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TOP STORIES

SVG/NYMIEG Baseball Breakfast goes deep with standing room-only crowd

By Ken Kerschbaumer

More than 85 New York-based media executives attended the "Baseball 2007: Using Media & Technology to Enhance The Fan Experience" breakfast on March 28. Presented by the New York Media Information Exchange Group in association with SVG and Chyron, leading industry executives from across the MLB spectrum discussed the new ways fans are being served at home, in the stadium, and on the road.

"MLB.com has been on a rocket ride since it was founded in 2000," says Joe Inzerillo, MLBAM SVP, multimedia and distribution. "And we're always innovating and pushing the envelope."

This year MLB.com will push the envelope by blasting out live streaming video at upwards of 400 kbps and is expanding it's Mosaic service that was in Beta last season.

"It's the coolest thing I've seen," says Inzerillo. "You can pick the games you want to watch and drag-and-drop them onto the mosaic." Users can watch six games on smaller windows or have one game larger and three smaller. And an integrated fantasy tracker can let fans know when someone from their team is stepping to the plate.

Jeff Price, SI Digital Media president, says the steps by MLBAM and other leagues points to their increasing awareness of how valuable their content is and how important it is to serve baseball fans. For its part SI has team pages for all major sports franchises and aggregates news on a 24/7 basis.

"We want to provide the best content to the user," he says. "And while some are fantasy players there is an avid core of loyal fans who want to be engaged with their team."

The changing pace of technology, in fact, has helped SI Digital Media build a brand without a network. "We don't need a linear network to succeed," says Price. "The combination of a magazine and the Web site is an offensive opportunity and digital will represent 20% of our revenues this year."

While MLBAM and SI Digital Media focus on the broadband and mobile market the YES Network considers it all: HD, mobile, broadband, and interactive TV applications.

"We want to be the pioneer in what we're putting out there and to be where our viewers and consumers are watching and interacting with media," says Michael Spirito, YES Network director of business development. "We launch a full-time HD channel on all affiliates next Monday and beyond that we've launched an iTV application with DirecTV that allows our users to go more deeply into our broadcast with a bonus cam, stats, and schedules."

Wireless is also important as the YESNetwork.com begins to offer wireless alerts for not only baseball but also the NCAA Tourney and other sports. "People are consuming media in different ways and we want to be there," he says. "It's about empowering the fan."

It also ties them into the broadcast. Fans can text in votes for the player of the game and other questions. And broadband, for example, allows Yankee fans around the world to keep in touch. A deal with YouTube gets YES Network clips out to the entire world.

Even the fans in the stadiums are having a better experience. About seven years ago stadiums began moving away from fixed signage positions to the LED world. **Chris Mascatello, ANC Sports EVP, technology**, says his company's biggest business is LED ribbon fascia and graphics behind home plate.

"And we're moving forward with HD," he says. "That's the buzz and right now we're on the cusp of true HD product with the goal of bringing convergence to all aspects of the media. We want to make the fan experience in the stadium the same from an informational standpoint as it is at homes."

Optimizing the quality of the graphics and video for these new mediums is a challenge, says Bill Hendler, Chyron CTO. "If you just take the 16:9 widescreen image and downconvert it for the 1:1 screen no one will be able to see that ball," he says. "Right now that has to be done manually in post production and that makes it impossible to have live coverage. So manufacturers like Chyron are working on solutions to automate or semi-automate those processes."