



Video

Live, From The Internet

James Erik Abels 10.09.08, 3:20 PM ET

Some 63.2 million television viewers tuned into the presidential debate Tuesday night. News Corp.'s MySpace broadcast it as well. The results were somewhat different.

"We think with over 100,000 views, which we've gotten every time, it's pretty good considering it's on every television network," says Lee Brenner, MySpace's executive producer of political programming.

Optimistic spin? Sure. But while watching live news on the Web remains in its infancy, it is gaining ground. An ABI Research study of 985 people found last month that video from news sites was the second most popular category of Web video, with just under 70% viewing it.

Converting that interest into live news viewership via the Internet seems only natural, particularly given its presence outside the home at places like work. And live news coverage may be a real boon to Web sites because the events have an instantaneous value that draws people immediately to them.

"In the back of everyone's head is the thought that there's a new way to make money here," says Joey Faust, a software solutions consultant for National TeleConsultants, which builds production facilities for big media networks like the Fox Business Network. He says his clients are heavily investing in production facilities that can quickly, easily--and simultaneously--distribute video content via traditional networks and the Internet.

News Corp. and **General Electric's** NBC Universal both show signs they agree--and that they want more online viewers than MySpace has delivered to date. The two networks agreed this week to feed live video coverage of the debates to their Hulu joint venture. Brenner says MySpace had no involvement in sister site Hulu's deal to showcase the debates live.

Hulu's broadcast was a first for the site, which in July was one of comScore's top 10 Web video servers (it trailed MySpace umbrella Fox Interactive Media in the ranking). Citing company policy, a spokesperson declined to say how many viewers tuned in to the show. "This is an experiment in thinking about if live streaming is something people truly want," says Hulu's Christina Lee.

While MySpace is using the debate coverage to help raise its profile and attract more users, Hulu showed a 15- or 30-second paid ad before the stream started. The same will be done during next week's final debate. Curiously, NBC News provided the video feed this week and Fox News--also supplying MySpace's feed--will provide it next week. Lee would only say both investors offered their video feed to Hulu.

Her company pushed the news value of the live video stream one step further than MySpace. It played roughly 10 minutes of NBC News' live editorial wrap-up after Tuesday's debate and may do the same with Fox News next Wednesday. For now, that may be good news for news networks looking to expand audiences. Hulu expects to syndicate next week's debate across the Internet by giving people a video player to embed on their own Web sites that will show it live.

But National TeleConsultants' Faust warns there is a flip side to the Web-based video syndication model these moves represent. "In this new media distribution model the brand is what brings you revenue," he says. As a result, he says media businesses like Fox News may not ultimately be thrilled to have its identity wrapped inside a third-party entity, even that of a sister company like MySpace. But with these ratings, who's really counting?