

NEWS RELEASE

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Switchover: “It is important that we get it right”

About 200 key players in the digital TV industry last week heard the chairman of the DCMS committee accuse the Government of being too hesitant on switchover.

In his keynote address to the Digital TV Group annual summit, the Rt Hon Sir Gerald Kaufman MP pressed the Government to take action.

“Digital switchover is a big issue,” he said, “but I believe that the Government is being more timorous than it needs to be.”

The need for confidence at all levels was highlighted by the DTG’s Chairman, Prof. David Youlton, who reflected that society “has historically reacted to change with uncertainty and fear”. He went on to say: “There is a tendency to play safe and avoid difficult decisions. These options are now closed!”

In his speech, Prof. Youlton asked whether the digital TV industry “will have the collective wisdom and vision to overcome our individual self-interests and work together to implement a coherent digital switchover plan?”

He stressed that the DTG’s role was absolutely central. “For almost a decade the DTG has provided the coherence and leadership that are vital,” he said. “In writing the D-book¹, acting as a technical clearing house, setting up the Test Centre², supporting the Action Plan³, the Digital Stakeholders’ Group and, now, SwitchCo, the DTG has proved that by working together we can predict and resolve all the issues that we have been presented with efficiently and without conflict.

“Having single-mindedly focused on switchover for so long, the DTG has developed a knowledge base and collective memory that will be crucial elements in under-pinning the substantial body of work that still lies ahead in the unfolding switchover process.

“It is important that we get it right,” he concluded.

In an entertaining address, Sir Gerald emphasised his support for switchover, citing his Committee’s report last year which had called for ‘an unambiguous’ date when analogue could be switched off. He hailed digital take-up as a “historic development” which had “transformed not only the present of television but also the future of television”. He added that the Government needed to ensure that digital switchover was affordable and practical for low income households.

In his speech, Marcus Coleman, the Director-General of the DTG, laid out a range of activities in support of the Group’s vision for switchover. He went on to say: “Switchover is, of course, a major milestone on the digital TV roadmap but will not be our only focus in 2005. We are tackling a range of issues to improve products and services and are looking at the introduction of exciting new services.”

¹ The DTG’s D-book sets out the detailed technical standards for digital terrestrial television in the UK.

² A wholly owned subsidiary of the Digital TV Group, DTG Testing Ltd carries out interoperability testing on digital television receivers. Its services include receiver testing, receiver test suites, engineering channel management and application testing, among others.

³ The Action Plan outlines the various tasks that need to be completed to enable the Government to make decisions about the timescale and strategy for switchover.

He talked about the significance of PVR technology and the Group's involvement with TV Anytime⁴, which raised important questions about how viewers should find content they want, how to attract viewers to that content and how to measure what they are consuming.

The other major interest for the DTG in 2005, he said, will be High Definition TV. He looked forward to the DTG securing its role as the "focal point for HD development in Europe".

He pointed out that spectrum for HD on terrestrial was a key issue. "We will be working on a set of requirements," he said, "to help frequency planners and broadcasters resolve the associated issues."

The second half of the Summit saw a lively panel debate chaired by Digital News columnist Kate Bulkley, who was joined by Andy Townend, of SwitchCo, ITV Director of Emerging Technologies Simon Fell, Lovelacemedia journalist Graham Lovelace, O2 Vice-President of Research and Development Mike Short, and the iconoclast Dermot Nolan. The theme was Digital Switchover and Beyond.

In his opening remarks, Prof. Youlton had expressed his concern that the "wealth of opportunity" offered by the digital revolution might be compromised by a "poverty of vision". By the end of the day, the audience had experienced a "wealth of vision".

ABOUT THE DIGITAL TV GROUP

The Digital TV Group (DTG) is the industry association for Digital Television in the UK: an independent body facilitating the rapid roll-out of digital television and convergence across the communications industry. Its membership stretches from camera to consumer; from the BBC, BSkyB and OFCOM to Sony, Philips and Panasonic, Dixons and Comet through to the Consumers' Association, RNIB and RNID. Its agenda covers all aspects of future technology, public affairs and the setting, promotion and interpretation of standards and good practice. For further information, please see www.dtg.org.uk.

Over **100 member organisations** value the business benefits that arise from first-hand participation in DTG activities.

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⁴ In basic terms, TVAnytime allows the viewer to watch audio-visual (and other media) programmes when they want, making it "Google for the television". The DTG's contribution to this worldwide effort is the TVAnytime Test Bed project: the world's first test bed based on an open market free-to-air platform.