

Are YOU ready for free digital TV?

Welcome back to a new series of monthly features about the world of British TV here on the northern Costa Blanca. My aim is to keep you up to date with the latest news, products and developments in the field of digital TV. Each month we will cover different items of interest to the local British-speaking expat community in a plain English, easy-to-read format. Last month we covered different types of flat-screen technologies. Thanks to so many of you who wrote in offering your thoughts, compliments and questions – keep up the good work!

This month we take a look at TDT, or Terrestrial Digital Television on the Costa Blanca, and what it means for you.

The current analogue TV signals are being switched off all over Europe, with the permanent move to newer digital technologies. The last signals are due (at the time of writing) to disappear on or by 3rd April 2010. We are expecting a huge local rush in demand for TDT boxes and aerials in the weeks after this date – much better to be prepared beforehand!

If you currently watch Spanish TV and are not sure if you have analogue or digital, ask yourself these questions:

- 1) If I stand outside my property and look at the TV aerial on the roof (not the dish), do the 'wings' open horizontally, or vertically? Horizontal wings imply an aerial set up for analogue reception. Vertical wings usually mean digital reception. Don't let any old fool talk you into spending unnecessary money on a brand new aerial if you don't need one. Many newer aerials can be mounted sideways to allow the reception of either type of signal! Rule of thumb: if your TV aerial is less than 5-7 years old, looks in reasonable condition and has 'wings' or side-panels, it may well not need replacing – simply adjusting. This alone can save you up to 200 euros!
- 2) Is my aerial lead plugged directly into the back of my TV set (or VCR) or does it go through a box with a 'DVB' symbol on the front? DVB or Digital Video Broadcasting is the new format, and means you have nothing to worry about. If your aerial plugs directly into your set, is your TV one of the newer (4-5 years or less) flat-screens? Most 'HD Ready' TVs come with an integrated digital tuner, although early models often had the option of a TDT tuner, OR an internal hard disk recorder, OR a DVD player. Again, look for the DVB symbol on the front of the TV set. You might also have a button on your remote control marked A/D or similar, which switches the TV between its built in analogue and digital tuners. Old CRT TVs (the deeper sets with glass screens) which are directly connected to an aerial (without a box) are unlikely to be able to pick up digital signals without adding such a receiver.
- 3) Does my picture go slightly snowy, or blocky in very bad weather? Snowy pictures are soon to be a thing of the past, relegated to the days of analogue. A blocky picture means you have a digital (if poor quality) signal.
- 4) When I change channels, do I get an information bar containing not just the channel number, but also the name of the current programme, as well as what's on next? These info bars are typically digital. A channel number in the corner of the screen, with no further info, is likely to be analogue.

So, you've established that you don't yet have digital Spanish TV (forget Sky, it's been digital since 1998). What can you do to get ready?

- 1) Convert your existing aerial, or buy a new high-gain digital TV aerial from a trusted local firm. If in doubt, ask them to install it for you, too. Expect to pay around 200 euros for a good installation by a qualified technician, including the cost of the antenna itself, the mounting pole, brackets and sundries.
- 2) Look for the DVB symbol on your TV, to see if you have a digital tuner built in. If so, your new aerial can plug directly into the back of the TV. If NOT, you will need to purchase a suitable receiver - again, best is from a reputable source. There are various types of receiver available, at different prices: standard TDT, HD TDT (yes, future broadcasts will move towards HD), recordable TDT which often has a USB slot for connecting flash drive sticks to record onto, and even PAY TDT, which features a card-slot for optional pay-TV channels. If in doubt, consult us, or another trusted installer...

So, after all this technical talk, what are the benefits of digital over analogue?

First and most obviously, there are many more channels available on digital than on analogue – expect around 35 TV channels in high quality, and maybe 15 radio channels, again, in crackle-free digital format.

Next, the information provided about each programme and the upcoming schedule is provided digitally on an EPG (electronic programmed guide) at the press of a button. No more hunting for outdated paper guides.

Third, many programmes dubbed or subtitled into Spanish from other languages (eg Hollywood movies and much, much more) can often be switched BACK to their native language. For many, this has been reason enough over the last few years to ditch analogue. Free movies and TV series, *in English?* Surely not!

To ensure continued viewing of your local Spanish channels in high quality, the time to act is NOW!

If this has whetted your appetite, please contact us for free advice and info, or with your questions. We exist to help you make the right choice for YOU, and your family!

Next month: Getting the most out of Sky Digital in Spain. What is all this 'red button' stuff? How can I record a whole series, even if I don't have Sky Plus? How can I set multiple recordings on multiple channels while I'm away, and have my Sky box change channels automatically for me, with no added equipment costs? If you can't wait till then, feel free to contact us to find out more...

Bill Pole runs ConeXionS Digital Satellite Solutions, based in Javea. Established in 1988, we are one of the original satellite TV firms on the Costa Blanca, surviving through success, customer loyalty and recommendation. Phone us on (+34) 660 638 975 or visit www.conexions-javea.com for the latest news and special offers.