

# Voyage.tv rolling out purchasing function on cable broadcasts

By Danny King

Travel agents will soon face competition from yet another electronic medium as Voyage.tv's destination programming for cable operators evolves into an interactive technology capable of selling trips with the click of a consumer's TV remote.

Voyage.tv, which started broadcasting its travel-destination videos on Cablevision in August, is set to debut interactive features this quarter after boosting its potential TV audience by 70% within the past four months.

The independent cable channel plans eventually to enable people to use their cable- and satellite-box remote controls to buy travel packages. The technology lets customers reserve travel packages by interacting with the company's 30-minute hosted shows via video-on-demand services.

Michael McNabb, CEO of New York-based Voyage.tv's parent, Voyages North America, said the customer will be able to make a nominal reservation fee payment by either going to Voyage.tv's website or by calling a toll-free number to book the remainder of the trip.

He said the feature would be available to about 3.5 million Cablevision customers in the New York area.

The channel uses wholesaler Mark Trav-

el and its sister company Trisept Solutions to develop high-end travel products based on the videos and to provide call center services.

It started testing its TV programming in July and in August debuted the content in about 20 million homes served by Com-

cast, Cablevision, Insight Communications, Mediacom Communications, Verizon FiOS, AT&T U-verse and Mag Rack Entertainment. Voyage.tv is now accessible in about 34 million homes and could reach 40 million by the end of March, McNabb said.

He added that Voyage.tv is set to announce another distributor this month.

"We've made tremendous progress to set up distribution deals for 2010," McNabb said, adding that the program's 70-30 female-to-male audience ratio makes for an attractive demographic for business partners.

Voyage.tv is one of a number of travel-oriented TV programs set to debut inter-



Customers will be able to make a nominal reservation fee payment at the Voyage.tv site.

active features within the next few months. Cruise Shoppes, a consortium of 200 small travel agencies owned by Florida-based Next One Interactive, launched its 30-minute show "Extraordinary Vacations" on DirecTV and Comcast last year. In April, it is set to debut on

AT&T and Verizon's TV services, with interactive features following shortly thereafter.

Such progress is being watched closely by both travel companies and industry analysts attempting to gauge whether video-on-demand will be a viable tool for either lead generation or actual transactions by complementing Internet-based promotions and other media.

While McNabb said the multichannel approach helped more than quadruple Voyage.tv's website visitor count between October and November, Mark Travel Senior Vice President of Corporate Development Brian Robb said the agreement with

Voyage.tv "has not moved the needle for us" in terms of transactions.

Among those skeptical of the model is Forrester Research analyst Henry Harteveltd.

"You've got too many complexities" in travel packages for cable programming to be a viable revenue generator, Harteveltd said. But he was also quick to add: "It could be very useful for a travel seller by providing a contact name, phone number and email address. It could be a gateway for creating a mutually beneficial relationship."

Additionally, Harteveltd cited forecasts by the research firm In-Stat that the number of U.S. households that regularly watch online videos on their TVs will jump tenfold, to about 25 million, between 2009 and 2013. If that is so, he argued, what sense does it make to put resources into transaction-based video-on-demand programming as more people access the Web from their TVs?

Still, McNabb insisted that his company was less than two years away from providing video programming that enables full travel-package purchases, while Robb cited Voyage.tv's programming proficiency as a reason why TV-based travel revenue might become a reality.

"They're very good at getting video content out," Robb said. "We're very interested in how this is going to evolve and play out."