

# The business imperative

Technology should always have a purpose - and it's not always easy to spot the winners

by Bob Charlton

"I'm pleasantly surprised that the broadcast industry is more robust than you would believe from reading the papers, because both in Europe and the US there has been a tremendous reduction in top-line revenues," comments Charles Jablonski, VP Operations at Onlive. "In the States we are just completing a major recapitalisation spree relating to our transition to digital and high definition.

"The recession is having an effect and some businesses are failing," Jablonski says. "But the up side to that is that the survivors emerge much stronger because they are forced to focus on real business issues and how they add value, which from a business perspective is a good thing."

Jablonski argues that there is a business case to be put for being a fast follower of technology developments. In the US, the transition to HD was structured and the spectrum was assigned centrally. In Europe, the spectrum was a scarcer commodity and broadcasters are still trying to come to terms with what the move to HD means.

"In the US we had the luxury of making the commitment to make the spectrum available," remarks Jablonski. "Every broadcaster knew that they could broadcast in HD, which created the impetus for them to have all the distribution partners in terms of cable and satellite to distribute HDTV.

"It's different in Europe, with different discussions between the broadcasters and carriers since it's all down to business."

Looking ahead from HDTV towards 3D, Jablonski has a clear opinion. He is a strong believer that technology should always have a purpose and that technology for technology's sake belongs in universities and nowhere else.



Jablonski: a 3D sceptic because of the business model, not the technology

With respect to the burgeoning interest in 3D TV, he observes that there is always a leading edge of proponents that have motivations to promote it.

However, when you look at the busi-

ness model, there are unresolved issues of delivery and display in the home. "Until there is a concise means of doing it, the people who produce the programming will always have the reservation of: what's in it for me?" he comments. "As with most technological

changes, it is a question of whether a fad becomes a fashion and that comes down to the business model which will take off only when the displays become cheap enough and pervasive

enough. That's when the adoption curve will take off. "If 3D is to happen, it will require an adaptation in display or a major shift in secondary markets, such as gaming," Jablonski predicts. "I'm a 3D sceptic, but my reservations are based around

the business model and not the technology itself."

Jablonski feels that there is a need for standardisation in the area of 3D, but there are a number of proprietary display systems, which differ significantly and do not help the creation of a uniform standard. Therefore, standardisation may happen more quickly in the distribution and transport layer than the display layer. Also, standardisation in the production area will help to limit costs since they will not need to produce content in multiple forms.

Whenever the media industry is in a period of significant change, as it is now, there are risks and opportunities. Jablonski offered the opinion that a major area of risk is that the change is not embraced fast enough.

**Charles Jablonski**  
Vice President Operations  
Onlive  
Region: Global

"We should be prepared to experiment and augment our activity to see what is the next new thing out there," explains Jablonski. "You never know exactly which new technologies will be the winners. Whatever the invention - from the steam engine through to the Internet - it's not the pioneers that make their fortunes. There is a lot of investment that is enthusiasm driven followed by a correction. And then the people that leverage the over investment make the money.

"Only when technology becomes engrained into real businesses in ways that extend their normal operations do we see the full value of a technological advance," Jablonski adds.

"The biggest challenge is that all the various pieces of technology are there, but when you connect the dots in a business or process perspective you have to be realistic. Funders want to know where the money is and this is much more focussed on business results rather than any emotional enthusiasm for the technology.

"It's always easier for me to sell technology based on a business need rather than a dream," Jablonski concludes. ■

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