Video Streamer Goes Live With Expansion Plan

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Today's buzzword: "TV everywhere." It means that television viewing is moving out of the living room as more people stream programs on their computer, tablet or phone.

It started as a trickle a few years ago with the occasional awards show or sports event. But now, that's turned into a stream of streaming.

And one company that specializes in the technology for live streaming, AEG Digital Media, a unit of L.A.'s Anschutz Entertainment Group, is striving to capture the flow. The company is making big investments and inking deals that it hopes will turn it into the go-to technology provider for real-time online viewing.

"There are a lot of eyes on trends of how consumers are watching media," said Chris Roach, head of business development at AEG Digital. "Our advice is to get out in front of that."

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To evolve alongside the fast-changing habits of consumers, AEG Digital has also been building out its offerings.

Last year, the company purchased a broadcast center in Marina del Rey, to expand its capacity to receive satellite and fiber-optic signals from all over the world.

For example, it can pick up the broadcast signal of a cricket match in Asia. The company then converts that signal into a streaming format and sends it to Internet video players.

Earlier this month, AEG Digital announced a deal with SnappyTV of San Francisco. The agreement will allow AEG Digital to use SnappyTV's software to create quick-turnaround highlight clips from live streams. For example, a hole-in-one at the Masters golf tournament could be turned into a highlight and subsequently sent out by a broadcaster via Twitter within a half-minute.

The highlights are meant to bring in new audiences from social networks while also giving advertisers another platform.

The SnappyTV deal took the form of a monthly licensing agreement. The companies will also work to develop new social media features.

SnappyTV Chief Executive Mike Folgner said offering highlights is another way for advertisers to stay relevant in today's quick-fire world of digital entertainment.

"(There's) a lot of advertiser interest to be the brand around these events," Folgner said. "If you're advertising on the events, you want to be advertising on the key moments."

Cable deals

AEG bought its way into the streaming business with the purchase of webcasting pioneer Incited Media of Los Angeles in 2009, which was merged with AEG Productions to create AEG Digital Media.

The acquisition gave the company access to AEG resources, including the broadcast center and satellite facilities at L.A. Live, the company's headquarters.

Although Incited was already known within digital circles, taking the AEG name opened more doors, said Drew Baldwin, chief executive of Tubefilter, an L.A. streaming media company with producing credits that include the Streamys, a Web video awards show. AEG Digital was a sponsor and technology provider for this year's Streamys in February.

"AEG is a very recognizable name in the events space," Baldwin said. "The 'AEG' factor is a big boost."

Thus far, live events have been big business for AEG Digital, which Roach said has revenue above $10 million annually. The company has about 30 employees

In recent years, the company has worked on streaming some coverage of the Grammys and Oscars, as well as Coachella and Lollapalooza music festivals. The firm is often hired by either the broadcast rights-holder or another technology company that has already been hired and wants access to AEG's capabilities. AEG Digital will sometimes share advertising revenues related to the streams.

But the task now is to move beyond one-off deals and into more annualized agreements with traditional cable companies. Roach said AEG Digital has already set up four deals in the past year with either cable channels or pay TV operators, although he would not name his clients.

As part of the expanded line of business, Roach said the Marina del Rey facility now hosts hardware from the pay TV companies. AEG Digital workers oversee the streams.

Demand for streaming technology services is on the rise. For example, DirecTV Inc. of El Segundo offers a streaming app and Time Warner Cable just last week announced the update of its Apple app that lets customers watch out of the home.

Those apps, however, only provide access to a few channels on DirecTV and Time Warner, because not all their content providers have agreed to deals to make their programs available for streaming.

But the offerings are nonetheless early efforts to combat so-called cord-cutting – or the trend of canceling a pricey pay TV subscription in favor of digital options.

Another apparent opportunity for AEG Digital is to work with its parent company's cable channel, AXS TV, which specializes in live events and has yet to launch a dedicated streaming service.

Tubefilter's Baldwin said AEG Digital is in the right position at the right time.

"People are getting excited about live," he said.

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