

# As screens abound, monitoring is critical

**D**on't believe the hype that TV is in decline. Recent research reiterates people's engagement with TV content is stronger than ever, and many homes claim they watch more content than ever – because they can.

Technology continues to make more content available with more flexibility. Personal video recorder penetration continues to increase – and will accelerate with the launch this week of internet-based FetchTV – while ninemsn's Fixplay video player has also launched and internet-enabled TVs are here too.

More platforms will launch, increasing people's ability to engage with TV content, and that's a key issue for the advertising industry – how are we going to respond to this new viewing behaviour?

Yes, the free-to-air TV bucket is leaking eyeballs but rather than going down the drain, they're leaking into different buckets that we need to identify and capture.

With the measurement of time-shifted viewing and the free-to-air digital channels, television has taken a giant leap. The ratings better represent homes with PVR technology. But it's not enough.

The industry must devise how to monitor in-home and portable viewing on TV, computer and mobile screens with a meaningful and consistent currency. We'll probably have a fourth screen when Apple's iPad and its clones take hold.

If you think this type of viewing is too small to worry about in the short term, think again. In a recent TV viewing study conducted by Starcom with Network Ten in November, a third of 16- to 54-year-olds said they watched TV programs over the internet. More specifically, 20 per cent of them stream TV programs over the net, 15 per cent download and save the programs,



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and 11 per cent watch programs downloaded by others.

In terms of the three screens, 87 per cent of downloaders watch or stream on computers, 23 per cent watch on TV and 7 per cent watch or stream on mobile phones; 16 per cent watch on more than one device.

That's a lot of viewing not currently being captured. And it's only going to increase as more content becomes available and download speeds accelerate.

It's time to start evolving our TV and digital measurement currencies now. We need an approach that captures all viewers as TV content radiates through different platforms. And we need to understand how the impact and engagement of viewing on different platforms vary.

It makes sense for TV ratings supplier OzTAM to take the lead on this issue. Its chief executive, Kate Inglis-Clark, has said this is the next major issue to investigate (see story below). Its ratings supplier AGB/Nielsen Media Research is doing preliminary work on this.

The Media Federation of Australia and the Australian Association of National Advertisers will devote the necessary resources to work with media companies and researchers to address the issue. The sooner we get started the sooner we can better understand what's really happening with all types of viewing. There may be an additional cost but it's an issue we can't afford to ignore.

John Sintras is the chief executive of Starcom MediaVest Group.