

FutureMedia

27 April 2005

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British TV is poised on the brink of a new revolution. The birth of multi-channel TV and, more recently, digital broadcasting have re-written many rules by offering viewers unprecedented choice – more than 300 digital channels are currently available. Now, however, the industry faces a shake-up just as profound with the arrival of VOD services set to completely change how audiences consume TV.

On demand services are the next step in the move towards a truly non-linear broadcast environment. With on demand, viewers no longer have to wait for the programme or movie they want to watch to air at a time pro-ordained by a channel scheduler. Instead, they can order that programme to watch whenever they chose. Self-scheduling – an activity already on the rise thanks to the spread of personal video recording will soon become the norm.

The challenge faced by broadcasters and platform owners will be how to retain the upper hand in this brave new non-linear content world. Which is why ntl decided to create and on-demand service for a range of third-party content-owning broadcasters. Its strategy was to roll out this new platform from January 2005 across all of its UK cable subscribers' homes. The new VOD service

would have its own brand identity, and it would be marketed to viewers through a combination of on-air promotion and off-air support materials, including direct mail. ntl appointed Dunning Eley Jones. Success depended on the agency's ability to ensure that the brand identity, on-screen design and navigational interfaces worked together seamlessly. The fact that the agency was able to design and implement each in-house was, therefore, a major strength.

The agency's work for ntl included developing a brand identity for the new on demand platform – ntl On Demand – and its on-air promotional channel and an interactive interface simple enough to be used by anyone aged eight to 80.

The identity they designed is based on the symbol of the 'play' button – the crucial additional functionality of on-demand services which provides the viewer with an instantly recognisable symbol for on demand content. The identity has been implemented both on air, in a series of genre specific idents and across a range of print material. The navigational system,

meanwhile, had to simplify the extensive new VOD service by allowing easy browsing and purchase of on demand content. ntl's primary method of marketing ntl On Demand to its customers is through a promotional channel. This would be positioned as the sixth channel in ntl channel line-up,

ntl would showcase content to viewers via the promotional channel rather than leave viewers to search the on-demand service on their own.

The agency worked closely with ntl's technical team to make the ntl On Demand barker channel work, drawing on its past experience to develop and test different navigational principles before liaising closely with the technical team to prototype test and build.

The process was closer to product design than graphic design, and the end result was a creative solution that evolved from the inside out. It was important not only to entice viewers into the on demand environment but to keep them there. So full screen web style menus listing different options were avoided in favour of a more user-friendly interface feature integrated broadcast and menu overlays to deliver a truly televisual experience.

Today, ntl On Demand is a distinctive brand that clearly identifies itself as a new and innovative service. The identity, on-screen presentation and interactive interface work together seamlessly to position on demand as an accessible, everyday function rather than an alien service that's potentially complex and confusing. The navigational principles are now being used by FilmFlex, the movies on demand service which also features on the new ntl platform.

It's a significant achievement and an important lesson for every media business eager to make its mark in the rapidly evolving non-linear digital content marketplace.

