



Replay on demand

M6 Web selects the Adobe® Flash® Platform for M6 Replay, its television on-demand service



When M6 Web launched its television on-demand service, M6 Replay, it needed to simultaneously reassure rights holders that their programming would be securely broadcasted online, guarantee the service was accessible to everyone, and monetize the site to ensure its profitability. A challenge that they overcame with the Adobe Flash Platform.



The M6 Replay site hosts more than 1.7 million unique visitors a month. In addition, more than 80 million videos have been viewed since the site launched.

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Florent Gellie, VOD product manager, M6 Web

With one million unique visitors after only its second month of operation, M6 Replay clearly found its audience, and set high expectations. “The site was an instant success and quickly surpassed one million unique visitors,” says Florent Gellie, VOD product manager at M6 Web. “Today, its audience sits at about 1.7 million unique visitors. But originally, it was only accessible to Microsoft® Windows® users. From the moment we launched, we started work on version 2 with one goal: expand our audience to Mac and Linux® users. Initially, we used the Adobe Flash Platform for the site’s front end but not for the videos. Since then we decided to also use the Flash Platform to stream the channel’s series, documentaries, and TV movies.”

Universal accessibility

The M6 Replay project was started in late 2006 to support the free Internet distribution of all of France’s M6 network programming through advertising revenue. There were many

challenges, not the least of which were broadcast rights. “We had to protect copyrights to be able to distribute series from the United States, among others, on the Internet,” says Gellie. “When we launched, the studios had only approved a single digital rights management (DRM) technology.” That technology did not allow M6 to reach all its audiences.

M6 had broadcast agreements in place, particularly for the series, but received many complaints that the service was incompatible with computers running Mac OS and Linux. Those users did not understand why they could not access programs that were broadcast for free. M6 had to find a technology for high-quality content streaming that supported multiple platforms for universal accessibility. “Only the Adobe Flash Player, a key component of the Adobe Flash Platform, allowed us to expand our audience because it is installed on most personal computers,” says Gellie.

With the Adobe Flash Player already on more than 98% of all Internet-connected desktops, the audience for the online services expanded. The network had one major problem to solve: how to secure the programs it broadcasted to the satisfaction of their copyright owners—studios such as Disney, Fox, and CBS.

Adobe Flash Media Server 3 was the solution. “In 2007, as we were launching M6 Replay, Adobe was launching Flash Media Server 3, which implemented the RTMPE security protocol,” says Gellie. “The U.S. studios were convinced that it was secure and we were confident that Adobe’s long-term support, particularly relating to content protection, was something we and the studios could count on.” The result: M6 Web received approval from U.S. studios and producers to distribute their television content on the web.

Getting rights-holder approval for web streaming

Martin Boronski, technical director at M6 Web, continues, “With RTMPE in Adobe Flash Media Server, we can encrypt the video stream between the video server, hosted with our partner Lighthouse Networks, and the Adobe Flash Player installed on a user’s computer. The encryption protects the content from being hijacked. Even better, unlike DRM, RTMPE does not put users through the complicated process of downloading a license. It’s a perfect combination of content security and a simple, user-friendly experience.”



Using the Adobe Flash Platform, M6 Web can insert commercial breaks into programming. Previously, ads were only shown before videos. They can now be inserted into the middle of a video in full-frame format with an attractive, user friendly interface.

From a technical standpoint, migrating video content to the Adobe Flash Platform was easy. “Implementing Adobe Flash Media Server and the RTMPE protocol went without a hitch, and Flash Media Server handled the increased traffic load easily, thanks in part to a robust content distribution network (CDN).”

Migrating to the Flash Platform was the road to success for M6 Replay. With the launch of version 2, user satisfaction immediately jumped. “We went from about 70% satisfaction to over 75% as a direct result of moving to the Adobe Flash Platform,” says Gellie. Designed for an enriching experience in a user-friendly interface, the Flash Platform helps to drive user loyalty and increase page view duration. “We surpassed M6 Replay’s audience size record one month after moving to the Adobe Flash Platform, with 10 million streaming sessions. The cross-platform support and rich user experience, coupled with quality network programming, are driving audience growth,” notes Gellie.

Web interactivity + rich TV content

With content protection for rights holders, multi-platform availability, a larger audience, and improved user satisfaction, M6 Replay could already be considered a success. But M6 Web was looking for more from the technology, including the ability to monetize the audience.

M6 Replay was running well when M6 Web decided to take it one step further with version 3 of the site, launched in January 2009. The goal was to strengthen M6 Replay’s business model and achieve development and maintenance savings. “Streaming based on the Adobe Flash Platform presents some interesting possibilities,” says Gellie. First, M6 Web worked on chaptering the videos to give users the ability to go directly to a specific section of the video without having to search through the timeline. “Some users like to watch videos from beginning to end in full-screen mode,” explains Gellie. “Others prefer to watch a specific part of an episode. Chaptering allows you to step through the video without using the timeline, like a DVD.”

To Gellie, it is a perfect example of the marriage of the interactivity and flexibility of the Internet with the richness of television content. To M6 Web, chaptering represents bandwidth savings. “Giving users the ability to jump to the section of the video that interests them instead of watching the entire show and searching through the timeline reduces our bandwidth usage,” explains Gellie. Since M6 Replay version 3 has standardized on 16:9 format video, users get an optimal viewing experience.

For the chaptering process, M6 Web developed an internal module using Adobe Flex®. Gellie says, “It is convenient and highly visual. People work through the video, setting chapter points and entering metadata. The chaptering then automatically appears in the front end.”

M6 Replay

www.m6replay.fr

Industry

- Online Entertainment

Challenges

- Grow audience of the M6 Replay site
- Offer a full-featured, revenue-generating online service
- Ensure content security and integrity for rights holders
- Optimize bandwidth use to reduce operating costs

Solution

- Deliver online entertainment to multiplatform environments
- Standardize on the Adobe Flash Platform to reliably deliver rich, dynamic television programming online to users relying on a range of computer hardware and software

Benefits

- Expanded audience for services
- Improved customer satisfaction
- Streamlined technical implementation and provided foundation to support other online services
- Increased opportunity for ad sales
- Optimized bandwidth performance with more robust CDN and the ability to break content into chapters

Toolkit

- Adobe Flash Media Server
- Adobe Flex
- Adobe Flash Player

During the 2008 European Football Championship, M6 Web tested the Adobe Flash Platform on a live event. The results exceeded all expectations, with 66% of users choosing Adobe Flash Player over the traditional system as their first choice for viewing.



“Euro 2008 showed us that the Adobe Flash Platform could manage live video streams while protecting the content. Above all, it convinced us of the benefit to users that comes from combining a captivating experience with a simple user interface.”

Martin Boronski, technical director, M6 Web

Monetizing with commercials

Using the Adobe Flash Platform, M6 Web can also insert commercial breaks. Previously, ads were only shown before videos. It is the perfect tool to help monetize the site’s services. With it, M6 Replay can create an environment for showcasing ads. They can now be inserted into the middle of a video in full-frame format with an attractive, user-friendly interface.

Advertising is based on user behavior. The more users navigate the site, the more likely they are to be shown a commercial break. Conversely, a user who sits down to watch a video in its entirety will be shown less advertising; a commercial about every 30 minutes. “We changed the site’s

design and removed the banner ads and traditional display ads,” says Gellie. “The interface is now focused on the player itself. From a business perspective, we have created a new way to sell advertising on M6 Replay by combining the interactivity of the web with an advertising model that is very close to that of television.”

As a result, M6 Replay’s success is not measured in page views but in videos watched. “Advertisers see that success,” says Gellie. “We have excellent click rates during videos, from 5% to 8%.” Indeed, today M6 Replay is refining its business model and heading towards a balanced budget. Although it planned to break even in four years, it could do so as soon as the end of 2009, after just two years of operation.

“Our migration to the Adobe Flash Platform has been a success and we are confident that it delivers the content protection necessary to meet the requirements of the copyright owners, particularly with the U.S. studios,” says Gellie. “User satisfaction is already there, and the time each user spends on the site is growing. We are now carefully watching the evolution of the Adobe Flash Platform, with an eye toward adding new features to the M6 Replay site and bringing it to other platforms, such as Internet-connected televisions and mobile devices.”



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