

NHL.com debuts new video player

By ERIC FISHER & TRIPP MICKLE

Staff writers

Published December 21, 2009 : Page 04

The NHL today will debut on NHL.com a dramatically rebuilt online video player called NHL VideoCenter, the league's second such reworking since April 2008.

Developed in tandem with league technology partner NeuLion Inc., the new video player features high-definition-like resolution; three additional channels devoted to shootouts, press conferences and breaking news, classic games and documentaries to join existing programming; enhanced sharing capabilities for content on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter; and a redeveloped search mechanism.

The prior version of the video player had been performing well in most key metrics. In particular, video starts on NHL.com were up 98 percent in October 2009 compared with the same month in 2008. But league executives said the continued evolution of Internet video, as well as fan demands, mandated the redevelopment of the NHL Network Online video player introduced just 20 months ago.

"This is about our not resting on our laurels," said Larry Gelfand, NHL senior vice president of media sales. "We very easily could have hung in there with what we had, but looking at the entire space and the needs of our fans, we know we have to continually evolve."

The NHL's heavy interest in online video, shared by many other sports properties, in part aims to further capitalize on industry trends in which the format, along with search advertising, are by some accounts the only forms of digital marketing to show year-over-year growth compared with 2008. That trend could very well continue as revenue from online video advertising is projected to increase between 34 percent and 45 percent per year through 2014, according to eMarketer, an Internet research company.

To that end, organizations initially spending against the new NHL video player include the U.S. Army, AT&T Wireless, ING Direct, Timberland, Honda, EA Sports and 2K Sports. Several of the channels within the video player will be sponsored as well, such as Cisco's title sponsorship of the press room channel and Verizon's title sponsor of an all-access channel.



NeuLion worked on developing the player.

The NHL also will use the new player to create temporary channels around special events such as the upcoming Winter Classic, annual player draft and postseason. Those channels also would be available for sponsorship.

The NHL hopes to integrate the new player into the Web sites of its 30 individual clubs by the end of the season, a pace that would beat the roughly yearlong rollout of the prior video player to the team sites. In addition to the NHL channels on the new player, the clubs would be able to develop their own, local channels using content they generate.

The new video player also follows the October rollout of a new NHL Facebook page that is tightly integrated with NHL.com.