Google TV for the Rest of Us

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Google TV has just launched in the form of new HDTVs from Sony as well as the Revue [1] from Logitech. The Revue is $299 and a 40? Sony Google TV [2] is $799 at Best Buy – about $200 more than an equivalent 40? LED HDTV. Both products require yet another thing to put on your couch or coffee table – a keyboard.

Google TV may say more about the power of search and Android than it does about a new paradigm for using your HDTV. (It may also be a testament to Microsoft's inability to make Media Center attractive to CE companies.) The issue I have with Google TV is not the nice media search interface. My issue is really simple – it requires me to spend $300 to $800 for a new gizmo that is basically comprised of a nice large font media search interface, nice entertainment GUI and a new remote control/keyboard. That just seems like a lot of money for a GUI + keyboard + search engine.

I do like and want the functionality of Google TV; I like the ability to play and search both my personal content as well as content that "lives" on the web (like Youtube and Netflix). So for this holiday season perhaps the real question then is "What about Google TV for the rest of us?"

Here's what I suggest. Buy yourself an Imation Link [3] and download your choice of free media interface – I suggest Boxee [4] for a simple clean GUI, but also either XMBC [5] if you are a techy, or Plex [6] for MAC users work as alternative choices.

The Imation link doesn't require you to buy a new HDTV so save the $800+. It costs less than half of the Revue – just $140 or less. The Imation Link transforms your HDTV into a big LCD screen for your current PC Laptop; it brings the power of your Laptop and of the Internet and all of the content of both to your HDTV. Used to using IE, Chrome or Firefox to search and play on the web, feel free. Surf and use Netflix, Hulu, Youtube, ESPN, Google search and any of your favorite online web

sites. All that web content that is now blocked on Google [like all the major networks] you can watch on your big screen from the comfort of your couch. Like using Skype to talk to friends and family? No problem. How ’bout PC gaming on the big screen. Love it. Whatever you like to do on your PC, go ahead. Wow.

What is missing? Most of us don’t have a general purpose media interface like Google TV running on their laptop. I suspect Google will eventually update Chrome, Google’s browser OS, to be Google TV capable. Windows Media Center works fine, but it doesn’t aggregate Youtube, Netflix and other web media content. There are however, some nice choices that work very well as an interface to your media, allow you to access web media and look great up on your HDTV. Boxee is my favorite. It is a free download, is platform independent, has a large apps selection and has a clean media interface for music, movies, photos, etc. You can look at media on the web as well as what ever is stored in your own media library. The next choice is XMBC. It is a freeware project that has multiple interfaces. Boxee was built and extended from the original XMBC source. XMBC is more interesting to techy types, or those people who enjoy full customization of their experience.

Aside from cost and avoiding a high dollar purchase, there are other reasons to purchase the Imation Link and optionally to also download Boxee’s media interface software. To me, the most problematic issue with Google TV is that Google TV requires you to learn a new graphical interface, requires you to use Google Chrome as your browser and requires you to add a keyboard. By contrast, using a product like the Imation Link – which throws your laptop screen up on your HDTV, you may use whatever browser or browsers you already know, use the keyboard on your laptop that you already like, use Google search, which you already know, and use whatever media GUI you wish to use – if any. Perhaps you like iTunes. Maybe you like Microsoft Media Center. Perhaps you’ll like Boxee or XMBC. And who knows, Google TV search may get ported from Android to Windows-7 before long. In short, you get to have your Internet TV experience your way, without having to learn something new, and it costs you way less money. The alternative is to have it Google’s way, and having to learn a whole new set of Google software while having to leave yet another remote control or keyboard on your couch and avoid having to buy a new HDTV. I vote for the Imation Link. And for full disclosure, I already own an Imation Link and happen to like it a lot.

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