

Timms: Switch on to switchover

Challenge for industry to make user friendly digital equipment and services

The TV industry was today challenged to seize the opportunity to make sure the consumer gets the most out of digital TV. E-commerce Minister, Stephen Timms, also published new research which shows that today's designs of digital TV equipment are hard to use.

The research, "Digital Television for All", was carried out by The Generics Group for the DTI, and studied the accessibility and usability of digital TV. The report, based on the current state of equipment and services, showed that:

- current designs make digital TV equipment more difficult to use than existing analogue equipment;
- poor design and "non-intuitive" systems are the greatest barriers to using digital TV; and
- 7.1% of the population (around 2 million people) would be unable to use one of today's set top boxes for simple everyday viewing, compared to only 2.7% with analogue TV.

Mr Timms said:

"The UK leads the world in take up of digital TV, and we must not squander the opportunity to make the most of this advantage. This report provides a wake-up call to the industry.

"Today's digital TV equipment is confusing and difficult to use, even for people who take to new technology quickly. As many people as possible should enjoy the full range of television services. Manufacturers must recognise the opportunities and commercial rewards from designing products which are

accessible to the widest range of consumers. We cannot expect people to fully embrace digital television unless it is simple and easy to install and use.

“There are no significant barriers to industry working together to solve design and ease of use issues and, in partnership with the Government, get the best from our digital future.”

The report provides a number of straightforward recommendations to address the challenges of accessibility that the industry can put in practice now. These include:

- making purchasing easier – including making remote controls visible at point of sale;
- Making instruction books and installation guides easier to understand;
- agreeing common design principles so that equipment is more intuitive to use

Government will examine the report’s findings and recommendations and work with the industry on how best to take forward action to address issues of accessibility and usability.

Notes for editors

1. The report was commissioned by the DTI to examine the “human aspects” of adopting digital TV. Its purpose is to address human issues so as to help encourage and enable the take-up of digital services by viewers with differing needs. Copies of this report can be found at www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk/dtv_for_all.html
2. The study was carried out by The Generics Group, incorporating additional further research by Ipsos, and John Clarkson and Simeon Keates of the Cambridge University School of Engineering.
3. Further information on the Government’s policies towards Digital Switchover, including the Digital Television Action Plan, can be found on the dedicated website www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk
4. The Generics Group (Generics) is a leading integrated technology consulting, development and investment organisation, with an international reputation for successfully commercialising emerging science and technology.

Generics invests in and develops technologies that underpin the future of the widest range of industries. Its key areas of expertise include: engineering, materials, telecommunications, life sciences, business innovation and electronics.

Generics' facilities include state-of-the-art laboratories and are located in Europe in Cambridge, Frankfurt, Zürich, Switzerland and Stockholm; and in Boston and Baltimore in the USA. Generics has over 200 employees, of which more than half are high-calibre technology professionals.

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