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Media & Entertainment

Player

HOW ACORN TV INCREASED SUBSCRIBERS 400% IN 7 YEARS

📅 Dec 9, 2024

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HIGH QUALITY NICHE CONTENT AND DIGITAL STREAMING MAKE A WINNING COMBINATION

Launched in 2011, Acorn TV offers high quality, carefully curated British mysteries and dramas to discerning viewers. As one of the first subscription streaming services targeting distinct, premium audiences, Acorn TV streams exclusive content series such as Agatha Christie's Poirot, Foyle's War, Doc Martin, and Midsomer Murders.

BACKGROUND

Known for specializing in the best of British television, Acorn Media Group has been delivering British mystery and drama television content to U.S. audiences for over 20 years. Through a range of media platforms, including broadcast, DVD/Blu-ray, and digital SVOD service, Acorn TV, viewers can access almost 3,000 hours of programming across over 150 franchises. The streaming channel is one of three niche subscriptions owned by RLJ Entertainment (NASDAQ: RLJE), a global entertainment content company.

Acorn TV exceeded its target for new digital subscription customers, and increased revenue from its over-the-top TV (OTT) business by the end of the year. "I joined Acorn TV because we offer specific content they are passionate about; and it's available quickly on a myriad of devices," states Titus Bicknell, Chief Digital Officer at RLJ Entertainment, Acorn TV's parent company. "With OTT, you no longer need a traditional broadcaster to distribute content."

In March 2016, Acorn TV revealed it had reached over 250,000 paid subscribers, a significant increase in year-over-year subscribers. The niche streaming service, which was first launched as an accompaniment to its traditional TV broadcasting, is now fully embracing digital broadcasting.

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STREAMING CONTENT TRANSFORMS AUDIENCES AND BRINGS IN NEW DEMOGRAPHICS

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“

The speed, functionality, scalability of the video platform are critical to delivering the quality experience customers demand from our service.

TITUS BICKNELL

CHIEF DIGITAL OFFICER AND EVP, OPERATIONS

“Over the years, viewers have come to Acorn TV because they are looking for content that only we offer,” states Bicknell. “There is a real emphasis on finding the right content for the possible U.S. window, and because we are that window, they come to us and stay.”

The emphasis on accessing content more quickly is driving some of Acorn TV’s audience, which fits an older demographic, to transition from traditional TV to a digital streaming subscription. However, the major growth in Acorn TV is coming from a completely new segment, 18-25 year olds. “Our availability across devices and platforms is enormously appealing to this younger demographic,” notes Bicknell. “This segment that literally views things differently; they have never had cable TV and may not even own a TV. Yet they are almost always watching multiple screens at once. It could be mobile device, a tablet, or a game console. The perception of entertainment in their lives is changing dramatically.”

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aming — not just changing the viewing habits of exist
blishing new viewing habits with new audiences.” To c
content on Apple TV, iDevices, Roku devices, Samsung Sma.

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“We’re in the business of reducing the friction between the desire for our content and the reality of delivering it in as many different ways as possible,” adds Bicknell. Making content available on multiple devices makes it possible for a wide range of audiences to embrace Acorn TV’s unique programming.

BUILDING A FLEXIBLE INFRASTRUCTURE

“One of the challenges of being in a niche market is that it’s very hard to determine the size of your addressable audience,” notes Bicknell. But, Acorn TV recognized the value of streaming digital content directly to viewers and developed an infrastructure to support hundreds of millions of video playbacks. “Digital has gone from a niche to a pervasive technology on the planet,” states Bicknell. “That has meant having to update our stack constantly.”

The initial challenge was managing the expense of new digital delivery to ensure the business could support it. Acorn TV developed a technology strategy that focused on agility, and rapid implementation. “There has been a huge evolution in digital content,” explains Bicknell. “That’s both the challenge and opportunity in the digital content market.”

Acorn TV selected Brightcove as its online video platform (OVP) because of its scalable and reliable. “In my experience, the player is key,” states Bicknell. The functionality, scalability and flexibility of the player — and the video platform — are critical to delivering the quality experience customers demand in an OTT environment. Brightcove platform enables Acorn TV to easily and quickly add new devices to meet the evolving preferences of its customers, which makes it possible for audiences to enjoy TV’s offerings on an expanding number of devices, including Smart TVs, Roku, Amazon Fire TV, and Fire TV stick. The company is currently working on a Fire TV

“At the end of the day, if you cannot deliver content to audiences on a consistent basis, you don’t have a business. Brightcove has been the most reliable provider of that core video service,” reports Bicknell.

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OTT OPENS THE DOOR FOR NICHED CHANNELS

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Acorn TV and RLJ Entertainment see room for expansion in the niche content market. “With OTT, more people can create and distribute content. We’re seeing more channels pop up and attract audiences with very specific types of content,” continues Bicknell.

RLJ Entertainment currently utilizes the Brightcove platform to power two additional niche channels, UMC — Urban Movie Channel, showcasing quality urban content — and Acacia TV, a healthy-living/ lifestyle brand. The company also has rich content libraries that present the potential for additional stand-alone channels. As an added benefit, Bicknell notes the cost of OTT delivery is less expensive than producing DVDs or Blu-rays. As Acorn TV scales with OTT, margins improve and Acorn TV can invest in more content.

“There is great scalability in the platform and technology we built, and we’re seeing more audiences for our niche content,” concludes Bicknell.

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Interactivity

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OTT

Platform

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Accessibility

Security

Content Monetization

Integrations

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