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## Disney's ESPN Cancels 3-D Programming

June 14, 2013 | Satellite Today | Steve Schuster



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[Satellite TODAY 06-14-13] 3-D TV broadcasting took a major hit this week as Disney-owned ESPN decided to discontinue its 3-D service by the end of 2013, according to a statement from ESPN.

"We are committing our 3-D resources to other products and services that will better serve fans and affiliates," the statement said, citing limited viewer adoption of 3-D services at home and service cancellations.

By 2014, ESPN will no longer offer 3-D broadcasts.  
Image credit: ESPN

While ESPN has discovered full-time 3-D channel programming isn't profitable, Chris Baugh, president at NSR, said the future of 3-D TV may rest in pay-per-view

programming, such as the Super Bowl, college national championships, the World Cup and the Olympics.

"I'm sure there is a consumer base that's disappointed but I don't think ESPN's decision indicates the 3-D market is completely dying; there will still be specialized programming," Baugh said. "If you look at any developed market like Europe and the United States, ESPN was one of the leaders. Sky, out of the U.K., still carries 3-D content; it's not dead, but I really think the new focus is on ultra-HD."

ESPN officials said on June 13, 2013 they will "continue to experiment with things like Ultra High Definition television tools to produce our current ESPN family of HD channels."

Michelle Abraham, a senior analyst with **Multimedia Research Group**, agreed with Baugh. "Other markets in Europe may continue to produce some large events in 3-D but much of the attention has turned to 4K [ultra-HD]," she said.

But Abraham does see a need for 3-D in other market segments. "I do believe movie studios will continue to produce content in 3-D as that has proven to generate revenue. They may also sell those movies on 3-D Blu-ray so there may still be some content available for 3-D TV owners," she added.

In the meantime, the cost for 3-D in-home televisions has dropped significantly. To date, a 50-inch Sony 3-D TV costs approximately \$1,100, a low price compared to about a year ago when the same TV would have cost around 30 to 50 percent more, according to a recent Time Magazine report.

Speaking from personal experience, Baugh said that in the two years that he's owned a 3-D TV at home he only used the 3-D capabilities twice. "At the end of the day, there was never a lot of 3-D content being carried anyway. Consumers just didn't warm up to it. 3-D was never a trend like HD to overtake the industry," he said.

As far as the recent ESPN announcement, Baugh wasn't surprised. "There were rumors for years; they [ESPN] were losing a significant amount of revenue," he said adding that 3-D broadcasting is an expensive proposition that requires two to three times the amount of bandwidth of traditional programming for providers, and special glasses for consumers.

"It's not like HD where you flip a switch and it works. It [3-D-TV] is nice, but its not a must have," Baugh said.

ESPN 3D first launched with the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa; at the time, 3-D was thought to be the next-generation of broadcast. In 2010 **DirectTV** Entertainment aggressively marketed it as the next-generation TV programming. "Watching ESPN's comprehensive lineup of sports programming in 3-D will be like having your own virtual seat at all of your favorite sporting events around the world. We are excited to be the first and only distributor to announce the launch of ESPN 3-D and we look forward to announcing additional 3-D partners throughout the year," Eric Shanks, then executive vice president of

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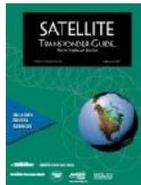
DirectTV Entertainment said in a statement in 2010.

However, Baugh is not too concerned about the impact ESPN's 3-D programming being discontinued will have in the satellite industry. "Globally, satellite operators are all capacity constrained. This [newly freed] capacity could easily be sold elsewhere," he said.

**Dish** declined to comment and DirectTV could not be reached for comment prior to publication.

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