

The Digital Switchover

The digital switchover process is led by the Government working with mainstream broadcasters. A new organisation - called **Digital UK** has been established. It will manage the switchover process and offer guidance to the public.



In Cumbria - the switchover process is in two parts:

1. The Border Region (i.e North, west and east of county) switch over second half of 2008
2. The Granada Region (i.e South Cumbria) switch over second half of 2009

Current Freeview coverage

Largely speaking, Freeview coverage is focused on urban areas, thereby reaching the majority of the population. For those who live in low-population areas where Freeview is currently not available, our services can still be received on digital satellite, which reaches virtually the entire population. All BBC digital channels can be received without a subscription to Sky, although you will need a Sky box and satellite dish. Extra digital channels via satellite that are not free are encrypted so will require a Sky viewing card.

We cannot extend our Freeview coverage until analogue TV is turned-off (because of the lack of spare frequencies).

Once we get to digital switch-over, we can turn-up the power of the existing DTT transmitters, as there won't be analogue TV to interfere with. In theory, we could reach around 95% of the UK population this way. We would need to convert the remaining 1,100 transmitters to reach the remaining 5% of the population.

Questions and answers

Digital Availability

Q. When will we receive a digital signal?

A. We have to slot in the digital TV system around the existing analogue system. The broadcasters only have a certain amount of allocated spectrum for all TV services. So far, by clever planning, we've managed to extend the digital terrestrial system to around 75% of household coverage (which has been no mean feat), and by doing that, we've had to ensure we don't interfere with peoples' existing analogue TV services. We can't actually extend the digital terrestrial service until Government start to switch off the analogue system. Our limited digital signal coverage is not really linked to the number of masts we have in the county, but is to do with the broadcasting spectrum that we are allowed to use. There is a spectrum which is allocated to TV & radio broadcasters – like a bandwidth. At the moment there is no more spare bandwidth to use. Ultimately, when the analogue signal is switched off, it will make room for digital. The solution if your area doesn't receive Freeview would be to use satellite to receive BBC digital services as you won't need to pay a subscription with Sky for these. We are talking to the commercial channels (ITV, Channel 4 & Channel 5) to see when their services will also be available without subscription. This situation is evolving.

Q. I have been using Sky to receive digital TV, but they have switched off the free-to-air channels. I can no longer receive ITV, Channel 4 or Channel 5. I don't want to pay a subscription to Sky.

A. The Sky system will still give you access to all the BBC digital services, as well as many digital radio channels. The commercial analogue channels are encrypted but you will still be able to receive them via a conventional aerial on analogue TV.

Q. I can't get Channel 5. If I'm not receiving all the services, shouldn't I be entitled to a reduction in my licence fee?

A. Channel 5 is not a BBC service. None of the licence fee money you pay goes to Channel 5 so that's nothing to do with the BBC or the licence fee. The small print on the back of your licence does state reception not guaranteed. The licence simply gives you the right to operate a receiver.

Q. I had Sky but cancelled the subscription. I can still receive the BBC digital channels, ITV3, but not ITV2. If Sky switches my viewing card off, can I plug straight in from my dish to the TV or do I still need a digi box to receive the other channels.

A. Yes you will still need a digi box. Keep your current system to receive the channels you can already receive. ITV3 is unencrypted, but the other commercial channels are encrypted, which require the card. ITV2 is only available on Satellite as part of a subscription package with Sky. You can still receive the commercial channels via analogue.

Q. Reception around the Tebay area is rubbish. Will these reception blackspots eventually be replaced by crystal clear digital reception?

A. The digital radio network is being rolled out to be available along the traffic routes. Check the local postcode to get an idea of where the service is available. Currently about 85% of the population can receive it

Q. I have an integrated TV – can I get a top-up TV package without the need for an extra set-top box?

A. If your TV has a slot for a viewing card, yes. The Government mandated that all integrated TVs should have the provisions for a viewing card, providing the mechanism for any potential pay services.

Q. We live in postcode LA12 but have never been able to receive viewable terrestrial analogue TV in our area, but we do receive a very 'noisy' pictures from a self help transmitter at Nibthwaite during good weather conditions. Will the digital service area cover the same area as the analogue service area, or will it be increased to include areas such as ours? If not could it be possible that the self-help transmission could lose a useable signal.

A. We can't give any guarantee that LA12 will or will not be included in the digital footprint. However, the BBC has stated that we will replicate the existing analogue system. The solution may be to utilise Satellite to receive digital services. It's worth being aware that there has been a noticeable decline in the self-help transmitters as there are more channels available via satellite in those areas.

Q. Why should I pay my licence fee if I'm not getting Freeview - I'm not getting the full BBC service?

A. That's why we put all our services (ie those you get on Freeview) onto digital satellite as well, so that people who can't get Freeview can still get our services via a satellite dish.

Digital Information and services

Q. What's so good about digital?

A. It offers all licence fee payers many more BBC services as well as other providers, both on TV & radio. Freeview is a one off payment – no subscription. Set top boxes are very affordable at £40-£50. Many high street chains are now selling integrated TVs with built in digital tuners including DVD players thrown in.

Q. What is the Sky free-to-view service?

A. This is a new free service from Sky called FreeSat where you pay a one-off fee of about £150. You'll receive a set-top box, satellite dish & installation, and a viewing card. This will then provide your BBC digital channels including the missing commercial channels.

Aerials and Other Technical Issues

Q. The BBC are advertising that the only expense to receive Freeview is a set top box, but this is a nonsense, as assuming we even have a signal, we also may need to buy a new aerial.

A. The majority of people can still use their existing aerial. But there will be some people who will need a new aerial because in some parts of the UK we are having to use very different frequencies to the existing analogue frequencies. If you have a wide-band aerial this will probably receive analogue and digital. Talk to a local aerial installer about the technicalities of what you already have/need for your area.

Q. Why is the volume level so different between programmes and adverts? A. It's often to do with the local playout arrangements in terms of where you're getting your

TV services from. It may be down to the playout editor who may like to crank up the volume of the adverts/trailers etc to get your attention. The BBC are often powerless to do anything about this.

Q. When I switched to digital. I received all the channels including the History Channel. I originally had an aerial that was mounted on a long pole, but as it kept getting buffeted in the wind, I lowered the aerial. As a result, I was still able to get all the digital channels except the History Channel.

A. Initially try a rescan on your set top box. However, as the aerial is now lower, you may now be missing one end or the other of the frequency range. More height on the aerial is probably the answer in this case.

Q. If I want to record onto my VCR with my Freeview box, I've been told I may need to spend more money to achieve that such as a new aerial, a new 4-way amplifier, a new flush outlet. Is this true?

A. You will still be able to record programs as you watch them by making use of the analogue VCR player and the Freeview box. If you want to watch one channel whilst recording another you will need to get a new digital video recorder or a PVR (Personal video recorder). These have 2 digital receivers so you can watch one channel whilst recording another.

Q. When digital first arrived on the scene, it was suggested that digital signals aren't as problematical as analogue signals ... but this doesn't seem to be the case. Is digital more versatile and what sort of things interfere with the digital signal?

A. Digital can be affected by interference, but unlike analogue TV, when you get a decent signal with digital, you effectively get the 'whole' signal (ie no snowy pictures, which you sometimes get with a weak analogue signal). If customers do have interference, like blocking on-screen, they should seek the advice of a professional aerial installer.

Contact

Digital UK Information Line - 0845 6 50 50 50
The Digital UK Website - www.digitaluk.co.uk

For more about **Freeview** and the channels available call 08708 80 99 80 or visit www.freeview.co.uk