Watching

From Page 7B

sources in relatively rapid fashion, particularly a new generation of viewers accustomed to trolling the Internet.

'I have a 19-year-old son, Spectorsky said. 'He doesn't watch broadcast TV that much. He goes to his iPad and watches an episode of 'The Office' over the Internet. ... He's a digital na-

One of the solutions has been to embrace and exploit other delivery systems. Time Warner Cable, for example, has an app that makes programming available through iPads and iPhones and expects to expand that to Android systems in 2012; even now, Android users can use the app to schedule recordings by their cable boxes.

Among traditional broadcasters, ABC, NBC and Fox all make episodes of programs available online through their own sites and Hulu (which also carries selected cable programs); CBS uses its own website and its online CBS Audience Network.

But is there money to be made from such efforts, or from any of the growing technological alternatives?

Netflix, for example, has pushed ever more aggressively into streaming video (and infuriated customers when it tried to offer streaming and DVD-by-mail rental as separately priced services instead of a single package). But Advertising Age noted that streaming has far less potential profit than DVDs, with shorter rights deals for streaming; the publication estimated that one DVD subscriber was as profitable as four or five streaming subscribers combined.

Hulu, famous for offering programs for free, has added a pay tier. Online videos from networks now routinely include commercials (and do not let you skip them); some on-demand channels disable the fast-forward function so you have to sit through the

Some program producers are still reluctant to let their programs be replayed online, said DeBevoise, senior vice president of the entertainment division of CBS Interactive. They fear that the replays could hurt the programs' earning potential when the show moves from network to syndication (where many shows finally make their profits) or when it is sold on DVD. Even though a TV episode may be available for online reviewing for just 30 days after its original telecast, that still adds to its audience exposure.

All these changes may require rethinking of what a program distributor has to provide. There is no question that networks, stations and other programmers are getting ever more into social media. And broadcasters may focus on big events like the Super Bowl or the Academy Awards, enhance them with local programming and let less-watched shows go elsewhere — if those local shows can get financed.

'If people can get this content through all these other delivery systems, and it lowers my rating and the financing to get these programs, I can no longer support them,' Spectorsky said.

As big as that question is, it is

far from the only one. What will happen to viewers who do not have computers, let alone online access, as the programming world looks past them? Cable changed the way broadcasters operated, shoving certain kinds of programs to the viewing margins. Online often promises content above and beyond what a basic telecast offers; those Super Bowl commercials I mentioned aired in a longer form online than they did on TV Sunday night.

What will a program designed to be seen both on a big screen and a tiny one look like? Technology does affect content. In the old days of TV, close-ups were more common, because the screens were small and the pictures often blurry.

Now I hear from viewers unhappy with audio mixes designed for home-theater systems and scenes that would look great in a darkened movie house but seem blacked out under the lights of a living room.

And what will be our relationship as viewers to the programs of the new video age, and to each other? The ancient idea of communal viewing went by the boards as TV sets multiplied in homes and channels proliferated. You've undoubtedly seen people in a restaurant booth, each on his or her phone, and the siren lure of product on phones will get louder. What will become of dialogue when there is always, literally, a TV screen at hand?

Rich Heldenfels: rheldenfels@thebeaconjournal.com

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