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DTH is history!

The future is IPTV

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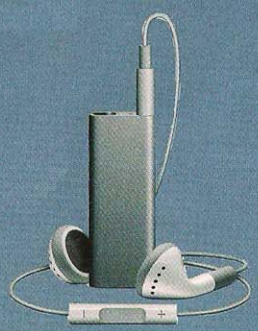

iPod Shuffle

Talkative midget

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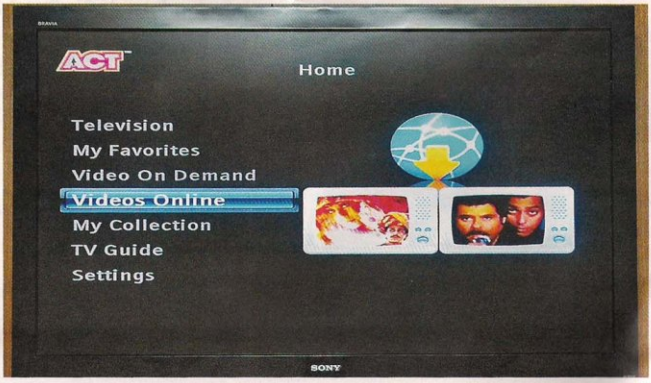
Turn on, tune in, and interact...

Sing a eulogy for the cable TV, for its days are numbered. With broadband homes becoming a reality, Internet Protocol TV is becoming the rage. After an exclusive demo of Bengaluru-based ACT's upcoming IPTV service, R.DINAKARAN tells you how different it is from your existing DTH connection and reasons out why you'll want to bring it into your living room



The age of plain vanilla television is over. If cable TV and DTH made your idiot box do better things, IPTV has the capability of making it look like a precocious genius. IPTV is in its nascent stages in India and currently, we just have a hand full of service providers.

While Airtel has launched its service in NCR and Delhi, MyWay has tied up with BSNL and MTNL and is in the process of rolling out services across the country. Reliance is also out with its IPTV services. In Bengaluru, ACT Television is all set to launch IPTV services across the city. The company, which is one of the top multi-system operators in the city offers broadband services, and is running a pilot project of the IPTV in around 200 homes.

Get the basics right

First things first, Internet Protocol TV has nothing to do with Internet TV and is a lot different from DTH. In plain terms, it offers television broadcasts through broadband, instead of the normal cable or terrestrial transmission.

The prerequisite for an IPTV service is of course a broadband connection and a set-top box that converts the IP signal back to a signal that your idiot box can understand. ACT's set-top box is just the size of your palm, but surprisingly packs in a good deal of punch for its size. Once you have connected the set-top box to your TV, your viewing experience shifts to a different plane altogether.

IPTV vs. DTH

If you thought the picture quality offered by DTH was great, IPTV goes a step further. You are also insulated from interruptions due to rain as happens in DTH. The range of possibilities you could get when television and Internet is put together is almost mind boggling.

Plus, in the case of ACT, it has the advantage of having an established network - both broadband and cable TV - and is able to leverage its strength, unlike other operators who are present in either of the two segments.

Pause, replay

The IPTV's set-top box lets you record, pause and rewind live TV, like the way your DTH does, but with a slight twist. Here you have the option of recording the movie in a hard disk (the set-top box has two USB ports where you can attach your pen drive or an external hard drive to store the recorded programme).

At times when your male partner turns bellicose especially because of a cricket match or aF1 race, and you don't want to miss your favourite soap, ACT comes to your rescue, allowing you to record one programme while your beau watches the other, much like a few DTH services. This way, you can also pack off your reluctant kids to the school and record their favourite cartoon show for watching later.

So what if you'll miss watching Friends on Star World tomorrow while attending that best friend's wedding reception? You can still schedule the recording of the programme before you step out, and play it as soon as you return. The set-top box will activate itself and record the programme whenever it starts.

You needn't remember the hundreds of channels either, ACT's set-top box helps you store your favourite channels for quick access in its 'favourites' section. The electronic programme guide offered by ACT allows you to check the programmes for the next three days. Of course, this is nothing new if you have a DTH connection which also provides the same functionality.

Watch movies on demand

DTH and some cable operators already have 'watch on demand' services. But what makes ACT's 'on demand' service unique is that you can watch the movie any time you want. You can also pause, rewind or forward the movie (especially during the mindless running around the trees sequences), which you cannot do with the 'on demand' services offered through DTH.

More than a TV

With its multiple USB ports, ACT's set-top box can be converted into a multi-media centre in minutes. You can watch photos from your phone, stream videos from your camera, camcorder, pen drives, external hard drive et al. You can also search and view Internet videos on TV using ACT's search software. ACT has also indexed videos according to categories, making it easier for you to find the content you want. You can store the videos you like as a bookmark.

What's in store?

If you think all these are futuristic, think again. ACT has a package of surprises in waiting, which will be rolled out in the upcoming months.

Even if you don't have an external hard disk or wish to invest in one, you'll be able to store your recordings in ACT's servers (in your own allocated private space) which you can access later anytime you want. ACT also proposes to tie-up with a couple of TV channels to store their programmes in its network servers for three months. Now that means you don't have to miss any favourite TV show.

In future, you might also be able to book train, bus or movie tickets, check train and bus timings, PNR status or seat availability, do Net banking or even e-shopping. What makes e-shopping through this IPTV different is that you can book the product and pay for it through the ACT service itself. You don't have to rush to a telephone to book your order. You will also be able to browse the entire collection at the e-store.

Further, ACT plans to allow email access through the STB. You will be able to check and reply to your emails while you watch TV. Other services usually found in IPTV services such as live voting (you can vote in a programme instantly through the STB), personalised astrology, city and travel info, news, stock and weather updates and cooking programmes are other features planned by ACT.

Price positioning

Though the price and packages are not finalised, the initial installation is likely to cost between Rs 3,000 - Rs 5,000. The basic TV service is likely to be priced from Rs 250 to Rs 300. All the add-on services like ability to record programmes will cost extra.

Overall rating: 4/5