

The Crew Report Issue 6 – Electronic Guru

Access to Home Comforts – a cure for homesickness?

Watching your living room TV from the yacht

In the last issue, I mentioned that, with IPTV, we will soon be able to watch TV anywhere we have an Internet connection. Well, since writing that, two new TV products have arrived on my desk and grabbed my attention, both of which are particularly relevant for crew.

When I was a student, in the olden days, first day of term would see loads of students arriving at the halls of residence with piles of suitcases and overflowing trunks and, inevitably, there would be a little old portable TV (possibly even “black & white”) from home perched on top of this pile.

Today you don’t need to take the TV with you. Just leave it at home. You can now actually access your own TV and satellite box through the Internet and watch it on your laptop in your cabin anywhere in the world if you have broadband Internet access.

Both of these two new products provide this service in two different ways. The first is a service that allows you to rent your own Sky Digibox and card, with your own subscription choice. Your box and card is not at your home, it is actually in a warehouse somewhere sitting on a shelf with hundreds of other boxes belonging to other people. They are all connected to one giant satellite dish. You are provided with Internet access to your Sky box. Thus, from your laptop you can access your Sky box remotely and, as you would if it was in front of you, you access the TV guide, select what you want to watch and watch it. No longer are you limited in what you can watch by having an inadequate dish or being outside the Sky footprint. Your only limitation is having the high speed data bandwidth available.

The second product is from Sling Media. By using the Slingbox you can watch and control your own home living room TV from anywhere. The product costs about €250. The Slingbox is a cool looking, state-of-the-art electronic device that connects to the back of your TV. It redirects, or “placeshifts,” the TV signal from your satellite receiver to your computer or laptop of choice, no matter your location. Again your only limit is having a high speed Internet connection. Check it out on www.slingmedia.com where you’ll see that one of their not so cool copy lines is “Now the only place you can’t take your TV is the afterlife”. Scary, or what?

You will require a Slingbox, the hardware and the SlingPlayer interface software that can be used on your laptop, PC or Mac running XP, 2000 or Vista. The SlingPlayer software works the kit to allow you to control your TV as if you were

at home. The control and video transmission is via SlingStream. SlingStream is a groundbreaking technology that dynamically adjusts the video quality to provide the best possible viewing experience.

Both of these new products and services require you to have access to a high speed, broadband data pipe. For the Slingbox to work you do need at least 256kbps or higher. For the Sky box in a warehouse you need a minimum of 380kbps. Currently you do need a large data pipe. Compression techniques may improve this in the future and data pipes will get bigger.

You can connect using Wi-Fi, 3G and HSDPA. If your yacht has VSAT and you have unlimited access to the Internet via the VSAT it would be prudent to check with your ETO before claiming this bandwidth.

With the bandwidth required per satellite box, it is not yet a practical option to replace the physical satellite decoders on board with Internet connections to home based satellite decoders. However, it is a practical option for a satellite decoder from the owner's home to be plumbed into the yacht's systems so that, for example, he can watch that one big ball game that's not televised in Europe.

Reading your local newspaper on board

To add to your home pleasures, try persuading the boss to take out a subscription to NewspaperDirect, so that you can read all the local news from home. A while ago at an international boat show, an Aussie hostess was moved to tears when I gave her a copy of The Age – she hadn't been able to source it since she began working on yachts, despite scouring the local newsagents every time they made landfall. Perhaps you should sell this idea to your boss first and foremost as a benefit to him and his guests, but it could also do wonders for crew morale.

The service is from NewspaperDirect, the world's leader in digital newspaper distribution. NewspaperDirect is an authorised out-of-market distribution partner for all the publishers they represent. You can choose from over 200 newspaper titles from 44 countries in 28 languages, including the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Borsen Dagblad and Yomiuri Shimbun, to name but a few.

You can print any title you select on the day of issue, regardless of where the newspaper is published. What's more, the newspaper is ready to print as soon as the publisher sends the first edition to press.

All the newspapers printed appear in their original format and layout. With this service, newspapers are double sided laser printed on A3 paper, making them easy to carry around without messy newsprint smudges.

This is yet again another service that requires a decent high speed broadband connection as each paper is a substantial data file, some software loaded on a PC and, ideally, a full colour A3 printer, although other printing options can be used.

So, all this technology could be either a huge morale boost for crew, or the cause of massive bouts of homesickness! I guess it all depends on your own personal situation. Waking up on a sunny morning on the shores of the Med, it gives me a certain sadistic pleasure occasionally to tune into the Flying Eye on London's Capital Radio warning of 15 mile tailbacks on the M25, and train delays caused by floods and strikes. On the other hand it can be depressing to hear that tickets are available for your favourite band's next world tour, which inevitably won't include a gig in Mallorca...