

***Sky Plus & Sky HD - The BEST gadgets of the 'naughties'?***



*Welcome back to RTN's series of monthly features about the world of British TV here on the northern Costa Blanca where we update you with the latest news, products and developments in a plain English, easy-to-read format. Last month we covered some of the lesser-known features of the standard Sky box, such as multi-room installations, hi-fi audio connections, and remote control codes.*

*This month we continue our look at the newer Sky Plus and Sky HD digiboxes, and the pros and cons of each!*

For those not familiar with Sky Plus in Spain, you're in for a treat... Sky Plus is TV when YOU want it. It's Sky Digital, but recordable and rewind-able with no need for a separate VCR or DVD recorder (in principle). It allows YOU to control when you want to watch TV based on your schedule, NOT the TV guide's...

Sky Plus works in exactly the same easy way as standard Sky digital, but there are a couple of extra buttons on the remote control. These allow users to pause live TV, rewind, fast forward past the ads, and record direct to the in-built hard disk.

Remember when I said that the lines between computers and TV were blurring? This integrated hard disk technology is just the start...

So how does it work in practise? Well, programmes are broadcast live on Sky Digital as usual, and are automatically recorded onto a small 'temporary' segment of the internal hard drive (you can store around an hour of live TV by default). When you press PAUSE, you can resume viewing anytime within the next hour. The clever thing with this 'time-shift' concept is that when the hour is up, the stored content is not instantly deleted – it continues recording, replacing each minute at the beginning of the recording with a minute at the end. So now when you return from the loo, the phone, or making a cup of tea, you can simply press PLAY to continue from where you left off!

So let's say you paused live TV for 20 minutes, and then want to resume watching from where you left off. You are now actually watching what was broadcast live 20 minutes previously, and so here is where another great idea comes in – when you reach an ad break, you can *fast forward* straight through it, bringing you slightly closer to *actual* live TV. A strange concept to get used to if you're unfamiliar with it, I know. Let's take this scenario one stage further, and let's say you're sitting down to watch a two hour movie. You paused

Sky Plus for 20 minutes at the start of the movie to make a cuppa, and then received a phone-call before sitting down for the evening. The movie started 20 minutes ago. On your screen, you still have the opening credits. You press PLAY, and the opening credits continue rolling. Fifteen minutes later, there's an ad break. It last about 4 minutes. You press FAST FORWARD and skip it, resuming your movie within seconds rather than 4 minutes. Over the course of the movie there are a total of 5 ad breaks, of around 4 minutes each. By skipping over all the ad breaks, you've caught up to live TV again, and are just in time to change channel for the news!

On that note, there are two ways to install and use Sky Plus: You can have just one cable from the dish, or you can have two (which we recommend, where possible). The Sky Plus box has TWO digital tuners built in, so you can connect two dish cables if you have them.

With a single cable feed to your Sky Plus box, you can do everything described above – however, there can be problems getting the recording features to work properly on just one cable – consult your favourite local satellite installer for help if required.

Having two cables allows you to make full use of the system, and watch one Sky channel whilst recording another – you can even record two channels simultaneously! However, each tuner requires its own connection to the dish. Your friendly installer should be able to upgrade you from a single-core to a good quality twin-core satellite cable as and when you choose to make use of this extra feature. Of course, a twin cable also needs a twin LNB. Luckily ALL of our dish installations over the previous years have had a twin LNB fitted as standard, so there is no additional cost of an LNB upgrade too.

So we now know how to pause and resume live TV on Sky Plus. The red RECORD (R) button is for recording a show semi-permanently to the Sky Plus internal hard disk. I say semi-permanently because recordings can be accessed *and erased* through the easy-to-navigate Sky Planner, which we discussed back in our May edition of this article. The difference is that this type of recording will not be erased or replaced without your express permission.

If you miss the first 20 minutes of our fictional movie, you can always rewind back to the start, provided you haven't changed channels since you picked up the TV remote. You might decide that you want to keep the movie for a while to watch with friends – press RECORD to add it to the list of previously stored recordings in your planner. From there you can always *series-link* as discussed back in May, or you can even auto-record all the upcoming episodes of your favourite shows at the push of a button.

Doing away with the need for a separate DVD recorder is great – but what if you want to watch a DVD? There is no facility for that on Sky Plus. Sure, you can hook up a separate DVD player, but then you're adding boxes again. Also, what happens if and when the hard disk on the Sky Plus becomes full? Record Eastenders and Corrie every night, and it soon will be... The answer: either delete the previously viewed episodes (Sky Plus also conveniently tells you which episodes you've watched - very handy!) or burn 'keepers' permanently to a separate DVD recorder for future viewing.

Many gadget and tech magazine have rated Sky Plus as the best consumer tech invention of the naughties, and many fans agree. Along with the iPod changing the way we store portable music, Facebook and Twitter changing the way we interact with friends (and strangers!) online, or Tomtom changing our driving patterns, Sky Plus has changed the face

of TV forever. I actually wrote a university paper on this very change from schedule-dependent TV to 'any-time TV', way back in 1995, along with GPS and recordable DVDs. I must admit though, I thought it would have come sooner. Look out for electronic wallets in the future, another tech prediction of mine from 1995!

So, on to Sky HD – the flagship of Sky's efforts. What is it? Well, it's Sky Plus as described above, but with the capability (and back-panel connections) to reproduce stunning HD images and multi-channel sound. It's what your HD-ready TV has been crying out for – provided your bank manager doesn't complain too much!

HD boxes cost more to buy, and will connect to your TV via HDMI cable (the new digital TV cable) or SCART (for older TVs - but why have an HD box on a non-HD telly?).

They function in EXACTLY the same way as Sky Plus above, but if you pay Sky an additional £10 a month - over and above any other package subscription charge you may be paying already - they will turn on the HD channels associated with your chosen package. Be warned though, that if you pay for sports but not movies, you won't be able to get Sky Movies HD, and vice-versa! The HD channels you receive depend *entirely* on your main package choice. To get the FULL line-up, you're looking at around £56 a month, including the HD channels...

Not ALL HD channels are subscription-based – you can access BBC HD, for example, with no card at all, as long as you have the HD box and HDMI cable, and an HD-ready TV – and a big dish, of course! We also supply and install FreeSat systems which also have recording and HD facilities, depending on model.

We hope you've been enjoying the World Cup or Wimbledon tennis through BBC News, *even on a small 1m dish*, as mentioned a while ago (bad luck, England!). To re-cap, go to BBC News on Sky channel 503, wait for the blue banner to clear, then press RED. From the menu which appears, key in 3001 SELECT to access the BBC Sports menu. Happy viewing!

Exclusive: ConeXionS is offering a cash trade-in when upgrading your old Sky box to Sky Plus or Sky HD. Take advantage of this special offer now, and enjoy the benefits described above in your own home! Contact us using the details below to request YOUR cash-back deal 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 yourself and your family!

Next month: I have received lots of emails, comments and questions over the last few months from interested readers, and so this time, I leave it up to you! What would you like to see covered here? Got a question that nobody can give you a straight answer on? Something useful to shout about? Please share it with us, and hopefully many more can benefit. Until then, stay happy and safe!

Bill Pole owns and runs the successful and newly re-launched satellite business, 'ConeXionS Digital Satellite Solutions' (based in Javea). Originally established in 1988, we are one of the longest-running and best satellite TV firms on the Costa Blanca, surviving through success, customer loyalty and recommendation. Find out why our customers rate us #1 for installations, service, after-sales and pricing! Phone us today on (+34) 660 638 975 or visit

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