

From SportsVideo.org

Thorpe, Experts Discuss Wow Factor of Sports at HD Expo

Posted in: [HEADLINES](#)

By [unknown placeholder \$article.author\$]

Oct 2, 2008 - 11:38:32 AM

By John Rice

What is the next technology leap that will cause sports fans to go “wow”? That was the topic at wide-ranging panel moderated by Canon USA Broadcast and Communications Division national marketing executive Larry Thorpe at last week’s HD Expo in New York City. “I would suggest that the real ‘wow’ factor of HDTV is still down the road,” says Thorpe.

Thorpe says the challenge facing the industry is “we are slaved at the moment because as we shoot HDTV we also have to protect for existing standard definition, and that does limit what can be done.” But, he adds, HD sets will become the norm in the next two or three years.

During the course of the one-hour session, panelists addressed a variety of technologies and applications that can impact the viewer experience for sports.

Akamai’s Chief Strategist for Digital Media, Tim Napoleon points to the ubiquity of broadband. “Technology is allowing us to cover more events,” he says. “It’s going to open up a lot of really fun, niche sporting events that will build an audience.”

Napoleon points to sports like Cricket. “We’re starting to see sports that are historically overseas come to North America in a big way,” he explains. And Mixed Martial Arts “really got its start on the Internet. Now it’s a staple on broadcast television,” he adds.

The Internet and interactivity is also growing as a supplemental experience for broadcast viewers. “We see the interactive side as a big part of changing the experience from a game-centric to fan-centric business model,” says Chris Wagner, Executive VP and Founder of NeuLion. “Last year and this year with the NHL, we had polling, user ratings, play list creation and chat as well. They’re all interactive community features.”

For NFL coverage, NeuLion has also provided a chat service. “It’s pretty interesting watching chat from around the world,” Wagner says.

ESPN’s, Bryan Burns, vice president, strategic business planning and development, says the question is how will the industry make new services a business? “We have a 15 person group at ESPN we call the ‘ITV cabinet,’” he explains. “We are kind of caught in a trap between evolving technologies, interactive television and the installed base (or TV viewers) and the coming of two-way services. Our plan is to try and create applications that will work in a broad number of households and applications that will work more creatively in a new, true two-way environment.”

Akamai’s Napoleon echoes the benefit. “If you can get a person with a laptop to also watch the TV screen you have two sources of revenue,” he says. “The event might be over on broadcast, but then the community will carry on afterwards.”

The new MLB Network is scheduled to launch on January 1 and VP of Engineering/IT Mark Haden says one of the mission statements of the MLB Network is to take the history of baseball and get it off of glue and ferric particles and get it into a stable form of preservation – and monetize it.

NeuLion's Wagner agrees that building digital archives can open new streams. "In this day and age, content is money in sports networks," he says. "Any different angles are worth money."

The panel also covered other technologies and applications that may provide future 'wow' experiences in sports. However, opinions differed on the viability and profitability of sports in a digital cinema environment and which sports best lend themselves to 3D.

MLB's Haden thinks there is future 'wow' to be found in Surround Sound. If 22 percent of homes currently have HD, he believes "probably only five percent have surround sound," he says. "That's an area we can expand inexpensively from the field. Wherever we can do a surround experience, we are. We're going to do that 'wow' factor in our games."

© Copyright 2008 by SportsVideo.org