



Start Over Makes a Great Leap Forward

When Time Warner Cable's Start Over service initially launched, it attracted its share of naysayers. Why would consumers want a service that merely allows them to restart an ongoing TV show from the beginning? It provides only a fraction of the full functionality of video-on-demand or a DVR.

The naysayers were wrong. The initial consumer response in 2005 was impressive enough to make Start Over a high priority for Time Warner Cable and to attract participation from networks, studios, and technology suppliers, as well as interest from other domestic and international cable providers.

Time Warner Cable has rolled out Start Over in 25 markets so far, aiming to reach 5 million subscribers by year-end. Start Over also is being included as a native application on Time Warner Cable's Digital Navigator, a tru2way-based interactive guide.

Start Over is a hit for the cable company, its programming partners and consumers. It allows consumers to restart a show with the touch of a button and it works on existing digital set-top boxes. It provides a clear differentiator for cable versus satellite services, which lack the requisite two-way capability, and telephone competitors, which lack the appropriate patent rights.

Start Over promotes viewer loyalty by extending viewing time, plus there's no fast-forward capability, so commercials are preserved. The service qualifies for Nielsen Media Research C3 ratings, which count time-shifted viewing the same as live viewing. Since Start Over increases average program viewing by 25%, programmers reap additional advertising benefits, the company says.

"Start Over is good for the television economy," says Bob Benya, senior VP, video product strategy, Time Warner Cable.

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So far, Start Over capability is available on up to 130 channels in Time Warner Cable's lineup, including many HD channels. National Basketball Association and National Hockey League telecasts were recently added.

Start Over has won a technology Emmy Award. It works by leveraging cable's existing video-on-demand infrastructure. A real-time acquisition system automatically fetches authorized programming from networks and it handles content rights management, metadata creation, and tracking reports for participants.

Other cable companies are looking at launching Start Over or similar services. Meanwhile, Time Warner Cable is testing its next on-demand iteration, Look Back, offering viewing of programs up to three days after their original air date, which qualifies for C3 ratings.

It's just one more step toward giving cable customers greater ability to watch what they want anytime and anywhere.

Lessons learned: 1. Consumers like simple, convenient applications. Start Over's satisfaction survey ratings run in the 90 percentiles, the company says. Among Time Warner Cable systems, 50-70% of digital customers use Start Over every month on an average of five to ten times per month.

2. Programmers and production studios will support advanced services that respect their content rights and support their business objectives. Content providers have embraced Start Over because it promotes viewership, protects content, and supports advertising.

3. On-air prompts can be an effective promotional tool. Much of the initial usage of Start Over has been generated by viewers hitting the Select button when prompted during enabled shows, the company says.

The tru2way Guide, www.ctam.com/tru2way

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