

Start-up beams TV to your hand

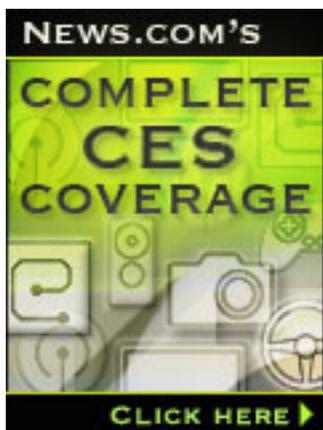
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If you're the kind of person who goes through withdrawal when separated from your TV for too long, Orb Networks wants to talk to you.

Orb is one of the featured start-up companies at the [Consumer Electronics Show](#), which starts Thursday in Las Vegas. Orb's technology lets people access video, music or live TV on their home PC though anything with a Web browser--a cell phone, a PDA or a work computer, for example.



The company is planning to announce at CES a slew of new relationships with companies including Intel, Netgear and Creative. More broadly, Orb is part of a surge in technology ideas aimed at moving into the rest of the world the multimedia files now filling up PCs.

"What we're finding with our customers is a lot more mobility and a lot more appreciation and associations with mobile products that can capture multimedia," said Leslie Adams, senior vice president at digital video company Pinnacle Systems, one of Orb's new partners. "It's like, 'Hey I've got these devices that allow me to view content, and I've got all this great multimedia on my computer.' We need to allow people to have access to that multimedia anytime, everywhere."

The push to move multimedia off the PC follows the first year when the legal distribution of digital audio and video really hit the PC world. The spread of [iTunes](#) and other music services, along with the rise of Microsoft's Media Center PC, has helped push the hobbyists' world of digital video and audio into the mainstream.

The problem has been that mainstream customers are much less tied to their PCs. And that's driving companies to develop easy-to-use home-networking technologies that can pipe audio or video around a house.

At the same time, the early adopters are increasingly chafing at the fact that content on the PC is stuck there. Music can be taken on the iPod, and portable Media Centers can hold plenty of video, but the computer remains the hub.

Any kind of connection

Orb's initial service addresses that issue by allowing anyone with almost any kind of Net connection to tap into the media on a home PC. It requires the installation of software at home, but once up and running, a customer can log in through a cell phone and listen to a whole music collection, or if there's a TV card in the computer, even watch live TV.

The system adjusts quality on the fly, so that the audio or video is appropriate for a color PDA screen or a broadband-connected PC, for example.

"It's a different use paradigm," Orb Chief Executive Officer James Behrens said. "This is going to change the way people view, access and display content."



A handful of other companies are also aimed at letting multimedia content spread.

A promising new peer-to-peer company called **Grouper** lets small groups of people watch one other's videos, stream one other's music without making copies, or look at the photos on one other's hard drives. And in December, Yahoo bought a start-up called Wuf, which aims to let people use their mobile phones to watch multimedia content.

Orb is in the midst of a flurry of deals, which executives say will ultimately let other companies, ranging from device makers to broadband Internet service providers, bundle its services with their own products. For now, it's available through the company for \$9.99 a month.

Orb is also working on a version of the technology that can be embedded in cable TV set-top boxes, so people can remotely tap directly into the TV without a PC. That remote access could potentially change the way TV networks have traditionally handled local broadcasts.

"It raises all kinds of questions for content companies," said Jupiter Research Michael Gartenberg. "Imagine if you're in Los Angeles and you want to watch the Yankee game through your cable at home. No one's ever dealt with these issues because no one's ever had to."

