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# Google TV Debuts

by James Careless

## LOS ANGELES

"I want my Google TV!" That's the operational mantra these days at the Entertainment Technology Center at the University of Southern California (ETC@USC). Funded in part by Disney, Sony Pictures Entertainment, Twentieth Century Fox, Paramount, and Warner Brothers—plus a number of equipment manufacturers and vendors—the ETC@USC serves as a dispassionate third-party evaluator of new entertainment technologies. That's why the facility recently bought a Google TV set-top box and put it through its paces both by ETC@USC staff, USC students, and members of the general public.

"At ETC@USC, our role is to think about and discover new entertainment technologies and usage paradigms," said ETC@USC CEO and Executive Director David Wertheimer. "Helping the studios and our other member companies put in context Google's entrance into the living room is what we do."

## THE BASICS

To "log onto" Google TV, the ETC@USC purchased a \$400 Sony Internet TV Blu-ray Disc player with Google TV built-in. Branded as the NSZ-GT1, this box sits between the TV and the incoming broadcast signal feed; be it off-air, cable, or satellite. The NSZ-GT1 also connects to the user's broadband Internet confection, either directly or via home network (wired or wireless).



*Google TV browser*

"The Sony box is similar to Logitech's version—the Logitech Revue—save for the fact that the NSZ-GT1 comes with the Blu-ray player; the Logitech does not," said Bryan Gonzalez, ETC@USC's Social & Digital Media Technology Labs Director. "With either Android OS-based box, you can surf the Web; access apps for NetFlix, Twitter, Pandora, and NBA Game Time; surf the Web and watch TV simultaneously; and use your HDTV as a giant digital picture frame."

One thing you cannot do with Google TV is watch full Web-based episodes of TV shows from ABC, CBS and NBC. This is no technical issue: The Big Three networks are deliberately blocking Google TV access to these webcasts. The three networks are in "ongoing negotiations" to place their long-form content on Google TV, according to TV Technology sister publication, Broadcasting & Cable.

Online video service Hulu is also blocking Google TV access but is also in negotiations to bring onboard the Hulu Plus subscription service, according to the Wall Street Journal.

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Before putting the set-top box in the ETC@USC lab—where it can be tested along with other web-based systems by researchers and consumers alike—Gonzalez set it up in his own home.

"The Sony NSZ-GT1 is fairly straightforward to install, in terms of instructions," he tells TV Technology. "However, after spending 30-45 minutes configuring it, the box asked to download software updates. This I did; resulting in the system rebooting and requiring me to do the install all over again!"

Functionally, Sony's Google TV system worked as advertised. Gonzalez was able to surf the Web while watching HDTV, access TV programs and music streams online, and generally enjoy the experience of having both the Web and broadcast TV integrated into a single device. (The NSZ-GT1 comes with a QWERTY keyboard-equipped remote control, to support data entry.)

His first impression? "Google TV is the type of technology that will appeal to the slightly tech-y consumer," Gonzalez said. "Early adopters like myself already have separate Web-connected computers linked to their HDTVs. Google TV provides a similar experience, without the need to purchase and install a separate PC. That could appeal to a lot of consumers who want Web access in their living room, as long as it is easy to install."



*The Sony NSZ-GT1 Blu-ray player with Google TV costs \$399.99*

## IMPLICATIONS FOR BROADCASTERS

Wertheimer doesn't foresee the Google/Big Three standoff continuing indefinitely. "The networks want consumers to view their shows, but need to be paid in some way that covers the costs of the shows being produced," he says. "When Google and others providing programming can demonstrate a path or model, the networks will be all over it."

Even when such a model is found, Wertheimer doesn't expect conventional broadcasting to lose its pivotal money-making status for many years. "These things always take longer than anyone thinks," he says. "I think broadcast TV will be alive and well for quite a long time, even as creators and distributors deliver on the viewer demand on new platforms."

In the meantime, the ETC@USC will keep testing Google TV, Apple TV, and whatever other new technologies hit the market. "What Google TV is as a product is just the beginning," Wertheimer said. "We try to think about how consumers might or might not take advantage of the capabilities of various devices to consume entertainment in new ways. We are especially interested in the intersection between social networking and entertainment—an area which is aided by devices like Google TV, and ultimately the apps that will be built upon platforms like it."

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