

Case study iDTV

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Intercommunale leiedal

1. Project summary

TVLink: publishing city news on an interactive television platform

Clients of the commercial interactive television provider Telenet are able to consult pages and videos about Kortrijk since 2006, september. Newsfeeds from the website of the city are combined with footage of the regional television station WTV. TVLink is a project of Telenet, the city of Kortrijk, WTV and Leiedal.

Zappware and Leiedal developed the necessary tools and software for the cross medial exchange of data. The service is mostly used for watching videos and consulting news items. Since 2006, only the cities of Mechelen and Kortrijk are present on an digital television platform. Kortrijk was the first city to include interactivity and on demand video. WTV can offer a direct link to the municipal pages of Kortrijk through the red button of the spectator's remote control. By using this platform, the partners want to reach people who otherwise don't have access to online information and interactive services. The other Flemish providers of interactive television, IN-DI and Belgacom, do not offer municipal information services yet.

The use of the pilot developed in the project is relatively small. Exact figures are not published, but use of interactive television in Flanders is estimated in about 700.000 of 2.550.000 households (27%). Interactive television is offered in Flanders since 2005. TVLink is being used by 1.000 different users a month. 700 video's a month are viewed on demand. Since the launch of the pilot, no other city joined the digital television platform, except from the city of Mechelen which launched a platform at the same time as Kortrijk.

Joint development

TVLink is a project of Telenet, the city of Kortrijk, regional television WTV and Leiedal. Zappware and Leiedal developed the necessary tools and software for the cross medial exchange of data. The city of Kortrijk delivers the news, and couples text with video's provided by WTV with an authoring tool provided by Zappware/Telenet. Text is provided by the website of the city of Kortrijk, XML-translated to the interactive television authoring tool. The interactive television distribution tool of Telenet delivers the content and the application to the settopboxes of the people at home (MHP).

Results

A large campaign on the regional television station tried to make the viewers aware of the existence of TVLink. In general, the use of TVLink is not as expected, but is nevertheless substantial as being a pilot project. It is also significant no other municipality uses the medium since 2006. The main reason for this is that the costs for broadcasting iDTV are now too high to be commercial for small projects like municipal applications.

In terms of use the video on demand about items of the regional television station about Kortrijk is the most used feature of the service. The newsitems are frequently consulted.

Other parts of the TVLink application, as reporting trash and other problems, are less consulted and used.

The TVLink is a fine tool for the City as a channel used for city marketing, gathers news and video in an appealing way, and these features can be further developed in the future. The archives of WTV and private archives can find their way to the platform.

2. Background / conditions

Because of the difference in partners, both public and private partners, smaller organisations and a very large corporation (Telenet) the project had to be followed up by a close steering committee. Especially the difference in culture between public organisations which want to communicate about the project results and the private companies that can not share their information easily, was often difficult to manage.

However, each partner contributed in their own way and shared the different experiences in developing this project. Since the technology that was used is rather new, we had to rely on a specialized development company (Zappware). The lack of such companies is a huge problem for the development of iDTV applications.

3. Decision taking

The main steering committee of this project had management delegates from all partners. This committee closely followed up the evolution of the project.

The main partnership agreement however was agreed between the city of Kortrijk and Telenet (private corporation). The other partners were mainly included by the city of Kortrijk.

The city of Kortrijk took this initiative because they always seek for new communication possibilities and because of their ambition to invest in innovative applications. The baseline for this city is 'city of creation, innovation and design'.

4. Statistics

The target groups for this project were mainly early adopters of iDTV and senior citizens. The use of iDTV is seen as a possible interactive communication channel to communicate with the elderly because of the simple use of a remote control instead of a computer. There are no statistics available of the amount of elderly that use iDTV.

5. Recommendations / conclusions

The use of iDTV as an interactive communication channel offers huge possibilities. Millions of television viewers will switch to digital television and can make use of an easy platform for interactive applications.

Since the technology and applications are new, it is hard to draw some general conclusions on the use of iDTV as result from this project. The following conclusions and recommendations are some analysis from Leiedal.

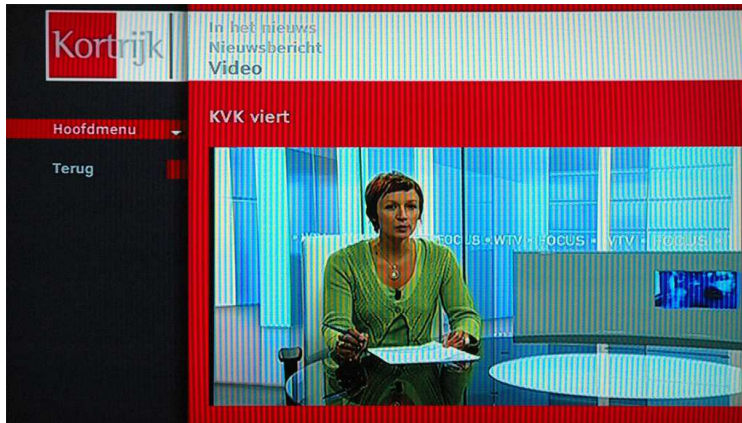
Conclusions / recommendations:

1. **A broadband network is essential to provide iDTV.** In Belgium the two main providers of iDTV could only achieve this because of the high bandwidth broadband network that is available. Interactive applications make use of high bandwidth so a cable or VDSL connection is essential.
2. **Conclusions on the use of the TVLink platform:**
 - a. **Interactive applications are rarely used.** Typical interactive web applications like submitting forms or polls can be used on an iDTV platform. This feature was not much used in this pilot.
 - b. However, the use of the **'red dot' connection was used frequently.** This means that users mainly got onto the TVLink platform because they clicked the red button when something was being broadcasted about Kortrijk. This means that people want to shift away from their current program to watch more information on the subject they have just seen.
3. **Television is a video channel.** Since this application makes use of television, visitors expect to watch video material. The request of video fragments is the most popular application. Textual information was not consulted often.
4. **Content is the key success factor of this project.**
 - a. Therefore the role of the regional television channel WTV as a partner in this project was crucial. They provided the

necessary contact extracted from the video they have about Kortrijk. If this content was not available, the iDTV spot would not have used. Providing this content can also be done by creating own video material, work with user generated content or work with a video company. These efforts will in the end be more costly and more time consuming.

- b. **Find content applications with added value.** In order to make such platforms attractive, some new content will have to be made available. For instance:
 - i. Image and video archives from regional television or publishing companies.
 - ii. User generated video content.
 - iii. More local news like reports on small events.
 - iv. Alarm notifications (eg. Fire)
 - c. The **exchange of news items** between the municipal website and TVLink helped the communication officers to easily share their information across different channels. Instead of typing over the content, these items were automatically published. This has been a huge time saving.
5. **Need for standards.** In Belgium, the three iDTV providers use different technology for iDTV. Telenet and in-di have based their technology on MHP, but with small differences. Belgacom uses different technology from Siemens. This makes it hard to share applications between the different providers. There is a strong need for standards to make it possible to provide the iDTV applications to different providers.
6. **There are other channels for interactive Digital Television.** The iDTV platform is not the only interactive platform that can be used to broadcast video and text information in a user-friendly manner. Applications that use the internet such as BBC IPlayer and Joost, or even game consoles like the Wii offer video material and text information and have huge successes. The advantage of these applications is that they use the internet standard to exchange information.
7. **Local governments should include interactive television in their communication multi-channel strategy.** They should however be aware that content is the key factor for these applications. Local governments should always be the owner of the source material, work with flexible partners and try to re-use existing content such as from regional television.
8. **iDTV has a potential for interactive communication.** Television is a user-friendly device that offers possibilities to attract certain target groups, like elderly. When using iDTV, making use of that user friendly aspect and the publication of video should be the main focus.

6. Attachments: screenshots of TVLink



Confirmation of publishing allowness

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Interreg North Sea Region



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