

2009 Inauguration Online: Two Unexpected Winners

By Eric Franchi Monday, January 26, 2009



Eric Franchi is the Senior Vice President of Business Development for Undertone Networks. In this role, Eric works toward forging strategic relationships and developing new revenue generation programs, while working closely with the executive team on critical endeavors. Since joining the company in 2001, Eric has held various executive-level positions such as Senior Vice President of Media and Senior Vice President of Sales.

Inauguration Day was a day of many milestones in U.S. history. From an interactive media perspective, it was a big day as well. Today's most-utilized tools either didn't exist during the last inauguration or were in their absolute infancy. Online video, the social Web and mobile applications took center stage this past Tuesday as millions worldwide accessed and shared the inauguration experience and information online.

For online video specifically, a record number of Americans leveraged the medium at work, school or at home to watch the inauguration. According to Akamai, a record 7.7 million users did so simultaneously, making it not only the most-watched live event in online video's history, but a testament to the user demand for online video access.

Outside of some expected capacity issues that excluded some users from accessing the stream optimally, the inauguration online was by most reports a success. Some long-time online video enthusiasts might remember an event almost exactly 10 years ago that did not go as well (<http://news.cnet.com/2100-1033-221271.html>). Check out the headline and sub-header - we've sure come a long way! In fact, more than one friend in my CNN.com/Facebook comments tab (more on this in a moment) mentioned that the Web stream was moving faster online than on cable TV.

Much has been written across the Net and blogosphere about the viewing experience. I'd like to highlight two unexpected successful executions in online video that day.

Ustream and the iPhone: If you had an iPhone, WiFi and the Ustream application (released only the day before the inauguration), you were able to watch the inauguration literally anywhere. A colleague of mine showed me the stream live during the event, and it seemed to work well in both audio and video. Blog comments across the Web echoed the positive sentiment. Reportedly, over 100,000 users downloaded this application before the inauguration, making it the 6th most popular application in the iTunes store. This represents a major breakthrough in mobile and online video. Is it out of the realm of possibility for live sporting events and the like to follow shortly? Would it be unreasonable (sports fans, please weigh in) to charge a reasonable fee for this kind of access? Is this the mobile breakthrough we've been waiting for?

CNN Live and Facebook: Anyone with a Facebook account could log in via Facebook Connect while watching the CNN.com live stream. This allowed Facebook users to broadcast their thoughts to their friends or to the entire world through the popular Facebook status update function. I spent most of my inauguration time using this service -- by choice, having closed multiple browsers from other properties -- since it was so engaging. One tab was a stream of my friends' reactions and thoughts, with the ability to comment on what they were saying. It was very much like watching the event together at a party, sharing the experience. The other tab showed what the entire logged-in user base was saying, with 600,000 total comments being generated across the globe.

Despite the advances online video has made in the last 10 years, we are still very much in the early innings of online video and live event streaming. But experiences like the above two give us a glimpse into a very promising future.