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Advanced Advertising Panel: Interactive's Time Is Now

Time Warner Cable's Jacobs: Embrace Interactive Ads Or Suffer Broadcast Fate

By **Mike Farrell** -- *Multichannel News*, February 23, 2010

New York —

Cable operators need to embrace interactive advertising technology or risk the danger of falling into the broadcast model abyss, a panel of experts said at an industry conference here Monday.

With more and more operators deploying Enhanced TV Binary Interchange Format (EBIF), the technical foundation for interactive advertising, panelists during the opening session at the *B&C/Multichannel News* event entitled, "Advanced Advertising: The Future Is Now," here Monday agreed that 2010 could be the time for advanced ads to make an impact. And though the technology has been hyped before with little to show for it, one panelist said that those that don't embrace the technology will suffer the consequences.

"Dollars follow eyeballs...," said Time Warner Cable Media Sales New York regional vice president Steve Jacobs, speaking at the opening panel. "If we are content to sit with what we have, then we fall to the broadcast model."

Cablevision Systems executive vice president of cable platform sales Barry Frey said that interactive advertising has left the development stage at his company and the New York-centric MSO is rolling out products, including dedicated branded channels, showcases, and more specific products such as "Select RFI," where a customer presses a button on their remotes to receive product information and catalogs via the mail and "Select to Save," where a customer can save the long-form ad content for viewing later.

Frey dismissed the idea that interactive advertising is a defensive move by cable operators to win back some of the ad dollars that have gone to the Internet. Instead, he said that the Internet has gotten consumers used to some degree of interactivity, which is only enhanced through the TV experience.

"People are extremely comfortable with their remote control, with their living room and with their television sets," Frey said. "So that's why I think we're going to see an acceleration [of interactive ads]. If consumers are doing this and the technology is there, then advertisers are going to have to follow."

At Comcast Spotlight, which has been aggressively deploying EBIF technology, the building blocks of interactive advertising capability, across its footprint, vice president of National Advertising Sales Mark Altschuler said that the most important advantage that cable operators have in the interactive arena is the connection to the customer's home.

The participants also defended Canoe, the cable operator advertising consortium that has come under fire after a number of delays regarding its interactive products. SeaChange International chief strategy officer Yvette Kanouff said that Canoe gets a bad rap for what it hasn't done, but not enough credit for what it has accomplished.

"What it has done is taken all the operators and tried to create a level of consistency, which is a huge task," Kanouff said. "They have made incredible strides... There is a lot of potential for what Canoe brings."

At Rentrak, Advanced Media Information division president Cathy Hetzel said her only concern is that the consortium helps build scale.

"If Canoe ends up being the vehicle that provides the opportunity for scale, I think that's fantastic," Hetzel said. "I think it won't stop anyone from moving forward."

As far as the future, Frey said that Cablevision is attacking interactive advertising on three fronts: telescoping, Select RFI, and Select to Save. He added that Cablevision is working with major advertisers like Colgate, Unilever and Century 21 on that front and is also working to get its full footprint ready for addressable ads.

At Comcast, Altschuler said that the largest MSO is continuing its EBIF rollout, and is working on rolling out telescoping technology.

"We're about ready to turn the page on RFI," Altschuler said.

At Time Warner Cable, Jacobs said that EBIF availability is another priority, adding that the company also is working on future products like microsites and T-commerce.

"We can go as far as our imaginations will allow," Jacobs said.

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