

You can get anything you want on the Internet. The internet is making everyone that creates , distributes and consumes content rethink long established habits. Bottom line is that if content is encoded within bandwidth constraints, any bit of content can be distributed to any node any where in the world. This isnt a shocking revelation, this has become conventional wisdom.

If I want pretty much any broadcast network show, I can go right to the network website and watch it. It wont be in HD. It will be on my PC rather than my TV. I might not be able to watch it the same time as its broadcast. But there is a good chance, I can get it pretty easily. If im literate with Bittorrent, i can definitely get it.

Which got me thinking. If broadcast shows are available everywhere anyway.....

1. Why are satellite distributors and cable MSOs required to "mustcarry" local stations ?

I could see if the station was exclusively local content. It could serve a local interest to have it available over cable and satellite. But they aren't.

It makes absolutely zero sense that broadcast networks and local stations put their original content on the net, making it available digitally to anyone , anywhere, but there are regulations that require carriage of that station.

Put another way: As of the 1st quarter of 2009, all over the air signals will distribute their programming digitally. All internet distribution of the same content is already digital. All satellite distribution of the same content is already digital. While most distribution of the content on Cable plants is currently analog, telcos doing video are digital and cable companies are doing everything possible to go digital as quickly as possible. Why should any one type of digital distribution be different from another ?

I understand that some people live in areas where TV reception is difficult and must carry is there to serve them. I also understand that there is a national and local interest for those same homes to have broadband to the home. Guess what. If you yank off must carry of stations, and let stations stream their signal over the net rather than their plants, you can take bandwidth that was previously configured exclusively to those stations and allocate that freed up bandwidth to other things, including more channels or faster internet or whatever else people dream up next. At its most basic, the cable and telcos can increase bandwidth to the home.

It may not be as pretty to receive a local station over the net on your PC, rather than on your TV , or in HD, but it accomplishes the goal of access to that station. Plus of course, the must carry eligible local signals are all going to still be available over the air, and in many cases the coverage area will be stronger (if the station full powers its transmitters)

Satellite providers can be required to carry a single national feed for each network, freeing up their bandwidth and possibly even contribute financially to broadband program to reduce costs and extend coverage. There is a far greater consumer interest in requiring "lifesaver broadband basic" than there is requiring that local stations be carried and that is the point. We need to think more in terms of must provide broadband, than must carry TV

Times have changed. Must carry is over the hill.

2. Whats the point these days of broadcast affiliations ?

I know that ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC want to aggregate as large an audience as possible so they can charge advertisers the most money. I know that they want to know they have guaranteed levels of distribution before they go in to spend 10s of millions on scripted programming or sports. And I know that local stations are screaming bloody murder about wanting to be compensated for their signals by cable and satellite and telco distributors. If cable networks get paid by the sub, why cant they is the argument. It has merit, but then again, since most all of their programming is available on the net now, there is a strong argument why per sub fees should not be paid.

Consumers just want content where they want it and how they want it. But consumer taste varies from city to city. A show that is a hit in one town can be a dud in another. A show that is racy in one town is provincial in another. Yet because of affiliations, with just contractually limited exceptions, network shows are distributed nationally.

Which leads to some interesting questions.

Should the broadcast networks drop affiliation and open it to market by market bid ? You want Friday Night Lights on your station in Dallas ? Come to our Programming Upfront and bid for your market. Any of the 10 or more over the air stations could bid in any city. Or beyond the stations based in dallas, maybe a website with 1mm uniques based in Dallas per day wants to bid on it and play it from their site knowing they can get registration data and sell advertising that is user specific, or more contextual.

On the flipside, what if stations decided to drop affiliations across the board and just bid for content on a program by program basis ?

I realize that owned and operated and group ownership of stations complicates much of this, but all it takes is one market. One market where the affiliates all unaffiliate. One market where the networks unaffiliate and open to bid. (Of course the anti trust questioning would be at the front of the line).

I honestly dont think the unaffiliation scenario has a chance in hell of happening as things stand today. But one thing is for certain. Things change.

3. Why is it that there are restrictions on satellite consumers receiving national network feeds ? The concept that national feeds are available based on the ability to receive an over the air signal in this day and age is just ludicrous. Maybe im misunderstanding something, but if im an internet customer i can get a stream via my internet connection of a networks programming from their website without any questions about how or whether i can receive their signal over the air. Why is it if a satellite company wants to offer the national feed to its customers, it cant ?

The must carry. Thats just crazy. As is not being able to get national feeds via satellite . Its absoutely ridiculous in this day and