

TV revolution brings 3D

New technology is reviving an old medium, writes **Rachel Browne**.

REPORTS of television's death have been greatly exaggerated.

A decade after pundits predicted free-to-air television would be killed off by a combination of pay TV, video games and the internet, it has shown remarkable resilience.

And, say senior industry figures, new technology has breathed life into an old medium.

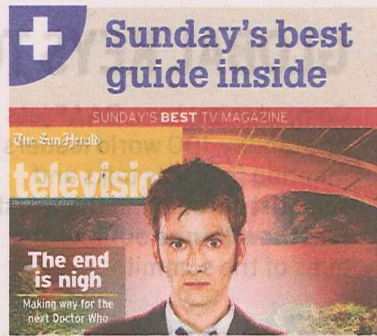
"The technological advances we have seen in the past 12 months have resurrected the passion for television," Freeview chief executive Robin Parkes said.

As television celebrates its 53rd anniversary in Australia, our relationship with it remains strong.

There is a TV set in 99.7 per cent of Australian households, the highest level among 52 countries globally, Nielsen's Online Global Survey found. This year, Australians watched three hours, five minutes each day, two minutes less than they watched in 2004.

But it is digital television, timeshifted viewing through the use of personal video recorders (PVR), video on demand and soon-to-be introduced 3D-enabled TV that have changed the way we interact with something that used to be regarded simply as part of the furniture.

The managing director of Sony Computer Entertainment Australia, Michael Ephraim, said viewers were on the brink of changes as



revolutionary as the introduction of television. "I grew up with black-and-white television and, believe me, things are changing rapidly," he said.

Last week Sony launched a service that combines a games console, Blu-Ray DVD player, personal video recorder, electronic program guide, music downloads and catch-up TV through ABC iView, with more channels of video-on-demand to follow.

"Consumers are becoming more savvy," Mr Ephraim said. "They are embracing digital technology and are becoming more aware of what is out there."

More than half of Australian households now have digital television and one-fifth have a PVR, according to Freeview's Year in Review report, released last week.

Rhonda Brown, marketing director at Free TV, which represents

the free-to-air networks, said early adopters were watching more.

"Technology is actually facilitating a better entertainment experience," she said. "Digital TV is providing superior pictures and sound, multichannels are providing consumers with more channels for free and personal video recorders are making it easier for people to plan their television viewing."

"We know that PVR homes watch between 10 and 20 per cent more TV than non-PVR homes."

And they're not just watching in their homes. The advent of the PVR and catch-up TV means viewers watch on laptops and phones.

The Seven Media Group sales and digital chief, James Warburton, believes the innovations have opened opportunities for viewers as well as changing their profiles.

"Everyone thought PVRs would be the death of TV but it's turned out to be quite the opposite," he said.

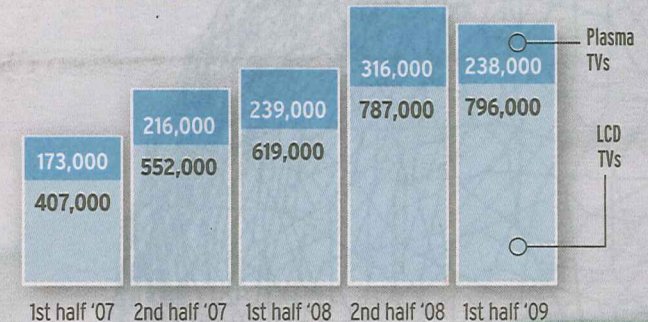
"PVR viewers are 10 years younger than the average TV viewer, which is important because it's that younger demographic networks and advertisers were concerned about."

The next step will be video-on-demand, with players including Microsoft, Telstra and Hybrid Television Services having already entered the market. "The download rate was 10 times what we projected," said Robbee Minicola,

PENETRATION OF ENTERTAINMENT TECHNOLOGY



SIX-MONTHLY SALES



chief of Hybrid, the Australian licensee of TiVo, which launched its CASPA on-demand service last week.

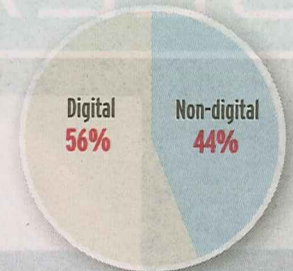
Australia's high rate of illegal movie and TV downloads suggests a strong interest in on-demand services, which Ms Minicola believes viewers

will be reluctant to pay for. "Many people are taking content off bitTorrent [file-sharing software] not because they want to steal content but because they had no other way of watching a show they had missed," she said.

leaping into your lounge



AUSTRALIAN HOMES WITH DIGITAL TV



VIEWING SHARE (6PM - MIDNIGHT)



SOURCE: FREE TV AUSTRALIA

Rather than having a subscription fee, CASPA will be advertiser-funded. "This service has to be easy for everyone from geeks to grandmothers but you don't have to get out your wallet every time you want to watch," Ms Minicola said.

"The fact is 72 per cent of the Australian public watches free to air exclusively. The overwhelming majority do not want to pay."

But we are happy to fork out for the latest flat-screen televisions and PVRs. About 2.4 million TV sets will

be sold by Christmas, with retailers saying business is up 20 per cent. In the first half of 2009, sales of LCD TVs alone topped \$1 billion.

The looming analogue switch-off in 2013 is driving the sales, said the consumer electronics marketer of

Samsung, Mark Leathan. He said the first 3D-enabled televisions – and, no, you won't need those coloured glasses – arrive in stores next year.

"What is limiting 3D is the lack of content. That said, we think it's something which will become

desirable over the next few years." Despite all the advances, content is still king, Mr Warburton said. "You can have all the best technology in the world but if you haven't got content people want to watch, they're not going to switch on."