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Digital television – How far we’ve come

Who can receive digital services?

In three short years since digital television commenced in the metropolitan markets of Australia a significant proportion of the Australian population has access to digital television services. Estimates now put the number of people who have access to a full suite of digital services in their area at more than 75 per cent, whilst up to 95 per cent of the population has access to a least one digital service. And the roll-out of digital services continues!

Following the introduction of the first services at the main transmitter in the metropolitan markets, broadcasters have expended considerable effort in increasing the coverage of their networks in the rest of the metropolitan markets and to introducing digital to regional areas.

Translators and new services

The networks have all commenced translator services in Sydney (Manly/Mosman and Kings Cross), and introduced new services along the Central Coast of New South Wales (Bouddi, Gosford and Wyong). Translator services in Melbourne at Selby, Upwey, Ferntree Gully, South Yarra, Rosebud and Safety Beach have started this month (December 2003). Translator services in Adelaide and Perth are also scheduled to start this month and Warburton services are expected to start early in the new year.

Broadcasters have commenced services in Newcastle, the Illawarra, the Central Tablelands and Canberra. The ABC has commenced a wide-ranging roll out of services throughout the regional areas of Australia (table 1) and the commercial networks have also made considerable progress in the regional markets (table 2).

Table 1: ABC startups in regional areas

New South Wales	Coffs Harbour, Grafton/Kempsey, Griffith, Manning River, Richmond/Tweed, Riverina, Ulladulla
Victoria	Goulburn Valley, Horsham, Mildura, Murray Valley, Nhill, Upper Murray
Queensland	Darling Downs, Mackay, Rockhampton, Southern Downs, Townsville, Wide Bay
South Australia	Mt Burr, Riverland, Spencer Gulf

Table 2: Commercial startups in regional areas

Seven	Qld	Gympie and surrounding areas, Rockhampton, Mackay
Ten	NT	Darwin
Prime	NSW	Batemans Bay, Gosford, Wyong
Southern Cross	NSW	Wagga
Broadcasters	Qld	Gympie and surrounding areas, Rockhampton
WIN	NSW	Central Tablelands, Griffith
	Vic	Western Victoria, Goulburn Valley
	Qld	Rockhampton, Darling Downs

Table 3: Startups by SBS

SBS	Bendigo, Hobart, Latrobe Valley, Mackay, Murray Valley, Richmond/Tweed, Toowoomba, Wide Bay
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Interference to analog television

Before the first digital television services commenced, the ABA, Commercial Television Australia (CTVA) and the broadcasters spent a considerable amount of time developing a system of introduction to minimise the likelihood of interference to existing analog television services.

Speculation was rife before the expansion of digital services that there would be extensive interruption to existing analog services, particularly in areas where channels 36, 37 and 38 were rolled out.

Pleasingly, the introduction of such a vast number of new services throughout

the country has resulted in minimal impact on analog television reception.

The interference management scheme has a series of measures to assist viewers: a telephone hotline; brochures with information that is specific to the area, including how to overcome potential problems; an extensive on-air and press campaign; and a mail-out. All combined, these measures have been designed to ensure as many viewers as possible are aware of the introduction of digital television and how they can get the best answers to their questions. CTVA is largely responsible for the ongoing facilitation of the interference management scheme and

works closely with the ABA and broadcasters to ensure as smooth a transition to digital as possible.

Complementing the interference management scheme has been the coordinated introduction of digital services in many areas. This has afforded broadcasters and viewers alike the opportunity to assess the impact and deal with any issues that arise.

The net result of this coordinated approach has been a lower than expected number and range of difficulties experienced by the viewers.

What's next?

Regional services, in addition to the previously mentioned metropolitan repeater services, scheduled to commence by the end of 2003 are shown in table 4. In addition, services in the Gold Coast and Currumbin are expected to start up in the first quarter of 2004, after a substantial upgrade at Mt Tamborine. The new facility is also expected to rectify a number of the poor coverage issues throughout the region which were identified under the television blackspot program.

Table 4 shows the remaining areas where either the first or further digital services are expected to rollout during 2004.

Set-top box take-up

More than 170 000 Australian homes have now moved to digital television, according to Digital Broadcasting Australia, the industry body associated with the introduction of digital television.

For more information

Technical questions

For information about the technical aspects of digital television services, including implementation plans, go to the ABA's web site: www.aba.gov.au/digitaltv/index.htm.

What digital services are in your area?

For information about digital services in your area, go to the Digital Broadcasting Australia web site: www.dba.org.au.

Interference

Copies of brochures can be downloaded from www.aba.gov.au or www.dba.org.au. and from all broadcaster web sites.

Factors contributing to the upward trend include: a greater awareness of the benefits of digital television; a greater, and more affordable, range of set-top boxes available in the market-place (more than 20 models with prices starting at \$299 for SD-STBs and \$799 for HD-STBs); and the growing popularity of the improved viewing provided by widescreen televisions.

Digital Broadcasting Australia reports that, since 2001, sales of wide-screen televisions have passed 270 000, and are increasing by 20 000 per month. As we enter the peak retail period of the year, expectations are that sales of set-top boxes and wide-screen television sets will continue to soar.



Table 4: Regional services scheduled to commence in December 2003

Prime	NSW	Bega, Bowral, Wagga Wagga, Wollongong North
	ACT	Tuggeranong
Southern Cross Broadcasters:	NSW	Coffs Harbour
SBS:	NSW	Broken Hill, Griffith
	Vic	Mildura,
	ACT	Tuggeranong, Weston Creek
WIN	NSW	Goulburn, Griffith
	Vic	Mildura
	SA	Mt Gambier, Riverland
	Qld	Townsville
Seven	Qld	Townsville

Table 5: New services scheduled to start in 2004

All broadcasters	Qld	Cairns East & North
ABC	NSW	Armidale, Bathurst, Bega, Bombala, Bowral/Mittagong, Cooma, Eden Goulburn, Lithgow, Murwillumbah, Portland/Wallerawang, Tamworth, Upper Namoi
	Qld	Babinda, Blackwater, Boyne Island, Capella, Emerald, Gladstone East & West, Gordonvale, Townsville Nth
	WA	Albany Town, Broome, Bunbury, Carnarvon, Esperance, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Manjimup, Narrogin, Port Hedland, Southern & Central Agricultural, Wagin
	Tas	Hobart NE, Launceston, Tarooma
SBS	NSW	Batemans Bay, Central Western Slopes, Grafton/Kempsey, Manning River, Southern Downs, SW Slopes, Tamworth, Upper Namoi, Ulladulla
	Vic	Goulburn Valley, Upper Murray
	Qld	Darling Downs, Toowoomba, Townsville
Prime	NSW	Bouddi, Dubbo, Goulburn, Kotara, Merewether
	Vic	Ballarat, Bendigo, Goulburn Valley, Latrobe Valley, Mildura
Southern Cross Broadcasters	NSW	Balranald, Batemans Bay, Bathurst, Bowral, Dubbo, Dungog, Eden, Gosford, Goulburn, Kotara, Kyogle, Lithgow, Merewether, Murwillumbah, Portland/Wallerawang, Richmond/Tweed, Swansea, Upper Hunter, Upper Murray, Wollongong North
	Vic	Bendigo, Latrobe Valley, Warrnambool
	Qld	Darling Downs, Gladstone East & West, Hervey Bay, Mackay, Townsville, Townsville Nth, Wide Bay, Yeppoon
	Tas	Bicheno, Burnie, Cygnet, Dover, East Devonport, Hobart NE, Geeveston, Launceston, Orford, Penguin, Ulverstone, Wynyard
WIN	NSW	Batemans Bay, Bathurst, Coffs Harbour, Dubbo, Dungog, Grafton/Kempsey, Kyogle, Murwillumbah, Richmond Tweed, Upper Murray
	Vic	Bendigo, Warrnambool
	Qld	Gladstone East & West, Northern Queensland, Sunshine Coast region
	Tas	NE Tasmania