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FCC chief pushes TV via high-speed Internet lines

By Jeremy Pelofsky, Reuters

WASHINGTON — U.S. Federal Communications Commission Chairman Michael Powell Wednesday said technology and telecommunications companies are racing to develop ways to pipe television shows into consumers' homes via high-speed Internet lines.

Telephone companies like SBC Communications are trying to fend off mounting competition from cable television companies that are able to offer consumers a bundled package of products, including phone and Internet service.

"Almost every major phone company I'm aware of has an initiative underway to begin to try to plug the hole with partnerships with satellite-delivered video but what they're really working on is broadband-delivered IP (Internet protocol) television," Powell told reporters.

"That's a major component that's moving fast," he said. Powell noted that TiVo, famous for its digital television recorders, was joining up with online DVD renter Netflix to offer movies to a home via high-speed Internet, or broadband, lines.

Powell said it was unclear what regulatory obligations such as serving the public interest would apply to television via the Internet, if any.

Separately, the FCC chief said the agency would likely resolve numerous complaints about indecency on television and radio by the end of the month because of time limits on such grievances.

In another sign that television via the Internet was gaining traction, Verizon Communications, the biggest U.S. local telephone company, on Wednesday appointed a new executive to manage entertainment content and marketing, Terry Denson, formerly of Insight Communications.

Verizon is rolling out high-capacity fiber-optic lines that can carry huge loads of data, with the goal of passing 1 million homes by the end of this year and another 2 million homes in 2005.

"His experience with Insight, MTV and ABC rounds out our capability to compete powerfully over our broadband services," said Marilyn O'Connell, Verizon senior vice president of broadband solutions.

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Already Qwest Communications International operates a small IP television service in Arizona and the other three big local telephone companies are ramping up their efforts, as well.

All four carriers already resell satellite television services from DirecTV Group and EchoStar Communications as part of their voice and Internet packages.

Contributing: Justin Hyde

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