

Smart TVs

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➔ Thanks to smartphones and tablets, the Internet already has migrated from your desktop to the palm of your hand. Now it's migrating even further. For example, there are connected cars that use the Internet to access weather and traffic data, connected refrigerators that use it to order groceries, and even connected clothing that uses it to track the wearer's activity and exercise.

For anyone who's done battle with their cable company, however, perhaps the most exciting Internet connection is the one established by smart TVs.

"A smart TV is a television that can be connected to the Internet to offer streaming media services and apps," explains Courtney

Konopotski, associate product manager for United Stationers. "It gives you the flexibility to get rid of cable, if you want to."

A growing number of consumers do eliminate cable, suggests a 2014 study by market research company eMarketer: More

than half of U.S. consumers will be watching TV through Internet-connected devices by 2017, it predicts, adding that the number of smart-TV users will grow from 50 million today to nearly 80 million within the next three years.



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—Devin McDonnell, United Stationers

screen

For resellers, the growing smart-TV market is a chance to be a “total” solution for small-business customers.

“Your customers have an expectation that they can come to you for all their business essentials,” says Devin McDonnell, United Stationers’ category manager for new technology. “But business essentials are changing.”

What’s so ‘smart’ about smart TVs?

You can do anything on a smart TV that you can do on a traditional TV—enjoy your favorite program, for instance, watch a movie, or play a video game. Because a smart TV is connected to the Internet, however, you also can do activities previously reserved for computers and smartphones, such as stream content from Netflix, Amazon, VUDU, and Pandora; watch videos on YouTube; play songs from your music library; or visit a favorite website.

These capabilities mean smart TVs can be just as powerful in businesses as they are in living rooms. A physician, for instance, can stream a health documentary from Netflix in her waiting room. An auto dealership can use YouTube to play its television commercial, if it advertises on local TV, or to stream videos from auto shows and car auctions. A bed and breakfast could use it in its lobby to display positive reviews left by guests on websites like Travelocity, and a retailer could use it on a store shelf to play videos of product demonstrations.

“The sky’s the limit in terms of how you make smart TVs applicable to your business,” McDonnell says. “Their [Internet connectivity] adds a new dimension to the content you can access and share.”

Smart shopping

Not all smart TVs are created equal. As with traditional TVs, consumers must consider size, resolution, clarity, sound quality, energy use, and, of course, cost.

United Stationers carries smart TVs from Magnavox, whose ENERGY STAR-certified products check all the boxes.

“Magnavox is a strong brand,” remarks Konopotski, who says United Stationers offers four Magnavox models ranging in size from 32 inches to 55 inches. “All models, except the 32-inch, are 1080p resolution and offer what’s called ‘TruSurround’ technology, which gives you [superior] sound quality without the need to invest in surround sound. It’s an all-in-one solution.”

Notably, Magnavox was not an early adopter of smart-TV technology. “They waited until the technology had been tested and proven, and that’s not necessarily a bad thing,” Konopotski continues. “Because they didn’t invest in all of the upfront R&D that their competitors did, they’ve come in with a good product at a very competitive price.”

That price means resellers can afford to be on the cutting-edge. “Not every customer’s going to need a smart TV,” McDonnell concludes. “But for those who do, being able to satisfy them across multiple categories will keep your business relevant.” O|L

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