Cable providers must use Quality of Service to address the online television threat

Indian fans of several popular US television shows rejoiced as a major online television brand began to offer services in India. Local cable providers are now faced with a unique and critical challenge, which they must address quickly. No longer are they competing with other local cable companies, but with global broadcasting giants with access to a wide library of films and programming from all over the world.

This threat is not just based around access to international hit shows. Global online television platforms have signalled their intent to become major players in the country by adding programming tailored to Indian audiences to their rosters to widen local appeal.

While uptake during the early months of launch has reportedly been slow the experience in other parts of Asia indicates that these are likely to be short-lived teething problems. Cable providers can act during this window to enhance their own propositions and use their experience and expertise to protect their existing positions.

The limitations of public broadband services

While new players bring proven business models and wide selection of international programming which has been a success in many other markets in Asia and around the world, they are reliant on public internet infrastructure to support high definition video content.

Current public broadband services were designed for multi-purpose, low-density usage, such as sending emails, instant messaging, banking services and browsing web pages. While YouTube videos can be seamlessly watched on a broadband connection, high-definition movies and programming demands a completely different scale of bandwidth. Watching a film or an hour of HD video programming uses 2 – 4 GB of data\(^1\). A multi-screen household – where one spouse watches the news in the living room while the other watches a soap opera in another room, for instance – uses considerably more bandwidth and can result in poor overall viewing quality.

New technology to address new viewer needs

In response to booming demand for high-quality and interactive content, Indian cable providers have begun to embrace a technology called Layer 2 Multicast (L2M). The reason? Existing broadband cabling is not suited for high quality video streaming to multiple locations – especially in densely-populated urban areas and regions far away from internet exchanges. L2M technology has been specifically developed to deliver high-quality video efficiently.

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L2 multicast enables the delivery of broadcast feeds using a ‘tree structure’. This supplies high quality coverage to multiple end points from a single source. What does this mean for the cable provider? Higher quality services over a greater distance and to more people.

The technology additionally offers the ability to track usage and tailor bandwidth allocation to expand the reach of content and provide fully interactive services. This capability allows players to differentiate themselves and increase customer loyalty through highly tailored customer bouquets and services.

Deploying the highest quality infrastructure designed specifically for the delivery of digital content will enable cable companies to cement their market position and avoid the fate of the many cable companies around the world struggling to compete with the threat of digital alternatives available over the internet.

Cable service providers with a strong customer base within India have the brand and reputation to lead television distribution into the future with L2 Multicast technology. With their deep knowledge of the consumer, they can develop unique, sticky propositions based on usage data for current services, expand the reach of popular local programming, move existing customers to new services and expand their overall footprint.