

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

***Advice about digital TV for people in Bedfordshire, and parts of Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Northamptonshire who receive their tv signals from Sandy Heath or its associated relay stations.***

Britain is changing over to digital TV and, while most traders are honest, there are a lot of unscrupulous people who have spotted a way of making easy money. We have produced the following quick guide to help you 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 is 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, but a Freesat+ recorder does the same job if you don't want Sky's pay channels.

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 sure 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 hearing impaired 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 less important 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.

## When does this happen?

Digital switchover starts in the Sandy Heath area on **Wednesday 30 March 2011**, and concludes on **Wednesday 13 April 2011**.

On 30 March analogue BBC2 will be switched off, and on 13 April the other analogue channels (including Channel Five) will be switched off and replaced by high power digital versions. Those who rely on the low power local relays for their reception will receive digital tv for the first time.

Digital viewers will need to retune their receivers on both the above dates.

Sandy Heath viewers will also need to retune their receivers later in the year on the following dates: 31 August, 14 September and 23 November 2011.

## What channels will you receive?

The situation in the Sandy Heath area is that in order to receive the full selection of digital tv channels from Freeview you may need to have your tv aerial replaced with a wideband model. However, if you are already receiving the full range of digital channels you should not need a new aerial after switchover. Older aerials installed originally for the four main analogue channels will certainly pick up all the PSB (public service broadcasting) channels including all the BBC channels, ITV1, Channel 4 and Channel 5, but a new wideband aerial may be needed to receive commercial channels such as ITV2, ITV3 and Dave, for example.

Sandy Heath has low power, local relays at Dallington Park (Northampton), Kimpton and Luton. These will transmit the PSB channels but not the commercial channels.

If you are not sure, step outside and take a look up at your tv aerial. If your aerial has its rods which are horizontal then you should receive the full terrestrial service which currently consists of around 80 tv and radio channels. If your aerials rods are vertical then you should receive around half the services, though this will include all the BBC tv (and radio) stations, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel five.

## The satellite option

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, but of course you don't need to buy a new TV set

### **Recording your programmes**

When analogue broadcasting is switched off your old VHS 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.

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

### **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.

**More information on our web site**  
**Professional Aerial Riggers Against The Sharks**  
**[www.paras.org.uk](http://www.paras.org.uk)**