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Technology

Better Than YouTube

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Big Media strikes back with Web video almost as good as real TV.

Until recently the internet strategy for broadcasters like Disney's ABC, Fox, **Time Warner** (nyse: TWX - news - people) and Televisa was to promote shows online so people would go watch them on a TV set. Their big fear was that a generation of viewers would throw over traditional television for jerky, five-minute productions on YouTube.

But maybe short attention spans were just a function of bad technology. A handful of show producers are trading in the Web's old flavor of video delivery (the dominant one being **Adobe Systems** (nasdaq: ADBE - news - people)' Flash) for newer technologies that deliver clear and smooth streamed images. Their supposedly attention-deficient viewers are suddenly half-hour fans again.

"We've got them for 22 minutes a session, compared with 3 or 4 minutes," says Ronald Berryman, senior vice president at Fox Interactive Media. Fox and abc insert sponsors' names, such as Clorox and **Allstate** (nyse: ALL - news - people), right before the show and above the viewing box while the show runs. "We can increase advertising and deliver long-form content."

A company called Move Networks in American Fork, Utah is at the forefront of this next evolution. Move does for video what voice over Internet networks did for telephone calls: It breaks up the video into bits and efficiently reorganizes them over the network so there's no need for the special computer servers and dedicated transmission lines required on streams using Flash. Shows such as Fox's *24* and *Prison Break*, ABC's *Lost* and *Grey's Anatomy*, and the CW Network's *Everybody Hates Chris* are now being streamed using Move software.

Move executives say they handle more than a million full episode streams a week, and viewership has doubled every month. Move says it is now delivering as much as 200 terabytes, or 200 trillion bytes, of streams per day (the average is 80 terabytes), roughly in line with YouTube but more than the Web sites of CNN, NBC and CBS.

Fox, which tested Move Networks' technology on the Web sites of 24 of its affiliates last year, plans to expand to 200 affiliates this summer and give consumers video-editing tools so they can produce their own brief programs. Another broadcaster, which was paying $1 million a month to deliver jerky versions of its shows, expects those costs to drop up to 85% with Move.

Move, like Flash, requires users to install a software player. But unlike YouTube-style Flash video, which fetches streamed bits in a series of requests from a set of servers at the sender's end, Move gets bits from the closest storage cache (similar to technology from Web video giant Akamai) and brings them back to the screen at the best streaming rate based on the network's traffic load. It uses standard Internet protocols, which means it can take advantage of the many server farms around the world that offer up Web pages. Both ABC and Fox say there is nothing else that can stream at this scale.

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Move, with 55 employees and $22 million in funding from Hummer Winblad and Steamboat Ventures (Disney's venture capital arm), has been in business for five years. It started out as an attempt to move large files by e-mail (thus the name Move Networks) but switched to video delivery in 2004 once its founders, both from **Novell** (nasdaq: NOVL - news - people), realized that video was going to be a dominant medium online. "People may want to watch chunks, but more people want to watch long forms," says Chief Executive John Edwards. "The industry just had to solve the glitches." Quality and profits. How radical can the Internet get?

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