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The New Media: Interactive TV

Cable and satellite transmission have changed the face of television. And, before long, "convergence"—the marriage of computers, telecommunication and TV (along with the arrival of High Definition Television, or HDTV)—is likely to change the "tube" even more dramatically. A small "set-top" box, not unlike the remote unit used by many cable customers, will permit the viewer to interact with program material. Choosing from optional story lines in sitcoms, selecting and ordering merchandise, music videos or feature length movies on demand, performing banking transactions, responding to polls, even voting in an election...these are just some of the ways that the viewer is going to be able to take advantage of Interactive TV.

Advantages

- After five decades of passive involvement with TV, the viewer can look forward to getting into the act and taking some measure of control over this experience.
- Response is instantaneous.
- "Distance learning," whereby students and instructor are separated from one another by considerable distance, is another intriguing facet.
- Opportunities for entertainment, information, education and direct marketing are endless.

Disadvantages

- Other New Media are here and now, but Interactive TV, at least for most communities, will be tomorrow.
- It will take time for set-top box technology to mature and spread.
- Many viewers prefer "passive TV."
- Voting via one's TV may sound good at first, but the possibilities for abuse are disturbing.
- As much or more than any of the New Media, Interactive TV may make the biggest impact on channels of distribution, advertising, etc., and will force marketers to rethink virtually everything they do.

Interactive TV at Work

Sega games on demand through Time Warner is a current implementation of Interactive TV. The "home shopping" channels on cable TV are half-way there in that they rely on 800 number phone ordering by viewers, whereas in true Interactive TV, the shopper will be able to order with the handheld remote device.

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