

Taking the Fight to Digital Platforms

FITE TV aims to make ring-sports programming mobile 5/09/2016

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While most televised professional and college sports games can be watched online on multiple devices, a good number of major pay-per-view ring-sports events have yet to enter the digital arena.

FITE TV is trying to change that. The mobile app, developed by digital media company Flipp Media, currently offers live boxing events, as well as pro wrestling and mixed martial arts content, streamed to mobile phones. The app is available via iTunes or Google Play and gives users the option of watching on their devices or connecting directly to a smart TV.

Through distribution deals with such event providers as Golden Boy Promotions (boxing), TNA (pro wrestling) and World Series of Fighting (MMA), FITE TV is streaming an average of eight live free and fee-based ring sports events per week.

FITE TV CEO Kosta Jordanov recently spoke to *Multichannel News* programming editor R. Thomas Umstead about the service, as well as his aspirations to eventually offer fight fans the opportunity to watch the biggest PPV ring-sports events online. An edited excerpt of their conversation follows.

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MCN: Do people actually want to watch a fight on a mobile phone?

Kosta Jordanov: It depends on the content. The trend is that people are shifting to short-form clips, and for those people who watch that content, the size of the screen doesn't matter that much.

When it comes to sports, however, people want to watch live sports on a large screen. For a three-hour show that you've paid \$30 to \$40 for, the small screen doesn't work. You want to sit with friends, drink a beer and watch a fight on the large screen. That's what's so attractive about FITE TV. The biggest differentiator is our technical ability to connect the stream and bring it to the big screen. We don't have any hardware for a specific box to be connected to the TV, and there's no need for a cable subscription.

Basically, we do IP delivery over the big screen using the mobile device as a remote-control interface. The only requirement is that the mobile device and the TV have to be on the same network. The stream goes through a cloud service that we support going to the big screen.

MCN: What are some of the rights deals that you have with ring sports providers?

KJ: We already have deals with 35 event providers on the wrestling, MMA and boxing side. We have a deal with TNA [and] Ring of Honor, on the wrestling side; Legacy [Fighting Championship] and WSOF [World Series of Fighting] on the mixed-martial-arts side, and Golden Boy Promotions and Integrated Sports for boxing. There really isn't a reason for a content partner not to work for us — it's all upside for everyone involved.

We're just one more distributor that they have to work with, but we have a slightly different reach. We're reaching cord-cutters; people outside the country. We also help our partners with the promotion of the event through Facebook and Twitter ads, sponsored ads. We can also provide content to specific countries.

MCN: Do you see a time when you'll be able to stream a major PPV boxing event from HBO or Showtime?

KJ: I think it's doable. I think we would probably start with some distribution outside of the prime window, or it could start with streaming of prelims,

weigh-ins and other supporting events leading up to the main-event card. Again, we're just another Dish or DirecTV; we're one more provider that can help provide revenue.

MCN: How does a consumer purchase an event to stream?

KJ: Through the FITE TV app, you can purchase the event just like you would through iTunes or Google Play. Once purchased, you get a confirmation from both FITE TV and from iTunes or Google Play.

MCN: The knock on streaming has been the piracy factor — there's a lot of stealing of the signal when it's on the Web. How can you assure event providers that you can eliminate piracy?

KJ: We have a very secure content-protection platform that we've been working on for the last four years. Through this platform, we've streamed content from CBS, Bloomberg [Television] and some of the movie studios that really have high requirements for signal protection. That said, every single signal can be hacked, but we're actually more safe than traditional systems. It's harder to steal the content from us than it is from cable.

MCN: Are there any plans to extend your content beyond ring sports?

KJ: We're very focused on ring sports — we don't have any plans to go to any areas until we own the space. After that, we may look at other events.