional cost by peering all the traffic. The content will be routed from its network, not through the Internet. As a result, the addition of multiscreen services will not affect the communities' connections to the Internet. The five deployments all provide bulk data services via wired Ethernet with robust Wi-Fi for supplemental access.

Adding multiscreen access to linear bulk video and wired and wireless high-speed Internet access will become the new paradigm for student housing communities. Multiscreen services such as Suddenlink2GO are the future for the multifamily industry, though most cable companies are still 12 to 18 months from deploying them. Although there will always be a place for large TVs in living areas, students' personal viewing is migrating to PCs, tablets, smartphones and other Internet-enabled devices.

The language in a community's bulk video and data services agreement is the only leverage the community may have to push for these services. In almost

every case, the community will have to wait until its provider makes multiscreen services commonly available.

AUTHENTICATING BULK USERS

Because multiscreen video services were not imagined when many communities were built and video services were contracted, communities may face significant challenges. The greatest hurdle may be authentication of the content rights. For most bulk video deployments, only the community's name appears in video service databases – not the residents' names. Consequently, a resident cannot authenticate, or create the login and password required for multiscreen video service. This is a major reason deployment of multiscreen video services to bulk communities lags so far behind deployment to retail subscribers.

Not all communities have well-managed Ethernets with robust Wi-Fi. Communities with less capable deployments may find that adding multiscreen video services stresses their networks beyond the breaking point.

Older cable modem deployments, in particular, may face technical obstacles. Did the cable company deploy a robust cable modem solution originally and continue to upgrade it as needed? Each community is unique, but generally, if its provider already has problems providing bulk data services, a community should be concerned.

The vast majority of vendors other

than franchised cable operators that provide bulk video solutions to student housing communities use programming from DISH Network. Though DISH does not have an online offering today, most observers believe a multiscreen service is on the way. If DISH does roll out multiscreen services in the near future, these private cable operators (PCOs) should continue to be able offer competitive offerings.

However, the reliability and cost-effectiveness of services may depend on the PCOs' peering relationships with DISH Network. As mentioned earlier, peering is critical to multiscreen video deployments. Without it, content would have to be routed through the Internet, which would drain site bandwidth and significantly increase the cost to the data provider or the community. Most multiscreen video service streams require a minimum of 3 Mbps. Some PCOs – such as Pavlov Media with its new Tesseractiv offering – are already peering to improve access to online video content such as Hulu and YouTube.

If bulk video and bulk data services are provided by two different companies, the situation becomes more complex. An existing video agreement might address this situation; if not, providing TV Everywhere would be at the video provider's discretion. If there is no peering, it may be best for the data provider and the community if the video provider does not enable the service. ❖

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