The Broadcast Digital Transition

Impact on Cable Television Households

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"The switch to digital-only television signals in early 2009 will usher in the most substantive changes to American TV in generations."

David Hatch, National Journal, 6/07

"Much of what consumers are learning about the looming shift to digital broadcasting is just plain wrong and could end up costing them money, according to a survey."

Consumers Union, 1/08

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What is the Broadcast Digital Transition?

- Congress mandated that full power over-the-air broadcast television stations convert to all-digital broadcasting by February 17, 2009 and return the analog spectrum they are currently using to the federal government.

- If your TV is hooked up to cable television or another subscription video service, your service will not be impacted.
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- If a consumer owns and "analog" TV set that is not connected to cable and functions with the help of "rabbit ears" or an antenna, they will not be able to watch broadcast TV channels on it as of February 17, 2009.

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Some Background

- Efforts to improve television signals began in the 1980s and were initially focused on high-definition technology. These early efforts were overtaken by the advent of digital technology.

- Congress, in The Telecom. Act of 1996, directed the Federal Communications Commission to give each “analog” broadcaster a new “digital” channel to which it was to migrate its broadcasts.

- The final version of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 set the broadcast digital transition deadline at February 17, 2009 and allocated up to $1.5 billion for a digital-to-analog converter box program.

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Why is There a Broadcast Digital Transition?

The Broadcast Digital Transition is being driven by the federal government's desire to reclaim valuable spectrum that the broadcasters have been using and auctioning it off for public service and commercial mobile uses.

Some spectrum will be used to enhance communications for emergency services providers like police, fire and emergency rescue,

Allow for new commercial wireless services including mobile broadband.

Spectrum auctions expected to raise $10 billion for the federal treasury.

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What Must Consumers Do?

Consumers with an analog television set who watch over-the-air broadcast television, via a roof-top or “rabbit ear” antenna must either:

Connect all television sets to cable or another video service,

Purchase a new television set with a digital tuner, *or*

Obtain a digital set-top tuner that will convert digital TV signals back to analog.

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What Happens After The Transition?

- All television sets connected to cable or other video services will continue to display broadcast television stations after the February 17, 2009 transition.
- Anyone with analog TV sets that are used to watch over-the-air broadcast television with “rabbit ears” or a roof-top antenna, then *please see the previous slide*!
  - Connect all television sets to cable or another video service,
  - Purchase a new television set with a digital tuner, *or*
  - Obtain a digital set-top tuner that will convert digital TV signals back to analog.

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How is the Federal Government Helping?

Congress directed the U.S. Department of Commerce to set up a $1.5 billion coupon program to subsidize the purchase of digital-to-analog converters.

The converters allow analog TVs not connected to cable or another video service to continue to receive over-the-air broadcast signals,

Coupon program commenced January 1, 2008,

Each household may request two coupons,

Coupons are valid for 90 days only and may be redeemed by retailers certified by the federal government.

1-800-DTV-2009, www.MYDTV2009.gov.

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The Need for Consumer Education

According to a survey from Consumer Reports National Research Center released on January 30, 2008:

Over one-third (36%) of Americans are unaware of the DTV transition,

Seven in 10 Americans have major misconceptions about the transition,

- **More than half believed erroneously that all TVs would need a digital converter box to function,**
- **31% of those unaffected by the transition planned to buy a new digital TV with a built-in digital turner,**

73% of Americans are unaware of the government coupon available to offset the cost of a converter box.

48% had the misconception that only digital TVs would work after 2009.

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How to Find Out if a TV is Analog or Digital

- Does your TV set have a "digital tuner" already built in? If it does, your TV set is configured to receive and display the new digital over-the-air broadcast TV signals that will be transmitted in February 2009.

- The best way to determine whether a TV set has a built-in digital tuner is to consult the owner's manual or look up information about the TV set on the manufacturer's website.

- Or, you can take an up-close look at the TV set to find out if it has an input connection labeled "digital input" or "ATSC" (it's the acronym for the new digital TV format).

- A TV set purchased before 1998 probably doesn't have a digital tuner. Almost every TV set made before 1998 was a traditional "analog" set that can't display digital TV signals.

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How to Find Out if a TV is Analog or Digital

- A big-screen, projection TV purchased between 1998 and 2004 may have a built-in digital tuner. A limited percentage of projection TV sets (and generally only those 42 inches in diameter or larger) included digital tuners before 2004.

- Starting in 2004, many TV sets featured digital tuners however some of the newer TV sets are purely display monitors that lack the internal circuitry needed to pick up digital broadcasts. These sets are usually advertised as "HD-ready" or "HDTV monitor" sets. That means they can display digital and high-definition signals, but require a digital converter or cable TV connection to get those signals.

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Television Receiver Rules

- All television receivers imported or shipped interstate after March 1, 2007 must have a digital tuner.

- Consumer electronics retailers can continue to sell analog-only television sets but, since May 25, 2007, are required to have clear and conspicuous labeling warning customers about the limitations of analog TVs.

- The FCC has pursued aggressive enforcement with field inspectors looking for violations.

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What Cable is Doing

- The cable industry has launched an extensive consumer education campaign, including English and Spanish language TV advertising valued at $200 million and an English and Spanish language informational website.

- The new ads can be viewed at www.ncta.com/DTVSpots.

- Web Content: www.getreadyfordigitaltv.com.

- Comcast has created a toolkit on the Broadcast Digital Transition designed specifically to help local government communicate with constituents on this important topic.

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What Local Government Can Do

- Make the Broadcast Digital Transition part of your constituent communications,

- Use the material in the Broadcast Digital Transition toolkit we are providing to place reminders on your website and in your newsletters, pass a resolution urging your constituents to educate themselves,

- Continue to work with Comcast, state associations, and others to educate your constituents about the Broadcast Digital Transition throughout the year.

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Thank

You!