

Comments on “The role of Integrated Digital Television sets in achieving Digital Switchover”

By D. Clarke

I am responding to this consultation as a private citizen, and therefore as a consumer of television products.

*Q1: To what extent do you think consumers can benefit from having digital decoders included in television sets? Are some consumers, such as those with disabilities particularly affected?*

A1: Consumers would not benefit at all from having digital decoders included in television equipment, for the following reasons:

They will pay substantially more for the equipment.

In many cases, people who cannot yet receive digital signals will be forced to pay the extra amount for functionality they cannot use.

Unless iDTVs are available for each platform, satellite subscribers (for example) may be forced to pay for terrestrial decoder equipment (for example) that they will not use.

Since terrestrial, cable and satellite digital TV systems use different standards, forcing consumers to choose one standard for their digital receiver equipment will “lock them in” to that particular platform. This will remove any realistic “choice” between platforms and therefore ensuring that instead of 3 competing systems, there will be 3 separate monopolies.

*Q2: How far do you think iDTVs can contribute to encouraging take-up of digital services?*

A2: Well, obviously if consumers can only buy iDTVs, then after a while it will be possible to say that 95% of the population have access to digital equipment – but it won’t necessarily mean that they can receive anything with it.

It will therefore paint a false picture of DTV take-up, especially with regards to free-to-view services.

I know that there is a signal coverage target as well as an equipment take up target, but it could be said that satellite TV already satisfies the coverage target. This would be meaningless if 99.6% of the population could receive satellite digital television, but 95% had digital terrestrial TV receivers.

*Q3: How far do you think iDTVs can contribute to reaching the point at which analogue terrestrial transmissions could be switched off in the UK? And in the rest of Europe?*

A3: See A2 above. You will not get a true picture of the readiness of the population for the switchover.

*Q4: How might we ensure that any proposal to make sets contain a digital decoder did not favour one platform over any other?*

A4: The only way I can think of is to mandate that manufacturers produce 3 variants of each product: a cable version, a satellite version, and a DTTV version – and then mandate that retailers stock all variants.

*Q5: How might we ensure that any proposal to make sets contain a digital decoder was neutral with respect to the market models and technical choices made by individual service providers?*

A5: I think you would have to take a lot of the technical choices away from the service providers and enforce strict standards for compatibility. For example, having common standards for interactivity across all platforms.

*Q6: If there was a proposal to make sets contain a digital decoder, what conditions should apply? For example, should the proposal apply only to sets of a certain size, or including certain features, or from a certain date? Should it include all receivers (including VCRs) with a PAL or SECAM decoder?*

Set a specific – advertised - date for the proposal to apply. The consumers who don't want to be overcharged could know when to buy cheap TV equipment without the digital decoders.

It must be possible to buy TVs with satellite TV decoders, without having to agree to connect them to a phone line for a year.

*General Comments?*