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OTT—The Digital Transformation Is in Full Swing

Over-the-top (OTT) is rapidly becoming mainstream. While the majority of consumers still subscribe to cable television, OTT is making inroads. As more and more consumers cut the cable cord and the offerings from OTT-delivered productions increase, we are overwhelmed with choices. It is an exciting time for television and motion pictures. New entrants, such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon, are changing the landscape faster than anyone imagined. Now that Netflix’s *ROMA* is an Academy Award-winning production, the move to OTT is bound to accelerate even more.

My husband and I are examples of today’s typical consumers. We still maintain a cable subscription, but watch little, if any, linear television anymore. We keep our subscription mainly because we enjoy watching our local cable’s news program, particularly during the winter months when we want to know the very local weather reports. It is also sort of a safety blanket. Given our lack of traditional network television viewing, we have considered

cutting the cord many times, not so much a financial action, but more so on principle. We do not watch most of the channels offered, so why should we pay for them?

OTT offers many appealing options. With our Apple TV in place, we have all the apps for the channels that are important to us. No more specialty sports channels to distract us—just the content we enjoy. It is great to be able to browse the vast collection of programs and have something to engage with at any time of the day or night. Currently, we are watching the entire collection of *Cheers* and *Frasier*, two fantastic shows with such smart writing and acting that remain timeless despite being many years past their production dates. We are also enjoying the wonderful new productions, mainly the documentaries, which I devour. Another excellent benefit of today’s OTT market is that we can enjoy international productions just as much as the work from Hollywood. If you want to watch a German series, no problem; adjust your German-to-English subtitling, and you are good to go.

It is a good time for OTT. With more and more productions, the industry is buzzing with work. From

actors to writers to accountants and caterers, there is plenty of work. It is only going to become a busier landscape as Apple, Facebook, and others join in the fun.

Engineers and technologists are also busy building out these platforms to distribute this vast amount of content. That requires clever engineering to ensure consumers have optimal viewing experiences—no endless buffering wheels. SMPTE is busy working on relevant standards, such as Interoperable Master Format (IMF) and SMPTE ST 2110, along with educating the industry on the topics that enable creatives to do their best work. This journal issue is devoted to describing the technologies surrounding OTT technology.

OTT is a business that is very important to SMPTE. As the infrastructure develops, it is vital that images traveling through the ecosystem are of the pristine quality that creators envision. Our work in supporting OTT fits right into SMPTE’s vision, which is to enable the technical framework and global community that makes motion picture, television, and professional media available for all humanity to enjoy for artistic, educational, and social purposes.



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