"WOULD you like Ice with that?" is a question buyers of digital television set-top boxes may be asked regularly, perhaps as early as November.

That's if local inventor Peter Vogel, founder of Faulconbridge, has his way, and manages to raise $6 million to commercialise the product.

Ice is an acronym for intelligent content engine, which promises to deliver something many of us secretly long for – ad-free commercial television.

Ice blanks the screen, turns the ad volume down to a level set by the user, or switches to another channel until the program returns.

Vogel, an internationally known inventor, is best known for the Fairlight CMI (computer music instrument), which he developed in partnership with Kim Ryrie.

It revolutionised popular music as we know it. Users in the 1980s read like a rock'n roll Who's Who. They included Kate Bush, Elvis Costello, Dire Straits, Madonna, Paul McCartney and Mike Oldfield.

Sound on Sound magazine says: "Sampling, graphic sequencers, multi-timbrality, software-based synthesis and the concept of the workstation can all be traced back to this instrument."

The Fairlight's legacy on the synthesizeers of today is perhaps Vogel's greatest technological contribution.

After investing about $1 million of his own money to get Ice to software prototype stage, Vogel founded Faulconbridge.

Yes, he is a resident of the Blue Mountains village of the same name, west of Sydney, just as the Fairlight reflected an earlier Sydney address.

Ice, with its capacity to zap ads, block content, and record programs without ads to a personal video recorder, is likely to prove popular with users who hate the intrusion and the typical leap in volume, that accompanies ad breaks.

It will be especially welcomed by users of powerful home theatre systems, with which an ad break can practically blast you out of your seat, Faulconbridge chief executive Duncan Ross says.

"If you ask people whether they'd like a technology that zaps ads or turns them down, the positive response is about 90 per cent.

"When you then ask them if they'd be prepared to pay $2 or $3 per week for the privilege, the percentage drops to about 23 per cent. We'd be very happy to achieve 3 per cent," Ross says.

Negotiations are under way with "four or five" set-top box and PVR manufacturers interested in licensing the system.
Resultant devices will be labelled "Ice powered". To use the service, consumers will need to acquire an Ice-powered STB or PVR, and subscribe.

An upgrade kit for those who have an STB is also likely on launch.

Ice's integrated program guide is not network-dependent, and is is made by Faulconbridge.

Wireless technology allows not just ad zapping, but automatic compensation for late-running programs being recorded to the hard drive of a STB or a PVR.

Amazingly, Faulconbridge employs people to watch television, non-stop, so very fine manual adjustments can be made to the IPG, and to account for news flashes, etc, appearing in programs.

By November, Faulconbridge expects the wireless IPG network to extend from Wollongong to Newcastle in NSW, with other areas to follow, depending on demand.

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