



Digital set-top boxes 'on sale in 2010'

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22 July 2009

The set-top boxes that many South Africans will need to watch television as the country completes its move from analogue to digital broadcasting are likely to go on sale in the first half of 2010.

Currently, South African television and radio signals are broadcast on an analogue platform, which requires a large amount of bandwidth to transmit picture and sound information, limiting the amount of signals that can get through at any time.

Digital signals require much less bandwidth, allowing more channels to be broadcast at the same time, with a brighter, sharper picture and better sound.

Switch-over date

South Africa began broadcasting a digital terrestrial signal alongside its analogue signal in November 2008.

This "dual illumination" window period is due to end with a final switch-off of the analogue signal on 1 November 2011.

Local TV viewers have until then to acquire either a digitally compliant television set or the set-top box necessary to make their old TVs digitally compliant.

Digital Dzonga Council

The Department of Communications has now launched the Digital Dzonga Council to manage the process of migrating to digital broadcasting.

Council members include officials from the department, consumer groups, various broadcasters such as the South African Broadcasting Corporation, eTV and M-Net, manufacturers, national signal distributor Sentech, and the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa.

"Once the services and technology have been tested adequately, and all other related processes are in place, [set-top boxes] will be made available in retail stores," the department's Mashilo Boloka said at the launch of the council in Johannesburg this week.

"The actual date will be confirmed and communicated to the public as soon as all relevant logistical, legal, technical and policy issues have been addressed. This is anticipated to be during the first half of 2010."

Boloka said a trial was currently being conducted with a small sample of viewers, adding that there were a number of issues that still needed to be resolved before the service could be made available to the public.

"This includes testing of the service to ensure that everything works as it should before consumers spend money on purchasing [set-top boxes]," Boloka said.

Subsidies for poorer households

In August 2008, then Communications Minister Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri announced that the government would introduce a scheme for ownership support to help households that could not afford to buy set-top boxes.

As part of the scheme, the government plans to subsidise 70%, or around R400, of the expected R700 cost of a set-top box.

Matsepe-Casaburri said the advantages of digital broadcasting far outweighed the estimated cost of such a subsidy. These include access to more channels, including focused educational channels, and direct access to new services, such as e-government services.

Global migration

The migration from analogue to digital broadcasting is taking place worldwide, in line with timelines contained in an International Telecommunications Union (ITU) treaty.

The ITU decided a while back that protection for analogue signals would cease in 2015, giving member states timelines per region to comply with the decision.

Source: [BuaNews](#)