

TV Viewers Tuning in Through the Net

Many people have shifted their television program viewing habits — watching shows on a computer or mobile device outside of the home rather than in front of a TV in the family room.

Welcome to modern times. Once centered on family time in one spot, TV watching is now more about personal time anywhere at any time.

But traditionalists do not fear, watching programs on a TV set at home is still more popular than watching on a computer or phone screen.

The average American watches nearly five hours of video each day, 98% of which they watch on a traditional TV, according to the Nielsen Cross-Platform Report, which takes a look at traditional TV, mobile video, and online video viewership trends in America.

The TV set is still the dominant platform on which to consume video content, but the means by which the content is delivered has changed. Improving screens and internet connectivity are increasingly making laptops, smartphones, and tablet computers into portable TVs.

“Third-screen” viewing via mobile devices is on the rise. Consumers are viewing more of their favorite shows from mobile devices, Nielsen reports, adding that the majority of mobile video viewers are teenagers.

The growth of internet viewership has a major impact on technological devices, says Richard Ballin, IT desktop analyst for South University, Cleveland.

“Ten years ago, I [was in awe] of every flat-panel television I saw in stores that simply reduced the bulk and weight of the CRT (cathode ray tube) televisions,” he says. “Today, that same flat-panel has become less expensive, lighter, can hook directly up to either a wired or wireless network and interact with specific applications pulling content directly from the internet.”

Both the infrastructure of the internet, as well as the home, will need to be upgraded.

Just as the computer has evolved from a large immovable object into a device that can sit in your lap, other devices have evolved and become smaller and more portable, Ballin adds. The past decade has also seen an increasing number of digital media products that allow customers to access internet-streamed video or audio through TVs and computers.

One of these products – Roku – is a small box that serves as a portal to digital subscriptions, channeling them to the TV. Users plug the box into their TV's video-in port and use the remote control to add subscriptions. With a Roku, they can access Netflix, Flickr, and Pandora accounts. They can also add YouTube, Facebook, Hulu Plus, Amazon Video OnDemand, and many other channels.

Game consoles including Xbox, Playstation3, and Wii, offer some of the same features as Roku.

With a Slingbox, users can bring their living room TV experience with them anywhere. The device allows them to watch and control their TV and all of its programming live over the internet from their desktop, laptop, tablet, smartphone, or a connected TV.

<http://cmsdeploy.content.edmc.edu/assets/marketing/Insite/tv-internet-tv-intext.jpg>

The options are growing, but one potential problem with streaming entertainment from the internet is that it can drain bandwidth.

“We have limited bandwidth to absorb media with,” Ballin says. “We can spread our consumption of media content over multiple tasks, including watching TV, texting from our smartphones, browsing the web, and listening to music. Or, we can focus it.”

TVs and computer devices will continue to be modified to meet the demand for web TV viewing.

"Both the infrastructure of the internet, as well as the home, will need to be upgraded to allow for a more fluid movement of data and the bandwidth caps and throttling that ISPs (internet service providers) place on individual homes and neighborhoods will need to be lessened, if not abolished," Ballin offers.

There's also a lot of discussion around how TV content will change given the increasing role the internet plays.

"I can see a day when both TV and internet overlap, where TV can be interacted with akin to how Xbox360 Kinect uses movement and motion to interact with programmed games," Ballin says.