

The Television Channel for the User

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Political debates with people asking candidates questions are a familiar format for television. But CNN has just introduced an important innovation. In its recent broadcast of the US presidential election debates last 23rd July, those asking the candidates questions were from the public at large – people who had previously recorded their questions on video and then posted them on YouTube.

As some analysts have remarked, the medium has affected the message. A home video perceived as an honest creation without any artifice shows, for instance, a woman taking off her wig and revealing a completely bald head. By putting a human face on the story of a person with breast cancer who questions the current US healthcare system, the video makes the audience become much more deeply involved. This rich media increases the content of the message much more than other resources, such as letters read by a moderator – a more impersonal option.

The secret of the great majority of technological initiatives that have succeeded in mass markets consists of achieving a technology so transparent for users that they no longer have to worry about it.

In the debate among the eight Democratic Party candidates for the primaries in 2008, the users created their own content using a webcam and a computer with an Internet connection, thereafter simply posting the resulting file on YouTube. The online video service took care of the video format and the necessary compression.

This user friendliness allowed people to post over 3,000 videos with questions for the candidates on this website. The CNN workers broadcast 39 of them.

Politicians will do well to carefully consider this type of petitions. One of the advantages of the tools that are usually included under the label of Web 2.0 is that it allows knowledge of users' needs and preferences, something that companies should take good note of.

Highlights

1 In its study, "Western European IPTV Forecast 2004-2009," IDC asserts that the business of television via Internet will go from the turnover of 262 million dollars obtained in 2005 to 2,500 million in 2009. Moreover, in two years, 6% of households in Western Europe will enjoy television by Internet.

2 A report by Ipsos Insight cited by eMarketer indicates that 11 million North Americans older than 12 downloaded TV programs via Internet in June 2006. It was the online video category that grew most in comparison to the same period of the previous year.

3 As of August, the US television network ABC will broadcast a weekly program based on videos recorded and published by users on the company's web. It's called i-Caught and is already functioning as an online video publication service.

4 According to the Hitwise research company, YouTube had a US market share of over 40 percent in May of 2006, 160 percent higher than in February 2006. MySpace Videos came in second place, with a growth of 3,825 percent over the same period.

At present, moreover, it is no longer indispensable to use an important media to reach a large audience. The most watched video on YouTube receives more than 50 million visits. Services such as YouTube or Metacafe are an efficient manner of distributing content via the Internet, but initiatives for viewing traditional television channels are also proliferating, such as Joost or Zattoo, which can naturally distribute new channels.

Television via Internet allows users to create video content and distribute it to a large audience and makes it no longer necessary to have a state license to operate a television channel. Thanks to devices such as TiVo – which updates television information on line — or Apple TV — which synchronizes the content stored on iTunes with the television thanks to its wireless connection to Internet —, these new channels can be viewed directly on television.

This time we have seen how CNN distributes YouTube videos, but in the future, it may be the other way around.