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Market intelligence on mobile content and apps

QuickPlay Media

TV might be an easier sell, but video-on-demand is where demand is strongest on mobile

When it comes to video on mobile, operators are promoting the TV-like aspects of their services, because that's what's familiar to the mass market. But as QuickPlay Media is finding out, video-on-demand holds much more promise.

About 20,000 videos are published each week on QuickPlay's video-on-demand (VOD) platform, which, according to the Canadian vendor, has become one of the world's biggest repositories of mobile-ready video content.

QuickPlay takes video content from traditional media companies and makes it mobile-compatible, but it does not make money as a video-content aggregator. "We're not a content aggregator from a distribution and rights standpoint," Wayne Purboo, CEO of QuickPlay Media, told *MM*.

Instead, QuickPlay simply allows media companies to publish videos that can be offered on an on-demand basis and also acts as something of a matchmaker between operators and content providers. Anyone interested in selling the videos published on QuickPlay's platform, such as a mobile operator, needs to strike a distribution deal directly with the media companies the content belongs to, he says.

QuickPlay makes money off the 150 or so media companies that regularly publish videos on the platform through rates for self-publishing and through revenue-sharing deals. "Media companies being 'pulled through' a distribution channel, such as a mobile operator service, have their content published for free and receive a revenue share," Purboo says. "Media companies can also 'self publish' a service and pay QuickPlay. Rates vary in the last case with the type of service created."

Fifteen carriers are offering a total of 25 services through the platform. Purboo says VOD will be an important add-on to broadcast mobile TV services, such as DVB-H and MediaFLO. "The core of our platform is designed for video-on-demand, but we have built adapters for broadcast and unicast, to link these back to our content-management system and deliver a video clip related to a TV show that a user is viewing," he says.

Not tied to a schedule

Purboo says cellcos emphasize mobile TV because it is an easier sell, since everyone knows what TV is, whereas the same cannot be said for VOD. But the practice of watching TV on phones is far less compelling than VOD, he says. "Video-on-demand is consumed more on mobile devices than broadcast or unicast TV," he says. "Mobile doesn't lend itself to being tied to a schedule."

The only times mobile users will want to simultaneously tune in to programming in big numbers will be for big sports events or major TV competitions, such as amateur singing contest *Pop Idol*, he says, and the cheapest way of delivering that is via broadcasting.

Some of the most popular content on VOD services includes music videos, breaking news, weather, sports updates and horoscopes, Purboo says. "It's surprising how many people like weather [video] clips," he says. Porn, meanwhile, tends to be the content that users are most prepared to pay for.

More mobile adult content is consumed proportionally by pay-per-view video users than by those paying a flat access fee, Purboo says. The amount of time spent by both groups watching porn is more or less the same, but

those who pay for each video they watch are less willing to do so for other types of content, he says.

The adult content available on QuickPlay's platform is nonexplicit – as Purboo puts it, it's "adult content with clothes on." The softness of the content has largely to do with the prudish culture prevalent among cellcos in QuickPlay's home market, North America: Offering tamer content gets around the need for age verification.

Purboo predicts that this year will mark a turnaround in the fortunes of the mobile VOD market, thanks to a "wonderful backlog" of video-enabled devices and the growing prevalence of unlimited flat-rate data plans.

Examples of the latter include offerings from US carriers Sprint Nextel and Verizon Wireless and Canadian carrier Bell Mobility, all of which give unlimited access to video services for about US\$20 a month, he says.

QuickPlay's platform sits "upstream" of mobile networks' video-delivery infrastructure, beyond operators' streaming servers, Purboo says.

"Our biggest opportunity is to replace the homegrown platforms that have been deployed by operators, which are not scalable enough and don't have proper content-management capabilities," he says.

In late 2007, QuickPlay helped Vodafone Italy launch an ad-funded video service featuring content from eight media companies and supported by the ad-serving technology of vendor Amobee. Recently it helped Bell Mobility roll out a long-form video service with content from TV-production company HBO.

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