



## The commencement of digital television in Newcastle

### lessons for the future:

What have we taken from the Newcastle exercise that will help in future implementations?

In the April 2002 edition of *ABA Update* we reported on the successful launch of digital television in Newcastle, with the commencement of services from Mount Sugarloaf. By the end of May all broadcasters, NBN, NRN, NEN, ABC and SBS had commenced operating digital services in the area from that site.

At the time two repeater sites, Merewether and Kotara, had not commenced, but were scheduled to do so by the end of 2002. The NBN, ABC and SBS digital services are now expected to commence at Merewether and Kotara in the first quarter of 2003. Arrangements relating to the NRN and NEN services are to be confirmed.

The experience of the Newcastle digital services start up has proven to be a critical one for the broadcasters and the managers of the interference process in the continued roll-out of digital services. It informed the ABA's thinking in predicting and dealing with any inconvenience caused to viewer's existing analog reception. The strategies developed particularly focused on markets where there are potentially large numbers of viewers affected.

In Newcastle for example, for the first time the more problematic channels 36, 37 and 38 were used by three of the broadcasters: NBN, ABC and SBS.<sup>1</sup> The next market where these three channels form 'a block' with wide audience impact will be Wollongong, where there is potential for interference in Sydney.

### Viewer information and education

Timely viewer information and education coupled with effective public relations strategies at a broader level proved crucial for the smooth introduction of digital services in Newcastle.

A key strategy for future public education campaigns is educating viewers in how to connect the VCR to the television through Audio Video (AV) cords by distributing brochures and on-air community service announcements well in advance of the start date.

However, advising viewers about the timing of the digital start-up shortly in advance allows for a more manageable approach to handling incoming calls to the call centre as it allows for greater concentration on genuine interference issues. A number of callers to the call centre were making general inquiries about digital television.

The ABA expects that better, and more targeted, information and publicity about digital television should reduce the number of this type of inquiry, freeing up the call centre resources for those viewers who need assistance.

For example, something as simple as the words 'test transmission' appearing in public notices and letters gave the impression that any inconvenience may have only been temporary. In fact, rather than being a 'test period', it was the start of an ongoing and permanent service. Some viewers seemed to be prepared to bear some temporary discomfort in viewing patterns and quality of reception, but this was not the case when they realised the digital transmissions were permanent. As a result, the term 'test' will be used sparingly in future.

### Call centre resources and information

Information available to call centre personnel is improving with each roll-out of digital television services. As with the information available on the ABA's web site, the information is becoming increasingly useful and comprehensive with each roll-out.

### Transmission times

Altering transmission times and gradually building the momentum associated with digital implementation in an area can stagger the impact of digital on the area or market. This increases the ability to provide assistance, deal with issues and manage call centre resourcing.

### Retailer and viewer assistance

Future roll-outs will also focus on increasing the information available to retailers. On the shop floor, providing more information about digital television and pre-tuning VCRs to non-problematic channels before they leave the store will assist in future implementations. Viewers, on the other hand, should pay attention to their antenna to ensure the existing wiring and antenna itself are functioning properly. It is recommended that viewers contact a qualified antenna installer.

The ABA has learned a great deal from the experiences gained from the commencement of digital services in Newcastle. This will assist with future implementations.

For more information about digital television, go to

- the ABA web site: [www.aba.gov.au](http://www.aba.gov.au) or
- the Digital Broadcasting Australia web site: [www.dba.org.au](http://www.dba.org.au)

<sup>1</sup> Channels 36, 37 and 38 are more likely to be the output channels for ancillary devices such as video cassette recorders and pay (subscriber) TV set top boxes.

