

Vidcasting market set to grow

The next Internet revolution may just begin at home on an almost non-existent budget. Over the past year, vidcasting, or video-on-demand broadcasts, have gained popularity across the Internet and are poised to become the successor to podcasting (recording an audio file on a computer, uploading it to a server, then pointing others to the link and gathering a listening audience).

The premise is simple: Record a short movie or show, then import the video into your computer, make whatever edits you wish, upload it to the Internet and then make the world aware of your new program. Add the right RSS code to the Web site the movie is running on and viewers will be alerted as to when the "show" has been updated.

"I think it's the future, where it's all headed," said a vidcaster who identified himself by his online handle, "Pox." He is the co-founder of "PSP Hacking 101," a biweekly homebrewed Internet video program that routinely draws between 30,000 and 60,000 viewers for each new episode. "Vidcasting allows everyone to have a voice."

The shows, which initially began as an experiment and means of easily answering frequently asked questions on a Web site devoted to modifications for Sony's PlayStation Portable videogame console, have since become an Internet hit.

"This will be the next step in broadcasting. Cable and broadcasting are working to make smaller niches, and there's a limit as to what can be done. On the Internet, you can have as many channels as you want," said John Lee, director of MGOTO, a startup venture that specializes in broadcast content for the Internet and mobile devices. "Smaller entities can now broadcast their content to millions of people."

As wireless Internet access becomes more prevalent in homes and offices, emerging network technologies, such as WiMax, could allow for high-speed wireless Internet connections to extend miles further than their current ranges and bring vidcasts to an even larger audience. Simultaneous developments in video compression can also ease the task of pushing large amounts of video data and bring the content to a wider array of devices such as PDAs and mobile phones.

"Right at this moment, anybody with a computer, a cheap microphone and an Internet provider can reach a potential global audience of hundreds of millions of listeners," said Ron Evry, host of "Mister Ron's Basement," a popular daily audio podcast in which Evry reads public domain stories for his listening audience. "How long before this becomes possible with video? Well, it's starting right now."

Unfortunately, there are some issues to contend with. Popular vidcasts may find themselves paying extra bandwidth bills from their Internet hosts due to the extra traffic their programs generate. "We switched to an unlimited host, which took the site down due to an overflow of traffic," said Pox of "PSP Hacking 101."

"Right now sponsors are helping with the hosting."

Additionally, there are no universal sets of tools for the easy creation of vidcasts, which may prove problematic for would-be program creators.

"Creating a blog is supported via sites like blogger.com, but a vidcast isn't as straight forward," said Tim Bjarin, president of analyst firm Creative Strategies Inc. "Over the next two years, firms will work to help automate the productions process via tools like a site similar to blogger.com."

"Vidcasts have some initial costs, but it's hard to tell where the business model will be. We're probably two years out from determining what the business model is," said Bjarin with regard to the economic situation.

"Ultimately, the advertising model has to kick in."

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