



What is a SMART TV and Could you Benefit from One in France?

by Ross Hendry

Smart TV is a name given to Televisions by the likes of Samsung and LG, that will permit and support a connection to the internet. It is a convergence of many technologies, namely those of Television, Personal Computing and the Internet. Most modern digital TVs are capable of becoming connected to the internet simply by using inexpensive add-ons. But does it make your TV smart?

The idea of connecting your TV to the internet is a good one for many reasons - just to get a much larger screen on which to view the www is very worthwhile, add then if you are able to browse the internet and play content you find, so much the better. This feature also permits you to view photos and videos you have taken with your digital camera, tablet or mobile telephone or have stored on your PC.



However, life is never that simple. Most of the TV manufacturers see smart TVs as a way of taking more money from you, so they have devised many ways of doing this. For example, by restricting where you are able to get the content you may want to view, to pay sites. For example, many Smart TVs do not have a fully functioning internet browser and so you cannot view the whole of the www, or may not be able to play much of the content you find. The software supplied on these TVs is not normally of the best quality and in my experience is not updated regularly. Until this happens regularly your ability to take advantage of the content offered will gradually be restricted.

You do not have to connect a Smart TV to the internet just to watch broadcast TV, either terrestrial or satellite. When you do connect to the internet there can be many benefits depending on what your manufacturer has included in your Smart TV - most will include You Tube, many will permit you to link to LoveFilm and Netflix or one of the other streaming pay sites.

There could also be problems with the more sophisticated ones, for example, Samsung have a voice command feature you may use to control the smart TV and search for content. This feature records everything you say, and maintains it and passes it to a third party, presumably to process your request. Here is what the Samsung small print says "Please be aware that if your spoken words include personal or other sensitive information, that information will be among the data captured and transmitted to a third party through your use of Voice Recognition." Frightening! If I cannot talk about private matters in my own home then where can I? I would rather not have a service that can record my private conversations and store them goodness knows where!

You should also be aware that having a Smart TV without a suitable internet service is like a chocolate fireguard, pretty useless. You need a minimum internet download speed of at least 2Mbps, preferably 8 to 10 Mbps to guarantee that you can provide the smart content to your TV without is stuttering or buffering, basically not getting the information fast enough to display a consistent uninterrupted stream of video. Any TV can become smart, and there are many ways to make them so, from as little as £15.00.

Set Top Boxes

The least expensive is the set top box, such as Google's Chromecast (£30, Amazon Fire TV stick £35, Now TV HD Smart TV Box £20, Apple TV £59 and the Roku Streaming stick £30; to name some of the more popular ones.) These devices usually have a WiFi connection that connects to your home WiFi and therefore your PCs as well as

your TV and a remote control (some are even controllable from a Smart phone app).

Games Consoles

The three main game console manufacturers namely Sony, Microsoft and Wii all offer media streaming and video on demand applications, Microsoft's new Xbox One even has built-in TV guides and that pesky voice control option (is it recording everything you say?). Netflix have observed that at times the Play Station 3 is the most popular device used to access their service.

Smart Blu-ray Players

Sony and others have made smart Blu-ray players that have a streaming interface that will permit connection to the www and thus smart functionality.

Your PC or Laptop or Tablet

This is my preference. This gives me total control over the interface to watch what I can. I use a streaming box to connect my TV to my home network (my WiFi) and thus I can display anything I can get on my PC with my TV. Many people have purchased or built a home theatre PC (these were small silent PCs designed to sit under the TV and were controlled by a wireless keyboard and mouse).

The latest in this line of technology is a full blown PC about the size of a small mobile telephone. These plug into an HDMI socket on your TV and connect wirelessly to your WiFi router and to a wireless Keyboard and/or mouse. They effectively turn your TV into a PC, they also support an SD card slot and USB interface. You may get Windows 10 and Android versions from as little as £76 for the PC, the wireless keyboard and mouse will be around £25 to £50.

Finally, is it worth having a Smart TV in France?

Because of the restriction of not being able to play BBC iplayer, or indeed the other UK channels due to the geographic restrictions on broadcasting, one could argue that it is a bit of a waste of time, however, if you use a PC type "Smart Interface" then these restrictions may be avoided by using a VPN, but it should be noted that this is illegal. I have not yet found a Smart TV that enables you to set it up to avoid the geo broadcast restrictions.

Smart TVs will improve and as the content available on the internet increases they will become more usable. But at present they are not too smart and easily improved upon. The restrictions on content due to living in France alone, make it worth waiting until things improve on that front before investing in Smart telly.

Ross Hendry is the proprietor of Interface Consulting and Engineering, who has over 42 years experience in Communications, Computer Technology and Direct Marketing. (See advert below).

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