

In An On-demand World

By Eric Franchi Monday, September 8, 2008



Eric Franchi was part of the team that launched [Undertone Networks](#) in 2002, and currently serves as senior vice president of media. In this role, Eric is responsible for leading Undertone's publisher expansion efforts and overseeing the company's product development, third-party partnerships and business development initiatives. He began his interactive career at About.com.

I THINK WE CAN SAFELY say that 99% of the Video Insider readership has watched an online video clip at some point in the past month. But I'd be curious about how many have watched a full TV show episode on their computer, ever. And of that number, what is the breakout of those who continue to do so, and with frequency?

Why? Because with all of our talk about the fraction of ad dollars online video sees versus traditional media, have you ever really tried to replace your TV with a desktop or laptop? I'm not talking about watching an in-flight movie, or two movies for that matter, if you're making a trip from New York to San Francisco. I'm talking about ditching your TV completely. It's not easy.

My wife and I are huge fans of "Mad Men," and at one point we realized that we missed an episode from season one. Rather than buy the whole DVD set, I suggested that we buy the episode on iTunes, download it to her laptop and watch it right then and there on her MacBook. And so the fun began.... We first set the laptop on our coffee table, but that proved to be too far away for the screen size and built-in speakers. So, I put it on my lap, which caused more than a little discomfort due to the heat, and we spent most of the first segment trying to find an angle that maximized both of our abilities to view the screen. All in all, it was not nearly as nice an experience as sitting back on the couch and watching TV in the living room. And we haven't done it again since. However, iTunes was incredibly convenient, easy to use and relatively inexpensive.

There have been a lot of blog postings and articles about people canceling their cable subscriptions in favor of a Netflix or iTunes subscription for entertainment. This can be a great option for some, especially with Apple TV's HD ability, and it can certainly save money in the long run when compared to a cable subscription, which mostly bundles hundreds of channels you'll never watch. The cable companies know this, and are quickly moving more content to their on-demand features than ever. And as a result, we're suddenly seeing limited advertising in our on-demand content. It's raw, and addressable only by show, but it's starting to emerge.

I wonder if we're seeing the true future of online video unfolding before our eyes. The world is becoming on-demand. The lines between computer hard drive and set-top box are becoming blurred. Incredibly rich, multi-platform user profiles can be developed via a simple login. As a result, targeting by device and by individual will no longer be a challenge, just an option. Imagine the video advertising opportunities that will emerge.