

Thinking Big About IPTV

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OK, to be fair, there are more than a handful of IPTV subscribers enjoying the pleasures of American Idol via nontraditional television, IP-based video transport. But, still being fair (a unique concept in this particular space, we understand), the IPTV universe still numbers quite a few hundred thousand people less than a million.

That little detail didn't stop HP, Intel and **Kasenna**, which calls itself the "IPTV Company," from teaming up to complete a one million IPTV subscriber benchmark test for broadcast TV and VOD services. Were they looking ahead or just flexing muscles for an imaginary audience?

"It was a pretty bold move, and there was some heavy investment from HP as well as Intel in developing both the benchmark test and the test bed platform," said Allan Linden, senior director of marketing communications at **Kasenna**.

Kasenna's LivingRoom servers scaled to 120,000 active subscribers per server, which Linden called "phenomenal." The tests also showed that the HP servers can scale up, so "using literally off-the-shelf servers and standard equipment, the service provider will be able to start deploying some of their video-on-demand as well as broadcast television with standard equipment," he said.

The test was like Cool Hand Luke eating 50 eggs. When asked why he picked 50 rather than some lower, more reasonable figure, Luke replied, "It just seemed like a nice round number." A million just seems like a nice round number to the carriers planning IPTV services.

"No one has a million subscribers yet, but the question shows up in a lot of RFPs. They want to know how we're going to scale the service from where they are today to where they hope to be in the future," said Peggy Dau, director of broadband and media in HP's communications and media entertainment group. "The mid-tiers, a lot of the telcos in Europe, may not ever get to a million, but they want to know that they can get to the hundreds of thousands easily."

A million or one

In other words, they're thinking big because they're expecting big things. **Kasenna** should be thinking just as big, said Dau.

"I've been pushing **Kasenna** on this for a couple of years. If they really want to prove they're a viable software player, they have to prove scalability," she said.

HP, she said, is accustomed to working with big numbers, "so I knew we had the capability to help them with it, but I felt for them to substantiate themselves in the marketplace vs. some of the much larger competitors ... this is something they needed to do."

And they did, said Linden. The tests can now be done on-demand by carriers in labs in Grenoble, France, and soon in Richardson, TX.

"The lab is set up so that the carriers can come in and test their own deployment strategies. Obviously, HP wants to sell servers, and Intel is in it because the more servers they sell, the more chips they sell, (and) from our standpoint we wanted to validate the ability to deliver on what we could do with them," he said.

And the carriers? They want to know that when those million eggs are cooked and put into a basket they'll be able to chew them up and swallow them without gagging, even if it leaves them with a bloated feeling in the end.

"We're measuring performance; we're saying how few servers can be used to support X number of transactions assumed by a million subscribers," Dau said. "We're assuming 60 percent - 600,000 active subscribers - how many servers you need to support that from the transactional perspective and from the administrative perspective."

All the telcos have to do, then, is cook up a million subscribers. Guess whose henhouses they plan to raid?

- Jim Barthold