

# The State of UK Terrestrial Web TV

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I am a follower of the WebTV experience, back way back when you could stream but a few TV experiences NASA TV being one, i remember watching a shuttle take off online, to the offerings we have in the UK today. Web TV is an obvious thing to do with today's always on broadband, wifi and even 3G technology, and our appetite for on-demand viewing. To demonstrate this the BBC are showing a great commercial, showing how people have viewed certain landmark occasions such as the death of Kennedy, the Berlin war coming down and the release of Mandela over the years on TV, and asking where will you see the next world changing event, implying this will be on the mobile

So what i'd like to do here, is round up the offerings of the main 5 TV channels, what i'm looking for, is the following, how do they work on the following platforms. WindowsXP, Ubuntu 8.10 and Mac OSX Tiger. I'm using XP and not vista, because i believe there are more XP installs out there. i'll use firefox as the browser of choice to keep the browser the same across all browsers, however will also give the default browser for each OS a go as well, just to see how different the experience is.

With this being said, lets get going

## **BBC**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer> [2]

The BBC were the [centre of much annoyance](#) [3] when they first launched the iPlayer, because they only supported the Windows Platform, however they made a commitment to ensure minority operating systems were supported, and now cover not only the OS's listed below, they also provide content for iPhones and many other device platforms. [recent reports](#) [4] seem to indicate that the iPlayer may also be used by all of the UK Terrestrial channels in the new year, as part of the [Kangaroo project](#) [5]. iPlayer content is also delivered both Live as well as a catchupformat now from the BBC, and its possible to do a series link for many programs. Long term, the plan is to use the iPlayer as a delivery mechanism for all historical BBC content.

The iPlayer content also works in third party systems such as iTunes and in Gnomes Media Player.. So all in all i think the BBC should be congratulated in producing such an all round system, and delivering such good content.

The layout of the Webpage is very modern, allowing for todays programs, catchup, and even BBC Radio, the navigation is simple, and in the most part, the delivery is provided using flash.

However, the content within the site is very much UK only content, and as such, viewing this content outside of the UK isn't happening easily, as they utilise Geo Location IP addresses, and spot where the originating Endstation is located.

## **Windows XP**

Both Firefox & Internet Explorer make use of the underlying Flash plugins, and flash 10 made a big difference for the delivery of Full screen content, the streaming is done very well, as i believe the underlying system is provided on some very high end platforms. as long as you have flash loaded, this will work fine.

## **Mac OSX**

As with XP the Firefox & Safari browsers make use of flash, what i did find in Firefox, was the full screen delivery of some content, didn't actually display full sreen, however this may just be my setup, or a glitch.

## **Ubuntu 8.10**

It was the linux crowd who got on thier hight horse when iPlayer only supported Windows on launch, and i have to say Firefox delivery is great, however if you are using an earlier version of Flash 9, the full screen can be a little jerky, and on a PC with Compiz running the display can crop a lot, that being said, with the right setup, the system is awesome,

## **ITV**

<http://www.itv.com> [6]

The ITV player offers on the homepage a link to the ITV1, ITV2, ITV3 and ITV4 live viewing pages, as well as [30 day catch up](#) [7] service. However to get this working, you need to download the [Microsoft Silverlight plugin](#) [8] for any of the browsers below, on Windows or Mac OSX, the [Moonlight project](#) [9] is needed for Ubuntu. The service is provided by placing some advertising at the start of each clip.

## **Windows XP**

Both Firefox & Internet Explorer need to have the Silverlight plugin installed, however the Firefox seems to be incredibly stop and start, i thought it might be the broadband, until IE7 worked fine.. This maybe Microsoft's implementation of Silverlight on Firefox, Who wouldn't push their worn browser?

## **Mac OSX**

Both Firefox & Safari have Silverlight plugins which can be downloaded direct from the ITV sight, after a browser restart the live TV and Catchup both worked reasonably well, with a little jerkiness here and there.

## **Ubuntu 8.10**

Using a combination of the latest Moonlight SVN and Firefox i was able to get this site working, however it wasn't something which you would consider easy, and i don't think Microsoft will be releasing a Silverlight plugin for linux any time soon. So we have our first Open Source unfriendly site here.

## **Channel4**

[http://www.channel4.com/watch\\_online/](http://www.channel4.com/watch_online/) [10]

Bit of an odd one here, there is a [link from the main channel4.com](#) [10] to watch online, which presents you with an alphabetical order list of Channel 4 shows, from here you get taken, once choosing a show, to the 28day catch up menu, No plugins sere needed when this worked, which as you can see below, was with a VERY limited results.

## **Windows XP**

This needed to download a plugin, however did work ok, only when using IE, Firefox achieved the same results as OSX and Ubuntu. the picture quality for the streamed content was fine.

## **Mac OSX & Ubuntu 8.10**

C4 are not what you would call real world friendly, despite the mass of bad publicity leveled at the BBC last year, C4 seem to have got no further with their systems, as trying to watch an application comes back with:

*Sorry*

*Channel4.com currently only supports Windows PCs using Internet Explorer 6 or 7. This is due to restrictions with the rights and technical protection measures required.*

*However, if you are using Firefox 2+ (on a Windows PC) you can get a plugin from [here](#) which should allow you to watch the programmes on Channel4.com.*

*Not too good.*

## **Five**

<http://demand.five.tv/Home.aspx> [11]

Fives offering again, allows for Catchup, the site itself is very simplist in its delivery, however this is in a good way, the site provides both free content, which is mostly UK based programmes, and complete series, which you can download, it does explain that for some of the content you will have to pay for the content, this is due to agreements with production companies.

Five seem to really like the DRM route, which is vry obvious when delivering content, and seems to subsidies the delivery of its content, with an ad at the start and end of the video. Which itself isn't annoying, what was, is the fact the adverts played consistently, but the programs didn't.

## **Windows XP**

Firefox

When trying to watch the Gadget show, i was prompted to download a plugin for firefox, to deal with the DRM, once this wa odne however even a reboot of the Pc would not get the media to play.

Internet Explorer

As too be expected this works fine, plugin downloaded, and everything worked ok.

## **Mac OSX**

Unfortunately the DRM is a bit of a kiljoy here, as Firefox & Safari will not play the media content, however this isn't obvious to start with, as the service does state that the browsers need an extra plugin. Downloading this makes no difference, and I was still asked for a plugin to be installed. I actually mailed Five about this, and the did replay saying they would be moving to a flash based delivery system in the new year.

## **Ubuntu 8.10**

Firefox, much like the mac, this is a no go area, DRM again.. ouch..

## **Thoughts**

Iplayer does indeed show what is possible with media delivery, across multiple platforms, and the sheer amount of free content, both Video and Audio, displays BBC's commitment to this delivry method. They have always been at the forefront of electronic program delivery, with [News 24](#) [12] being available live for a long time streamed from the website, as have programs such as [Click](#) [13] and [Panorama](#) [14]. However the lack of need for DRM plugins, shows what can be done with a little foreplanning, and thought.

This thought seems to be lacking with the other channels offerings, using browser plugins, and requirements, which don't offer a service to all thier customers. Admittedly, this is not necessarily the fault of the providers, as there are so many options for streaming available, however, its not hard to see that the cross compatibility, an ease of install of the Flash platform, does put it head and shoulders above the rest.

However when it comes to distributing your content in this way, this could lead to a big problem for the BBC, which is funded by the TV Licence fee, as the [TV Licence](#) [15] is defined "*as a licence needed to receive radio signals on an electronic receiver.*" Its a bit hard to charge for this, if people are watching online. The BBC may eventually have to look at how it funds the distribution of its content. There is an argument that as we have to pay for this content anyway, it should always be free. However with computer systems and Media PC's slowly creeping into the living room, and most larg screen TV's having VGA connectors, you are not actually receiving any radio signals...

### **So what about the others?**

The ITV offering has improved, however with the lack of a Linux version of Microsofts Silverlight, is a personal issue, and that really goes for the other two as well, there is a HUGE userbase for non Windows based OS's and nod just on PC platforms, the mobile phone as a convergence devices.

Channel4, and Five offer what can only be considered locked down propritory system, limiting thier content to Windows IE only users. Which does indeed cover a large chunk of the market place, however, not everyone..

The issue most of the providers of this content will have is the matter of funding and licenced content, we watch TV from many countries in the UK, and geting this placed online is hard, as contracts have to be signed, and profit made. However the BBC have managed this free of charge with the [Heroes Season 3](#) [16], so deals can be made for content. I dont see advertising on the front of programs, as being a major issue, as long as they are not too long, with the commercial channels, the lack of advertising revenue every 15 minutes during a program, needs to be managed, and recovered, as i know many people ho only watch thier TV online....

### **Alternatives**

So are there alternatives out there? you bet there are, for Windows & Mac users the iplayer content can be watched on iTunes, and live TV can be watched for all the above channels using Zattoo, or downloaded from Torrents using Ted. None of them have made the move to Joost or Miro yet.

### **[Just talk](#)**

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**Source URL:** <http://www.tuxmachines.org/node/32983>

### **Links:**

[1] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/taxonomy/term/68>

[2] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer>

[3] [http://www.theregister.co.uk/2007/07/12/bbc\\_osc\\_meeting/](http://www.theregister.co.uk/2007/07/12/bbc_osc_meeting/)

[4] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/7777679.stm>

[5] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kangaroo\\_\(video\\_on\\_demand\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kangaroo_(video_on_demand))

[6] <http://www.itv.com>

[7] <http://www.itv.com/CatchUp/default.html>

[8] <http://www.itv.com/silverlight2/>

[9] <http://www.mono-project.com/Moonlight>

[10] [http://www.channel4.com/watch\\_online/](http://www.channel4.com/watch_online/)

[11] <http://demand.five.tv/Home.aspx>

[12]

[http://www.tuxmachines.org/www.bbc.co.uk/mediaselector/check/nolavconsole/ukfs\\_news/hi?redirect=fs.stm&nbram=1&](http://www.tuxmachines.org/www.bbc.co.uk/mediaselector/check/nolavconsole/ukfs_news/hi?redirect=fs.stm&nbram=1&)

[13]

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaselector/check/nolavconsole/ukfs\\_news/hi?redirect=fs.stm&nbram=1&bbram=1&nbwm=1&](http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaselector/check/nolavconsole/ukfs_news/hi?redirect=fs.stm&nbram=1&bbram=1&nbwm=1&)

[14] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/>

[15] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Television\\_licence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Television_licence)

[16] [http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00fvd2x/Heroes\\_Series\\_3\\_The\\_Eclipse\\_Part\\_2/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00fvd2x/Heroes_Series_3_The_Eclipse_Part_2/)