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# Launching a VOD platform?

## Get THESE right first

All set to launch a VOD offering?
Remember it's the audience you need to focus on.
Technology—not so much, not now

# In today's time, having a Video On-Demand (VOD) offering is indispensable

whether you're a major content producer looking to take on Netflix, or a sports club looking for greater fan engagement. Even if you're a business far removed from media and entertainment, looking to show off what you do best with video presentations and demos, you need VOD.

For individuals or small companies just starting out, their first experience with VOD is likely via a global social video platform like YouTube, or possibly Facebook. The reasons are simple—zero entry cost and a global reach. It works well as most audiences use these platforms as a daily go-to source for content.

With time, these folks slowly realize that they are, in effect, working for the platform, not themselves. While it's crucial for a company to maintain a presence on a globally known platform like YouTube, there comes a time when they need to focus on business expansion. It's usually at this stage that a content producer thinks of building their own VOD offering on their own platform. This is easier said than done.

**To build a successful VOD platform, you need two things — understanding what your audience needs and a deep understanding of the technology involved.**

# Genesis of VOD

Although we always think of video on demand as the brave new world of content viewing, we fail to see that it has been around for quite some time. The first iteration of VOD was with cable platforms, when services like Tivo were rolled out in the late nineties.

You could select individual programs or an entire series from the schedule, which would be automatically recorded on a DVR for you to view anytime later.

With video on demand coming to picture, things changed massively. In terms of technology, it was a slight step backwards as the available bandwidth was unable to handle anything close to live broadcast resolution.

Real-time viewing was a dream back then and hence video downloads took over. Gradually, the internet pipes and encoding technology caught up and watching real-time videos became a reality.

**The revolutionary shift in VOD hasn't so much been the delivery mechanisms, but the ability – for both distributors and consumers – to deal with the scale of offerings available.**

During most of VOD's history, even for the most enthusiastic Tivo user, viewers were exposed to only dozens of titles to watch. But as soon as it was viable to stream quality content, the format was able to do justice to a huge collection of high-end content libraries.

- A recent Statistica report says that as of January 2021, Amazon Prime Video was the Subscription Video-on-Demand (SVoD) service with the highest amount of movies and TV shows available worldwide with around 34,700 movies and 9,700 TV series. Netflix stands second with about 11,900 movies, and 6,800 TV shows, followed by Hulu and NowTV."

- According to a report on trends in the VOD market in EU28, published by the Council of Europe, the total number of unique film titles available to Europeans in SVOD platforms in the middle of 2020 was 41,981, and the total number of TV seasons (which contain multiple episodes) was 12,358. The number of unique film titles available via TVOD (which don't require the same licenses as SVOD platforms) was 60,028!

These are some huge numbers and can be overwhelming for any user. Given this huge content library, users first need to figure out how to navigate multiple platforms with thousands of hours of content. Video streaming platforms can play a crucial role here. They must find ways to make this plethora of content easily discoverable to these overwhelmed customers, making it simpler to consume.

Metadata has thus emerged as a vital feature in any VOD offering.

**Without accurate rich metadata, even the best content in the world is likely to get lost in the firehouse pouring into customers' browsers every day.**

# What exactly is metadata?

Metadata started as a simple set of parameters such as title, description, artist, and year released. However, it has now evolved to include a very complex system of structures. Metadata accompanying content may now include thumbnail images, detailed descriptions, subgenres or even trailers.

**Any modern VOD platform must have two principal elements:**

- **Good content discovery**
- **Getting the right content to the right audience**

Thinking about metadata goes beyond merely applying descriptions, data, and categorization to individual pieces of content. It also requires thinking about the larger structure of how your content sits within your overall library, and how your individual content pieces are connected to each other.

**For instance, for a series, you must consider the following:**

- **The metadata applied to individual episodes**
- **How episodes interlink with each other and the seasons they are a part of**
- **How each season relates to other seasons and the series as a whole**

If you leave all these elements up to the audiences to search on their own, you'd surely be providing a bad viewing experience. As a conscientious content provider, you must try to elevate the customer experience with rich access to relevant content by anticipating your audiences' needs.

If your metadata is of great quality, it automatically increases the chances for the audience to discover content. An episode accompanied by a short summary is going to be far more discoverable and potentially engaging compared to one with no summary at all.

# Building your content factory

To generate high quality content, you need to bring the creativity of clever human beings to bear. Before jumping into content creation, they must understand the content and the art of pleasing the viewers. This sorts the content bit, but what about technology? You also need a technological solution that will help you take care of various aspects of content management.

*Linear is a great way to kick-start your monetization strategy. It's the fastest way for content to get discovered. And there are regular ad breaks, already data mined, so you see a flow of revenue coming in pretty fast.*

*Baskar Subramanian*
*Co-founder & CEO, Amagi*

**To deal with the masses of content, VOD platforms need to minimize human interventions. They need to adopt a content factory-style pipeline that's something like a physical manufacturing plant.**

A piece of content for a premium brand today might be delivered to hundreds of different VOD platforms worldwide. Each of those will have their own video and metadata format requirements. Since content processing is a long and elaborate process now, doing it all in-house is totally impractical.


## When putting together your VOD platform, you need to know where the content is ultimately going.

The technological complexity will hugely depend on the distribution platforms it is ultimately going to. Your final distribution platform(s) will drive some of the big decisions like:

- **what formats need to be created**
- **what transformations the content needs**
- **what the costs are going to be in delivering those formats**

**Transcoding and video processing are computer-intensive jobs. Moving that on-premises workflow to the cloud can simplify a lot of the overwhelming complexity.**

What happens with the cloud is that you can spin resources up or down as you need them and send content to hundreds of destinations virtually, simultaneously.

And brands are not producing a single asset today – they're producing thousands of hours of assets – highlights, trailers, promos, and live events. For a small brand, it could be 1000 hours a month – for a large one, it could be as much as 30,000 hours

# Leveraging machine learning

Alongside this content factory approach sit new tools powered by machine learning. **Artificial intelligence and machine learning are the essential tools that allow you to enhance your VOD metadata and manage it at scale.**

### ML for thumbnails

For instance, adding or replacing thumbnails manually across all your titles would be a monumental process, and probably not the best use of human resources. Now there are tools powered by machine learning that are very effective at selecting thumbnails from the content.

These can be then passed to a human to approve or reject or can be added to the title's metadata package automatically, increasing overall efficiency.

### Trailer editing made faster

Same logic goes for trailer editing. Although it is an art form, even the most enthusiastic, well-paid team in the world will crumble before the task of selecting shots and cutting promos for 500 titles. When machines can now produce convincing promos – for films, TV shows and even sports events, why do it manually?

**Even Wimbledon began using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to produce highlights. They started using technology from their partner, IBM, as far back as 2018.**

The Wimbledon AI was taught to recognize the implications of the tennis players' various gestures, and the sounds of the crowd. This helped pull out the most exciting moments of the match in a fraction of the time a human editor could do it, to create 'cognitive highlights' or highlight packages out of matches that condensed a three-hour match down to a two minute video.

# Discover me

If your content is easily discoverable, that's half battle won! Content discovery is the key for the success of your VOD platform. First things first—is your platform visible? Do people know of its existence?

Before worrying about content discoverability, you need to focus on how popular your platform is. Who finds your content and how they find it are going to depend greatly on your business model.

Are you a direct-to-consumer business? Or are you part of a larger third-party platform that is hosting your VOD assets?

If you are direct-to-consumer, the challenge starts on day one. How do you drive traffic to your destination? Or if you have a mobile app, how do you drive downloads of that? It's a classic problem with D2C.

Once you have that traffic coming in, because these are more serious audiences who have made a decision to download your app, you may have a chance at a better relationship with them.

On the other side, if you are delivering your content to a third-party VOD platform, content discoverability becomes the biggest challenge. It's something like the problem of a small retailer operating on Amazon trying to get their product to appear in a product search.

That's how essential it is to get your metadata right. Its richness can make or break your business. It's also a chance to enhance user experience when they interact with your content, when compared to content from other sources.

# Getting content engagement right

Some platforms are already enabling advertising capabilities, allowing you to promote your content within them. Roku, for example, allows people to advertise on the platform to nudge users toward content, or to publish sponsored content that can help discovery.

Once people are watching your content, how do you keep them engaged with the other content you have to offer? Just being aware there are opportunities beyond listing your episodes and inviting your viewer to click play can be enough to get your imagination going.

Involving customers with recaps of the previous episode or what's to come in the episode they're about to watch – or nudging them to continue by showing a preview of what's coming up next – can be very effective.

The global K-drama phenomenon, which is very thorough about employing recaps and previews, should be a good inspiration here.

# Linking up with your partners

It's not likely, if you have a VOD platform of any scale, that you are producing all your content in-house. There must be a variety of content sources like different production companies, news sources, sports agencies, and archives. The incoming content will need to be dealt with and normalized before they go on to their destination, whether that's on your own direct-to-consumer platform or another partner platform.

**You may simply be aggregating content, which you're then trying to distribute to customers in as many formats as they can engage with. The ultimate goal is likely to be—monetization.** You'd want to get a bang for your buck through as many means as possible, including advertising and subscription, and trying to deliver revenue back to the original content owners.

**Here's when you need to think quick. You need to ask yourself:**
**Which content will make money?**

- **What is going to work best in the demographics you are aiming for?**
- **How can you commercially align your interest with the content creator's interest?**
- **Is there going to be a revenue share or are you going to make an upfront payment?**

**Once you have answers for the above questions, you'll have to move towards the business side of things. If you are doing a revenue share, you will need good tools to let you know:**

- **How many viewers are watching the content and across what platforms**
- **Whether you're running your content on a VOD or a linear model**

From there, you move to managing content rights. Rights management is the other key part to focus on. There are a bewildering variety of parameters here – geographic restrictions, number of times the content can be shown, what formats the content might be restricted to, and so on. Since you'll have to take care of all these fine details, **you need a robust technological solution to track rights compliance across your entire ecosystem. This is vital if you're aiming to deal with more than a handful of creators.**

# Get the Amagi ON-DEMAND advantage!

Amagi ON-DEMAND is our end-to-end orchestration platform that gives you complete control of your VOD workflow from ingest to delivery. It helps manage your entire VOD asset processing workflow, from content ingestion to delivery of assets to a multitude of OTT, vMVPD, and ad-supported platforms using an easy-to-use web interface.

Our solution offers operational superiority based on complete automation of media processing capabilities.

**With Amagi ON-DEMAND, you can focus on reaching more viewers without worrying about the logistics involved in delivering content across platforms.**

Amagi has partnered with a wide range of content platforms and developed plug-and-play integrations adhering to the ingestion requirements. It also provides incremental cost saving opportunities as you increase your reach and monetization opportunities with a presence on a wide range of platforms in a short time.

**Advantages**

- Intuitive UI to manage the entire VOD workflow
- Hassle-free distribution to 25+ vMPVD, MVPD, and VOD platforms
- Broadcast grade content quality
- Sophisticated alert and reporting capabilities
- Effective content monetization with Dynamic Ad Insertion (DAI)

# Thrive with us!

Reach out to us to at
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About Amagi

Amagi is a next-gen media tech company that provides cloud broadcast and streaming TV solutions to TV networks, content owners and streaming TV platforms. Amagi enables content owners to launch, distribute and monetize live linear channels on Free-Ad-Supported Streaming TV and SVOD platforms. Amagi also offers 24x7 cloud managed services bringing simplicity, advanced automation, and transparency to the entire broadcast operations for traditional TV networks. Amagi delivers 500+ channels with deployments in over 40 countries. Amagi has presence in New York, Los Angeles, London, Paris, Singapore, New Delhi and Bangalore.

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