

Just because it seems like much of the internet wants television to be delivered outside traditional platforms doesn't mean that it's a good business to pursue. As anyone who reads this blog knows, I think the future of TV is TV. But what is the future of entertainment on your TV ? Entertainment on your TV and TV (video programming) on your TV are not the same thing.

The first question to ask is "Why is TV so popular ?". Why do so many millions spend so many billions in order to watch the shows, movies and events that TV serves up ? The answer is the clue to what the future of Apple/Google and their device competitors should be.

TV is the best cure for boredom. That is what makes TV so popular.

TV is the path of least resistance alternative to doing nothing. When you do nothing. Time passes too slowly. When you are doing something, even something that barely requires consciousness, like watching TV, there is the chance that time will go by more quickly. We look for the path of least resistance to passing time whenever we are bored. All it takes is a click of the tv remote. The boredom ends and there is even the chance that we will be entertained and really like what we are watching. So there is also significant upside to watching TV. So we watch a shitload of TV .

Now ask yourself what you do when you are bored to tears and you don't have a TV available. Used to be you played solitaire at your PC at work. Or maybe back in the day you picked up a magazine or book. Now we go to our laptops or phones. We check our email. Maybe we check a couple websites. But even that burns a limited amount of time.

Once we are done with those mundane tasks and a TV is still not available, we turn back to our PC/Phone/device and we play games.

Why do you think social games like Farmville, Mafia Wars, etc are so popular ? Because they are the path of least resistance to ending boredom when there isn't a TV around. Add to this the brilliant addition of the social element of competing with your friends that facebook provides and gaming has gone to a whole new level

Yes, there were competitive social games before, but none on a platform everyone you know is already on (facebook). None where they had to do nothing to join the game and could do it on their own schedule.

Social games are the non TV cure for boredom.

So what do Apple TV IOS and Google TV Android platform offer ? That's right . Social Games on your TV.

There in lies their Holy Grail to competing with TV.

This isn't Farmville vs Dancing with the Stars. This is about the best alternative to boredom.

If Google , Apple and their competitors can find simple games that are compelling to tens of millions of people and create a unique experience on your HDTV, they have a chance to start pulling people away from watching shows on TV. You could actually see the number of hours spent watching TV decline materially.

Look at the most successful TV programming. American Idol. Dancing with the Stars. Both have a unique social element, voting. People discuss their votes with each other. People take pride in keeping "their choices" on the show (trust me, this is what kept me on Dancing with the Stars). Even Football has Fantasy Football with millions playing. How many times have you watched games with someone more interested in Fantasy scores than the score of the game . "Fall down at the 1 yard line is not an unheard of scream in a group of guys watching a game"

Google and Apple (and at some point MicroSoft and maybe Sony or Nintendo) have platforms that are open enough to developers who can develop simple games that anyone can play with a facebook login. It wont require any real skill to play, will be very simple, but very addictive. The law of numbers says someone will come along and invent a game, played best on your TV through one of these boxes, that catches the imagination of tens of millions and is played on TV nationally or maybe even globally. It's not inconceivable that this game will release new features, some Power Ups or unique incentives if you tune in at 8pm EST on thursday night.

The possibility of millions of people playing some game on Google TV OR Apple TV at the same time has the chance to put a hurt on traditional TV providers. Not whether or not Hulu and Fox , ABC, NBC are blocked from Google TV.

Of course its going to take a few years for enough of either box to get out in the marketplace at current prices. But its not inconceivable that the right game could drive the uptake of enough boxes to move people from TV Shows to Games on TV

If Apple and Google try to pre empt traditional TV distributors using TV content, the only winner is Netflix and the traditional tv distributors and networks.

If Apple and Google try to create their own alternatives to boredom, then their only competition is from each other and other comparable platforms. And it really will come down to luck. No one can plan to have that first entertainment application on a device platform that catches the imagination of the country and results in millions of people playing each other at the same time.

But its a business model for Apple and Google that will work.

Before you can win any business, you have to understand what business you are in.

TV as a whole is not in the business of creating great content. Its in the business of curing boredom. Always has been. It has always been the cure with the path of least resistance. Apple and Google TV need to realize that their cures for boredom using TV content won't ever be the path of least resistance (typing in a search term ain't it). BUT, they have a unique development platform that traditional distribution 's set top boxes aren't designed to support. They could create an alternate cure for boredom that is the path of least resistance for tens of millions.

But they have to change the game, not play the same old game.