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Tube-Transforming TV Applications

from ES3

By Matt Alderton

Doug Edwards wants to change the way you watch TV. CEO and founder of ES3, a Pickering, Ontario-based company that develops TV applications for Mediaroom, Microsoft's Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) platform, he envisions a world in which the biggest screen in the home—the television screen—is also the most powerful, matching and perhaps even surpassing the capabilities of much smaller screens, including those of computers, tablets, and smartphones.

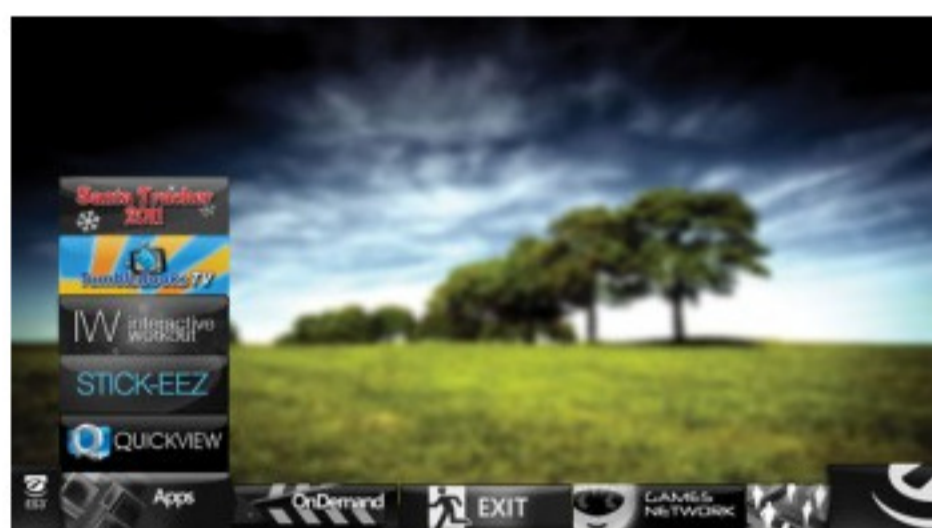
Founded in 2002, ES3 is already revolutionizing the TV-watching experience. One of only two companies in the world that have Microsoft Global Premier Partner status, it's helping more than seven million Microsoft Mediaroom users worldwide turn their televisions into interactive, immersive habitats for education, entertainment, and communication through partnerships with its customers, which are telecommunications companies such as Bell Canada, Telus, and AT&T, among many others.

To find out how ES3 is changing the channel on traditional television, *Advantage* spoke with Edwards about four of its most exciting Microsoft Mediaroom applications.

TV Dashboard

IPTV MENU

TV Dashboard is designed as an entry point to the larger IPTV experience, acting as a menu through which to access and open other IPTV applications. Launched via a dedicated "TV" button on one's remote control, it's the key that unlocks the Microsoft Mediaroom platform's full capabilities. Manifesting in the form of a discreet dashboard at the bottom of the screen, users can use the up/down and left/right buttons to navigate through a selection of "tiles"—each of which launches a new IPTV application or displays other information without interrupting TV programming.



While applications vary between providers, TV Dashboard options include widgets for accessing news, horoscopes, weather, lottery numbers, stocks, and gas prices—all localized to the user's city or region, thanks to IP technology that automatically retrieves and utilizes the user's geographic location.

Other features allow the user to customize their settings—for instance, changing the system's default language or screen-aspect ratio—and even to launch a help module that provides education and troubleshooting without the hassle of calling a customer-service hotline.

Stick-eez

IPTV APPLICATION

When leaving the house, family members often leave notes for one another—posted on the refrigerator, perhaps, or written on a scrap of paper that's left on the kitchen counter. Whether you want to ask your spouse to pick up dinner, or remind yourself to pick the kids up from school, Stick-eez allows you to leave virtual notes on your TV.



Utilizing ES3's proprietary text-input methodology, TextBands, the application allows users to type notes using their remote controls 25 percent faster than if they were using traditional text-input methods, which typically require "triple tapping" the remote's number keys or using its arrow keys to navigate an on-screen keyboard.

Message delivery is equally innovative, as Stick-eez allows users to schedule one-time and recurring message-delivery times; set criteria so that messages are delivered when the recipient turns to a particular TV channel; send text messages to the TV from their mobile phones; listen to messages aloud, thanks to text-to-speech technology; and block TV-viewing capabilities, which allows parents to exercise parental-control features (for example, if they want to make sure their kids do their homework after school, parents can leave a "do your homework" message that appears when the TV is turned on, then blocks programming until they get home from work).

Tumblebooks TV

IPTV APPLICATION

Critics often accuse television of killing brain cells. With the Tumblebooks TV application, however, television builds them.

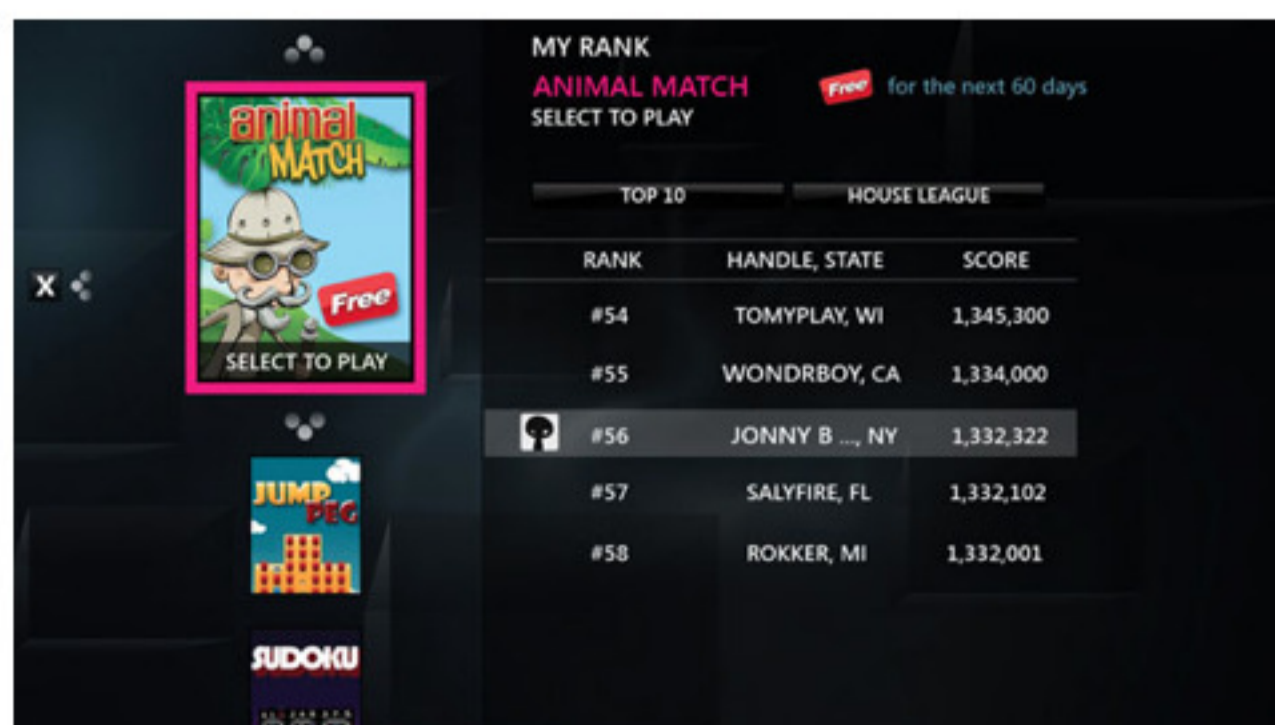
An "edutainment" application, Tumblebooks TV is designed to entertain children while also helping them establish and develop their reading and reading comprehension skills. It accomplishes that via a subscription-based library of 150 animated storybooks, featuring the work of celebrated children's authors, such as Robert Munsch. Using the remote control—which can be childproofed with a special "Nanny" mode that locks up the remote control for basic use of the application, keeping children from accidentally navigating to other channels or applications—kids can select their favourite storybooks by category or title, then follow along as the story is read to them. The interactive combination of animated illustrations, verbal narration, and on-screen text is enriching for new and existing readers alike, as it helps the former learn to read and the latter expand vocabulary, improve spelling, and enhance comprehension.



DistracTV

IPTV APPLICATION

Many family members spend time wondering what to watch on TV or waiting for their next show to start. ES3's DistracTV Games Network changes that by turning the television into a casual-game portal that can provide hours of entertainment, depending on how soon the user wants to return to TV programming.



Featuring an ever-expanding selection of classic games—initial offerings include sudoku, hangman, word jumbles, blackjack, and Texas Hold'em poker, among others—the network allows users to create their own nicknames, avatars, and favourites, then engage in animated game play either alone or with others.

Plans are also in the works to bring branded game shows and board games to the network's library; to enable multiplayer, online gaming between households over the Internet; and to introduce "companion device" game play that allows users to interface with games using their smartphone or tablet computer instead of their remote control.

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