



Policy Position: Accessibility of digital television equipment

Issue

The switch off of analog television by 2013 requires all households to begin getting ready for digital television now. However, for the 20% of the population who have disabilities, there is no information readily available about accessible digital television equipment.

Background

The digital switch off has already begun. Mildura, Victoria was the first to lose its analog television signal on 30 June 2010. Metropolitan areas, such as Sydney and Melbourne, and remote areas including Alice Springs and Kalgoorlie, will be the last to switch off analog television on 31 December 2013. More information about switch off dates is available here: http://www.digitalpg.com.au/digitaltv_switchoff.asp

The analog switch off will mean that all households will need either a set top box, digital TV recorder or an integrated digital television to continue viewing free-to-air television.

A set-top box (STB) connects to an outer signal and decodes it to form content that can be viewed on television.

Digital TV recorders allow programs to be recorded and are available for use with an aerial, satellite, cable or telephone based digital TV signal.

Integrated digital televisions will replace analog televisions, for those who no longer wish to use old TV sets. The digital televisions include a built-in digital tuner and do not require further equipment to pick up a digital signal.

Features such as large remote control keys and set-top boxes that provide audio and visual feedback to pressing buttons make digital TV equipment more accessible and therefore more useful for people with disabilities. However, it is currently optional for equipment providers to offer accessible digital television features, leaving uncertainty for the one in five Australians who do have accessibility requirements.

At the moment, there seems to be only a limited number of products that have some combination of these features.

What needs to be done

The Digital Switchover Taskforce makes information available about digital television equipment on its website. However, there is no information about accessible equipment and this must be included on their website.



Accessibility features of set-top boxes

- The STB is able to decode formats in H.264/MPEG-4 AVC. This Standard for video compression provides good video quality and the flexibility to allow the Standard to be applied to a multitude of applications through various networks, including low and high resolution video and multimedia telephony systems.
- The STB provides an audible and visual feedback to pressing buttons on the remote control.
- The STB with clear on-screen menus to navigate to more advanced features without the consumer losing track of where they are. For instance, a one-step way to get back to the home screen if you go through multiple screens or menu tabs.
- On-screen information is displayed in a large, readable font with appropriate contrast.
- Basic functions (including power, channel selection, volume control and menu selection) are available on the receiver front panel.
- Software upgrades do not cause loss of basic existing user settings. Basic functions include favourites and subtitle selection.
- The receiver provides a mechanism to support speech output of text displayed on screen ('talking-menus').
- The STB automatically includes new services as broadcasters activate them.
- Automatic re-scanning capabilities
- The STB indicates the status of subtitles and caption settings on the receiver screen.

Accessibility features of remote controls

- The Remote Control provides a button to select/deselect subtitles, captions and audio description.
- Remote Control Keys are large and well separated, by at least 50 per cent of button width.
- Different Remote Control Key functions are distinguished by distinct shapes or texture.
- Power and standby buttons are distinguished with a different colour.
- There is a raised marking on the figure 5 key of the numeric Remote Control pad, to assist visually-impaired viewers.
- Remote Control Keys are logically grouped by function.
- The Remote Control provides a power and standby switch.
- The Remote Control is easy to grip and buttons are easy to push.
- The Remote Control provides numbers and symbols in large print.
- The battery compartment of the remote control is easy to open and can be closed securely, to assist those with a physical disability affecting their hands.

Information about accessible digital television equipment needs to become readily available for people with disabilities immediately. All information material to consumers should be available in plain English and at minimum, in the main alternative languages (Italian, Greek, Cantonese, Arabic, Mandarin and Vietnamese). Information should also include clear instructions about the main, accessible functions of the set-top box and remote control.



What we're doing

ACCAN is currently a member of the Digital Switchover Taskforce's Consumer Expert Group. The Committee consists of members with expertise in consumer issues within the communications sector. The Group meets monthly to provide the Government with consumer concerns as well as solutions relating to the digital television switchover. The Group aims to inform the Taskforce of the best methods of providing digital television information to the wider community.

What you can do

ACCAN wants to ensure that all aspects of the digital switchover meet the needs of people with disabilities. If you have any comments about ACCAN's requirements for digital television or our position on the need for digital television accessibility, please contact us at accessibility@accan.org.au.

Useful websites

Digital Switchover website - <http://www.digitalready.gov.au/>

Digital Switchover Household assistance scheme – This scheme provides subsidies and is only available to pensioners http://www.digitalready.gov.au/household_assistance.aspx

Consumer Expert Group media release - http://www.minister.dbcde.gov.au/media/media_releases/2009/032

Media Access Australia's website - http://www.mediaaccess.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=66&Itemid=50

UK Digital Switchover website – The 'Buying Digital Equipment' guide on this website is particularly useful as it highlights the requirements for when switching to digital television. <http://help.digitaluk.co.uk/display/4/kb/article.aspx?aid=5977>