

IPTV: The future of TV is here and now

BY MILLETTE BURGOS

IPTV is a blockbuster, and it works, said one of the speakers at the IPTV World Forum 2006, held in Olympia, London, last month. Judging from the number of attendees and the liveliness of the panel discussions, it can safely be said that the world will witness more deployments of this service in the months to come.

On the first day of the forum, keynote speaker Chris Coles, president/CEO of Myrio (a Siemens company), got the ball rolling right into the heart of the matter in his opening speech entitled: TV Over Broadband – A New Industry is Born. Coles began by citing a number of industry experts who forecasted a negative growth pattern for IPTV.

But, is that the truth? Coles asked. He then proceeded to show a growth

chart culled from three international research houses that presented a contrary view. In fact, Coles' chart indicated that the number of IPTV subscribers are expected to reach 120 million worldwide by 2010.

He said that there are currently a lot of changes on all fronts: Content-delivery options

are expanding; the amount of content is proliferating; TV-viewing habits are changing; and the devices in which this content is being viewed are either shrinking or growing. These elements and more thus present a great degree of challenges to content service providers, spurring them to look for new revenue streams like IPTV.

Iman Shah Ismail, vice-president, Broadband, for MiTV, an IPTV broadcaster in Malaysia, was one of the panellists at the three-day event.



Ho Meng Kit, deputy secretary (Infocomm and Media) of Singapore's Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA) and other MICA delegates attended the forum "to know more about IPTV for regulation purposes".



Meanwhile, panellist Theo Langton, senior manager for broadband and next-generation network solutions development at Cisco Systems, who delivered a presentation on the IPTV market evolution and service differentiation requirements, said that IPTV is still at its early stages, and that enhancing user experi-

ence for this service is crucial.

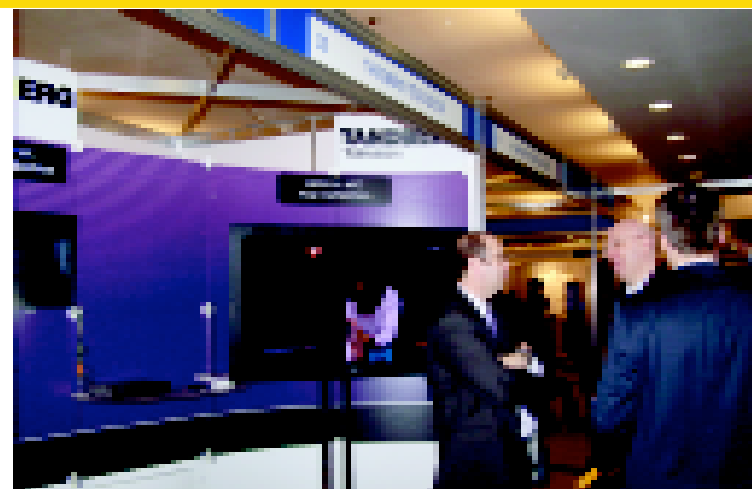
Another panellist, Tim Shepherd, Tandberg TV's IPTV business development director (EMEA and APAC), predicted that IPTV will be the leader in HD content offering, and that offering HD programming via IP will be a key differentiator for the service.

On the other hand, Martin Cullum of Bell Canada said that increasing bandwidth alone is not enough for IPTV. "You need to have a stable service that people can rely on," he added.

As general manager of the Video Networks group within Bell Canada's Technology Development Department, Cullum heads a team tasked to look into the development of emerging technologies and applications in support of IPTV and residential gateways.

Cullum shared with attendees some important findings of a market research conducted by the team on the viability of IPTV. If potential IPTV service providers want to succeed in this area, he said, they should take note of the following key success factors:

- Delivery of high-quality video;
- Responsive IPTV user interface;
- Simple navigation;
- Attractive content; and



More than 70 exhibitors trooped to the event to display the latest IPTV solutions.

□ Reliable and robust delivery. Cullum said: "IPTV should provide the ultimate TV experience."

But why invest in IPTV? Dutch telco KPN, which expects to launch an IPTV service in the second quarter of this year, provided the answer to this question during one of the sessions.

Hugo Suidman, senior marketing manager, KPN, said the rationale for going into IPTV is that the traditional TV market is gradually declining.

In February this year, the telco signed contracts with more than 60 content providers to feature on its IPTV service. Besides carrying Dutch national and commercial TV and radio channels, there are also several theme channels that will be part of KPN's IPTV programming.

KPN's basic IPTV package, Suidman said, will comprise at least 60 TV and radio channels, although subscribers will be offered extra services. Apart from video-on-demand, these value-added services include being able to catch up on missed programmes, or opt for special

theme packages with extra channels – music, adults-only, sports, news or kids.

KPN's IPTV subscriptions will come with a personal recorder that can store up to 100 hours of recordings and enable viewers to take breaks during live TV broadcasts. While an electronic programme guide will give an immediate overview of what is on, viewers can also set an alarm to alert them when their favourite show starts. Up-to-the-minute weather, traffic and news reports will also be available.

KPN also started deploying wireless DTV in October 2004. Currently, there are 184,000 subscribers to this service. The wireless offering consists of 23 TV and 17 radio channels.

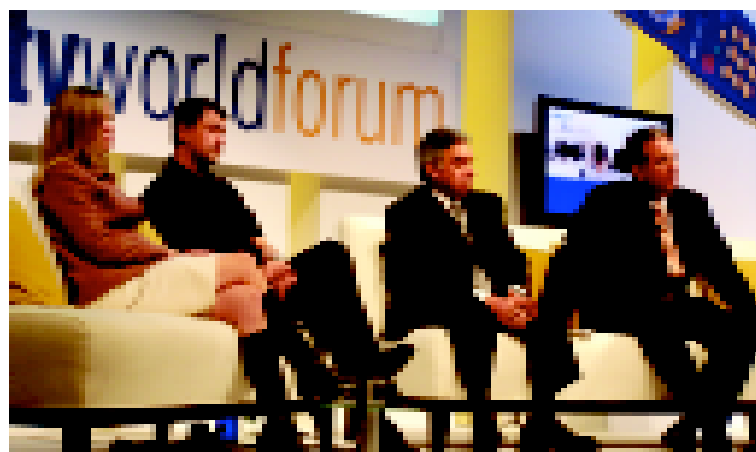
"Within one year," said Suidman, "KPN's established a clear footprint in the TV market."

He said that IPTV would give TV audience the freedom to watch the programmes they want, when they want to. However, the key is to sell the idea of IPTV to potential subscribers.

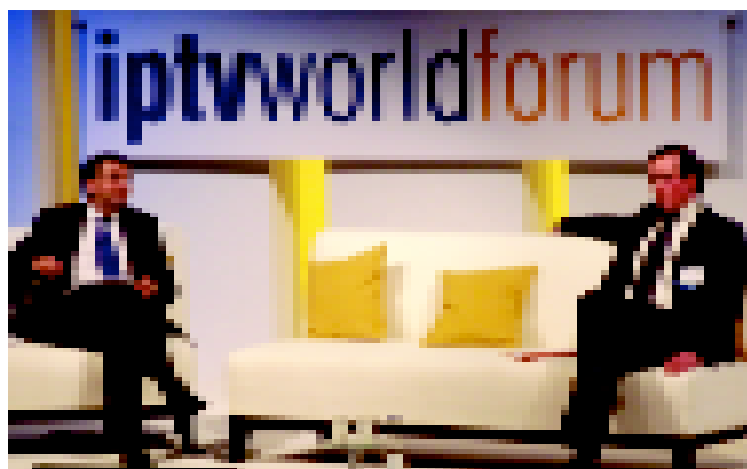
"You have to first attract your customers with an interesting proposition," said Suidman. "But, at the same time, you have to reassure them that this offering will be easy to use."

He added that IPTV would evolve into a "me" TV, as it will become more personalised. Also, because of the interactivity features of the service, TV would become a door instead of a window to other value-added services.

"KPN is just starting the TV journey," Suidman said. Yet, he is confident that technology will be on hand to support this new TV evolution.



The panellists discussing broadband and content delivery, from left: Aubrey Schneggenburger, 20th Century Fox; Danny Wilson, Pixelmatrix; Dom Stasi, TVN Entertainment; and Peter Kerchoff, T-Online.



KPN's Hugo Suidman (right) being interviewed by Simon Spanswick, chief executive, Association for International Broadcasting.