

Why this is lame

by Tom Burton

Hyper fast broadband (sadly not in Australia), super powered servers, a gaggle of web 2.0 and desktop applications are spurring daily innovations and new products ranging from virtual word processors to photo sharing and podcasting.

Only this month, a new application called [Orb](#) was released which allows streaming from a PC of a live to air tv program say in Los Angeles direct to any other PC, say in Australia.

If consumers want to watch the most current episode of *Lost* live then it is but a click away for any one with a browser.

Communication Minister Senator Coonan's cautious attempt to at least get the industry onto a digital path way is to be applauded but against this backdrop of the hyper innovation and mega investment of the web it looks lame.

Having made a lifetime of 25 per cent margins by stopping any lookalike competition the media companies are not about to stop.

As a recent Parliamentary report noted by far the best method for accelerating the rollout of digital is to give the consumers something more than just a better quality signal for their money. DVD's and hard drive personal video recorders can do that quite nicely thanks.

The digital broadcast system as designed delivers 35 simultaneous channels of high quality (visually) programming if we were so brave as to actually allow multichannelling.

But no we can't do that for fear it might upset the owners of the only multichannelling game in town - Foxtel - jointly owned by Telstra, News Limited and PBL.

To be fair to Foxtel, it would support multichannelling if they could also operate on a level playing field and be allowed to buy programs without the impediment of the anti-siphoning rules.

These rules give the free to air broadcasters' first dibs at almost any sports event worth watching. Sport is key to the broadcasters' ratings and revenue and so this is where the battleline gets drawn.

It is a line Coonan was not prepared to step over. It would be as crazy as saying Holden has first rights on all the V6 car models, yet in a testament to the industry's political muscle that is exactly what the Government is saying.

It is not all sad. The demand that the conversion to digital now begin from 2010 is to be applauded. The analogue spectrum currently being sat on by the broadcasters is immensely valuable and useful for a myriad of other wireless services and other broadcast applications - most obviously more broadcast channels.

Oh but that would mean competition, which sadly means it will not happen. Time to download Orb.

March 14, 2006 12:54 PM

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Why did the minister not reclaim public property - the broadcast spectrum?

<http://blogs.smh.com.au/mashup/archives//003819.html>

14/03/2006

Instead of enforcing squatters rights for the existing fat cats, why not put a sunset on current spectrum usage - then auction channels of narrower spectrum (useful for digital rather than analogue applications) for 5 year periods? The change to digital is the perfect time.

The existing broadcast companies should either pay competitively for the spectrum they want, or they miss out someone who makes higher value use of the spectrum will fill the gap. The taxpayer gets some of the money currently creamed off by the media moguls, (who do not pay tax!) as spectrum rental. A transparent and competitive tender every 5 years means there will be more players, and less opportunity for politicians and media tycoons to exert their influence over each other.

If current broadcast channels want, they can change to pay for view - if anyone still wants to pay to watch their programmes. Others can then fill the gap with more free to air content covered by advertising.

As for sport - once broadcast goes digital, there is no reason the channels (internet or UHF) should not simply bid for the broadcast rights, regardless of delivery medium. The highest bidder wins. The whole issue boils down to a question of the means of delivery (a technical side issue), and how the consumer pays.

I think its called a free market - Australia really should look into it.

Posted by: P-Beau at March 14, 2006 03:09 PM

Let's be honest -- the list of possibilities for digital TV is huge, because a lot of them are indeed possible -- but the switch-on of digital was the last time everyone agreed on something:

- 1. perfect reception
- 2. widescreen pictures
- 3. CD-quality and surround sound
- 4. multiple angles of suitable events
- 5. interactivity
- 6. additional programme information
- 7. more channels (for new players or incumbents)
- 8. cinema quality
- 9. antenna-based pay TV (restricted access)
- 10. future augmentable video formats for added efficiency

Of course, to get D or H you needed to give the existing players a large chunk, to which most agreed, but partly because this is also needed to get G.

After that, the arguments started. Some of these can't happen at the same time, but they can happen on the same day within each and every TV network.

The good news is most of the options are still available, with a bit of added technical know-how, industry consensus, economic growth, and keeping some of the quotas in place.

Posted by: Christian Kent at March 14, 2006 03:02 PM

This is ridiculous. Multi-channeling must be allowed.

My personal gripe is that I live in Perth, and because of local bias towards AFL, channel 9 play AFL live instead of NRL. I would hope that with multi-channeling, Nine would show the league live on an alternative channel.

Similarly, channel 10 might have played the Malaysian grand prix live on an alternative channel, since it is on this weekend in our time zone. Watching it at 10:30pm is ridiculous.

I have to stop myself accessing smh before I get to see these sports, in case the results have been posted!

Posted by: Dan at March 14, 2006 02:59 PM

Digital TV fixes the reception, but not the content.

In well, things could be worse, we could live in Afghanistan or Nigeria and have access to absolutely nothing.

Posted by: antimatter at March 14, 2006 02:50 PM

Actually hyper fast broadband is available in Australia, but sadly not through Telstra. Internode, iiNet, iPrimus and others have speeds up to 24Mbps using their own hardware, at several telephone exchanges nationwide. Telstra could, literally by the flick of a switch, allow every ADSL user in the country to access ADSL at up to 24Mbps, but will not do it.

Posted by: Rhys Winn at March 14, 2006 02:13 PM

We should be able to access everything via the new technologies available.

The oppressive laws and lame excuses for control over communication mediums is stifling progress and human involvement in this country.

For those people who can't directly experience the entire global world oppressive government intervention further puts them at disadvantage.

Intervention in this field is the work of totalitarians.

Posted by: ppm at March 14, 2006 02:05 PM

Big Business.... Little Brain

Posted by: Mike at March 14, 2006 01:53 PM

In discussing the anti-siphoning rules, Tim Burton ascribes too much political clout to the broadcasting industry and none at all to consumers. The main (perhaps only) reason the government is loathe to drop these rules is their fear of voter backlash if major sports events - test cricket in Australia, AFL, the Melbourne Cup and so forth - were to disappear from free to air TV. Yet that is exactly what will happen if anti-siphoning rules are dropped. The government's wariness is well-founded, I believe, and indicates the strength of consumer sentiment rather than the power of the broadcasting industry.

Perhaps a way out of this problem would be for the government to amend the rules by exempting each sports event from them where the Pay TV broadcaster signs a deal that allows a free to air broadcaster to show the event on, say, a delay of at least one hour.

Posted by: kywong73 at March 14, 2006 01:30 PM

It is obvious that she has no understanding of the technology.

Digital Tv is great. I have it, but I had to get it due to poor reception. In its current state though it is not compelling enough for people to switch. The extra content is stifled by the ridiculous multi-channeling rules. Were it not for my reception problems with analogue I would not have switched either.

Currently it's like having a really fast car, but never being allowed to drive faster than 20kmph.

Why oh Why can't they get someone with half a brain in these important portfolios.

Posted by: Shane at March 14, 2006 01:19 PM

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