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Hava Faces off with Slingbox

Like Sling Media and Sony, Monsoon Multimedia provides streaming video from TV to PC and mobile phones.

December 20, 2006

By **Kalpana Shah**

Monsoon Multimedia, an innovative product startup based in India, is getting set to compete with Sling Media and Sony.

The company has designed a product, known as Hava, for place-shifting and time-shifting TV programs, allowing video streaming on a PC. While Slingbox is a clear leader in this space, Hava "has the second-mover advantage," said Arvind Jha, President, Monsoon Multimedia India.

Added features from Hava are a recording facility (making it time-shift) and multi-cast capability, so the video can be streamed to several PCs on the network. Until recently the product was sold only through its own web site, but Hava is now also available through Pinnacle Systems under its brand PCTV To Go.

India's National Association for Software and Services Companies (Nasscom) selects three companies every year for an award for Innovative Company of 2006, and Monsoon is on Nasscom's shortlist.

Monsoon Multimedia has \$5.5 million in angel funding, with investors spread across several geographies. Monsoon is raising another \$2 million in angel funding, after which the company plans to raise \$10 million through venture capital, "hopefully by mid-2007," said company president Arvind Jha.

'It's an interesting market with plenty of room to slug it out.'

-Bundeeep Singh Rangar, IndusView

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Hava competes with Sling Media's Slingbox and Sony's LocationFree products in a market suddenly crowded with place-shifting devices. All the place-shifting devices work in a similar way: a hardware component is attached to the user's TV and video source, which is then connected to the home or office network.

To connect to the TV and watch the video, a software component needs to be installed on the user's PC.

Streaming Video Wirelessly

Hava enables video to stream in MPEG-2 format over the home network or in MPEG-4 format over the Internet. (MPEG-2 and 4 are standards specified by

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the Motion Pictures Expert Group to broadcast video and associated audio.)

Hava works wirelessly, using an 802.11 a/g wireless card to accomplish DVD-quality wireless video streaming. What makes the quality of Hava's video superior, according to Mr. Jha, is the presence of a Vbooster, wireless video-streaming software technology developed by Monsoon.

VBooster automatically adjusts encoder parameters based on the available wireless bandwidth to ensure smooth multicast delivery of the video stream to all the clients on the network, said Mr. Jha.

The wireless network stays unaffected and can be used for all PC functions such as web browsing, printing, file transfer, and the rest while watching wireless video.

Currently available only in the United States, Hava will be marketed through channels in Japan, Korea, China, and India in the first quarter of 2007. All these markets will require some level of localization such as adjusting the tuner for local TV frequencies.

Teaming with Manufacturers

The company expects to allow manufacturing with about 15 OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) next year, and through them sell about half a million boxes. Two low-cost versions (\$149 and \$199) work where users have already installed a set-top box for TV viewing. Monsoon Multimedia is working on a "merged" version of set-top boxes and Hava to make the experience clutter-free.

"It's an interesting market with plenty of room to slug it out," said Bundeep Singh Rangar, chairman of strategic research group IndusView.

With headquarters in India, a subsidiary in California, and engineering teams in India as well as in Russia, Monsoon is working on the cutting-edge products.

The company's 14-member Russian team has expertise in embedded Linux, while the 26-member India team works on the "receiver" or PC-side of the product as well as quality assurance, and the 18-strong U.S. team is responsible for customer-facing quality assurance.

The founders of Monsoon Multimedia also founded Dazzle, a company that developed a hardware and software product to compress video based on MPEG standards.

Monsoon COO Graham Radstone was a director at Emuzed, which developed a TiVo-type product for the PC based on Microsoft's Media Center PC operating system. SCM Microsystems acquired Dazzle in 1999, and Emuzed was sold to Flextronics in 2005.

Mr. Jha's presentation to the Nasscom jury on Wednesday provoked an interesting question from an entrepreneur. Would the founders sell Monsoon Multimedia if they were offered \$20 million? Mr. Jha said they would not.

"But we might for \$80 million," he joked. After all, anything to do with video on the PC today comes within kissing distance of a billion dollars.

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