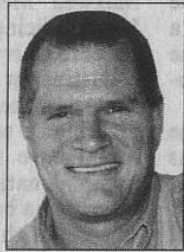


Catching up with missed TV shows online



John Deans

Besides watching the news, sitting in front of the television is probably one of my worst wastes of time. Thank goodness that "Lost" ended last week, "24" did not air this season due to the writer's strike and "The Shield" will not start up again until the fall. Maybe this summer I won't blow as many hours in front of the TV.

Currently I find the most entertaining shows of all continue to be the news programs with the antics of the Presidential candidates Obama and Clinton fighting it out and the liberal Republican McCain trying to be just as left as his opponents. As a far right-winger I have become politically homeless and feel like I'm watching a live televised preview of Orwell's 1984 set to start in 2009.

The TV world and the PC platform have been merging for quite sometime now. Over the past couple of years I have writing about this technical union like the Slingbox which displays your TV programs on your computer and YouTube.com that delivers millions of videos of almost anything.

Over the past few months I have been asked about watching TV shows online and if that is a good idea. There are right and wrong ways to go about this so let's run it down today.

My first experience of watching full length episodes of television programs online started back in 2006 when I got interested in a cool show on CBS that was several episodes into its first season. The show was called "Jericho" which was about a small town that survived a nationwide nuclear holocaust and how they endured the troubles and challenges after such a horrific terrorist attack.

I was bummed that I had missed the first dozen episodes but then I noticed on CBS.com I could watch practically any previous episode of any TV series online. So for the next couple of evenings I watched all those shows of "Jericho" I had missed one right after another. Yes, I know that was a big waste of time, but that show really rocked!

The online video player was clear and smooth with good volume. It had just a couple of commercials you had to watch like one at the start and another at the end. Those videos of "Jericho" are gone now since the series ended this year, but videos of their current shows like the multiple CSI programs are all there.

ABC.com also has their primary shows online and available just after they air on the

network. You can go to their Web site and watch any episode of shows like "Lost" that stream in HD (High Definition) after downloading and installing an applet that can play these TV shows in smooth and clear High Def right on your laptop or desktop.

Of course Fox has similar online content with the ability to watch their previous shows like House, Hell's Kitchen and The Simpsons online at their Web site Fox.com. Most of the mainstream networks offer some amount of full episode or at least highlight viewing over the web. These official network Web sites are the best place to view TV shows via the Internet since no copyrights are violated and the video quality is at its best.

Other legitimate online video sources included sites like TVLand.com and Hulu.com. For the classic oldies like The Beverly Hillbillies, Gun Smoke and one of my favorites - "All

In The Family" check out TV-Land.com for partial and some selected full episodes online.

By far the largest legal online TV program source is Television.Aol.com with full episodes of shows like Gilligan's Island, Welcome Back Kotter, and numerous other shows. Last year they spun off a similar TV Web site called Hulu.com which has a large collection of TV and movie clips including some full episodes. It appears they either link to the original network source or have buffered the original video and replay it through their online viewer.

In general the safest and most consistent way to watch TV online is through the original network sources or other sponsored and authorized sites like the ones mentioned above. Keep in mind that all these shows will have already been played on their network channels so you will be watching archived material and nothing really new or live.

Only by using a SlingBox that is connected to a live satellite or cable network feed (preferably yours) can you watch mainstream TV shows in real time.

What you do not want to do is fall for web advertisements which proclaim you can purchase a yearly or even one time subscription to a TV video Web site and get access to thousands of live TV channels. Those deals are out there, but you will NOT be able to see the big four networks, HBO, ShowTime, or any of the news stations like Fox News Channels, MSNBC, or CNN.

Those thousands of TV channels are from all over the world and none of them are mainstream programming. Trust me, I did try one of these rip off deals a couple of years ago and was very disappointed.

If by chance you have found an online source to watch live TV free or for just \$50 a year, odds are it is rogue and break-

ing numerous copyright laws. Those types of sites are akin to porn sites and come laced with spyware and pop up ads that will infect your PC quickly. Stick with the primary network and large scale TV Web sites and you will be safe.

Plus, if you want to see a good TV live wouldn't you want to watch it on your big screen TV rather than a puny 15" laptop computer monitor?

Bottom Line: If you need to catch up on some episodes of your favorite TV program you missed then check out the full episode web page on that network's Web site and watch it on your computer.

Next Week's Column: Laptop Earthquake Monitoring Network

John Deans of DeansConsulting.com is a Brenham area computer networking consultant that can be reached at 979.289.2233 or John@DeansConsulting.com for your questions and comments.