Over-the-top media service

An **over-the-top** (**OTT**) **media service** is a streaming media service offered directly to viewers via the Internet. OTT bypasses cable, broadcast, and satellite television platforms, the companies that traditionally act as a controller or distributor of such content.[1] It has also been used to describe no-carrier cellphones, where all communications are charged as data,[2] avoiding monopolistic competition, or apps for phones that transmit data in this manner, including both those that replace other call methods[3][4] and those that update software.[4][5]

The term is most synonymous with subscription-based video-on-demand (SVoD) services that offer access to film and television content (including existing series acquired from other producers, as well as original content produced specifically for the service).

OTT also encompasses a wave of "skinny" television services that offer access to live streams of linear specialty channels, similar to a traditional satellite or cable TV provider, but streamed over the public Internet, rather than a closed, private network with proprietary equipment such as set-top boxes.

Over-the-top services are typically accessed via websites on personal computers, as well as via apps on mobile devices (such as smartphones and tablets), digital media players (including video game consoles), or televisions with integrated Smart TV platforms.

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Definitions

In 2011, the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), Canada's telecom regulator, stated that it "considers that Internet access to programming independent of a facility or network dedicated to its delivery (via, for example, cable or satellite) is the defining feature of what have been termed 'over-the-top' services".[6]

In contrast to video on demand video-delivery systems offered by cable and IPTV, which are tightly managed networks where channels can be changed instantly, some OTT services such as iTunes require that the video be downloaded first and then played,[7] while other OTT players such as Netflix, Hulu, Disney+ and Amazon Prime Video, offer movie downloads that start playing before the download completes (streaming).[8]

The FCC categorizes the OTT services into two groups: multichannel video programming distributors (MVPDs); and online video distributors (OVDs).[9][10]

Virtual MVPDs include such varied services as AT&T TV, fuboTV, Sling TV, Hulu with Live TV , and YouTube TV.

An OVD was defined by the FCC as:[9]

> any entity that provides video programming by means of the Internet or other Internet Protocol (IP)-based transmission path where the transmission path is provided by a person other than the OVD. An OVD does not include an MVPD inside its MVPD footprint or an MVPD to the extent it is offering online video programming as a component of an MVPD subscription to customers whose homes are inside its MVPD footprint.

Background

In broadcasting, *over-the-top (OTT) content* is the audio, video, and other media content delivered over the Internet, without the involvement of a multiple-system operator (MSO) in the control or distribution of the content. The Internet provider may be aware of the contents of the Internet Protocol (IP) packets but is not responsible for, nor able to control, the viewing abilities, copyrights, and/or other redistribution of the content. This model contrasts with the purchasing or rental of video or audio content from an Internet service provider (ISP), such as pay television, video on demand, and from internet protocol television (IPTV).[11] OTT refers to content from a third party that is delivered to an end-user, with the ISP simply transporting IP packets.[12][13][14][15]

Types of content

OTT television, usually called online television or internet television or streaming television, remains the most popular OTT content. This signal is received over the Internet or through a cell phone network, as opposed to receiving the television signal from a terrestrial broadcast or satellite. Access is controlled by the video distributor, through either an app or a separate OTT dongle or box, connected to a phone, PC or smart television set. By mid-2017, 58 per cent of US households would access one in a given month and advertising revenues from OTT channels exceeded those from web browser plug-ins.[16]

The record of simultaneous users watching an OTT event was set at 18.6 million by Disney's Indian video streaming platform Hotstar.[17]

OTT messaging is defined as instant messaging services or online chat provided by third parties, as an alternative to text messaging services provided by a mobile network operator.[18][19] An example is the Facebook-owned mobile application WhatsApp, that serves to replace text messaging on Internet connected smartphones.[20][21] Other providers of OTT messaging include Viber, WeChat, FaceTime, Skype, Telegram and the now defunct Google Allo.[22]

OTT voice calling, usually called VOIP, capabilities, for instance, as provided by Skype, WeChat, Viber, and WhatsApp use open internet communication protocols to replace and sometimes enhance existing operator controlled services offered by mobile phone operators.

Modes of access

Consumers can access OTT content through Internet-connected devices such as phones (including Android, iOS, and Windows-type mobile devices), smart TVs (such as Google TV and LG Electronics' Channel Plus),[23] set-top boxes (such as Apple TV, Nvidia Shield, Fire TV, and Roku), gaming consoles (such as the PlayStation 4, Wii U, and Xbox One), tablets, and desktop and laptop computers. As of 2019, Android and iOS users make up more than 45% of the total OTT content streaming audience, while 39% of users use the web to access OTT content.[24]

See also

- Access-independent services
- Content delivery network
- Home theater PC
- Internet television
- List of Internet television providers
- Multi-screen video
- Multichannel television in the United States
- Streaming media
- Telco-OTT
- YuppTV

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