

Getting to Know You

Reliacast Puts the Audience into Content Management

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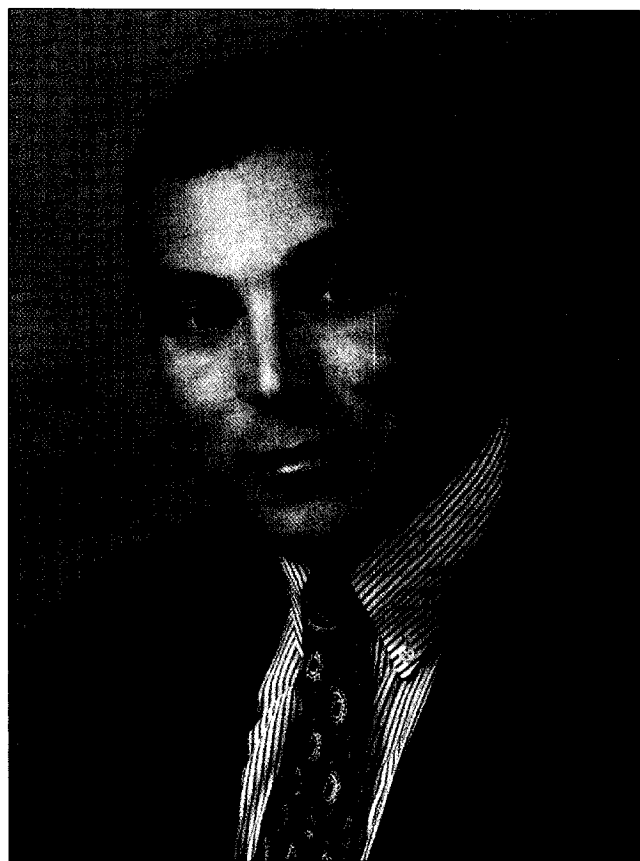
PHILIP DE LANCIE

It takes more than information to prosper in an information-based economy. Whether your stock-in-trade is popular entertainment or arcane knowledge, the value of your content comes not simply from owning it, but from getting it to those who are willing to pay for it. It's a matter of finding the right audience, and knowing enough about what they want to keep them coming back for more.

In the world of Web-based content delivery, simple approaches such as counting hits or click-throughs provide neither the detail nor the accuracy required to learn much about who the audience is and how they are responding to what you have to offer. Enter Reliacast, Inc., a Herndon, Virginia company founded in 1999 to address these very issues.

"Our mission," says president and CEO Tom Klaff, "is to help monetize the streaming media market by ensuring that content delivery networks (CDNs), content providers, and enterprises deliver their digital content to the correct audiences and achieve maximum return on their investment." A privately-held company, Reliacast has about 50 employees in its Virginia, San Francisco, and New York City offices.

Klaff says that to fully tap the revenue-generating potential of intellectual property, content providers need to fully understand who their audiences are, where they are located, and the nature



Tom Klaff, President & CEO, Reliacast, Inc.

of their end-user experience. He calls the field "Audience Management," and says that Reliacast has built a comprehensive solution—appropriately called Audience Manager—that combines conditional access, stream encryption, audience measurement, geographic containment, scalable data aggregation, and reporting.

"We've focused on addressing business challenges rather than concentrating on individual technologies," Klaff says. "Our solution allows businesses to control who gains access to their content, to know precisely who watches it, and to understand how viewers or listeners are reacting to it, including how long they are on and the quality of service they receive. Armed with this information,

our customers can protect their assets, maximize their investments in digital media, and increase competitive advantage by becoming more responsive.”

ENTERPRISE AND BEYOND

For now, Klaff says, Reliacast is focused on the enterprise streaming market in sectors like financial services, manufacturing, healthcare, and pharmaceuticals. The company is touting the benefits of audience management in a variety of specific applications, including corporate communications, training, product launches, and earnings Webcasts. Customers may either license Audience Manager or utilize Reliacast’s managed service offerings.

In the longer term, Klaff sees the entertainment market—specifically home consumers—as a huge opportunity. “Media and entertainment customers are interested in some of our advanced capabilities such as pay-per-view and geographic containment,” he says. “They are also very interested in understanding how their audience interacts with their content in order to more effectively target advertising and promotions.”

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT ROOTS

The Audience Manager package is an outgrowth of multicast protocol work done by Reliacast CTO James McNabb and Dr. Alfred Weaver, a computer science professor at the University of Virginia. Working for the Department of Defense, the two built software to monitor the delivery to a mass audience of content such as battlefield command-and-control and satellite imagery.

“The software authenticated the user,” Klaff says, “and monitored what content was received, and when.” When McNabb and Weaver joined with Klaff and others to acquire rights to the work from the Department of Defense, Reliacast was born.

Klaff describes the Audience Manager package as “a multi-tier Web-based architecture.” Reliacast provides all the software, including third-party products, re-

quired to operate the system, while hardware and operating system software is the responsibility of the customer.

The package is made up of several components, both server-side and client-side. At the core of the systems is Reliaserver, which manages all Reliacast events held on the network, displays viewer and listener data, and reports on event management data associated with audience behavior and demographics.

“When we deploy Audience Manager,” Klaff says, “we install the Reliaserver at a data center, management center, or network operations center, so we can take advantage of technical support, UPS backup, generator support, and security. Reliaserver runs in a Solaris environment and uses an Oracle database and a BEA Webserver.”

TICKETS AND TURNSTILES

On the client side, the viewer or listener needs an R-Ticket, which allows access to a Reliacast program or event, and Virtual Turnstile, which gathers usage, event, and audience data. These components are automatically downloaded as part of the event registration process.

“No custom software or special configurations are required for viewers,” Klaff says. “The Turnstile is either a player plugin or a Java applet. We support both Real Networks and Windows Media players, and we will be supporting Apple QuickTime in the near future.”

Before the event begins, the R-Ticket and Turnstile are used to “attach” the end-user to a third component, the Reliacast Net Agent (RNA). “Net Agents are distributed agents that act as a conduit between the Reliaserver and the audience,” Klaff explains. “They support the Virtual Turnstile in authentication, measurement, and control of a Reliacast event. The Reliacast Net Agent aggregates usage data from multiple Virtual Turnstiles, and then forwards it to the Reliaserver, which stores the information for reporting and billing purposes.”

RELIACAST, INC.
www.reliacast.com
CEO: Tom Klaff
No. employees: 50
Founded: 1999

RNAs are installed on one or more servers throughout the network; how they are dispersed is dependent upon the scale of events and the geographic location of viewers. Multiple instances of the RNA software may be run on one host to accommodate a large number of viewers and to provide redundancy in the system. The RNA runs on either Solaris or LINUX.

Reliacast also offers two “value-added” applications: ReliaGuard and Geo-IQ. ReliaGuard is a stream encryption module that allows the provider to determine which events and content need to be secured, and to designate the appropriate level of security for each. Geo-IQ is a “geographic containment module” that can determine where audience members are located and restrict content delivery based on location.

With its optional applications and a range of settings within the standard components, Audience Manager is not designed as a one-size-fits-all solution. “The beauty of Audience Manager,” Klaff says, “is that it allows our customers to specify the information they want to collect about their audience. It’s valuable to them because they actually get the information they want and need.”

However it is configured, Reliacast is betting that Audience Manager will come to be seen as a vital tool for managing the content/audience interface. “In the end,” Klaff says, “no matter the industry, the business winners will all have one thing in common: an understanding of their audience.”



PHILIP DE LANCIE (delphi@mindspring.com) is a freelance writer covering media production and distribution technology. Comments? Email letters to the editor to eletters@onlineinc.com.