

Dedicated to a smooth digital migration

The formation of the Digital Dzonga demonstrates a noteworthy commitment by the South African government to an inclusive and transparent decision making process for the country's migration from an analogue broadcasting platform to a digital one.

According to Lara Kantor, chairperson of the Digital Dzonga, this can be seen in the composition of the council, which includes senior representatives from all parts of the digital terrestrial transmission (DTT) value chain, including government, regulators, broadcasters, signal distributors, manufacturers and consumer representatives.

The Digital Dzonga is an advisory council established by the Department of Communications (DoC), dedicated to making the migration from an analogue broadcasting platform to a digital one as smooth and easy as possible, in line with Government's Broadcasting Digital Migration Policy. The Digital Dzonga is a non-executive body appointed by the Minister of Communications from nominations received from government, the regulator, industry, consumer bodies and the general public. It interacts with ICASA, role-players and the DoC throughout the process on all matters relating to digital migration.

The council may consist of up to 15 members; it currently includes a chairperson, 12 members representing various stakeholders, and two mandatory members representing the government and the regulator, ICASA.

Kantor says the members must have suitable qualifications, expertise and experience in the fields of broadcasting, electronic engineering, economics, consumer issues, technology, frequency band planning and any other relevant expertise or qualification.

"The Digital Dzonga is involved in every aspect of the Digital Migration, equipping stakeholders with the skills and information required for the transition," she says.

"It monitors the efforts of government, broadcasters and equipment manufacturers, educates South Africans about how digital TV works and protects consumers' rights by ensuring they are informed about the requirements of the



The Digital Dzonga's Lara Kantor.

migration process."

The Digital Dzonga is funded by government through the DoC. Its responsibilities include:

- Providing a forum for discussion by digital migration stakeholders on all matters related to the migration;
- Giving strategic guidance to the Minister and the Department regarding the migration to digital television;
- Making recommendations regarding the implementation of the Broadcasting Digital Migration Policy;
- Monitoring the migration to digital broadcasting
- Setting up working groups to assist Advisory Council members in the effective exercise and performance of their duties, including issues of technology and standards; broadcast infrastructure; help and support; communications and monitoring and research.
- Assisting the DoC to develop a plan to assist low income and special needs groups to switch to digital television.
- Addressing conformance issues including the branding and marketing of a digital television

logo for digital television equipment, to help the public identify compliant equipment;

- Communicating with the public on broadcasting digital migration;
- Consulting with representatives of consumer groups, to ensure that the views of these groups are taken into account
- Providing oversight of the Digital Dzonga project office.

Kantor says the process of migrating to digital television has been exciting, challenging and rewarding. "In the first year of our existence we have focused on better understanding the nature of DTT, closely studying how these processes have been managed abroad and the particular challenges of rolling out DTT in the context of a developing country.

"It is important to understand levels of readiness if our migration is to be successful."

This approach was validated at the Digital Switchover Strategies event held in London in February. In the category "Best Digital Switchover Plan," South Africa's Digital Migration Plan achieved 2nd place, which is remarkable considering that SA was the only developing country shortlisted among countries that have already completed their switchover to digital television.

"In the year ahead we aim to build on the solid foundation we have established as we prepare for the launch to market during 2010 by increasing the delivery capacity of the Digital Dzonga (in terms of regulation and support) and implementing a broad based social marketing communications strategy to ensure consumers have the information and support they require to switch over in the planned timeframes," says Kantor.

She maintains that television opens up the future through watching educational, entertainment, sport, information and cultural programmes.

"Digital TV will bring so much to South Africans through more choice of channels and content. It's exciting that South Africa will be counted among the most advanced countries in the world – going digital in a way that will meet our country's own unique challenges," concludes Kantor.