

**SURVEY REPORT:**

# The State of Direct to Consumer Internet Video Services

How media companies and enterprises are building out their own OTT video ventures

UNDERWRITTEN BY



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## SUMMARY

- Our survey of companies that currently offer, or plan to launch, so-called “direct to consumer,” or over-the-top (OTT), video services in the market suggests that the industry is maturing. Though 51 percent of those surveyed view their video service as a money-making venture, 49 percent see it as providing some other primary benefit to the company. Not only are the types of OTT video services offered to consumers becoming more diverse, but the marketing and distribution are also improving such that target audiences are more likely to find new services intended for them.
  - Consumers have plenty of reasons to watch shows and movies online, as 56 percent of US households now subscribe to one or more of the main subscription SVOD services. Services like Netflix and Hulu provide incentive for consumers to switch their viewing to OTT devices such as Roku or other mobile devices. Once they’ve made this switch, features such as voice search and recommendations make it even easier for consumers to discover new services.
  - Quality is the watchword among survey participants. Standard-definition video is declining fast, and high-definition and ultra-high-definition (UHD) are growing quickly.
  - Currently, 35 percent of the video library for the average OTT video service provider (OVSP) is standard-definition quality. A year from now, that number will fall to 29 percent.
  - The average OVSP’s content library today is 59 percent high-definition video. OVSPs anticipate this increasing to 71 percent within a year.
  - On average, 6 percent of OVSP libraries are UHD quality, a surprisingly high claim. Within a year, survey respondents anticipate this increasing to 17 percent.
  - With little UHD-quality video available in the market, survey participants may be overly optimistic about how quickly they will be able to exchange content to the new format.
- Similarly, survey participants are perhaps a little prematurely enthusiastic about the opportunity for virtual reality. Six percent say they support VR video experiences today, which is surprising given the experimental nature of the technology. Twenty percent of respondents say they will support the format in the near future.
- A lot of data and press have been saying that consumers aren’t interested in interactive video, particularly when it comes to so-called “second screening.” However, our survey group seems more optimistic about the features. More than two-thirds say they provide some interactive features today, and 86 percent say they will offer more of these features within a year.
  - Despite the continuing popularity of the subscription model, ads are a more popular way to monetize a service. Seventy-three percent of respondents say they’re using ads in their video service and 60 percent using subscriptions. There is a growing sophistication about how best to optimize ad values. Seventy-one percent say they’re using, or plan to use, new ad techniques like programmatic selling and targeting the ad to the individual.
  - Thirty-five percent of respondents have built, or are building, their own online video delivery platform. Five years ago, when few providers were able to offer full OTT delivery solutions, this number would not have been surprising. Today, however, there are online video delivery platforms that are reliable, scalable, and market tested. Those developing their own solutions would be well-advised to reevaluate the decision to build their own video platform rather than buying one or partnering for one.
  - Thirty-five percent of those surveyed say they trust their video platform provider to tell them how their service is doing. This group should consider building some in-house expertise, or hiring a trusted third party, to do at least some monitoring and tracking of their video service performance.

- There is continuing concern about OTT video service security. Over two-thirds of survey participants expressed some level of concern about security, with piracy and cyber-attacks neck and neck as their primary worries.

## ABOUT THE DATA

To better understand how corporations with media assets are planning to deliver them to end consumers, nScreenMedia partnered with *Broadcasting & Cable* and *Video Edge* to field a survey to 389 company managers with responsibility for the technological implementation of their video-streaming service. The respondents were drawn from the following groups:

- Broadcast television stations, station groups, or networks (e.g., NBCUniversal, KPBS, Sinclair)
- Pay television operators/MISO/MVPOD (e.g., Dish Network, Charter Spectrum, SureWest)
- Programmers: syndicators, studios, and other license holders (e.g., Syfy, Endemol, MGM)
- TV services: producers, distributors, talent, television rep firms, or other providers (e.g., Adrenaline Films, BBC Worldwide, Katz Television Group)
- New media: digital, Internet, or interactive companies (e.g., Netflix, Sling TV, AwesomenessTV)
- Other companies with video assets to be delivered to consumers (e.g., American Express, Procter & Gamble).

Survey respondents are all based in the United States and were drawn from:

- Corporate management
- Engineering/IT management
- Programming management.

For simplicity this report refers to all survey respondents as OTT video service providers (OVSPs). It also refers to all broadcast TV stations and groups, pay TV providers, and programming and services companies simply as TV companies.

## WHAT WE LOOKED AT AND WHY

The survey's objective was to better understand how companies planning to launch (or are already providing) a consumer video service would execute their plan, and to gauge their expectations for the service. The survey covered the following topics:

- The type and quantity of video to be delivered
- How the video would be monetized, or in what other ways it would contribute to the company's goals
- The quality of the video assets
- How live, linear, and on-demand assets would be delivered
- Attitudes and expectations towards video ads
- How the technical implementation and management of the service would be handled.

This report is made possible by the generous contribution of Akamai. Though the report is a collaboration between Akamai, NewBay Media, and nScreenMedia, Akamai and NewBay Media did not influence the data, analysis, or conclusions presented here.

## THE DATA

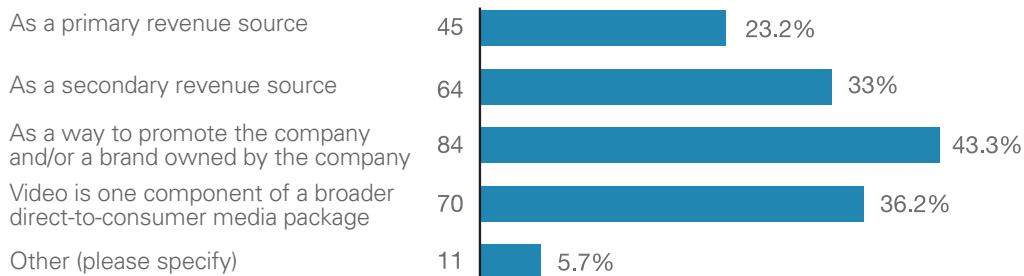
### THE OUTLOOK FOR ONLINE VIDEO SERVICES IS BRIGHT

During the early years of the OTT revolution, DTC services were often viewed as little more than ancillary revenue streams to the main business of broadcasting. As consumers have embraced OTT ever more enthusiastically, DTC services are becoming more XYZ.

This survey clearly shows that media company leaders view DTC OTT not only as a major revenue opportunity but also as an essential brand-building tool. Forty-nine percent of survey respondents look to their video service as more than a primary generator of revenue. Educators, community service organizations, retailers, and even organizations such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service have video assets that they feel will benefit an audience as well as their own organizations, and are readying services to deliver.

Figure 1

### How does your organization view DTC video service?



Nearly a quarter of the survey participants, however, depend on their video service being a primary revenue generator for the company, and a third see it as a secondary generator of revenue.

With so many non-traditional media companies entering the online video market, there should be no shortage of video service launches in the coming year. Although 45.6 percent have already launched their services, 10.3 percent of survey participants plan to launch within the next quarter, and 35.4 percent plan on launching within the next year.

#### THE QUALITY EQUATION

In the space of just a few years, Internet video delivery has moved from a novelty characterized by user-generated content delivered in substandard definition to a mainstream video source handling premiere dramatic productions in UHD. The library

of content our survey participants plan to bring to market in the near term reflects this shift toward quality, and the quality promises to improve even further in the year to come.

Today, 35 percent of the video from the average OVSP is at standard-definition quality. A year from now, that will fall to 29 percent. In addition, 48 percent of OVSPs say they currently have virtually no SD content at all. By next year, that figure will increase to 59 percent.

Much, but not all, of this video will transition to high definition (HD). Today, 59 percent of the average service content library is HD video. OVSPs anticipate this increasing to 71 percent within a year. Those with 75 percent or more of their library at HD quality should increase from 42 percent today to 58 percent within a year.

Figure 2

### OVSP Standard-Definition Video Library Profile

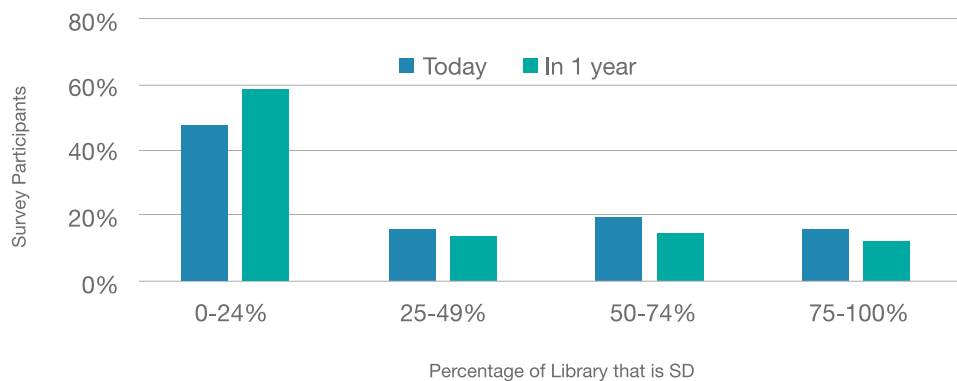
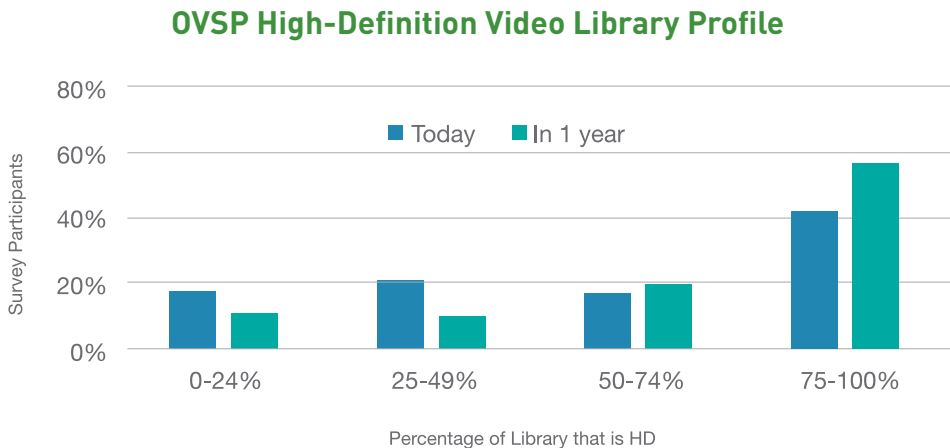


Figure 3



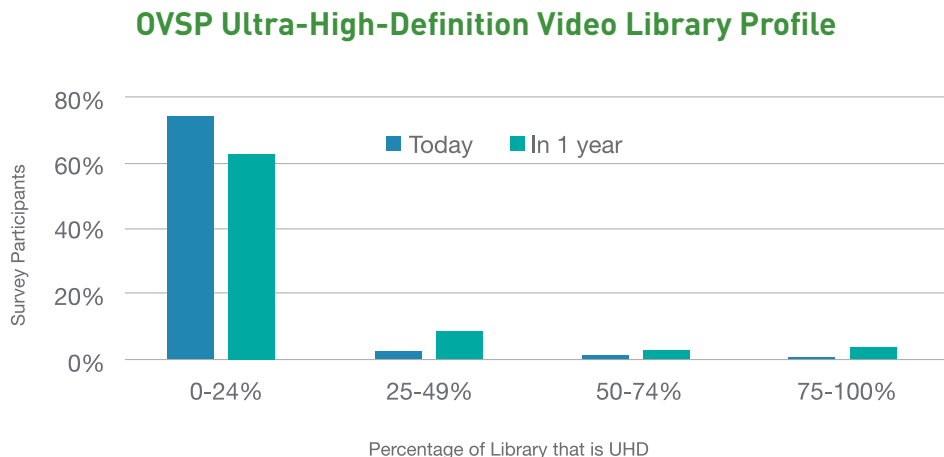
Most surprising of all is the speed at which respondents anticipate ultra HD (UHD) will catch on. Today, the average service has just six percent of its library at UHD quality. OTT video service providers anticipate this increasing to 17 percent within a year.

Survey respondents have reason to believe that their audiences will be able to watch the UHD video they're acquiring. Many people today have broadband service capable of delivering UHD, and this looks set to continue to increase. To reliably stream 4K, a broadband user needs at least a 25Mbps connection (this is the speed Netflix recommends for its UHD content).<sup>i</sup> In the US, 25 states have 25Mbps broadband adoption rates over 10 percent, and only two states have

adoption below five percent. Other states are doing much better. Washington D.C. has a 25 percent adoption rate, Delaware 22 percent, and Rhode Island 19 percent.<sup>ii</sup>

Even more surprising than the speed at which OVSPs believe UHD will arrive is how quickly they plan to embrace virtual reality (VR.) Today, six percent say they support VR video experiences. Since VR is still very much an experimental technology, this is surprising in itself. Though solutions like Google Cardboard are available in the market, quality headsets are not. The front-runner in the VR headset market, Oculus Rift, is scheduled for release in March 2016 for \$599.<sup>iii</sup> Affordable quality VR cameras are still not available. GoPro says it will release a more

Figure 4



affordable version of its \$15,000 Odyssey camera in 2016. Finally, the production infrastructure and filming techniques for VR movies have barely begun to be established. YouTube announced that it's partnering with GoPro to provide a "stitcher"<sup>1</sup> to create VR movies, though the release date has yet to be announced.<sup>iv</sup>

Notwithstanding the nascent state of the VR market, 20 percent of survey participants say they will support the format in the future. That future could well be several years away!

### ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF EXPERIENCE

The most common end-user features that OVSPs include with their service are search (38%), recommendations (31%), and closed captioning (29%). Search and recommendations are two very important features for any video service and can be a real advantage for driving revenue. As pay TV operators have rolled out search and recommendations to their subscribers, for example, pay-per-view purchases have increased. The number of pay TV subscribers with access to search has increased from 38 percent in 2013 to 47 percent in 2015, and the number with access to recommendations has increased from 16 percent to 22 percent over the same period. This has led to a steady increase in the number of households that rent movies: from 26 percent in 2013 to 32 percent in 2015.

**Today, the average service has just six percent of its library at UHD quality. OTT video service providers anticipate this increasing to 17 percent within a year.**

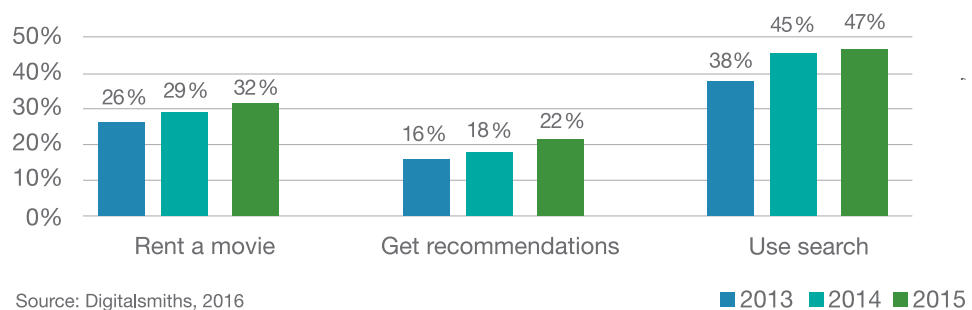
Looking to the future, 31 percent of OVSPs are planning to add personalized recommendations, which have the potential to increase monetization even more than standard search and recommendations.

Surprisingly few OVSPs (10%) offer direct support for binge viewing, though 16 percent do say they plan to add the feature in the future. With 75 percent of consumers engaging in the behavior, it could be a great way to increase revenue.

Voice control and search is one feature that has drawn lots of attention in the market, but only seven percent of our survey participants have implemented it. It seems likely that will change, with 20 percent saying they plan to support it in the future. With all of the major streaming media players, smartphones,

**Figure 5**

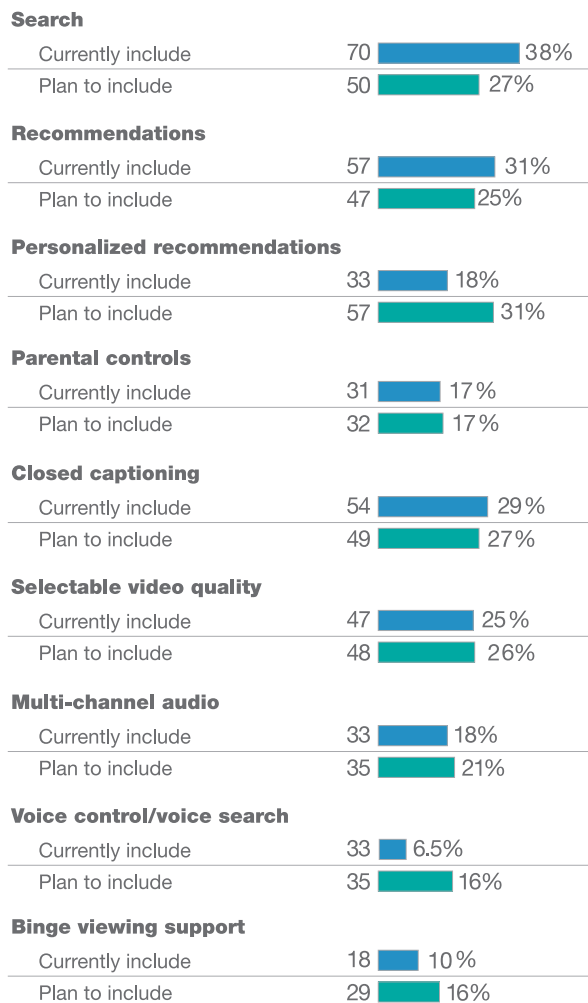
### How use of search, recommendations, and PPV has changed in US pay TV subscribers: 2013-2015



1. VR movies are shot with multiple synchronized cameras. A stitcher takes these distinct videos and combines them into a single VR experience.



**Figure 6** | **How does your organization view DTC video service?**



and tablets supporting voice search and control, this could be a feature that consumers grow to expect from any video service they use.

Selectable video quality<sup>2</sup> is a feature that a quarter of survey participants say they currently support, and the same percentage of participants say they plan to support it in the future. This is a very useful tool for consumers watching video on mobile devices, because it allows them to manage their data consumption and stay under their mobile data plan cap. The feature is also helpful, therefore, to OVSPs, as it should help drive engagement by allowing mobile customers to increase their viewing time.

We wondered how many of the survey participants are planning on extending and enhancing the video experience with interactive features. A surprising number, 68 percent, say they are currently providing some sort of enhancement to the video experience, and that figure will grow to 86 percent since many more plan to add such features.

The most popular enhancements involve information related to the video. Twenty-three percent of OVSPs are showing sports statistics, recipes, or directions with videos, and 36 percent plan to add this type of feature. Traditional interactive TV concepts like T-commerce and audience polling and quizzes are also popular. T-commerce, enabling people to buy merchandise through their TVs, is supported by 17 percent of OVSPs, with 25 percent planning to add this feature in the future. Polling and quizzes are only provided by 12 percent today, but 31 percent plan to add these features in the future.

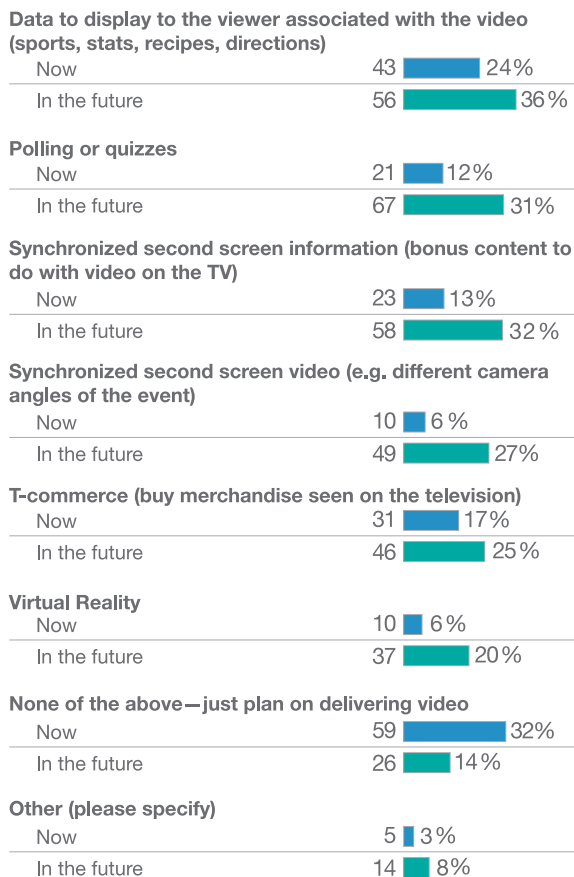
Using a mobile device to deliver information and video synchronized with video on television has received a lot of criticism lately. Data clearly shows that the most popular second-screen activities are unrelated to what's on TV.<sup>v</sup> For example, 71 percent of consumers browse the Internet and 58 percent read and post on social networks about topics unrelated to the show they're watching on TV. However, 49 percent of TV viewers search for information on show cast members and 37 percent search for reviews of products they see in ads while watching.

Our survey group seems undeterred by the negative press second-screening has received. Thirteen percent of those surveyed currently deliver synchronized information, such as cast bios and quotes, to a second screen, and 32 percent plan to do so. Only six percent of survey participants currently deliver synchronized second-screen video (e.g., different camera angles), but 27 percent plan to add it in the future.

2. Rather than allowing a video service to determine the best video quality, a user can force it to deliver at a desired quality.



**Figure 7** Which of the following enhanced features do you offer as part of your video service now, or plan to offer in the future?



### SHOW ME THE MONEY

Given all the nervousness around security issues, Even though it might not be the primary motivator for launching a video service, the vast majority of survey participants, 78 percent, say they generate (or will generate) at least some revenue from their video service. With 56 percent penetration in the US, the success of subscription VOD services such as Netflix and Hulu is spurring many to launch their own SVOD services.<sup>vi</sup> Sixty percent of OVSPs in our survey say they have launched, or soon will launch, a subscription-based service.

However, subscription is not the most popular means of generating revenue. Ads top the monetization methods of our survey group, with 73 percent saying they use, or plan to use, them in their service. This might indicate a resurgence of interest in ads, which have suffered neglect over the last couple of years as ad-free viewing in SVOD services gathered steam. Recently, however, there has been a growing realization that consumers are only willing to pay for a small number of one-price-gets-all ad-free services. Providing ad-supported content that's free to consumers lowers the barriers to consumers watching the content, and it may also afford an opportunity to get them to upgrade to a subscription tier in the future.

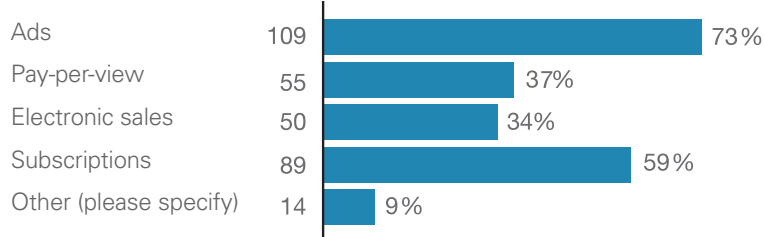
Our survey group also shows a growing sophistication with regards to how they plan to increase ad value and reach. Eighty percent plan to dynamically insert ads at the time the video is streamed, and 71 percent plan to use programmatic platforms from companies such as Adobe, Tremor Video, and Videology. Furthermore, rather than relying on traditional targeting techniques to reach large groups of users, 32 percent plan to target ads to individual viewers using specific preference data.

It should also be noted that many survey participants plan to utilize multiple monetization mechanisms in their services. Hulu, of course, has shown that it's possible to combine ads successfully with a subscription, but smaller ad-supported services also have additional

**OTT video service providers show a growing sophistication in their approach to ads. The vast majority plan to use dynamic insertion, programmatic sales, and new targeting techniques.**

Figure 8

If yes, how?



opportunities. For example, 37 percent are planning to use pay-per-view and 34 percent will use video sales. Both of these techniques can be readily combined with ad-supported services to drive additional revenue.

There was one monetization technique about which we did not ask specifically, but which our survey participants wanted to tell us about anyway. Nine percent of survey respondents say they're using other means to generate revenue from their video service, and by far the most popular mechanism for this group is one of the oldest techniques in the ad playbook: product placement. In the digital age, product placement comes with a very important benefit: it cannot be blocked by the huge number of ad-blockers that consumers have installed on their devices.

**ON-DEMAND DOMINATES, BUT LINEAR STILL MATTERS**

On-demand delivery is the primary mechanism for delivering video for 79 percent of OVSPs. Live

events and sports are also very important, with 65 percent delivering this type of content. Many people don't think that linear channels will survive the transition to online delivery. For example, Ted Sarandos, head of content at Netflix, spoke about the evolution of television viewing at Vanity Fair's New Establishment Summit in San Francisco:

"In 10 years ... it will be entirely delivered on the Internet. It will be a series of apps that's closer to what you see on smart TV. I don't think it will be delivered on cable, and I don't think it will be linear."<sup>vii</sup> Nearly half of our survey group does not agree with Mr. Sarandos, and they plan to make the format a central part of their video service.

Another delivery mechanism that is far from dead is the download. Forty-four percent of OVSPs plan on supporting this format. They join a growing list of mainstream service providers, including Amazon Prime Video and YouTube Red, that are leveraging downloads to support viewing in situations where customers have marginal to non-existent Internet connectivity.

Figure 9

How will current or future videos be delivered?

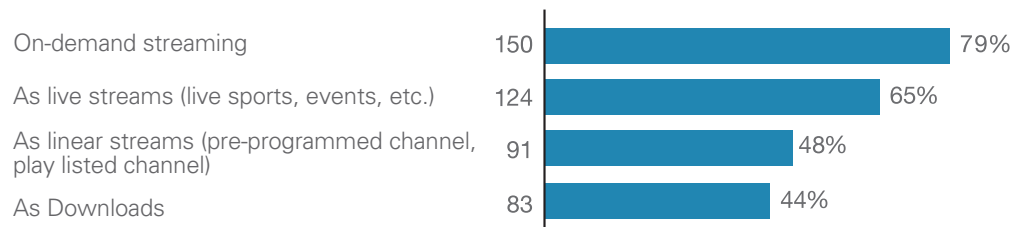
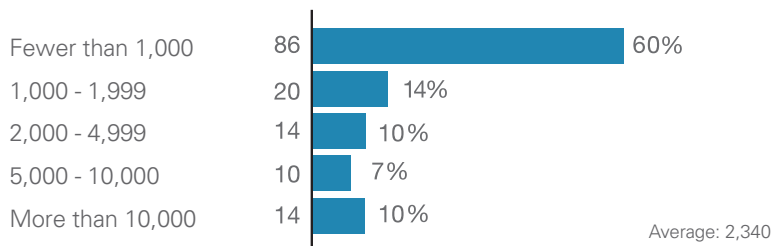


Figure 10

### How many video titles will be available in your DTC service?



Again, many OVSPs will combine these delivery methods. For example, a linear service will frequently provide on-demand content and may allow some of that content to be downloaded to a consumer’s device.

#### On-Demand Delivery

While service providers like Netflix and Amazon have libraries with tens of thousands of titles, the majority of survey participants (60%) have fewer than a thousand. Just 10 percent have more than 10,000 titles in their catalog.

Most (63%) will rotate new content into the service and old content out at least weekly, and 11 percent will do this multiple times a day. The providers most likely to rotate content on a daily basis are those providing news (45% of survey participants,) and sports (40%). Fifty-one percent of those rotating content change fewer than 10 titles at a time, and 89 percent rotate fewer than 100 titles at a time

#### Live Delivery

Live sports are becoming an increasingly important

part of the online video economy. Marquee events such as the Olympics and NCAA basketball are almost ideally suited for online delivery. The restricted bandwidth of traditional television prevents all of the games and events from being covered live. There is no such restriction online.

A surprising number of those delivering live streams (47%) say they will be doing so daily through their service, and 17 percent say they will be streaming live continuously. Forty-seven percent also say they plan on delivering more than one event simultaneously, with 18 percent saying they plan to handle six or more events at the same time. Virtually all OVSPs providing live streaming (91%) will make at least some of the content available on-demand for later viewing.

#### Linear Delivery

Despite the fact that Netflix doesn’t expect linear channels to survive, they are beginning to reemerge online. Services like Pluto.TV and Crackle are taking advantage of the immediacy of the format, and some are even embracing

Figure 11

### How often will your service stream live events?

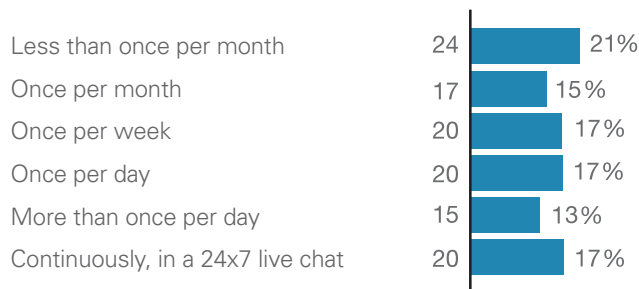
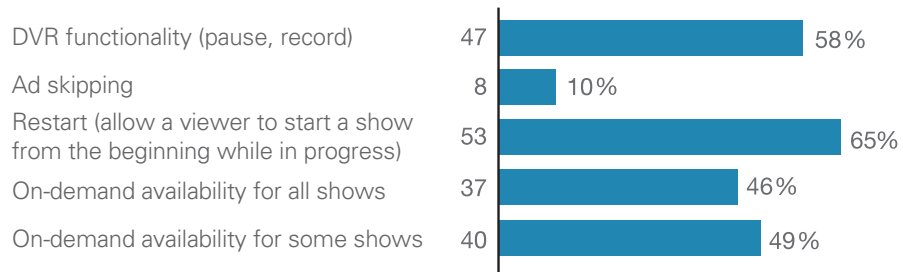


Figure 12

**Which of the following features do you provide or plan to provide in your service?**



the background role television sometimes takes in our lives. For example, Pluto.TV’s Tom Ryan understood from the beginning that his service would often be streaming to people paying only occasional attention to the channel being watched.

Almost half of our survey participants will be delivering linear streams as part of their service.

Twenty-one percent of respondents intend to deliver 10 or more linear channels in their service at a time, and 64 percent will deliver more than one channel. Though the linear format is important, many will also support on-demand viewing. Fifty-eight percent will provide DVR-like features such as pause and record. Sixty-five percent will allow viewers to restart a show that may already be in progress, and half will have at least some on-demand content available. One feature that could be on the way out for linear channel providers is ad-skipping. Only 10 percent say they plan to support it.

**THE TECHNOLOGY OF VIDEO SERVICE DELIVERY**

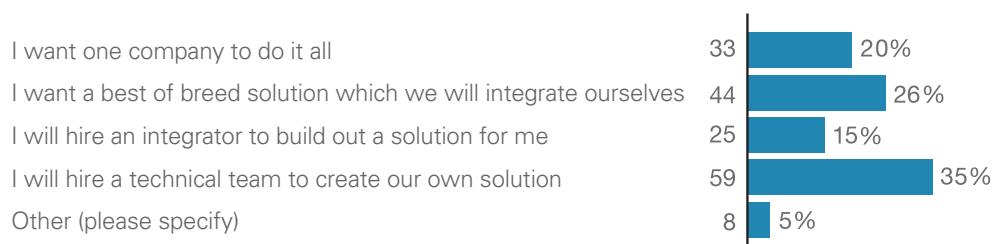
If you’d been planning an online video delivery service five years ago, you may well have had to build some or all of the solution yourself. That was the situation when Hulu was founded back in 2007, and so the company developed its own video delivery platform from scratch.<sup>viii</sup> The situation today is very different. Companies such as Akamai and thePlatform have mature, full-featured, and market-tested platforms.

This message has apparently not reached some of our survey participants. Thirty-five percent of OVSPs surveyed say they’ll use their own technical team to create a video service delivery solution. They would do well to reexamine this hazardous and unnecessary course of action.

The rest of the survey participants plan to leverage existing solutions or technologies for their video platform. Twenty percent plan to use a single company to handle everything, 26 percent will pull

Figure 13

**Which of the following best describes your philosophy for building a video management and delivery solution?**



**Thirty-five percent of OTT video service providers say they'll use an internal technical team to build a video service platform. They would do well to reexamine this hazardous course of action.**

together a best-of-breed solution, and 15 percent plan to use an integrator to build out a solution.

When it comes to the many apps that will need to be delivered to cover all consumer electronics devices, most OVSPs take a more pragmatic approach. Twenty-seven percent say they'll build some of the apps themselves but will leverage the expertise of external developers for others. Thirty-one percent plan on having all the apps created either by an external app developer or by their video platform provider.

Fifty-nine percent want that solution to be multiscreen from the start. Just 24 percent want to target the television, 12 percent mobile devices, and five percent favor the PC.

When it comes to managing the video service, 35 percent of OVSPs are comfortable allowing their video platform provider to take care of everything and give them regular reports.

Though most platform providers are scrupulously honest, it might be wise for service providers to have at least some internal capabilities to verify that they're getting the performance for which they're paying.

Thirty-three percent plan to monitor the performance of their service with an internal team, and 17 percent plan to hire an independent company to handle the management tasks.

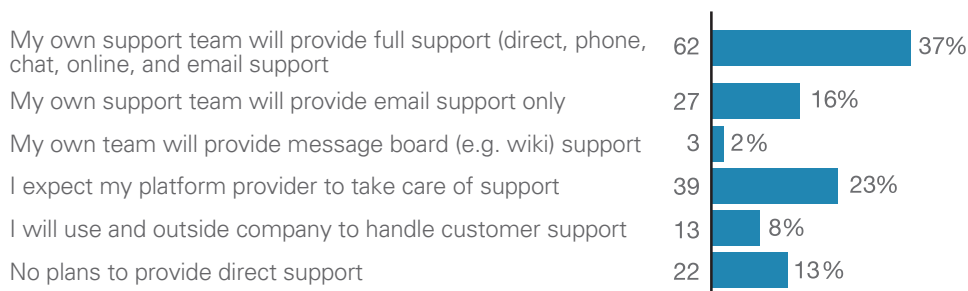
Customer support is an often neglected aspect of online video services, but only 13 percent of those in our survey group say they have no plans to provide it. Most (37%) feel comfortable handling support themselves (including phone, chat, online, and email.) Twenty-four percent say they expect their video platform provider to handle technical support, and 16 percent say their own technical team will provide email support only. Half of those opting for email support only are companies with revenue-generating video services. They might want to investigate whether a higher level of support might be more appropriate.

### VIDEO SERVICE SECURITY

As seen in the report *Secure My Site — Media Security Concerns, Beliefs, and Attitudes*, security is a serious concern for media companies.<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, OVSPs are similarly concerned about the security of their video services. Sixty-eight percent say they're at least somewhat concerned

Figure 14

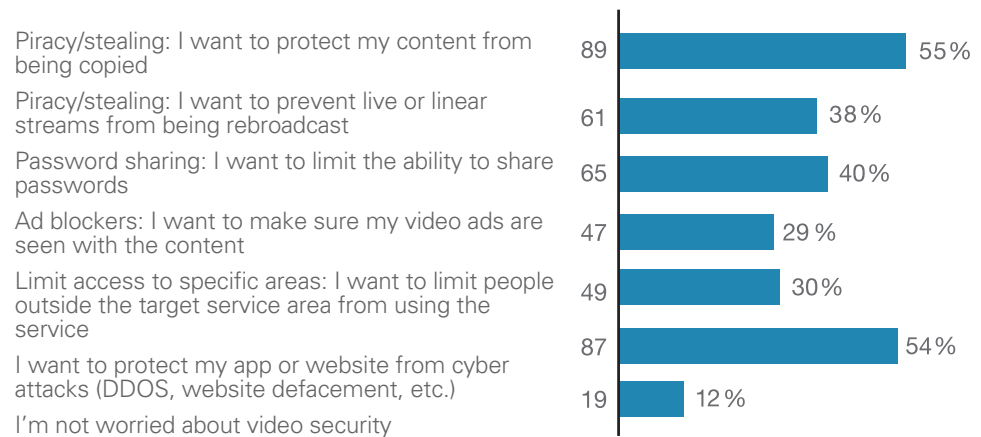
### What type of customer support do you provide or plan to provide?



3. This report is available for free [here](#).

Figure 15

### What security concerns do you have about your online video service?



about security, and just 14 percent say they have few or no worries about it.

Content piracy and illegal rebroadcasting of live broadcasts are both issues for OVSPs, with 55 percent and 38 percent respectively indicating their concern. Fifty-four percent say they're concerned about cyber-attacks disrupting their service. With so much concern about content security, it should come as no surprise that only 12 percent say they have no plans to use video security. Most (45%) opt for HTTP secure streaming, and 32 percent say they plan to use DRM solutions such as those provided by Microsoft and Apple. A quarter plan to use forensic watermarking to protect their video content.<sup>4</sup>

More of the OVSPs fielding revenue-generating services (primary and secondary revenue) expressed concern across all security issues. For example, 61 percent of OVSPs with revenue-generating services say they're concerned about piracy and the same number (61%) are concerned about cyber-attacks, whereas only 55 percent and 54 percent, respectively, of the total group say this.

Password sharing is a big concern for 40 percent of the survey group, though the jury is out as to

whether the practice is hurting or helping online video services. An estimated one in 10 SVOD users are using a shared password, giving rise to claims of millions of dollars in lost revenue.<sup>ix</sup> In an attempt to combat sharing, providers like Netflix and Amazon limit the number of concurrent streams a subscriber can have. Others, like HBO NOW, impose no limits at all. Richard Plepler, HBO's CEO, has said he sees password sharing as a way to attract new subscribers.

To learn more about the security concerns for video services, see the free report *Secure My Site – Media Security Concerns, Beliefs, and Attitudes*.<sup>x</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The data suggests that we are entering a new phase in the evolution of online video services. Until now, the emphasis has been on market leaders like Netflix and Hulu. This has led to a stampede of premium content providers entering the market with their own SVOD services, and increasingly with ad-supported offerings.

The success of these mainstream services is actually opening doors for providers of smaller pools of more niche content. Simply put, once a

4. Forensic watermarking technology inserts an invisible watermark into the video that identifies the person for whom the video is intended. If the video is stolen, the watermark can be used to track the video back to that original intended recipient.

consumer experiences the benefits of IP-delivered video through a market leader like Netflix, they're more likely to seek out other providers that cater to their niche interests.

Our data shows that there are a large number of companies with smaller content libraries readying services to take advantage of the audience as it migrates online. This will lead to a virtuous cycle, where more viewers will bring more content, which in turn will bring more viewers. This is likely to disrupt traditional TV suppliers even more than it has so far. Many of the niche subjects that are only available on high number channels on cable will begin to appear online.

The data shows an increase in smaller service launches taking advantage of the growing online audience and emerging virtuous cycle. We expect this trend to accelerate over the coming months.

A surprising number of OVSPs are considering building, managing, and supporting their own video service platform. These service providers should reconsider this hazardous path. There are plenty of established, reputable technology and service companies with market-tested solutions. In all likelihood, leveraging this external expertise will result in big cost savings over building solutions in-house, and reliability and scalability will also be much better. ●

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