

Has the internet killed television?



By [Tim Wyatt-Gunning](#)

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Our TV died last week and nobody noticed. One of our cats died too. We were all sad about the cat and made insincere mutterings about getting a new one. As for the telly, not a word. I feel a bit sad, because it has been a good companion over the years.

Just like the cat, it wasn't a particularly close relationship, but in hours of need I have enjoyed its company, with its broadcasted and reassuringly dull o'clock schedule, day in, day out, its refusal to lower itself to my real-life issues, its brain-washing and tumble-drying spin on the reality of the outside world.

All we had to do was sit there and watch, agree, disagree, love it or hate it. If we really hated it, we could turn over to The Other Channel. There were, of course, in addition to The Other Channel, a couple of other channels, even in the early days, but rather like the Secret Service they weren't formally recognized, and any interaction with them was silently deemed to be subversive, inappropriate, risky and best avoided. Content Deprivation was so severe it drove us to enjoy some truly awful things. Whatch ['Torvill & Dean - 1984 Olympics - Bolero - HQ'](#).

But it was all so effortless and comfortably numbing, wasn't it?

In its early form, pre-nineties, pre-choice, and conveniently pre-democracy, our favourite broadcaster gave us his or her opinion. Watch the [First Official TV Broadcast in South Africa \(SAUK/SABC, Afrikaans Language\)](#), and bereft of any voice pleading otherwise, we trusted him, and his familiarity would warm our opinion. He told us what our favourite TV programmes were (such as Law & Order), what our favourite sport was and what time we should go to bed.

And then along came the internet and changed the world and its seasons, with fewer cold wars and more Arab springs.

We create our own opinion now and we compose our own history. What on earth were we thinking, lazily digesting our processed TV dinners from our spudified couches for a whole generation?

We can do it all online now but until a few months ago, I had two separate planets of Internet and Television (although, like Pluto, TV was already on the boundaries of de-classification). Planet Internet was a written one, where I read something I was interested in, then clicked, and read something else interesting. Planet TV was a visual one, where I watched half-interested, and clicked, and watched, less interested. On the clickometer scale, each click on the internet signalled increasing interest and each click on the TV signalled declining interest.

I think the turning point for me, the point at which I thought "I don't need to read everything on the Internet, I can watch it",

was when my cell phone broke and I knew that any authorized dealer would tell me it would be cheaper to buy a new one. Sod that, I Googled it in that simplistic child speak that both Google and I really appreciate 'how can I fix the microphone on an iPhone' and of the most immediate recommendations listed, I jumped at the YouTube explanation because I'm lazy and it's easier to learn from watching how to do it than it is reading how to do it (and it worked, it involved a piece of cardboard, but that's not relevant).

So do I still need TV? If I lived in the UK or the USA, I can't possibly see how a sane person would answer yes, unless the view from their window (real one with glass, not the Microsoft-coined one, behind a PC monitor) encompassed sheep, but even that's not much of an excuse these days since many sheep farmers in the UK have access to download speeds twice as fast as our latest catch-up gadgetry allows in SA.

But here, in SA, am I ready to throw away my TV?

If you have a higher end uncapped ADSL account (at least 4mbps) and you're not a TV devourist, I really do think the answer is yes.

If you're on a mobile 3G connection, it simply doesn't make sense, because we're talking 20 gigs+ per month, at the very least, and regardless of the promo pricing, when the snow melts after Christmas you will be paying R200+ per gig.

All in with ADSL, line rental and data charges, you're looking at R739 per month. For DSTV, I'm spending R625. I must be nuts because the only thing I don't get from the internet which I do from DSTV is live sport. Nothing else. Even Top Gear. I know I can PVR the latest series, and I have done, but it came as a surprise and only after I had bought it on iTunes. Even the original excuse for everything, "the kids", simply doesn't wash anymore. They want the app, they want the game, they want to interact and to decide when and what they view.

I have everything in the world a few clicks away. Except for live coverage of the English Premier League football and the occasional Super Rugby game if the Stormers are winning.

Maybe I should get the telly mended after all? I'll have to take it to the computer shop because the telly man went out of business a few months ago.

Our beautiful internet. Early days.

ABOUT TIM WYATT-GUNNING

Tim graduated from Cambridge in 1992, was a banker in London for 4 years, before getting involved in the European telecommunications industry in 1996 with LDI. In 1999, he moved to South Africa to set up Storm Telecom. For 9 years Tim co-ran Storm, driving it to revenues of over R250m, with over 6000 business customers across the country, until it was bought by Vox Telecom in January 2008 for R360m. Tim joined WebAfrica as CEO in October 2011.

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