

# EMERGING PLATFORMS

**SURFING TECHNOLOGY'S SEA OF OPPORTUNITIES**



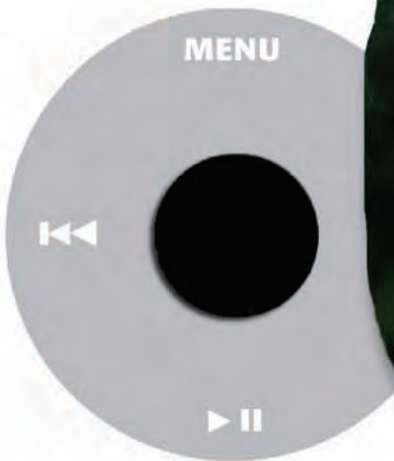
A surge in Internet-based and mobile entertainment suggests new work opportunities for actors, but catching this cresting wave for a profitable professional ride can pose a daunting challenge.

Already a well-established video game platform, the Internet is now awash with live action programming of both short- and long-form varieties. Similarly, mobile entertainment ranges from new handheld consoles for playing video games and DVDs to cell phone "mobisodes" and video for iPods.

But perhaps no other segment of these emerging entertainment platforms presents a wider array of new content—both dazzling and puzzling in its breadth and variety—than so-called Internet television.

As a practical matter, there are two basic categories of Internet TV sites from an actor's perspective. Some offer opportunities for paid Guild work (SAG already has a Made-for-the-Internet Agreement in place and Global Rule One applies for all Internet work), while others are only useful to non-members looking to promote themselves. And at this time, there seem to be far more examples of the latter sort of sites than the former. Regardless, a good rule of thumb: Any time Guild members see themselves on the Internet and are unsure as to whether compensation is due, they should contact the Guild.

Some of what's been dubbed Internet television—or alternately IPTV (for Internet protocol television)—can amount to little more than re-purposing of conventional TV content. So there are episodes of hit shows available for download on the Internet and even onto iPods, but that's not likely to expand the universe of new



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Courtesy of Marcello Mencarini

opportunities for actors unless spin-off episodes are created for the various platforms.

"We're in the very beginning stages of what is probably going to be a revolution in the distribution of television programs," says Brian Seth Hurst, son of Philadelphia broadcast pioneer Ed Hurst, who helps clients such as AOL, Virgin America Airlines and Banyan Entertainment conjure various Internet TV strategies through The Opportunity Management Co. in Santa Monica, Calif. "And just like you have union and non-union plays, you probably will have both on the Internet. But there will be more programming and more opportunities for actors and directors."



CBS' new Innertube venture seems to bode well for series spin-offs, and that could see broadened opportunities for TV actors. It will bear watching whether other broadcast networks respond similarly.

There are also several independent IPTV sites with a primary mission of distributing original content. Some of these are essentially amateur videos posted for fun and generate little profit for anyone involved. Many are dominated by animated fare.

But still others involve paid actors and potentially powerful promotional platforms that may offer a glimpse of entertainment paradigms to come.

The more ambitious sites are sometimes sponsored by individual advertisers, often car companies with a quest for the young, free-spending demo that comes with the cyber-territory. Toyota recently signed a cross-platform advertising agreement with Fox that will see the auto giant supporting the network show *Prison Break* on TV, the Internet and cell phones. And Ford Motor Co. supports the Web site *Neverything.com*, offering two-minute episodes featuring the antics of a pair of slap-happy brothers, along with a contest to win a 2006 Mercury Milan.



Heavy.com offers both user-created and more heavily produced content, some of it sponsored by individual advertisers such as Butterfinger candy bars and Diesel jeans.

But Channel101.com, one of the most content-rich of the many Internet television sites, takes a different approach, posting episodic video and other shorts, then selling DVDs of the more popular titles.



Channel101 refreshes its "channels" monthly with original content boasting occasional appearances by the likes

of a pre-*King Kong* Jack Black and Sarah Chalke of NBC's *Scrubs*. Andy Samberg, currently part of the *Saturday Night Live* cast, gained early exposure from work displayed on Channel101.

"A lot of times on the Internet, there's no pay involved for the actors," notes Behn Fannin, an aspiring filmmaker whose *Four-Eyed Monster* is a popular title offered on MySpace.com and YouTube. Broadcast Yourself Tube.



Still, cyberspace's truly blue-chip sites, such as AOL, Yahoo and MSN, do have well-funded development programs for originally produced videos.

For instance, AOL has a key creative deal with actor Ashton Kutcher. Yahoo—while pulling back a bit from a much-publicized headlong rush into proprietary video under former NBC boss Lloyd Braun—remains committed to select projects. And MSN reportedly was talking to Tom Arnold about starting in a Web-based sitcom.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Kate (EVANGELINE LILLY) and Sawyer (JOSH HOLLOWAY) on the run in ABC's *Lost*.  
TOP LEFT: Image from the poster for *Nuovi Comizi D'amore* (*New Love Meetings*) an Italian documentary billed as "the first [feature-length] movie shot with a camera phone."  
LEFT COLUMN: *Ghost Whisperer* (produced under a 2005 SAG Television Agreement) is available for viewing on CBS Television's new free broadband Web site, Innertube.



E3 PHOTOS: MERRILYN ROMEN

### Ready to Explode?

Although IPTV content was being made in the mid-1990s, it's just now starting to gain attention. Part of that transformation involved perfecting business models, the availability of Internet broadband and finding audiences. Now that it's beginning to happen, certain analysts feel that IPTV is ready to explode.

"A major reason that IPTV may work this time around is the increasing availability of Internet broadband in over 100 million households worldwide, which offers a much richer stream than the low-bandwidth dial-up connections that were available in 1999..." says writer Christopher Harz on the tech Web site [www.awn.com](http://www.awn.com). "Delivering content over Internet protocol has several advantages. One is interactivity—IPTV can be two-way, allowing the viewer to interact with the content to achieve iTV (interactive TV) features such as commenting on the show...or buying merchandise worn by the actors."

In addition to the new productions offering casting opportunities to actors, the spread of broadband means actors now can post professional clip reels on individually tailored Web sites to promote themselves and their talents.

As for cell phones and other new distribution platforms for

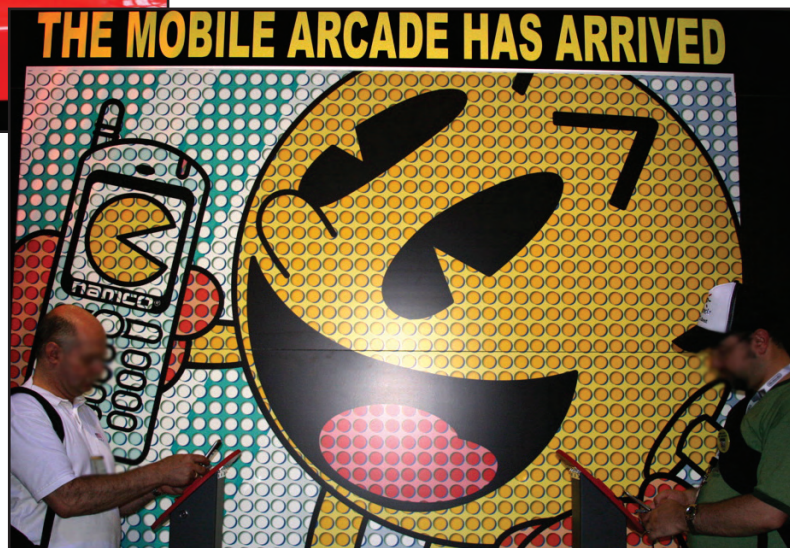
entertainment content, the platforms seem similarly poised between professional promise and immediate opportunity.

"These emerging platforms offer an opportunity for up-and-coming actors to showcase their wares," said Peter Levin, whose Bellrock Media produces mostly animated and game content but is targeting opportunities in the comedy vein.

Frank Chindamo, whose Fun Little Movies produces short live-action comedies for Sprint and others, makes a point of casting Guild actors in his videos. Chindamo suggests that with new opportunities come new ways of looking for work, and FunLittleMovies.com regularly accepts video submissions from actors and others seeking exposure via the company's mobile-entertainment programming.

"Actors absolutely should not just sit there and wait for people to call you up," he urges. "Videos that star you are going to be the head shots of the future."

Perched at the top of the mobile heap are those lucky few actors cast in network-produced mobisodes spun off from shows such as ABC's *Lost*. Storylines in such fare often boosts the stature of fringe characters, potentially helping an actor to assume center stage for the first time. The key for the actors who are asked to do



these new types of content: Communicate with the Guild. Ask about these opportunities. Make sure the work is covered by Screen Actors Guild.

Though some of these emerging platforms may be unready for primetime, there was a recent sign that creators have reached a watershed point of respectability: AOL was recently awarded the first-ever Emmy presented for content delivered via the Internet and mobile devices for the concert special "Live 8."

It won't be the last.

Photos from E3 2006, the electronic entertainment expo held May 10-12 in Los Angeles

# ON THE Download

## THE GUILD'S TECH HISTORY

In the run-up to a vital Guild meeting, a prominent Screen Actors Guild leader sent a letter to fellow board members ringing the alarm about a rapidly advancing technology. Noting that the Guild “could not be blamed for not looking ahead,” he warned that watershed advances were at hand and the Guild must be ready. “Remember,” he urged, “things happen awfully fast these days.”

The concern? Not iPods or mobisodes or online distribution, but *television*. The memo’s author? Guild co-founder Bradley Page. The year? 1933.

Yes, technology is reshaping the industry today and the pace of change has radically accelerated. But technology has *always* been an innovative force in the entertainment industry—upending traditional business models, creating

periods of uncertainty and ultimately giving way to profound new opportunities.

Are there lessons applicable to today’s technology debates? Absolutely. Perhaps the most important one is that performers have always had to organize and fight for their fair share of a constantly evolving pie.

In the 19th century, the telegraph was the Internet of its day, opening a new world of possibilities with near-instant communications across great distances. Radio and television further advanced this radical notion in the 20th century, with debuts that created both excitement and trepidation.

In the early days of radio, naysayers wondered aloud why anyone would go to the theater when they could hear live entertainment for free in their living room. Television was similarly decried in its early days as the death of American cinema.

### TELECOMMUNICATIONS MILESTONES

1840 - 1974

SMITHSONIAN PHOTO: ALFRED HARRRELL

**1844**  
First telegraphed message



**1876**  
Telephone patented

**1891**  
Motion Pictures invented

**1910**  
First commercial radios sold

**1922**  
Regular radio commercial broadcasts begin

**1927**  
First public demonstration of television

**1941**  
First commercial TV broadcast

**1946**  
First public mobile phone service

**1948**  
Cable television introduced in U.S.



**1956**  
Video “quad” machine introduced; becomes videotape/TV standard for 20 years (commercial use)

**1958**  
First working model of a computer/video game (Tennis for Two, invented by nuclear physicist Willy Higinbotham)

**1969**  
Network Measurement Center at UCLA - first host-to-host message sent to Stanford Research Institute

**1971**  
First personal computer sold for \$750



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Bell Service (now AT&T) launched the first mobile telephone service in 1946.

Others wondered who would put these strange boxes in their living room and watch such small screens.

In the 1980s the VCR presaged modern-day questions surrounding TiVo

sistent over time. With each new advance, actors have had to fight for their fair share of the earnings pie. It took a strike in 1980 to extend the principal of residuals to home video.

The Guild agreed to an initial formula that would give studios room to see how the home video market developed. A quarter century later that good faith has hardly been rewarded. Home video and DVD is a \$22.8-billion marketplace, and actors continue to receive the "initial formula" established in the 1980 agreement.

The basic storyline of the debate hasn't changed much in 25 years. Studios claim industry economics make it impossible for them to share more. Actors see thriving sales growth and remain skeptical of this "line in the sand" approach.

Were there missed opportunities in the past? Of course. Will there be missed opportunities in the future? Hopefully not.

History yields important lessons about the promise of technology—and the vital role creative guilds play in ensuring artists' rights are protected as their performances are sold in increasingly diverse ways. There can be little doubt that the road ahead will be more autobahn than country lane.

But if the past is prologue, technology will continue to open up new opportunities for working actors and the industry as a whole. As all parties grapple with how best to respond to this sea change, there are bound to be many firsts. One occurred on February 2 when CBS became the first network to offer direct downloads of its television shows. Its first sale was an episode of *Survivor*.

Whether the ultimate irony or a prescient omen, only time will tell.

and online distribution. How could network television survive if viewers can watch on their own time and fast forward through the ads?

The instinct to cling to the familiar is an understandable one. As a result, there will always be a contingent that prefers Pandora stay safely sealed in her box. Yet technology marches dispassionately forward.

Temporarily disruptive, yes, but this process of innovation-led upheaval and renewal has also created profound economic expansion. Radio and television created whole universes of employment opportunities.

Rather than end American film, home video arguably proved its salvation, generating revenues that today far outpace the domestic box office (and creating the \$3 billion direct-to-video market).

The challenge for working actors, too, has been con-

## 1975 - Present

**1975**  
First home video recorder sold in U.S. (Sony Betamax)

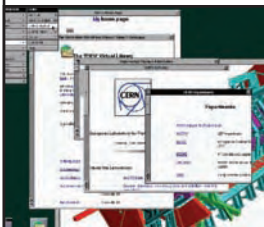


**1978**  
Laser disc hits market

**1983**  
First official cellular phone call, from Chicago to New York

**1990**  
Englishman Tim Berners-Lee invents first Internet browser called the "WorldWideWeb"

**1992**  
Worldwide web made available to public



**1994**  
First secure online credit purchase

**1997**  
First DVD player sold in U.S.

**1999**  
First public digital motion picture screenings for paying audiences

**TiVo service offered**

**2004**  
First TV Commercials shown on the Internet

**2005**  
Apple's Steve Jobs reveals the video iPod, announcing Walt Disney Co. would supply ABC and Disney Channel shows for download - the first major networks to do so

**2006**  
CBS becomes first TV network to directly offer downloadable copies of its TV shows, starting with episodes of *Survivor* for \$1.99 on cbs.com

