

Digital TV in Brazil: a path to health democracy

RNP participates in the consortium that will plan services, applications and contents

The first image to appear in the Brazilian TV was that of five-year-old Sônia Maria Dorce, who, dressed as an Indian, said: "The Brazilian TV is now on air." It happened in 1950, in the launching of TV Tupi, which radically changed the course of the history of the media in the country. More than half a century later, Brazil lives a similar moment: the arrival of digital television, which promises to bring interactivity and to transform the relationship of the spectator with the television.

The aim of the government is to create a reference model of the Brazilian System of Digital Television (Sistema Brasileiro de Televisão Digital - SBTVD); for this reason, in January 2004, it formed SBTVD Development Committee, made up of the ministries of Communications (MC), Science and Technology (MCT), Culture, Development, Industry and Foreign Trade, Education, Finance, Planning, Foreign Relations, the Presidential Chief of Staff and the Secretary of Government Communication and Strategic Management of the Presidency of the Republic.

After an MC/MCT/Finep and Funtel public notice with the theme Services, Applications and Contents of the Brazilian System of Digital Television, the best projects were selected. In order to make the task more effective, each project was in charge of a theme area aimed at the development of software and models of specific services and contents.

All in all, there are 70 education and research institutions, universities and companies participating in this initiative, which involves more than a thousand researchers and a budget of R\$ 30 million. SBTVD Development Committee will be responsible for the general coordination of all the projects, with the technical and financial support of Finep and of the Research and Development Center on Telecommunications (Centro de Pesquisa e Desenvolvimento em Telecomunicações - CPqD).

For the field of health, it gained a consortium made up of the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB), the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE), the Edumed Institute, the Center of Advanced Studies and Systems of Recife (Centro de Estudos e Sistemas Avançados do Recife - Cesar), the Rede Nacional de Ensino e Pesquisa (National Education and Research Network - RNP), The Education and Research Institute of Sírio-Libanês Hospital, and the TV Cultura of Santa Catarina, and which is coordinated by the Institute of Development and Education and the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC).

The challenge of this consortium will be to create a solution with great penetration in all social levels to bring access to health services as close as possible to the population, increasing the availability of those services, as well as to use an apparatus that employs a known technology so as to

stimulate its use. The digital interactive TV will also have to help health professionals, making available services that offer adequate technical-scientific content in order to keep them up-to-date.

— In our opinion, Digital TV will permit the implementation of a great deal of innovating services in the field of health, which will increase the degree of social inclusion, promote the democratization of information, improve health services, mechanisms of social control and remote assistance, as well as foster popular and professional health education among others – says Aldo Von Wangenheim, general coordinator of the consortium, who is optimistic about the possibility of the digital TV reaching the potential that the Internet still hasn't been able to reach.

One of the central arguments for the existence of the consortium is this question brought up by Wangenheim. According to the project, although the creation of new network-based technologies aimed at the transmission of and access to health knowledge permits the implantation of sophisticated services, systems based on centralized database and those distributed in the field of health, all this is restricted to less than 10% of the Brazilian population who has access to the Internet.

The arrival of digital TV, entering Brazilian homes by means of electric energy and television, which already reach the majority of the population, seems to be able to revert this situation and to take several of the services now available in the Internet to all this public.

The challenge will be to guarantee the dialogue with the spectator

For Cleidson Cavalcante, project manager of the consortium, the effort made by the education and research centers to produce an SBTVD reference model in the field of health will be a great opportunity to spread scientific and technological knowledge in the nation, with implications going beyond the digital television initial goals.

According to Cavalcante, the proposal is to conquer the spectator so that he can enjoy the health information that will be made available by the new TV.

— It is no use suddenly putting health information on the screen that is different from the way the Brazilian is used to watching it on TV. In the last 54 years in Brazil, a whole language was constructed by means of a unidirectional flow of information. The great challenge of digital TV will go beyond ensuring new technologies; it will be necessary to ensure a dialogue with the spectator – says Cavalcante.

All the network infrastructure for communication and data exchange in the project of all the institutions involved in the consortium will be in charge of RNP, which will also provide a distributed network of video servers.