



5 May 2006

Press release

EMBARGOED UNTIL 22:00, 4 May 2006

COUNTDOWN TO UK'S SWITCH TO DIGITAL TV STARTS TODAY

Seven-year, £200-million campaign unveiled, featuring 'Digit AI' played by Matt Lucas

The UK's switch to digital TV begins today with the launch of a seven-year, £200-million public information campaign.

Digital UK, the independent body created by the broadcasting industry, is leading the switch to digital TV, the biggest event in broadcasting since the introduction of colour. Switchover will affect virtually every home in the UK. Although 70 per cent of homes already have digital on at least one TV, latest figures from regulator Ofcom show that only one in four adults lives in a home where all TV sets have been converted.

The public information campaign aims to raise awareness that switchover is happening, encourage consumers to look for the digital 'tick' logo when buying new equipment, and explain that Digital UK is on hand to provide independent advice and support.

The programme begins tonight (5 May) with simultaneous TV slots booked across terrestrial and digital TV channels – including the BBC, the first time this has ever happened. On commercial channels, Digit AI, a friendly robot played by Matt Lucas, will interrupt iconic Sony and Guinness advertisements to tell viewers about switchover and the Digital UK helpline and website.

National and regional TV and radio communications will continue throughout May, supported by national and regional press advertising from 8 May. Regional activity, including BBC television trails, is focused on the first three regions to switch – Border, West Country and Wales.

Every household in the UK will be contacted directly about switchover. In the first phase of the campaign, more than three million public information leaflets are to be delivered to homes in Border, West Country and Wales, the first regions to switch. Information will be available in retail stores and citizens advice bureaux nationally.

Technical work has already started on the first transmitter in the Border region. Over the next seven years, all 1,154 transmitters across the 14 ITV regions will be upgraded with digital antennas.

Activity is underway to educate retailers and manufacturers, encouraging them to carry the digital 'tick' logo, which shows customers what products and services will work through switchover. Digital UK is also engaging with charities, community groups, landlords, housing associations and commercial and government properties to ensure they understand what they need to do to switch to digital.

The roll-out of digital terrestrial television across the country will make the service universally available. Currently, one in four households cannot receive a digital terrestrial signal – a situation that can only be resolved by switching off analogue.

Ford Ennals, Chief Executive of Digital UK, said:

“The switch to digital is one of the biggest events in broadcasting history and certainly the biggest single change to television since the arrival of colour 30 years ago. It will bring more choice to more people and make digital terrestrial television universal.”

“Ensuring everyone is aware of switchover, when it is happening in their region and what they need to do to switch is a major challenge, which is why we have launched this public information campaign. Our aim is to make sure no one is left behind.”

Broadcasting Minister James Purnell, said:

"The Government has made it clear that digital switchover will happen between 2008 and 2012, bringing the benefits of affordable digital television to the whole country.

"Making sure people are aware of digital switchover, and how to prepare for it, will be fundamental to the success of this ambitious and unprecedented plan.

"So I welcome this campaign launch, which marks the first part of Digital UK's important work to ensure everyone knows what's happening, when it's happening and what they need to do to be ready for switchover."

- Ends -

For further information:

Joe Smithies, Digital UK press office, 020 7462 5442 / 07989 222 696

Matt Cooper, Rosie Strachan or Joanna Kwiatkowska, Fishburn Hedges, 020 7839 4321

Notes to editors

1. The Digital UK public information campaign is being funded by the BBC via the licence fee.
2. Ofcom estimates that the switch to digital will cost UK households an average of £132 to get the equipment they need. (Source: Scientific Generics Nov 2005)
3. Creative agency for the campaign: AMV BBDO
 - TV director: Mark Denton at Therapy
 - Digit AI animation and stills: Moving House
4. Media planning and buying: MediaCom
5. Direct Marketing: Rapier
6. Web design: Grand Union
7. Digital 'tick' and Digital UK identity: Lambie-Nairn
8. Retail materials: 999 Design
9. Digital 'tick' programme management: Momenta

About switchover

Switchover will make it fairer, as more people will be able to access more digital services than they can today. Currently, one in four UK households cannot get the full range of digital TV services available free through an aerial and the Government wants everyone to have a choice of affordable digital TV options. Only switchover can change this.

Switchover starts in each of the television regions throughout the UK in the following years:

2008: Border

2009: West Country; Wales; Granada

2010: Grampian, West; Scottish

2011: Central; Yorkshire; Anglia

2012: Meridian; Carlton/LWT; Tyne Tees; Ulster

About Digital UK

Digital UK was launched in September 2005 as an independent, not-for-profit organisation to co-ordinate the UK's switch to digital television. Its main responsibilities are to:

- Co-ordinate the technical roll-out of digital terrestrial television across the UK, region by region, to a timetable agreed by Government.
- Communicate with the public about digital switchover, ensuring everyone knows what is happening, what they need to do, and when.
- Liaise with TV equipment manufacturers, retailers, digital platform operators and consumer groups to ensure understanding of and support for the switchover programme

Digital UK was set up at the Government's request, in recognition that switchover would require cross-industry co-ordination. The company is headed by Ford Ennals (Chief Executive) and Barry Cox (Chairman) and its board members are:

- The public service broadcasters: the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, five, S4C and Teletext;
- The digital-terrestrial multiplex operators: National Grid Wireless and SDN;
- Two Representative Director positions representing 'The Supply Chain Group' (manufacturers, retailers and aerial installers).

It is wholly funded by its board members the public service broadcasters (BBC, ITV, Channel 4, five, S4C, Teletext), and the digital terrestrial multiplex operators (Crown Castle and SDN).

For consumer information about Digital UK and the switchover to digital TV, visit www.digitaluk.co.uk or call Digital UK's information line – 0845 6 50 50 50

get set for digital 