

## How to Prepare for the Digital TV Transition

Are you ready for the television revolution/? The coming transition from analog to digital television (DTV) represents the most significant advancement of TV technology since color TV was introduced in the 1960s. But while nearly every new technology we use today has “gone digital,” if you are like many Americans, you may be completely unaware of the upcoming DTV transition, which will be completed in February of 2009.

The benefits of digital television are clear: sharper pictures, free from “ghosting” or fuzziness at the fringes of a signal area; CD-quality sound; more programming choices through additional digital side channels, such as dedicated weather or traffic channels; and the amazing, you-are-there picture quality of high-definition broadcasting.

More than 90 percent of television stations in the U.S. are already broadcasting in digital, but few consumers are aware of the February 17, 2009, transition deadline, when TV stations must cease analog operations and henceforth transmit only digital signals. According to a recent survey by the National Association of Broadcasters, 62 percent of Americans have not seen, read or heard anything about the DTV transition – and among the few who have, none could say when the transition would occur.

Who needs to get ready? The DTV transition doesn’t directly affect everyone. If you have a digital tuner in your television, or subscribe to a cable, satellite or telephone company TV service provider, the transition will be seamless. But those who are impacted are impacted dramatically. You need to take action if you are one of the 19.6 million households or businesses that rely exclusively on free, over-the-air broadcasts made available through a rooftop antenna or “rabbit ears.”

The impact reaches beyond households and into the hospitality industry, in North Carolina and elsewhere. If you have a “seasonal” cable connection (i.e., you have the cable disconnected during the winter months and feed guest-room TVs with over-the-air TV signals via a rooftop antenna), or if your only TV service is via an antenna, you need to start thinking about how the transition will affect your operations. Overall, the DTV transition will directly impact more than 69 million television sets.

Fortunately, navigating the transition is easy. You have only to follow one of three simple steps to make sure your household or your business continues to receive free, over-the-air television:

- 1) Purchase a DTV converter box that will convert the digital signal into analog for an existing analog television set. The DTV converter box, sometimes referred to as a set-top box, is an electronic device that makes the new digital signal viewable on an older analog television set. Converter boxes will be available for purchase in early 2008 and are expected to cost between \$50 and \$70 each. To help cover the cost of the converter box, the federal government will offer two converter box coupons, valued at \$40 each, to eligible households beginning early next year. Each coupon may be used toward the purchase of a single converter box. You will still need an antenna, in addition to the converter box, to receive a digital signal on an analog television set, but existing antennas will work the same as before. For more information about the converter box coupon program, visit [www.ntia.doc.gov](http://www.ntia.doc.gov).

2) Purchase a new television set with a built-in digital tuner. Another option you may choose is to upgrade to a new television set with a built-in tuner. As with older sets, you will need an antenna that provides quality reception of over-the-air analog television signals in order to pick up free digital broadcast programming from local stations. Before deciding to purchase a new digital TV, make sure your current TV doesn't have a built-in digital tuner. Most sets sold in the last few years that are larger than 27 inches will likely have a digital tuner.

3) Subscribe to cable, satellite or a telephone company television service provider. All of these services will allow you to receive digital television signals on analog television sets, as long as all the sets are connected to the service. No additional equipment is required for consumers who decide to go this route.

While there is still time to decide how to navigate the digital television transition, it's a good idea to start thinking now about which option will work best. Converter-box coupons will be available only to households, not to businesses, but the one-time cost of purchasing converters may outweigh the ongoing cost of cable or satellite TV service. If you choose to purchase a new television set with a digital tuner, take time to learn about available options and features and shop around for the best deal. Leaning toward a subscription to a cable, satellite or telephone company television service? Spend some time looking into which of these services best suits your needs and fits into your monthly budget (and be aware that the satellite-TV providers don't always carry local TV stations as part of their programming lineups).

The digital television transition is coming, and it means a better quality television experience for those who take one of the three easy steps above to upgrade. But consumers who don't take those easy steps risk losing their free television programming. Common sense suggests preparing now for DTV.

Additional information about the DTV transition is available at [www.dtv.gov](http://www.dtv.gov) and [www.DTVanswers.com](http://www.DTVanswers.com). Information about which over-the-air antenna is best for your location is available at [www.antennaweb.org](http://www.antennaweb.org).