



Ordering with the Click of a Remote

One of the promises of interactive TV is that it will provide an easy avenue for cable marketers to upsell new services directly through television. Showtime Networks already is putting the promise into practice with its Showtime Marketing Application, which enables viewers to interactively sample Showtime originals, learn about Showtime Networks' channels, and order the pay service by using their TV remote.

"The existing deployments are bringing in new subscribers every day and have already generated millions of dollars in revenue and cost savings," says David Preisman, VP of interactive television, Showtime Networks.

The Showtime Marketing Application currently is available to more than 15 million homes on cable and satellite and is expected to reach millions more by year-end, the company says.

An on-screen interface presents custom marketing video designed to entertain and educate viewers about all aspects of Showtime's channels and programming. Viewers can even watch sample episodes and get bonus features for hit programs, including Dexter, Weeds and The Tudors, to see what they've been missing.

The application is comprised of a series of dynamically updatable templates that can be linked together in various combinations to create almost any kind of marketing and acquisition campaign. On the backend, the Showtime Marketing Application ties into a cable operator's billing system so that accurate pricing is displayed and orders can take place in real time.

When Showtime Networks began developing the app, the main goals were simple: drive revenue and reduce operating costs. Those goals are growing in importance during these tight economic times. Not only does the app take an innovative approach to driving additional sales for the programmer and its distributors, but instant ordering through TV reduces call center expenses.

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Much of Showtime's development effort revolved around creating an experience that is intuitive and easy. "We spent a lot of time and effort designing interfaces that are flexible enough to support our marketing efforts, while remaining welcoming and un-intimidating to viewers who are new to interactivity on the TV," Preisman says.

When it comes to ITV, Showtime is platform agnostic, meaning that it wants to make its applications available through any technology so that they reach as many viewers as possible. The company's deployment efforts include cable, satellite and telco platforms and involve many software technologies available today, including OpenTV, ActiveVideo, EBIF and tru2way.

As more cable operators invest in ITV technology, instant ordering is one way that they can realize an immediate benefit to the bottom line.

Lessons learned: Preisman stresses the importance of planning, testing and revising interactive applications so that all of the details are in place before deployment.

"We have learned quite a bit from our many successful ITV launches over the years, and as a result we do a much better job planning for issues that typically arise. Therefore, we spend a lot of time with up-front planning and documentation, detailing everything from the high-level architecture to details such as color palette and font limitations. We also learned to leave a lot of time for testing and revisions prior to the initial launch," he says.

The tru2way Guide, www.ctam.com/tru2way
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