

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

HOWZATT! BROADCASTERS EXPLORE NEW REVENUE STREAM

WEB HAS BEEN CAST FOR LIVE CRICKET

Amit Sharma  
NEW DELHI

INDIAN advertisers are now waking up to a new platform to cash in on the country's passion for cricket: webcasting, or live telecast of cricket matches on the internet.

With sports broadcasters Ten Sports and Neo Cricket running webcasts on their sites, an array of brands such as Samsung, Maruti Suzuki, Airtel, DoCoMo and Xerox have checked out the new media platform that comes at a fraction of the cost of television advertising.

"Advertisers are beginning to understand the potential and growing popularity of the web," says Felix Jose, VP, new Media, at Nimbus Communications, which owns Neo Cricket and Neo Sports.

Yahoo!, Vodafone, DoCoMo, Aircel, Samsung and Toyota are among companies advertising on Neo's website, www.cricketmirvana.com, during the webcasts of the ongoing tri-nation one-day championship in Bangladesh and the recent Sri Lankan tour of India. "We realise that there is a healthy and growing interest for cricket on the web as more consumers are moving online for getting updates and sourcing information. We are therefore increasing our focus on digital media," says CD Choi, head, corporate marketing, at Samsung India.

Nimbus Communications, which claims to have pioneered cricket webcasting in the country, has already sold 50% of its advertising inventory on webcasts for next month's South African cricket tour of India to a clutch of web-only advertisers including Toyota and Thailand Tourism Promotion Council.

"Webcasting should be a viable standalone revenue stream within the next three years," says Peter Hutton, senior vice president, revenue and digital media, at Taj Television Ltd, which runs Ten Sports.

The Dubai-based company started live cricket webcast on www.ten-

sports.com with the three-nation (India- Sri Lanka-New Zealand) Compaq Cup in Sri Lanka in September last, where it attracted brands such as Airtel, Xerox, Samsung, Maruti Suzuki and Cisco.

"We are all trying to grow the webcast advertising market; it helps us attract extra spending from advertisers," Mr Hutton said.

At present, according to Neo's Jose, an advertiser can run a full campaign on webcast for just Rs 1 lakh, reaching out to about 2.5 lakh computer screens. In comparison, a 10-minute advertisement on television during a live telecast costs Rs 2.5-4-lakh.

Apart from being a cheaper medium, webcast enables real-time ad insertions and response measurement for advertisers, says Saurabh Bhatia, CEO of Vdopia, the online advertising partner of Nimbus and Ten Sports. "Unlike on television, advertisers on webcasts are able to simultaneously place different advertisements for consumers in different geographies through dynamic ad insertions. They can also pay per viewer as the number of viewers is gauged instantly."

But then, it's still no comparison to television in terms of reach. Live cricket on TV reaches 1.3-2 crore viewers on an average compared to just 5-10 lakh viewers of webcasts. And, according to media planner Sandeep Lakhina, COO (South Asia), Starcom Worldwide, it will take a long time for webcasting to make any serious inroads as it requires large-scale broadcast penetration.

"We have bought advertising on webcast because it suits the needs of our clients but it is a very nascent medium, reaching out to niche consumers," says Lakhina who buys advertising inventory for Samsung and Aircel.

Advertising on webcasts is part of the approximately Rs 1,000-crore internet advertising industry that is growing at 56% per annum. Cricket webcasts command a significant premium over webcasts by entertainment channels as they are mostly live and involve high property costs (read cricket telecast rights).

