

## Industry view

# Streamline your screen time

The dream of personalised, fully integrated entertainment, piped throughout the home is set to become reality now that the technological plumbing is in place

When I was a lad, we had one telephone and one TV that received three channels. To find out what was on, you looked in the newspaper. To see the latest movie, you went to the cinema. To crib your homework, you opened an encyclopaedia.

It was primitive by modern standards, but brilliantly simple. About the most complex decision my parents had to make was whether to watch *Match of the Day* or *Wuthering Heights* on Saturday evening.

Now I'm a dad, we have TVs in almost every room and the TV guide weighs more than the phone book. We all have mobiles, iPods and laptops. We've got WiFi, satellite and broadband. STBs, IPGs and DVRs. An Xbox, a Wii and a Blu-ray player.

I'm petrified something will go wrong, because frankly I wouldn't know where to start looking for the fault or who to call, to fix it. And whenever we buy something new I spend hours studying manuals and introducing it to the other gadgets in the house.

My dad just had to pay the telephone bill, but I've lost track of the number of bills I get, for landline, mobiles, TV, internet and whatnot. And although the interactive programme guide is very comprehensive, it's so complex that I just flip through the channels.

Ah, you'll say, but look at all the extra functions you get. But the funny thing is, despite having gizmos in every room and bits and bytes zinging through the ether, things don't seem to join up very well.

I can pause live TV, but I can't pause it in the lounge and start watching again from my

**The important thing is that managed services need to remove complexity, not create it. At Pace our vision is a straightforward one: to make customers' lives simple**

TV in the bedroom – let alone on my iPad. My kids can't watch TV on their laptops, so they kick me out of the lounge. And as for playing music from the internet on the hi-fi, or monitoring the CCTV from the PC – forget it.

Now they tell me to expect new services: interactive TV, video-on-demand, tele-medicine, intelligent energy management, virtual shopping trips via social networks. And all I can think is... No more!

So I was relieved to learn that I'm not alone. "Most people who have a life don't even know how to choose all the technology they need, never mind fitting it together," says Neil Gaydon, chief executive of Pace, a leading developer of technology for the pay TV industry around the world.

"TV is a 'lean back' medium and people don't want to spend time managing it, dealing with multiple suppliers, or making complex

choices about electronics that may soon be out of date. They want to deal with one supplier that does all the difficult stuff for them."

And they're willing to pay for it. "In the US, where there's much stiffer competition between media companies, people can pay £100 a month for all the TV, video, phone and broadband they can eat. And they like it," says Gaydon.

The promised land of seamless, personalised, fully integrated entertainment, piped to any device inside the home and out of it, is getting pretty close in the US, says Gaydon – much of it enabled by Pace hardware and software.

Cable companies like Sunflower offer whole-home DVR (digital video recorder) services, with up to nine HD-quality streams simultaneously to any room in the house. If you nip out to brew a cuppa, you can pause the programme and restart it in the kitchen while your partner continues watching in the lounge.

AT&T's U-verse service offers a simpler whole-home DVR, combined with broadband and telephone – all via one advanced residential gateway (a sophisticated set-top box), and with a single bill that also includes mobile telephony. TV content can be piped to PCs and tablets as well as TV sets.

In June, cable TV company Comcast launched an entirely new experience for its subscribers, with a service that personalised TV viewing for the first time, making it more interactive, personal and social. The new service gives cable TV viewers fast, intuitive search, the ability to see and access all the user's recordings, favourites and recommendations in one place, and social media apps that let users share their viewing experience with friends.

Closer to home, French cable operator Canal+ has a DVR that connects to the

company's broadband service to let subscribers access content via the internet. Immediately, this gives TV viewers greater scope and choice in the video on demand that they can access quickly and without having to wait 20 minutes for a film to download. Ultimately, this type of technology could deliver an enormous range of content and services via the TV, and other devices, for the first time.

"About 40 pay TV operators around the world offer multi-screen services that let subscribers watch content on TVs, PCs and mobile devices," says Chris Mather, vice-president of commercial operations at Pace. "Today it only works for tech-savvy consumers, but before long it'll be part of the plumbing, as easy as flicking a light switch."

The technology that creates this plumbing will become ever more sophisticated, says Darren Fawcett, Pace's chief technical engineer. We'll need something that converts TV signals or phone calls to IP (internet protocol), integrates them with content from the internet where appropriate, and distributes them to any kind of device.

Something must handle all the networking issues (so that, for example, our phone doesn't die when everyone else in the house is downloading movies), and provide access to storage for recording or pausing various types of content.

But all this will be transparent to you and me. If it goes wrong (which won't happen often) we'll call one number and the supplier will sort it out. The challenges for companies like Pace, and its clients in the world of media and communications, will grow and grow. Consumers will remain blissfully unaware.

"The important thing is that managed services need to remove complexity, not create it, and to do this involves some very involved thinking and advanced technologies.



To make something simple for everyone is actually the hardest thing to do. Pace is determined to be the first company to deliver 'simple', says Gaydon. "At Pace our company vision is a straightforward one: 'To make customers' lives simple'."

Martin Black  
[www.pace.com/global](http://www.pace.com/global)

## Ten things tomorrow's TV will do for you

Let you watch on any device: TV, home cinema, PC, laptop, tablet or phone.

Follow you as you move from room to room, and beyond.

Adapt the content to the device (so you can watch TV on your phone without a magnifying glass, for example).

Remember your personal preferences: volume, subtitles, favourite channel and so on.

Help you get involved: participate in debates, select camera angles, view background information.

Recommend what to watch based on your tastes, mood, even the time of day.

Enable you to watch with your friends when you're alone, via social networking.

Let you monitor your energy usage and CCTV camera from your armchair.

Send you a single monthly bill covering TV, movies, internet access, landline and mobile phone.

Get itself fixed when it goes wrong.