

International broadcast & media briefs

A monthly summary of web-based news

March 2004

Asia

China Eases Foreign Investment Restrictions

China's State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) is now allowing international companies to set up joint venture outfits with local production companies. Joint ventures formed by domestic and foreign companies will be able to produce a variety of television programs for local broadcast outlets – except for news programs. International companies will also reportedly be able to work with local outfits to develop new pay-TV channels. Source: www.worldscreen.com/

Europe

Sublicensing scheme for non members of EBU: 2004 Olympic Games and European Football Championship

Non-Members of the EBU may avail themselves of favourable conditions for access to the 2004 European Football Championship, which is being held in Portugal from 12 June to 4 July, and the 2004 Olympic Games, which are taking place in Athens from 13 to 29 August, under a special sublicensing scheme.

More: www.ebu.ch

Murdoch wants quick Italy expansion, backs Blair

News Corp Chairman Rupert Murdoch aims to get Italians to sign up to his new Sky Italia service at twice the rate Britons picked up on his BSkyB platform, he was quoted as saying on Thursday. In an interview with *Corriere della Sera*, Murdoch said Sky Italia had 2.5 million clients — 2.2 million of whom already subscribed to Stream and Telepiu, which merged to form Sky Italia last year. More than 100,000 new people are signing up per month, he told the paper.

More: www.reuters.com

French discuss communications bill amendments

Suggested amendments to the French electronic communications bill, currently before the National Assembly's social affairs commission, include extending the current must carry rules to satellite broadcasters. Such a move would be a gift to Canal Satellite Numerique, which is currently deprived of commercial channel TF1, though it does now have access to the public channels France 2 and France 3. TF1 is the owner of the rival TPS platform.

Source: *Broadband TV News* 12 February 2004

Italy gets a fourth digital multiplex.

More: <http://www.dtg.org.uk/news/world>

Italian broadcasters form DTT association

Italian broadcasters RAI, Mediaset, La7, and the Ugo Bordoni Foundation have set up DGTVi, an association of digital terrestrial TV operators. The new association will seek to ease the transition

from analogue to digital and closely cooperate with the relevant Italian and European authorities, operating in a non-discriminatory mode towards all operators and end users.

More: www.dtg.org.uk/news/world

UK

Hutton report criticises BBC news reporting standards

Lord Hutton found that key aspects of a BBC journalist's claims about the Government's 'Iraq dossier' were unfounded and that editorial procedures for checking and verifying his information were inadequate. The report stands as a salutary reminder to broadcasters to make sure that all news sources and information are thoroughly scrutinised before going to air.

More: news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/uk/2003/david_kelly_inquiry

Ofcom publishes Statement of Principles for Broadcasting Act licences and Telecommunications regulation

This document sets out the background to Ofcom's funding in 2004/05 and consults licensees, service providers and other stakeholders on the Statement of Charging Principles required under Sections 38 and 347 of the Communications Act 2003. It provides an outline description of how Ofcom will be funded, and the cash requirements implicit in the 2004/05 Ofcom Plan.

More: www.ofcom.org.uk/consultations

Ofcom initiates Consultation on spectrum licensing for 'Audio distribution systems' at Special Events

This consultation seeks views on the opening of some programme-making spectrum to wider usage in response to demands from operators to be able to deliver audio distribution services at Sporting Events etc. Hitherto, the only opportunity to do this has been via the licensing provisions of the Broadcasting Acts and using spectrum set aside for sound broadcasting purposes.

More: <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/>

Regulatory worries 'holding back broadband'

A report from the Commons' Trade and Industry Select Committee on the broadband market said telecoms companies and internet service providers, excluding BT, lacked confidence in the regulatory regime.

More: <http://news.independent.co.uk/business/news/>

Top-Up TV lodges complaint against BBC

Top-Up TV founders David Chance and Ian West have lodged a complaint with telecoms regulator Ofcom claiming that the BBC is trying to "hamper" its plans to launch an 11-channel pay TV package due to go live on DTT in a month. The BBC, a key-player in the Freeview operation, is notably unhappy about Top-Up TV, believing that it will set back digital takeup by adding to consumer confusion.

Source: <http://www.digitalspy.co.uk>

It's the new thing in TV taping and Sky has hit 'fast forward'

Back in the dark ages, when the humble video recorder was the latest must-have in television technology, two platforms, Beta-max and VHS, slugged it out for pole position. Betamax lost (largely because the big Hollywood studios backed VHS) and was consigned to the can. Fast forward 20 years and broadcasters are drawing the lines for the next battle: to corner the market in personal video recorders (PVR)s. It is still a niche market. There are currently only around 200,000 PVRs in the UK. Most of these are Sky's model, Sky Plus, the one PVR that is backed by a broadcaster. By 2007, business information group Datamonitor estimates that up to a quarter of all homes in the UK will have a PVR. More: <http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/media>

BBC in disability drive

The BBC is to implement a stringent set of targets to increase the number of disabled people in its programs. The move comes as the corporation launches an £800,000 fund to encourage talent and ideas as part of a new disability initiative. More: www.broadcastnow.co.uk

Top-Up TV signs set-top box deal

Top-up TV, the new pay-TV network set to be offered to almost a million Freeview viewers, has secured a deal with a major electrical manufacturer to create a series of smartcard set-top boxes. Thomson, which made many of the old ITV Digital boxes, is believed to have already begun developing the boxes in anticipation of the launch of the 10-channel service in March. More: <http://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/frames>

Ofcom appoints Consumer Panel members

Ofcom today announced the appointment of members to the Consumer Panel. The eight appointments follow the announcement on 9 December 2003 of the appointment of Colette Bowe as Consumer Panel Chairman. The Consumer Panel is an independent body set up under the Communications Act 2003 to advise Ofcom on consumer interests in the broadcasting and telecommunications sectors. More: www.ofcom.org.uk

Ofcom announces consultation on Ofcom guidance on the definition of control of media companies

Consultation closes: 22 April 2004
Comments on this guidance are welcomed from the broadcasting and newspaper industries, consumer groups and any other interested parties. Any comments will be considered by the Ofcom Board before final guidance is issued. More: www.ofcom.org.uk

Skybet helps Sky cheer interactive sales

BSkyB announced that revenue from its interactive division jumped 62% in the six months to December, boosted by increases from both Sky Active and SkyBet. The broadcaster reported total interactive revenue of £147m for its fiscal first half, with revenue from its interactive portal Sky Active up 17% year-over-year at £56m. More: <http://www.netimperative.com/cmn>

DTI commissions logo for digital switchover

The Department of Trade and Industry has commissioned top design agency Lambie Nairn to come up with a logo to be used as part of the UK Government's plan to boost awareness of the proposed 2010 analogue switch off. Source: [Broadband TV News](http://www.broadbandtvnews.com), 12 February 2004

SRH set to grow Eire interests

Scottish Radio Holdings has been given the green light by the Competition Authority to acquire Dublin music station FM104 for nearly £18m, providing it meets certain conditions. More: www.broadcastnow.co.uk

US

Indecency Bill Passes First Hurdle

The House Telecom Subcommittee passed a bill to raise broadcast indecency penalties ten-fold. If passed, the fine would be \$275,000 per violation with a cap of \$3 million. Source: <http://www.rwonline.com/dailynews/>

FCC Proposes Part 15 Changes to Ease Broadband Deployment

Can the U.S. power grid be used to expand deployment of broadband services? And would that deployment cause interference to hams and public safety agencies? Those questions, which have been bubbling for months, now are officially up for discussion, and the industry is getting a look at how a BPL system might work. The FCC has proposed changes to certain technical rules that it says will foster broadband deployment using the capabilities of the nation's power grid. More: <http://www.rwonline.com/dailynews/one.php?id=4620>

FCC updates conditions on obscenity/indecency on FCC website

More: <http://www.fcc.gov/parents>

Powell Urges Industry to Adopt "Net Freedom" Principles

Federal Communications Commission Chairman Michael K. Powell has urged high-speed Internet providers to adopt voluntary "Net Freedom" principles and has urged consumers to challenge their own providers to ensure their expectations are being met. More: www.fcc.gov

Hostile \$50bn bid for Disney sets media shares alight

Share prices of media companies jumped yesterday as world stock markets digested the \$50bn hostile takeover bid for the Walt Disney Company by Comcast Communications, the cable television and high speed internet business. More: <http://news.independent.co.uk/business/news/>

Net Profit Up 51 Percent at News Corp.

NEW YORK, February 11: News Corp.'s second quarter net profit was up 51 percent to \$361 million on revenues of \$5.6 billion, mostly due to growth across the company's cable channels. More: <http://www.worldscreen.com>

