

Don't let the digital sharks get their teeth into your wallet!

Advice about digital TV for people in the following areas:

Adwick-le-Street, Askern, Balby, Bawtry, Bessacarr, Campsall, Crowle, Doncaster, Dunscroft, Dunsville, Epworth, Gainsborough, Harworth, Hatfield, Haxey, Highfields, Rossington, Scawthorpe, Scunthorpe, Selby, Sprotborough, Stainforth, Thorne, Tickhill, , Westwoodside, and Woodlands.

Britain is changing over to digital TV and, whilst most traders are honest, there are a lot of unscrupulous people who have spotted a way of making easy money. We have received the following quick guide from PARAS on how to avoid getting ripped off. PARAS is an informal group of professional aerial riggers with detailed knowledge about the switch-over to digital television and how it is affecting the public. As professionals they are appalled at the way some unprincipled traders are using the switch to digital TV as a means of misleading or even cheating the public, especially the more vulnerable members of society. If you know of anyone who might be vulnerable please show them this article if appropriate.

Exposing a few common myths about digital TV

The most common myth says that you need a special aerial for digital. In fact the majority of people will get digital TV perfectly on their existing aerial. You should always try your digital reception with a cheap 'set top box' (£25 from a supermarket) before you think about buying a new aerial.

Another myth says that if you can't get Channel Five now it means that you won't be able to get digital TV unless you buy an expensive new aerial. This is completely untrue. Channel Five reception and digital reception are entirely different things.

You may have been misled into thinking that, if you live in a really poor TV reception area, paying for Sky is the only solution when the analogue signal is switched off. Absolutely wrong! Read the section on satellite options below.

It is also not true that the only way to record digital TV is by using a Sky+ satellite recorder. There are lots of ways to record digital TV. See the "Recording your Programmes" section. Of course, it is a fact that to use a Sky+ recorder you have to pay a subscription to Sky.

Some people have been told that the only way to get TV when analogue is switched off is to subscribe to Cable TV. This is also nonsense.

Your television set

You definitely do not need to buy a new TV set because of the analogue to digital change over. Any TV set less than twenty-five years old needs nothing more than a simple digital TV receiver – a 'set top box' – which you can buy from electrical shops or supermarkets for about £25. If, however, you decide to buy a new TV set you should be certain to get a digital one and have it demonstrated. Be aware that a lot of non-digital sets are being sold off cheaply – don't buy one. If you are deaf ask the shop to demonstrate the subtitles for the hard of hearing. Are they easy to switch on?

Your aerial

If you have been getting good reception from your existing aerial it is likely that it will be fine for digital. You should buy a digital 'set top box' and try it on your existing aerial before you consider buying a new one. If you can get all the channels you want and the picture is stable there's no need to buy a new aerial. Even if a few unimportant digital channels are missing they will probably come on after analogue is switched off because the digital signals will be much stronger then, up to ten times in some cases.

Most people in the areas listed at the top of the page use the Emley Moor transmitter. Emley Moor viewers get *Look North* from Leeds with Harry Gration. If you are an Emley Moor viewer then your existing aerial will definitely be OK for digital, as long as you get good analogue reception. So if you can see Harry you don't need a new aerial for digital! It's that simple!

Some people in the areas listed use the Belmont transmitter. They get *Look North* from Hull with Peter Levy. In the period leading up to analogue switch-off your old Belmont aerial will not receive all the digital channels. But after analogue ends in 2011 all your familiar channels plus many more will come in perfectly on the aerial you have now. (This is because the frequencies will be re-arranged.) So, Belmont viewers who are in no hurry to 'go digital' and who want to keep costs to a minimum should forget all about it until 2011, then buy a 'set top box' or a digital TV set during the last few months before analogue switch off, and use it with the old aerial. After analogue finishes all your familiar channels will be available from the old aerial. You might or might not need a new aerial if you want the full range of digital channels. But in essence, if you can see Peter you won't need to get a new aerial for digital after 2011 unless you want to! It's that simple!

Beware of the shark!

If you do replace your aerial beware of the aerial installer who points to a nearby roof to show you a large aerial with a lot of funny shaped prongs, or shows you such an aerial in a catalogue and says, "That's what you need. That's a digital aerial!" If most of the other aerials on the street are small ones then it's very unlikely that you will need a bigger one. The installer could be trying to sell you an expensive aerial that you don't need. There have already been countless examples of people being sold massive aerials for digital TV (costing perhaps £350) when a normal one is all that's needed.

At the moment digital is transmitted on low power, so until analogue is switched off in 2011 digital reception might be tricky in some areas. This is no reason for you to be rushed into spending money on a large aerial now. When analogue ends, the digital power will be greatly increased. So it could be better to wait until then before buying an expensive aerial. If you buy one now you might not need it after 2011. Only buy a new aerial for digital if you've tried reception on your existing aerial and found it lacking, and if you don't mind spending money on something you might not need after 2011. In any case, there's a limit to what you should spend on an aerial, because there's always the alternative of using satellite, as explained below.

The satellite option

There are very few places in the areas listed above where reception from an aerial is so poor that you will have serious problems with digital reception. If you are sure you

are in such a bad reception area you should not spend large sums on a massive aerial. The answer is to use satellite. The broadcasters have made sure that you can get all your normal TV channels from a satellite dish, *without subscribing to Sky*. Of course if you *do* want Sky all you need do is take up a Sky subscription in the normal way.

But if you don't want to pay any subscriptions you can use a Freesat service. There are two Freesat services. One is 'Freesat from Sky' and the other is the Freesat scheme operated by ITV and the BBC. If you have no intention of ever subscribing to Sky then the BBC/ITV Freesat scheme is the one for you. Ask a TV dealer for a 'BBC and ITV Freesat' set-top box, which will cost about £55. You will also have to pay for a dish installation. You don't need to buy a new TV set of course.

Recording your programmes

When analogue broadcasting is switched off your video recorder won't be able to receive digital programmes by itself. However, if you still want to use it you could buy a second set-top box and use it to supply programmes to the video recorder. So you would have two set-top boxes, one to feed the video recorder and one to feed the (analogue) TV set.

In any case, as long as your video is in working order you will always be able to play your precious old tapes back through any TV set even after analogue broadcasts are switched off.

If your video recorder is getting a bit old though, it might be as well to buy a new digital recorder. This will need to be the type that works from either an aerial or from satellite, depending on which you have. The modern digital recorders are very easy to use, and if you have always found the old video a bit confusing you'll get a nice surprise if you get a new digital one. If your reception is from an aerial you can use any of the non-satellite digital TV recorders on the market, such as the Freeview+ one. If you have Sky you can use a Sky+ box to record programmes, and if you have BBC/ITV Freesat you can use a Freesat recorder (available from Dec 2008).

Choosing an installer

The best bet is to get a good recommendation from someone who has had an aerial or satellite dish fitted recently.

The biggest adverts in the yellow pages are often franchise operations that take a fee for passing your details to local installers — who might be good or bad.