

Virtual VCR, Dec 1991

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I suppose this service is now partially incorporated into both Sky Plus and BT Vision, but could have been available over 15 years ago.

Concept

Virtual VCR

The Problems

- Currently, home VCR machines are capable only of recording one channel at a time. Given that channels tend to compete by putting good programs on together, viewers sometimes miss programmes that they would like to record.
- customers are spending money on VCR machine which could be spent on telecomms
- advertising on TV is broadcast rather than multicast and consequentially non-optimal

BT opportunity

BT could provide a means to record programs for later viewing using the network.

Customers would be able to record as many simultaneous programmes as they wish. They would not need their own video at all in principle.

- increased traffic
- broadband service
- combines well with directed advertising, which would appeal to TV companies (and their clients)
- possible legislation bypass

Summary

BT could offer customers the option to watch programs that they would otherwise miss. There are a few possibilities:

BT could actually record the programs (or parts of them) at the request of the customer and offer VCR type facilities for record and play-back, possibly with no restrictions on the number of channels involved.

Alternatively, BT could act as a carrier for a video library which may be offered by the TV companies.

Neither of these approaches would require TV signals to be sent upstream, only signalling information si required in this direction.

The first of these seems to offer the best potential, since it is more within the control of the customer and behaves as if it were his own VCR. It would have a different character to normal video library services. It may also be treated differently by legislation.

This service could offer the customer the means to dispense with video purchase, or offer advanced facilities not available on his machine. It could have an effect on the advertising market, since programs would not necessarily be in direct competition.

It would also offer the potential for BT to offer customised advertising as a service to the TV providers, since it would no longer be a broadcast.