
Google, Rich Media, and the Enterprise

The popular media reveled in the escalation of Google's assault on Apple. As entertaining as the quips and comparisons were, one aspect of the Google move into television attracted little attention. Internet-savvy TV boxes are widely available. Dozens of companies, large and small, are chasing after the advertising dollars that "lean back" media represent. This is an interesting metaphor. Using a computing device is a "lean forward" experience. One has to engage with the device. A "lean back" experience is one in which a person sits or reclines and allows a TV program to wash over them.

The focus of Google's television and rich media announcements at its May 2010 Google I/O Developer Conference suggested an audience of Gen Y couch potatoes. I have watched many people in an airport watch the programs on the departure lounge TV, flip through Web pages on a laptop, and talk on a mobile phone. The potential revenue to the company that can capture the next-generation media consumer fuels Google's and other companies' product and services push.

One question that I had as I worked through the often-insightful analyses from rich media experts was, "What impact does Google's rich media push have for an organization?" and "Is there an enterprise angle to what has been a substantial investment in time, resources, and development for videos and music?" Based on my research, Google's rich media push was interpreted as a consumer play.

What might Google do with its television products and services in the enterprise? Google itself provides little detail on this subject, but there are some clues visible in Google's partner program.

I found the product from Google partner SnapStream Media (<http://www.snapstream.com/>), a company based in Houston, Texas. SnapStream, founded in year 2000, received support from the Houston Technology Center for its "revolutionary media monitoring technology used by public relations and public information organizations to monitor and respond to TV coverage." (Source: <http://www.spurinteractive.com/articles/opportunity-houston-it-article.html>)

The company has moved beyond personal video recorders. In late 2009, the company had become a leader in TV search software with clients like the *Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. The company offered an innovative TV Trends solution. You can experiment with the service on the TV Trends Web site. (<http://www.snapstream.com/tvtrends/Default.aspx>). If you want to know how many mentions a particular word tallies on national US television, the service will tell you what's said on TV with a mouse click. The splash page for the free service displays the top eight hot and cold trends.

The company operates servers that process the content on broadcast television, a trick not even the wizards at Bing, Google, and Yahoo have mastered. Enter a key word like “BP” and the system shows that CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, ABC, and Headline News are covering the oil spill obsessively. Johnson & Johnson or J&J, despite its health-related product issues, is a non-issue. Public relations firms and companies concerned about their public image use the service. SnapStream is strikingly similar to Google’s own text-oriented story tracker, Google Trends (See <http://www.google.com/trends>)

But one important part of SnapStream’s business is its SnapStream Enterprise TV Search Appliance. This product is now available in the Google Apps Marketplace (<http://www.google.com/enterprise/marketplace/viewVendorListings?vendorId=93>). According to the information on Google.com:

SnapStream Enterprise is powerful television search technology used by organizations that want to put their finger on the pulse of TV. A cross between a DVR and a search engine, SnapStream Enterprise allows your organization to easily record and search thousands of hours of TV recordings. One SnapStream TV search appliance can simultaneously record up to 10 TV shows and search within more than 9,000 hours of recordings.

The Google site provides a direct link to a YouTube.com video overview of the SnapStream Enterprise Server. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6KSP4R5GvWY>). In an interview with Houston 3 TV, SnapStream founder Rakesh K. Agrawal, a computer scientist and mechanical engineer said, “We’ve shifted our focus to solving television search problems for organizations.” The company has been successful in providing television archiving and search for organizations, a fact that has made some search vendors like Autonomy and Google take notice. The SnapStream system can record multiple video streams at one time. Once the content has been recorded, a user can do a key word search. The system also allows a user to set up an alert on an “as it happens” basis or on a schedule specified by the user. The alert provides a list of which show mentioned something and what time the comment was made. The system makes it possible to search, copy, and link to rich media content. The company “bridges the gap between old media and the new media,” said Mr. Agrawal in his Houston 3 interview.

Other features of SnapStream’s enterprise product include the ability to record up to 9,000 hours of television programming, the ability to sync to a licensee’s iPod or iPhone, and snip clips from full recordings. But perhaps the most interesting facet of the SnapStream Enterprise TV Search Appliance is that it features integration with the Google OneBox. Within an organization, TV programming can be monitored and the search results displayed within a Google results list.

SnapStream’s customer list includes television and radio broadcasting companies. What’s interesting is that political figures, including Hillary Clinton, are SnapStream customers. Law enforcement, public relations firms, and educational institutions have licensed the company’s system.

Google's rich media announcements suggest that similar functionalities may become available directly from Google. SnapStream's success as well as Autonomy's presence in this market niche provide some evidence that enterprise video may be a large market. Most organizations know about YouTube.com as a way to deliver short videos.

Google could integrate such functions as YouTube distribution, SnapStream's video archiving and search, and Google's more sophisticated enterprise capabilities into one service. A law enforcement agency could rely on Google to provide a comprehensive information service. Firms such as Silver Lake Sumeru have rolled up i2's Analyst Workbench with Knowledge Computing Corporation COPLINK. (See <http://www.i2group.com/us/news--events/about-i2>) Furthermore, Marsh McLennan's Kroll unit has somewhat similar capabilities. The potential for Google to become a player in this highly specialized but high profile market sector could be a source of new revenue for Google.

Will Google compete with its partner in its enterprise video push? Will Google continue to partner with SnapMedia? Will Google acquire SnapMedia as it did Simplify Media and Episodic? To answer these questions, we have to wait until Google makes a definitive move. Until then, Google has technology and partners who can deliver rich media services into commercial and non-commercial organizations.

Google's push into rich media, based on the information revealed at the May 2010 Google I/O conference, struck me as primarily for mass market rich media products and services. In my opinion, it would be an error to ignore the potential for these technologies in the enterprise. Google's enterprise unit can make use of the company's rich media technologies, combine them with other Google services, and place pressure on such vendors as Video Monitoring Services of America (<http://www.vmsinfo.com/>). My research suggests that Google is adept at using its technology in multiple markets, often grafting two or more technologies together to create a new service. Google will, at some point, take advantage of enterprise TV opportunities.

The future direction of SnapMedia hinges on how Googley the firm is. SnapMedia seems sufficiently Googley to make an acquisition of the company by Google something to consider. This type of deal would deliver Google skilled professionals and customers. But acquisitions do not resolve the threats that other, well funded and capable competitors pose. In the enterprise sector, Google faces a number of challenges. Redmond, Washington, and Cambridge, England are home to two companies who cannot be ignored. Google's rich media plans must become more than conference presentations. Management and customer service may be more important to the success of Google's rich media efforts than technology regardless of how Google obtains a capability.

Either way, SnapMedia has an opportunity to hit the big time, with or without Google.

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