

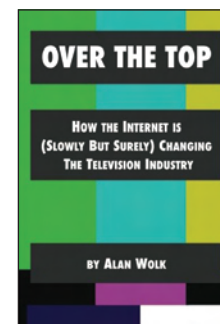
WOLK, A. *Over the top. How the Internet is (slowly but surely) changing the television industry.*

Seattle, USA: CreateSpace, 2015, 176 p.

ISBN 978-1514139011

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The changeable situation television is going through and the impact of the internet on it has infused a lot of books with a sense of fatalism, predicting its imminent death. The publication of *Over the top. How the Internet is (slowly but surely) changing the television industry* (2015) undoubtedly coincides with a period of extreme disruption. Its author, Alan Wolk, an analyst specialising in the new television, Professor at Rutgers University for a year and with an important career in advertising, tackles the key aspects of this new scenario. He does so with a clear aim: to offer a complete picture so as not to descend into a superficial, simplistic view. Hence his focus on professionals in the industry with certain basic knowledge and a deliberately across the board approach. The result is a vital piece of research into the *status quo* of the TV industry, its main agents of change and the trends that can be glimpsed on the horizon.

The word that best describes television's current situation is transition. The new OTT model (with content distributed online) has no witnesses but has inflicted considerable damage on traditional television. As Wolk himself says, "change happens gradually, and then all at once". TV is still immersed in the first stage of this process. The accelerator in the crisis of traditional TV consumption and business is no other than the internet and the freedom it has given viewers. This argument is the gateway that allows the author to introduce the much-debated concept of audience fragmentation. Viewers are no longer limited to the programming grid; content can be viewed without the imposition of timetables, on different devices and in different locations. This new situation is threatening the traditional system based on the commercial profitability of space (according to its audience) and costly pay-TV packages (with a rigid supply). In fact, Wolk believes the key lies in being able to measure real connected consumption. A large part of the lack of determination and transparency in this area is down to the first screen's fear of losing its supremacy in terms of profitability simply because there's still no economically viable alternative.

If one thing is clear after reading this manual it's that the traditional concept of television is not mutating due to any single

isolated agent. It's a full-blown perfect storm: the combined effect of content digitalisation, technological development and new habits of the average viewer which have totally upset the apple cart. Television, as I've already mentioned, is undergoing a transformation that is not yet complete. The traditional business model, protected by an intricate network of rights, economic interests and a certain amount of inertia, exists side by side with a search for a new sustainable business model. How have we arrived at this situation? Wolk devotes the second chapter to breaking down the different drivers of change. He even assigns them a rating for their "disruption potential" according to the impact they've had on the traditional TV industry and consumption. At the head he places the aforementioned **time-shifted viewing** (watching programmes outside the schedules set by the grid), a practice which, in recent years, has gained fans with the consequent slowdown in live audiences and, by extension, a "depreciation" in the conventional audience which, to date, had set the advertising price for space. We have therefore gone from a concept of *household television* to *individual television*. Various factors have influenced this rise in time-shifted viewing. For example, the gradual spread of **VOD** (video on demand), especially the TV on demand services of conventional networks. Also the proliferation of **set-top boxes** (the new generation of devices that connect any device to extensive OTT content, such as AppleTV and Google Chromecast) and the improvement and widespread use of **smartphones** which, for younger audiences, have become the main viewing screen. The new **streaming platforms** (such as the very famous Netflix), in addition to fostering time-shifted viewing, have also led to the definitive triumph of accessibility, consumption on the move, cross-platform adaptability and the abandonment of expensive subscriber packages (**cord-cutting**) in favour, precisely, of internet TV services or light bundles at more affordable prices and with a better user experience. This has also encouraged a new culture of **binge viewing** where traditional products designed for consumption in a series are watched as "marathons" lasting several hours at a time.

The new TV has also entailed an increase in the influence of the individual on content. Social television (active involvement in social media at the same time as watching TV content) is another key transforming element that offers an infinity of possibilities in terms of audience interaction (crucial to retain audiences), user feedback (which can better inform production decisions) and targeted advertising (based on user preferences).

Fan communities are also crucial, with the potential to establish a direct relationship with audiences, acting as powerful generators of content and sources of audiovisual discovery; many people are already talking of the global niche. Wolk also devotes a special section to **data and metadata** as a disruptive element: tonnes of data, generated through consumption via connected devices. Monitoring the habits of viewers and taking informed decisions related to these is, today, one of the main drivers of innovation in terms of user experience and content.

Wolk saves the last chapter for his predictions regarding the future of television. He believes the clearest trend is **TV Everywhere**: seeing what you want, at any time and on any device with a totally personalised experience. This phenomenon will pose interesting challenges such as measuring consumption completely and more effectively targeted advertising; and also opportunities, as this kind of viewing is more active with a more direct attention threshold. He also predicts **specialisation of the second screen**. Its integration within the TV ecosystem and better audience segmentation could be one of the great assets to improve the medium's advertising potential. Wolk believes that TV is also bound to embrace the concept of **BYOD** (bring your own device); in other words, the multiplication of content access points instead of the traditional limitation to a certain provider and device, resulting in the monumental task of developing appropriate applications for each device and operating system. The new TV is likely to result in **better recommendations and discovery** to "connect" (increasingly more abundant) content with users. The author predicts **new business and profit models**, such as targeted advertising, premium services without advertising, supply based on subscription, branded content and branded promotions. The future, concludes Wolk, augurs the **data empire**. Measuring, processing and taking informed decisions will form the basis of better TV services and better experiences. A more individual TV, more diverse, more available and more compulsive.

Over the top. How the Internet is (slowly but surely) changing the television industry (2015) is an instructive book, easy to read and enjoyable, albeit with too much casuistry when documenting some of the phenomena. In spite of its local approach brimming with examples and references to the US, it does not become merely anecdotal. Wolk has managed to identify players, disruptive elements and trends in new television and position them within a theoretical framework applicable to any region. This is his great contribution to professional and academic debate and it undoubtedly represents the most comprehensive work on the current TV ecosystem published to date.