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## The OCAP Banquet Table

**The last of a three-part Multichannel News Special report on topics that are sure to be front and center at the National Show in San Francisco April 3-5. This Week: Technology to Watch.**

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Led by Vidiom Systems Corp., a sizable number of OpenCable Application Protocol-related companies will dot Cable Television Laboratories Inc.'s CableNet exhibit at the National Show this year, a testament to the renewed interest in interactive television applications.

Operator interest is being fueled by DirecTV Inc. and Echostar Communications Corp.'s addition of ITV services, according to executives working at OCAP software, hardware and applications suppliers.

Broomfield-Colo.-based Vidiom, which built an OCAP software stack for Time Warner Cable and Comcast Corp, is leading the charge. The company has expanded to 80 employees and is now involved in 13 OCAP-related projects, says Mike Malcy, Vidiom vice president of business development and marketing.

Vidiom will showcase several products at CableNet, including its OCAP Porting Kit, OCAP Foundation Pack and Vision Workbench tool set. The company also will be holding an OCAP training course on April 3 from 10 a.m. to noon at the Moscone Convention Center.

Vidiom's product set is based on the software stack it created for Time Warner, which has been adopted by the OCAP joint venture between Time Warner and Comcast. "They have full rights" to the stack, Malcy says. But Vidiom also has the licensing rights to distribute the stack elsewhere.

All OCAP stacks need a Java virtual machine implementation, and Vidiom has been selected to be the distributor of Esmertec's JVM. The Esmertec JVM is build into Vidiom's Foundation Pack, which it is showcasing to cable operators. "Vidiom is a one-stop shop for the OCAP stack and JVM," Malcy says.

Vidiom's Workbench is a development toolset for OCAP Applications. The company lists 20 WorkBench customers, including The Weather Channel.

At its booth on the exhibit floor and its kiosk in CableNet, Vidiom will highlight WorkBench apps running on the Motorola Inc. DCT 6412 and the Scientific-Atlanta Inc. 8300 set-top boxes, with digital-video-recorder functionality.

Vidiom also will demonstrate V Guide, an OCAP-based interactive program guide using real-time Tribune Media Services data. Other demonstrations will feature gaming applications from Zodiac and Visiware.

Vidiom's V Cert program allows MSOs and application providers to pretest OCAP applications and detect problems before sending them to CableLabs for official testing, Malcy says.

Softel-USA Inc. will feature MediaSphere, an OCAP-related video carousel for ITV playout.

Softel has worked with Starz Encore Group and Turner Broadcasting System Inc. on some ITV-related applications and is testing its product with several MSOs, according to Sam Pemberton, president and CEO.

MediaSphere's product lineup consists of a testing and certification piece, a distribution and playout system and a monitoring, archiving and rebuilding piece.

The distribution and playout system features four MediaSphere products: MediaSphere Manager: Enterprise Edition, MediaSphere Push, MediaSphere Trigger and MediaSphere TX. The Enterprise Edition is designed for wide- scale MSO rollouts of ITV services, and controls the entire process. The Push product allows for seamless distribution of ITV product from headend to home, Pemberton says.

Trigger makes sure the right content is played out from the carousel to the right set-top box. The TX monitoring system allows MSOs to gauge if ITV applications have played out correctly.

Softel launched in 2001, and specializes in captioning and V-chip preparations and transmission for broadcast and cable networks. "That's the profit center, and it allowed us to invest heavily in the ITV space," Pemberton says.

The company supplies ITV carousels for a broad mix of European cable, TV and DBS operators. Content aggregator YooMedia has used the products for dating and gaming applications, Pemberton says. "We built the first MHP carousel in Finland," which was used for weather and local-information applications, he says.

In 2003, the company opened an office in Stamford, Conn., and sent a visiting engineer to CableLabs to join the OCAP effort. "We are very committed to open standards," Pemberton says. "The specifications are now available."

He feels ITV can work in the U.S. based on the success in other continents. "It's been out there for a long time. It's a big revenue generator; that's proven abroad." In the U.S., he says, "What has been lost is getting the operator and the viewer experience right. We've got to generate money for the operator, and it also has to enhance the viewer experience. We can offer real-time interaction with current shows."

Pemberton says the ITV could be popular for shows where contestants are voted on by viewers, like *American Idol*, and that ITV ads can be good revenue generators. "The key is education," he says. "In Europe, state broadcasters put a lot of effort into educating the viewer. It's now ingrained in the psyche of the viewer."

Pemberton isn't a big fan of two-screen (PC/TV) interactivity. "I don't want to have to go to my PC. The broadcaster loses me from the broadcast," he says.

"Some ITV [content] is shockingly poor," he adds. "Once you have a poor viewer experience, getting them to relick can be a challenge. That's why operators are so keen to get it right. Operators want to have differentiators."

Pemberton says Softel works with Emuse Technologies, Ensequence and Vidiom for authoring tools.

Meanwhile, UniSoft Corp. — which also will be at CableNet — provides OCAP headend servers, along with development and testing software.

"The encoding and playout side is our primary focus," says Guy Hadland, chief technology officer.

For Unisoft, that product is the TSBroadcaster, which can be integrated into either the S-A digital network control systems or Motorola's digital-access control system. Unisoft also provides testing components (it's Soft OC and OCAP ATE Host products); an OCAP security file generator — for generating authenticated OCAP applications and signed OCAP code images for common download — and its DigiHost headend application management server.

Hadland says four MSOs are now testing its product in the lab. Starz also used the product for an ITV demonstration late last year. "We wanted to develop the technical knowledge to uplink bound applications and understand how OCAP applications are ingested," Hadland says.

For instance, a voting application could probably be encoded at the uplink. Applications from premium programmers, like Starz, would likely need injection at the headend, because of the need to work with conditional-access systems, Hadland says.

Hadland says Unisoft is pitching TSBroadcaster to MSOs and cable set-top vendors, then it will move onto to cable networks. The TSBroadcaster includes the TSPlayer, an MPEG-2 (Moving Pictures Expert Group) transport stream player that includes a software multiplexer built in next to the ASI driver.

The DigiHost headend application management system includes subsystems for playout management, messaging, viewer management, metering, interactive advertising, secure payment, information services, financial management, application management, system management, server application, browser management and zap-tracking.

NDS will be showcasing demonstrations from MTV and Disney's *Kim Possible* cartoon. The MTV "HiJack" demonstration will randomly "hijack" your set-top, NDS says, launching a gaming or "crazy animation" content.

The *Kim Possible* demonstration will show an original 11-minute episode embedded with digital trading cards of the characters. Viewers can play the shows over and over to collect all of the cards. In addition to its function as a gateway to launch the enhanced episodes, the Disney Channel portal page serves as a home base for the trading card collection pages and multi-player trading application.

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