Is Dating Going To Become Extinct?

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Abstract.

The internet and digital TV services are becoming more and more common place. With all this extra information and extra services available, how is it affecting people and where will it go from here? Will dating die in preference to chatting in chat rooms?

Introduction.

This paper explains how set-top boxes have evolved from the old analogue boxes, and the new facilities that this has afforded. How the market place is changing and where it will head in the future. With thought to how all these new facilities are affecting people's way of life and social interactions.

"We've come a long way baby!"

How true this is! In the 1950's when the first television broadcast took place, who would ever have imagined that we would have all the facilities available to us that we have now. Even 5 years ago when people had access to sky analogue, who would have foreseen technologies such as Tivo? In this very technologically aware time, progress is being made at a phenomenal rate.

We first had the Newspaper Age when you made one very expensive copy and then the more you made the cheaper it was for you, but all the people buying it got the same thing at the same price. Then came the Broadcast Age which basically gave everyone access to an up-to-date newspaper 24 hours a day. Now we are well and truly in the Internet Age. Not only do you have access to a wealth of information you now have the capabilities to alter how and what you see. Consumers have never had so much choice, or access to so much knowledge. Is this really helping them and improving their quality of life?

E-commerce.

The internet has undoubtedly been the driving force for all the changes that we are seeing in economies and in technology. E-commerce is a relatively new thing and is beginning to account for a large amount of some companies revenues and most countries money. With the agreement of terms for a general electronic purse, making purchases on the internet should become easier and easier, thereby more people will use it and e-commerce will become an even more important part to business. Broadcasting has always been the medium for advertising, so the gradual merging of the internet and TV was probably inevitable.
The boom in E-commerce has also been assisted by the drop in prices for home PC's which are internet capable. Now with digital TV people can go on-line with a set-top box and order products. This is making the internet even more accessible to people who cannot afford the expense of a PC that they may not use or need. At the moment the products that they can buy is more limited through the box than on the internet. Companies are gradually starting to advertise more and more on the internet. It tends to be fairly effective and potential customers can interact with the advert. This is the advantage the internet has over a normal advert on TV, interaction. So now they are melding digital TV with the internet so you can add this form of interaction to normal advertising which will reach more people. People with digital TV can then interact with the advert whereas people with normal terrestrial TV can see it the same as usual.

Tivo.

With the advent of Tivo people have even more power at their fingertips. Tivo is a link between a normal set top box and a PC. It records information to a hard drive stored within it, using software to keep track of film showing times from different channels. It allows you to record and replay a live TV channel without losing any information. It basically implements the facilities a VCR gives you but without the tapes and with a lot of extra advantages. It's the new digital VCR to go with new digital TV.

An idea for a product will be the integrated set top box -we will no doubt see in the future. This would integrate normal digital services with the Tivo services. Eventually when the manufacturing and technology becomes cheaper you will probably be able to buy a completely integrated TV which has all these abilities built in.

High Definition Television.

With digital TV you can now send better broadcasts. The ATSC digital standard provides for high definition television pictures being transmitted. This means people can receive better picture quality and Dolby Digital sound (if they have the correct equipment) in their own home. Home cinema systems are becoming more common place. I debate the necessity of this. If the standard of sound and video is improved much more then the improvements will actually be beyond our perception and so completely pointless. I think that if you cannot tell the difference then why pay an extra £1000 for the TV?

Set top boxes are progressively becoming home PC's without the power. You can now buy keyboards and mice to use to control them. These accessories are actually fairly necessary as writing an e-mail using the remote control can be a very long and tedious task. This tends to prevent people without the accessories using the e-mail facility.
Bandwidth Problem.

The biggest problem with the internet as it stands is there is a huge bandwidth bottleneck. The typical residential user has access speeds in the range of 28.8 to 32 kbps according to recent FIND/SVP data. 30% of residential access is provided at less than 28.8 kbps. People are not inclined to sit for long periods of time waiting for their web pages to load.

The Solution?

Set top boxes could save people from this problem. Vertical Blanking Interval (VBI) lines could be used to send data on. The average internet user sends very little data out, but receives a lot of data. With a set top box the information is sent unidirectionally i.e. into the box. If data was sent using the VBI lines then connections of up to 128 kbps are quite easily achieved. A standard phone line could be used to send the users data back out. This is one possibility that is being investigated to be used to overcome the bandwidth bottleneck.

Future Growth.

Interactive television is predicted to grow at a very rapid rate according to a study released by Jupiter Media Metrix. Interactive television is set to grow at 83% per year through 2005, the number of households joining the internet will only grow by 9% a year during the same period. This is mainly because people buy interactive television for the entertainment packages, and enjoy the interactive services which come with it. They get the benefits of the internet at no extra cost. They can also use the services with no extra training.

T-Commerce.

Significantly what is dubbed as T-commerce (purchases made through interactive television) is being widely accepted. In-fact a significant minority of consumers prefer to make purchases through their television than their PC. A study performed by Gallup found 27% preferred T-commerce. Anything from household goods to cinema tickets. Although people were not very keen on using T-commerce for banking.

Neil Gaydon, president of Pace Micro Technology Americas said "T-commerce, delivered via interactive digital TV, is being built on a sustainable digital TV business model. Consumers are adopting this technology primarily as an entertainment service, and t-commerce comes as part of this package."

Current estimates have sales through interactive TV at around $58 million worldwide. According to Forrester Research, interactive television will generate upwards of $20 billion in revenue by 2004: $11 billion from advertising, $7 billion from commerce and $2 billion from subscription fees. It is predicted that interactive television will surpass the Internet as an advertising medium within four years.
Enhanced TV content.

Over time it is expected that TV content will improve. Currently you can watch football matches from many different camera angles at your choice. The facility to bring up statistics during the match. Gradually the whole television watching experience will change as you can personalize what you do and do not see more and more.

TV Guide's reach the 21st century.

With interactive television, the choice of channels is becoming increasingly large and unwieldy. Now there are on-line television guides which can be used to scan through TV listings. You can order pay per view films on-line and get e-mail's reminding you that shows are on. No more the dog eared TV pages. There is also an interactive TV guide supplied with interactive TV.

Junk the Junk News.

Not only can you have programs that select news that may interest you from on-line news groups. Soon you will have this facility on your own TV. A product is currently being researched by Microsoft which analyzes and indexes news footage. In the future you should be able to type (or maybe even say) "Osama bin Laden" and select from a list of relevant stories. An interesting and helpful development for the future!

The affects on people.

Progressively we are becoming a more individual society. People are spending less time outside. The chat room for some is the new version of the pub. Is all the new technology helping and improving people's lives?

In some cases I think the internet and interactive television is helping improve the quality of people's lives. For example the internet, E-commerce and T-commerce give disabled people a lot more freedom. They do not need to go to the shops to get food, they can order it and anything else that they would like and have it delivered straight to their door. They can socialize in chat rooms with out prejudice because of their disabilities. They would be treated as any normal healthy person.

A problem with the internet and E-commerce is the need for a PC to be able to take advantage of all the cheaper products. Buying a PC is very expensive. Which tends to mean that the poorer people such as the elderly and unemployed cannot afford the PC and so cannot get the cheaper goods which they need the most. This could make the poverty gap even wider. Also the elderly tend not to embrace new technology, as they tend not to have the patience to learn something new. This is where interactive television comes in handy. Television is not intimidating to the elderly and buying things through the television might be the best way forward for them. So interactive television would be a good thing for these groups.
The only problem that I can see or think of about interactive television is if parents use it as a dumping ground for their children to keep them occupied. Which is already a problem with television anyway. Children especially tend to use chat rooms to meet and talk to people. This is very dangerous anyway if unsupervised as there are a lot of pedophiles who use chat rooms as meeting grounds. I am concerned that as technology becomes a more integral part of our society people's social skills and ability to interact with each other will be diminished. Obviously it will never reach the stage where no-one dates (if it did the world would die out!) But it is helping to create generations of people who find it very hard to communicate verbally or get along with and work with people.

I am also concerned that as interactive television becomes more popular and gives you more services you will start to have the same problems as the internet currently has. Large volumes of pornography, people spreading extremist opinions etc. This is probably inevitable, but television has a watershed to try and help parents keep children from seeing unacceptable things. You would not want your child getting hold of a hand set and accidentally getting pornography instead of the teletubbies!

There is also the problem of information overload. The 21st century is supposed to be one of the most miserable. People have so much choice that it is actually becoming stressful for them. With interactive television the choice is going to be even larger. Possibly if you can exert an influence over what you see with filtering programs it would be more bearable. But I think interactive television will not help with this new problem.

**Conclusion.**

Interactive television is becoming very popular, and this trend seems set to go on in the future. It is adapting to the market place, and permanently trying to find new services and products for users. It is a common way onto the internet for everyday users, and looks set to replace the PC as the preferred way to shop interactively, as it is very convenient and very easy to use.

The interactive television providers have not met their dream yet where you can sit and watch a news broadcast, like the news readers tie, press some buttons and have one winging it's way to you home. But they are making steps towards this goal and it may become a reality fairly soon.

I cannot see interactive television going away, I think it will evolve and develop further and become an integral part of society. It will alter how people interact but no more than the internet was already going to. It will help improve some people's ways of living. But will never kill dating! Although will add to the stress of information overload.
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