



Digital Television



Promoting access to
electronic communica-
tions for deaf people

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Why should I consider taking up digital TV?

The government currently plans to switch off analogue TV signals region by region between 2008 and 2012. They can only do this if most people are able to receive digital television by then. Your current television will still work after the changeover but only with the addition of a set top box (STB) to enable you to receive digital signals. Alternatively you can buy an integrated digital TV set sometimes known as an iDTV.

How can I receive digital TV on my analogue TV?

You can receive digital television in three main ways - called *platforms* - by satellite dish (Sky), by cable (NTL/Telewest) or through your TV aerial (Freeview). If you choose Freeview, you will need to buy a STB. There is a wide selection to choose from with prices ranging from about £30 to £100. For satellite and cable you usually pay a monthly subscription, and Sky or the cable service provides the STB and installation. There is also a service called Freesat, provided by Sky, for which a one-off fee of £150 is charged and you receive 120 channels. With Freeview you get a set number of TV and radio channels, and the option of subscribing to TopUpTV for more channels. You may need to upgrade your TV aerial to receive the Freeview digital signal. Currently Freeview is only available in about 73% of the UK. The Freeview website, www.freeview.co.uk, or the Digital UK website, www.digitaluk.co.uk, are good sources for

reliable information about digital TV. In some areas, Freeview may not be available until the analogue signal is switched off in that region but we have been assured that no-one will lose the main public service channels (BBC1, BBC2, ITV1, Channel 4, Five) during the transition period.

Will I get subtitles on digital television?

Yes, you will - but you do not access them in the same way as you do on analogue - 888 will no longer be used. Many STB remote control units have a "subtitle" button or "subtitles" can be selected from a menu. Many people find the digital font clearer than the analogue font. Always ask the retailer to show you how to switch on subtitles and make it clear that, if you are not happy with the way subtitles are displayed, you will take the box back and expect a product exchange or a refund.

What channels will be subtitled?

Whether you choose Freeview, cable or satellite you should be able to receive the same channels as you get on analogue (BBC1, BBC2, ITV1, C4 and Five) with the same subtitling. Depending on the *platform* and/or the subscription you have chosen you will also get extra channels that may or may not have subtitles. The amount of subtitling on the digital channels will increase as time goes on - BBC1, BBC2, BBC3 and BBC4 have a 100% target by 2008, the ITV and Channel 4 target is 90% in 2010 but others may have far less or none at all, depending on their audience share and revenue.

Ofcom, the communications regulator, has set the targets for subtitling, signing and audio description (collectively known as Access Services) for about 70 digital channels and will review these regularly. You can find more information on the Ofcom web site (www.ofcom.org.uk).

Will I be able to record digital subtitles?

You can no longer buy any video recorder that will record analogue subtitles – they are no longer being made because analogue is being phased out. In theory you can record digital subtitles using your old analogue video recorder, but the way in which you need to connect up the equipment is very complicated and the instructions are not easy to follow.

Gradually deaf friendly products such as the Sky+ box are coming on the market. This is what is known as a personal video recorder (PVR) – and will both display the subtitles and record them; however, it can only be used on Sky channels by those who subscribe to Sky. Sky+ records on to a hard disc in the machine rather than a tape, which means that if you want to keep the recording you have to transfer it to something else. But most people only record to watch later - and do not want to keep the recording. Sky+ has two digital tuners which means you can watch one digital programme while recording a different one. [If the PVR or video recorder only has one tuner you can't record one programme while watching another].

The situation has recently improved for those who have Freeview. There are now Freeview PVRs with twin tuners that give the same functionality as the Sky+ and enable you to record all digital channels with subtitles onto the PVR hard disc. New products are appearing all the time

so the situation should continue to improve. High Street retailers are not always knowledgeable about the needs of deaf people and may not always give the best advice – or even correct advice – about recording subtitles, although there are honourable exceptions. Suppliers of equipment for deaf people such as Connevans and RNID will stock suitable equipment and will give good advice. You can also use a DVD recorder rather than a PVR, and if you want to keep your recordings that is likely to be the best way of doing so. DVD quality is very good, but there are competing systems in use, and again care is required to make sure you buy the right equipment.

Cable has tended to lag behind as far as equipment suitable for deaf people is concerned, but is now starting to make products available

What is High Definition TV?

High Definition TV (HDTV) is a new way of transmitting the TV signal that gives much better quality pictures and sound. However, you need new equipment with a large screen to appreciate the difference – on a normal TV you will not notice much difference. Programmes are now being made in HD, but the service is only just being launched, and you will need a TV set which is labeled “HD ready” and has the pink digital tick to enable you to benefit from this service.

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