

The Los Angeles Times

Disney to Offer Interactive VOD Channels

By Gary Gentile
Published May 15, 2007

Some cable TV customers could soon be able to book a trip to a Disney theme park with the click of their remote controls.

The Walt Disney Co. later this month is launching an interactive video-on-demand travel channel on cable systems served by Time Warner Cable Inc. and Cablevision System Corp., the companies said Tuesday.

The channel will include original programs, including reality shows, episodic programs, concerts and special events highlighting Disney's domestic theme parks in Florida and California as well as its adventure travel business.

The shows will be offered free to viewers and will include interactive features, including the ability to request more information using buttons on the TV remote control.

The programs will reach more than 9 million people nationwide.

Although the deals with Time Warner and Cablevision are structured differently, Disney will create the programming and pay the cable companies to air it.

On Time Warner systems, viewers can use their remote to request brochures, DVDs and other information through the mail or via e-mail.

Cablevision subscribers can use a remote control to trigger a phone call from a Disney travel representative within 15 minutes, Disney said.

"We hope this kind of engaging entertainment really does begin the booking process for some families and continues to grow our engagement and relationships," Jay Rasulo, chairman of Walt Disney Parks and Resorts said.

Cable systems are anxious to enable commerce using two-way connections and offer lots of video choices in part to keep viewers glued to their TV sets and away from the Internet.

"Cable systems see VOD as the way to break the Internet's hold on consumer entertainment," said James McQuivey, an analyst at Forrester Research.

"Since the VOD system is a 24-hour pitchman of product, not having the ability to connect to a call center for more information would be an opportunity missed."

Disney tested the channel on Cablevision's system for several months last year.

The companies were able to monitor which programs people watched, whether viewers fast-forwarded through some parts and what parts received repeat viewing. The test helped Disney develop the shows that will debut the week of May 21 on Time Warner systems and May 29 on Cablevision.

"It has a lot of the interactivity of the Web," said Barry Frey, senior vice president of advanced platform sales at Cablevision. "It will also give a lot of details to Disney and Cablevision on how many people are watching, how long they are watching."