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Your Tube
By Steve Smith

NO MOBILE AFICIONADO SHOULD MISS the otherwise calm and collected auteur de tutti auteur David Lynch losing a wing nut over mobile video. In this inspired mash-up of the iPhone TV commercial theme and a DVD extra from his recent "Inland Empire" release Lynch comes to a quick boil about the idea of watching films on your "f**king phone." Lynch may have less to worry about than he supposes. Consumers are going to have enough of a time getting used to short-form video on cell phones before we have to worry over long form. Even a dedicated "Daily Show" or "CSI" fan would have to think twice about draining their phone battery to watch a full episode. I think a more likely scenario for phones in the near future is the way they enhance the first screen experience and even offload some of the interactive duties we might expect from next-gen TV.

One of the most successful current examples of mobile extensions of a TV brand is the "Lucky Case" program with Endemol's "Deal or No Deal." Viewers can short code in their choice of the winning case by short code. Doug Busk, vice president of industry relations, **SinglePoint**, which powers many other SMS programs, says the secret here is "holistic" integration of the contest with the show's content and production values. The case game is promoted as part of the show's content, legitimized by its familiar talent, and not relegated to an add-on during the credit crawl. "Empowering the viewer to be a participant in the show" is what drives activity in these programs, Busk says.

Steve Leonard, the head of off-deck operations at Motricity, says that mobile voting on recent Fox Presidential debates proved successful because the audience interactivity was a visible part of the on-air programming.

The downside of programs like "Lucky Case," which uses premium SMS billing to enter a sweepstakes, is that they are attracting lawsuits. Do these models constitute illegal gambling? Until the courts settle this one, networks are treading more carefully in the sweepstakes-related premium programs, which can be wildly popular and lucrative. "A year

and a half ago we were running a nightly show seven nights a week," says Leonard. "That has slowed down because people are trying to figure out the lawsuits."

Whatever program and revenue models that do evolve over time from SMS Interactive TV, the role of mobile in network and studio programming is well-entrenched, say both Leonard and Busk. In just the last few years the level of expertise within the TV companies has escalated as "mobile experts" emerge within the content companies themselves. "There has been a diaspora of mobile talent from the suppliers," says Busk. In the past, the mobile vendor came in with the big idea along with the technology, but now he finds "we come in increasingly to partner with these mobile experts."

As video clips become easier to push to more phones via technologies like MMS, the opportunities for deeper on-air/on-phone integrations become much greater. Personally, I think that the high level of personalized interactivity cell phones and Web sites make possible with content brands may help the main "first screen" of TV remain more passive than some industry prophets suppose. As television moves exclusively to a digital platform in the next couple of years, many anticipate that the big screen inevitably will become more interactive, with on-air shopping, multi-screen views on the same sports action, and voting and sweepstakes entry over set top boxes.

The problem with that interactive TV scenario is that interactivity is a very personal activity that generally occurs on Web or phone when one person has exclusive access to the screen. The TV will be the first truly shared and inherently social medium platform to go digital. If you thought people fought over the remote now, imagine the living room carnage when someone stops a sitcom to click on and buy a character's skirt. In a room of beer-fueled football fans, what happens when five guys want to watch the same digitally enhanced game from five different angles? Police departments nationwide will have to come up with a new code number just for calling in domestic ITV disputes.

But DTV comes into an environment where two other screens already provide ample opportunities for interactivity. The phone could easily become the personalization engine for TV. We have already seen this done nicely with some of Bravo TV's reality programs. Users subscribe to a contestant/character who then messages back inside info about the other characters or the on-air action as it happens.

With MMS video pushes, one can imagine alternative scenes being sent to a subscriber's phone during a program. A good indication of the power of parallel programming via mobile is the recent news that in a 24-hour period ESPN's mobile NFL content received more users than its Web-based NFL site. Rather than having everyone in a room urge the remote-holder to change the channel to check on a score, it seems that more and more people are simply popping open their phones to get a personalized take on the day's sports picture.

David Lynch's hatred for the "f**king phone" may be premature and misplaced. It is quite possible that mobile will offload the interactivity that otherwise could ruin the socially shared, narrative experience of TV.

So now all of us can watch "Inland Empire" and "Twin Peaks" together on the same screen and send our own text messages back to Lynch, saying, "David, what the f***?"

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