

What is the Future of Social Television?

by C. T. Martin

When people thought of TV many years ago, only names like Zenith, Technicolor, and Ed Sullivan came to mind. Today we think of Google, HDTV, *Saturday Night Live*, and let's not forget - social networking. Life in the 21st century moves at the speed of lightning, and people want their entertainment to do the same. Enter social television - the integration of the internet, social networking, and television.

With so many people engaged on social networking sites there is not a lot of time or interest in just watching a TV program in a dark living room. Social TV allows us to enjoy everything simultaneously, with all of our friends. For years developers have worked to deliver this through one easy device, where everything can be viewed and manipulated on the same screen. Is this one screen solution the future of social television?

The new Google TV by Sony will be unveiled at an event in New York on October 12, 2010. However, there are several obstacles with this one screen solution. First, many find the screen within a screen feature to be distracting and although many are drawn to the concept for a while, most end up closing the second screen after a few minutes. Second and more important is the cost. The Google TV by Sony is expected to start at about \$1,000. Companies like Logitech Revue and Sony are producing boxes that can be used with your existing HD television, but even these range from \$200 to \$300. Another current challenge is that cable television providers are not yet working with Google so as to provide true integration with their system.

So while it does make sense to combine access to the internet, TV, and social networking, does this mean that everyone needs to purchase a new one screen solution or can your own existing hardware be just as effective or better? Take a look at a few simple facts. According to Facebook's site statistics, over 500 million people are active users. Over one million websites have integrated with Facebook and more than 150 million people use it through external websites each month. Therefore, since most people are already connected, it is much more cost effective to use two screens. The user uses one of the many sites that are already integrated with a social networking tool, while enjoying their existing television at the same time. While a show or a live event is being broadcast, in effect people can have an instant global conversation! And, all of this can be enjoyed right now.

It may be contended that there is greater entertainment benefit from the one screen format because of being able to view media from the internet on your high-definition television. While that is desirable, in these times of economic difficulties people are looking for ways to save money. For less than \$25, a cable can be purchased from your favorite electronics store to attach your laptop to your TV and voila! - you can see everything from your laptop on your HDTV.

In a relatively short time span in this 21st century, society has had countless advancements in technology that would have been deemed impossible just a few decades ago. Much of that has been developed separately and has had limited integration. Now that internet connectivity is virtually everywhere, that has all changed. The future of Social TV is now and rests with you.

