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Media Biz ABC's big Move away from Flash «

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 MEDIA BIZ
With Paul R. La Monica

About the author

April 4, 2007

ABC's big Move away from Flash

Flash! Ah-aah! Savior of the universe! Oops. Sorry. This blog post is about Flash, the multimedia software from Adobe (ADBE) that is used to serve up videos on sites like Google's (GOOG) YouTube and News Corp.'s (NWS) MySpace, not the [cheese-tastic song by Queen](#) from the campy 1980 [Flash Gordon movie](#). I couldn't help myself.

Anyway, Adobe's Flash is used by many large media companies. And it has been the backbone of the video player that TV network ABC used on its web site. Note the use of the past tense.

Earlier this week, ABC.com unveiled a [new broadband video player](#), which includes among other things, an option to watch shows such as "Lost," "Dancing with the Stars," "Grey's Anatomy" and "Desperate Housewives" in a full-screen format. But ABC is no longer using Flash. Instead the new player relies on a technology developed by privately-held Move Networks.

What's interesting about this, uh, move is that Move Networks is a start-up that has received funding from Steamboat Ventures, the venture capital division of Walt Disney (DIS), which also owns ABC. And this is not the first time that Disney has shepherded some business to a Steamboat-funded company. Last year, [I wrote](#) about how Disney's ESPN.com dumped Yahoo!'s (YHOO) contextual advertising system Content Match in favor of AdSonar, a product developed by upstart Quigo, which also is backed by Steamboat.

So even though a cynic might claim that ABC is simply helping boost business for a company that just happens to be an investment from its parent's VC stable, I think Move Networks is a company worth keeping an eye on.

I spoke with Move's CEO John Edwards (not the presidential candidate) last month and he told me that Move is close to being profitable and hopes to generate about \$40 million to \$50 million in annual sales within the next two to three years. Move also is backed by another high-profile VC firm, [Hummer Winblad Venture Partners](#).

Jim Ericson, vice president of marketing for Move Networks, told me in an interview Wednesday that Steamboat decided to invest in Move after ABC already had expressed interest in the technology.

"ABC was astounded by the video quality we were able to deliver online and said we need to have this for our customers," Ericson said.

Alexis Rapo, vice president of digital media for ABC, added that the full-screen version offered by Move was "incredibly crisp and clean compared to Flash" and only had minimal buffering at the beginning of the stream. She said that this should hopefully lead to a better viewing experience for users, which in turn, should boost the effectiveness of the commercials that advertisers are placing within the streams.

So is this a big loss for Adobe? Yes and no.

"Adobe is aware of ABC's decision to implement a new video player to view television shows online. It is unfortunate, but we are deeply committed to providing our customers with a seamless experience to view streaming, live, and on-demand rich interactive content to the widest possible audience. At the upcoming NAB trade show we expect to announce some exciting new developments around Flash and video playback that will interest broadcasters worldwide," wrote Jim Guerard, vice president and general manager, Dynamic Media for Adobe, in an e-mail. But ABC's Rapo pointed out that even though shows on the new player are supported by Move, the ads are actually still served by Flash.

Nonetheless, it will be interesting to see if more media companies follow ABC's uh, Move. After all, ABC has been a pioneer among the major TV networks in broadband video. ABC said that approximately 73 million episodes have been viewed on ABC.com since the start of the current TV season in September and that traffic for ABC.com in February was higher than the web sites for GE's (GE) NBC.com, Fox.com and CBS.com. (CBS)

And so far, users appear to like the technology. Bloggers at [Scobleizer](#), [Gizmodo](#) and CNET's (CNET) [Crave](#) have raved about ABC's new player.

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Posted by Paul R. La Monica 1:09 pm 2 Comments | [Add a comment](#)

Why can't the reason be the quality of the product. ABC.com at full screen is smoother, quicker and less distorted than two of the "other guys" players at default size. I find myself watching reruns on ABC rather than trying to fight with the skipping on another network "first run" show.

Posted By Jeff, Lahaina HI : April 7, 2007 10:47 pm

Sure these guys are funded by Disney's venture arm, but they fund all kind of things. Also, Fox was using Move for their video player back in September, long after it was funded by Disney, I think.

Posted By Bill W, Santa Monica, CA : April 6, 2007 3:51 pm

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