

In the Era of Multiple Screens, Quality Counts

As consumers juggle more video service options, they become more discerning about the quality of the video experience. Service providers should view this as an opportunity, not a threat.

By Jeremy Bennington ■ *Cheetah Technologies*

The television industry is going through a period of rapid change and innovation – a sort of video renaissance – as content and service providers compete for consumer eyeballs. The ability to stream content online through over-the-top (OTT) services and new broadcast streaming services poses the threat of cord cutting, and as a result operators face a new challenge in the battle to retain subscribers.

As the video wars heat up, ensuring that customers receive the best possible quality of experience (QoE) and quality of service (QoS) will become an advantage in the increasingly competitive video market. For video providers especially, achieving a balance between keeping up with industry innovation and addressing fundamental network issues is essential.

QoS and QoE have become buzzwords in the video industry, encompassing a multitude of aspects of the user experience. In general, QoS refers to how well a service is delivered across a network, and QoE refers to the experience a viewer has while watching video – what the viewer can physically see and how it can be characterized in terms of quality.

With reports from the 2012 NAB Show reflecting a paradigm shift toward a multiplatform digital future, traditional providers must adopt a strategic approach and recognize that video quality is directly tied to revenue. A recent Informa survey indicates advertisers may be willing to pay more for guaranteed

Automating network maintenance helps avoid network fatigue and keep service quality high.

QoS, which demonstrates the importance of quality regardless of platform.

QOS BEGINS WITH THE NETWORK

QoS always begins at the network level. Proactively managing network health seems obvious for operators, but it's a common challenge with a significant effect on QoE and customer satisfaction. Understanding how to mitigate and resolve network disruptions is a critical first step to ensuring that video is seamlessly delivered across the network.

Surprisingly, regular maintenance causes network fatigue over time, so automating operations as much as possible can help avoid overtaxing the network by opening, closing or modifying resources frequently. Mechanical failures, including loose or damaged connectors, cable shield damage or signal leakage, can hinder video delivery, as can such external factors as temperature and weather. Unless they are addressed in a timely fashion, all these roadblocks inhibit successful delivery and ultimately

affect the video itself, causing viewer frustration and potential abandonment.

As well, the Federal Communications Commission requires operators to generate daily service reports showing proof of performance, a time-consuming undertaking that can be proactively avoided through automation to ensure that various network test points meet regulatory requirements.

Network management is a 24/7 operation. Daily tasks such as changing pads and equalizers can have a negative effect on service delivery if done incorrectly. These manual errors can be avoided by automating as many tasks as possible and establishing set standards for operations personnel to ensure consistent QoS at any day or time.

For decades, cable operators have been delivering video to the home, and their networks, though solid, still require regular maintenance and attention to thwart service delivery inhibitors. Over recent months, there has been

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talk about cord cutting as consumers shift their dollars to alternative Internet streaming services. When consumers are presented with several video options, operators must efficiently manage their existing networks and simultaneously stay ahead of changes to fully embrace the major revenue opportunity that lies in front of them.

THE CHALLENGE OF TV EVERYWHERE

As the transition to online video continues and traditional video providers begin complementing their services with Internet streaming, all providers must take into account bandwidth and its effect on both QoS and QoE. More broadcasters and video providers are jumping on the TV Everywhere bandwagon – offering new streaming services, creating apps for iPads and smartphones so viewers can watch TV on the go, and enabling video on demand through gaming consoles. With this trend comes the challenge of keeping costs low without compromising

Traditional pay-TV providers still have a leg up in delivering consistent, high-quality video.

video quality on a crowded network.

Although several nontraditional companies, such as Amazon and Aereo, have entered the online video market, traditional pay-TV providers still have a leg up to excel in delivering consistent, high-quality video. Along with bundled content, many of these providers also offer content delivery networks and broadband services, with which they can leverage their connections and generate new sources of revenue. For example, if a customer subscribes to a lower-tier broadband service but temporarily wants to stream a high-quality video, a broadband provider can boost the connection speed for a day at a certain price. This business model can apply regardless of the video source – making it possible for broadband providers to benefit from

competing streaming services.

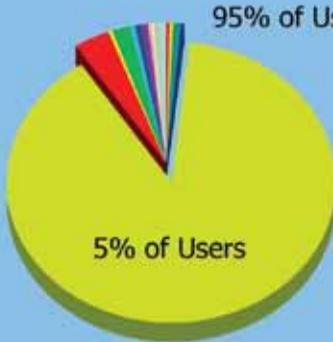
For the first time since the advent of color TV, the video industry is going through rapid change and innovation. Technology giants such as Google and Apple are trying to claim their stakes, OTT services are making headway and TV Everywhere is on the rise. All these options can be confusing for consumers who are trying to decide where and how they would like to view content, and traditional video providers feel the pressure to keep up. If there is one constant, however, it is that consumers demand instant gratification and pristine video quality. As they move into the multiscreen future, video providers can't neglect the importance of quality and should use it to their advantage in the battle for subscriber retention and growth. ♦

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