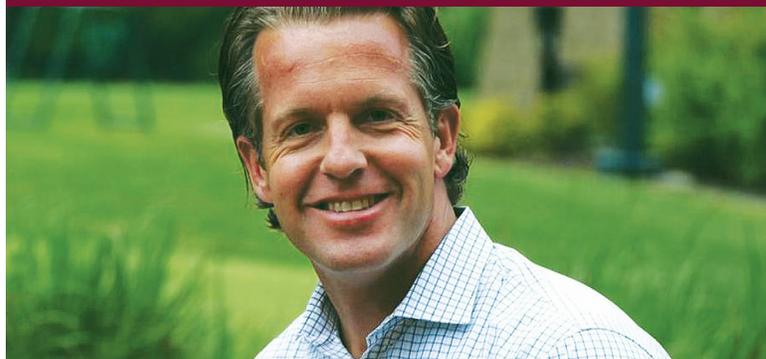


CASH & CARRY

How Cash Hagen of WOW! Internet, Cable, Phone carries both linear and OTT video in one set-top box and gives his customers a seamless Internet and video experience.

By James Careless

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Cash Hagen is chief technology officer at WOW! Internet, Cable, Phone, a Tier 2 MSO with 800,000 subscribers operating in 11 states. Like other service providers, WOW! is facing an opportunity and a threat. Increased competition and network utilization from Netflix, Amazon, and other OTT (over-the-top) streaming video services are challenging WOW!'s value to its subscribers because OTT fans are using third-party devices other than WOW!'s set-top box (STB) to watch shows such as House of Cards and Orange Is the New Black online.

"When people use OTT devices with STB-like capabilities made by Apple, Amazon, Google, and Roku, it weakens their loyalty to their video service provider and provided cable STB, just like tuning to FM weakened the base of people wanting to buy AM-only radios," says Hagen. "To reinforce our value to our subscribers as their preferred content provider, WOW! is viewing this as an opportunity to integrate OTT content directly into our cable TV 'walled garden,' just like using an AM/FM radio covering both bands."

To make this happen, WOW! initially rolled out premium-priced, highend IP hybrid gateways/STBs with built-in HDD-based DVRs. "These devices have satisfied our subscribers who want 200+ channels, an extensive collection of on-demand content, integrated OTT content, and services such as whole-home DVR," Hagen says. "But they do not appeal to the 30 percent who don't want to pay more for or require this capability/expanded product offering. I'm talking about the 'cord shavers' and 'cord cutters' who see OTT as a way to cut, or even eliminate, their cable TV costs."

OTT Plus Linear at the Right Price

Seeing this as the clear path forward for consumers and a great opportunity for WOW!, the search began for an economical hybrid STB solution. They needed a cost-effective unit that combined conventional cable TV and OTT channels on one box, using a single program guide/ search engine controlled by a handheld remote control—and all branded in the subscriber's mind as a distinctive WOW! service. "We needed this device to be cost-effective not just for us to buy, but to deploy, configure, and support," says Hagen. "This is a great way to keep costs down for the company, and for our budget-minded cord shavers/cutters."

After extensive research, WOW! selected Evolution Digital's economical IP Hybrid STB. Featuring a program guide/search function powered by TiVo, the IP Hybrid STB integrates both linear cable and OTT into a single, compact STB. To reduce manufacturing and operational costs, this STB has

eliminated the use of hardware-based CableCARD in favor of software-defined HD uDTA security conditional access. This change also makes the IP Hybrid STB easier to deploy in an existing cable plant, allowing MSOs of all sizes to bring Netflix, Amazon, and other OTT services into cable's walled garden where they belong.

"Evolution Digital's IP Hybrid STB is flexible enough to serve as a standalone STB, or a client to either a physical TiVo DVR or virtual cloudbased DVR," notes Brent Smith, president and CTO of Evolution Digital. "It can also support all IPTV, meaning that this device will work in today's mixed environment, as well as tomorrow's all-IP world."

For WOW!, the Evolution Digital IP Hybrid STB is an effective way to keep budget-minded cord shavers/cutters within cable's fold. A single connection to the HDMI 1 port on the main TV greatly enhances and simplifies the viewing experience for the consumer. "The growing popularity of Netflix, Amazon, and other OTT services is a reality of cable TV life," says Hagen. "Deploying IP Hybrid STBs makes these OTT services enhance the value of WOW!'s offering to our customers, rather than letting third-party OTT STB-like devices eat away at it."

James Careless is a longtime contributor to Multichannel News.

Evolution Digital's Hybrid IP STB

Evolution Digital's Brent Smith refers to the company's IP Hybrid STB as the cable TV industry's "game changer." But the unit could also be called a "game restorer," because this hybrid STB restores MSOs to their superior competitive position in the content provision marketplace. With its ability to provide customers with a single remote-controlled STB for accessing OTT and linear TV using TiVo's proven program guide and search technology, the Evolution Digital IP Hybrid STB brings OTT into cable's fold. Netflix and Amazon become two more reasons for cable subscribers to stick with cable rather than leave it behind.



The IP Hybrid STB includes HDMI, MoCA, Ethernet, AV, and RF ports. The unit supports Rovi-Powered Guide or TiVo Experience and enables universal searching across all content libraries. With a single connection through the HDMI 1 port on a smart TV and a user-friendly remote control unit, consumers can simplify the viewing experience and get rid of other streaming devices. Add its ability to work with cloud-based DVRs and support an MSO's move to be part of All-IP content distribution (<http://evolutiondigital.com/2016/02/value-and-benefit-of-transitioning-to-all-ip-distribution/>), and this STB is the right choice for all MSOs, especially those Tier 2 and Tier 3 cable operators who can benefit from the reduced equipment purchase costs provided by the NCTC/Evolution Digital partnership.

"Our IP Hybrid STB really meets the OTT challenge and turns what was a disadvantage for MSOs into an advantage," says Smith. "This is why Evolution Digital has sold three million IP Hybrid STBs to date, and more are being ordered by MSOs every day."

Learn more about the Evolution Digital IP Hybrid STB.
<http://evolutiondigital.com/ip-hybrid-stb/>



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