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# DBSF Caribbean 2012

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Digital Broadcasting Switchover: benefits,  
considerations and best practices

Event Report

## Inaugural Digital Broadcasting Switchover Caribbean Forum St John's: Antigua & Barbuda 13 – 14 August 2012

### Introduction

The Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA), the Caribbean Broadcasting Union (CBU) and the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO), organised a conference on Digital Broadcasting Switchover in Antigua and Barbuda on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> August 2012 aimed at assisting decision makers in the Caribbean region to manage the impending Digital Switchover (DSO) effectively and efficiently.

The Conference was opened by Mr Lasantha De Alwis, Corporate Secretary of the CTO, with greetings then from the CBA, CBU and the Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU).

### Opening Keynote Addresses

The opening speech was made by Hon. Dr Edmond A. Mansoor, Antigua's Minister of State at the Ministry of Information, Broadcasting, Telecommunications, Science and Technology, in the Office of the Prime Minister. He set a very positive and enthusiastic note for the conference based on a vision that spanned broadcasting, telecommunications and the Internet. The Hon Minister announced that Antigua and Barbuda would implement a 4G/LTE network by the later part of 2012. For digital switchover he favoured a Caribbean solution with country-specific elements, as DSO will not affect cable-based services which are the predominant services in the Caribbean with Antigua & Barbuda having 92% cable penetration.

Mr Pham Hai, Head of Broadcasting, International Telecommunication Union (ITU), provided a global perspective of digital television switchover, noting the countries which had already completed the process and those who are still to complete, and describing the different approaches which had developed in different continents. He explained that switchover presented a one-off opportunity to optimise the use of the 'golden spectrum' in the UHF band – the frequencies which had the best balance between propagation characteristics and capacity. He noted the importance the African and Middle Eastern countries had attached, within the ITU Region 1 deliberations, to being able to use the 700 MHz band, as well as the 800 MHz band, for international mobile telecommunications after 2015. He underlined the need for regional collaboration both on spectrum management and for the creation of economies of scale on the receiver side of the industry.

Mr Fred Mattocks, General Manager, Media Operations and Technology, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, gave an overview of the digital television switchover process, set within the communications eco-system evolving in the digital world. He examined the different perspectives of governments, broadcasters and citizens and showed how they overlapped. He warned that for broadcasters there were significant costs and that, while analogue terrestrial switch-off was not absolutely essential in all cases, the costs of a prolonged period of simulcasting (or dual operation) would normally lead to it sooner or later. Mr Mattocks then provided a detailed case study comparing the United States and Canadian switchovers, observing that the US process had been policy-driven while the Canadian was industry-led and timed to benefit from the US experience. He also pointed to the speed at which cable, satellite and broadband distribution were displacing terrestrial reception, enabling Canada to reduce terrestrial coverage as part of its switchover strategy.

The opening session was followed by separate workshops dealing with the critical components of digital switchover.

### **Workshop I: Digital transmission**

Mr Nigel Cassimire, CTU's Telecommunications Specialist, explained the role and work of the CTU, summarised the progress towards switchover made across the Caribbean nations to date, and emphasised the advantages of achieving regional coordination in the selection of technical standards.

Mr Giovanni M. King, Chief Operating Officer, Bureau of Telecommunications and Post, St Maarten, explained why St Maarten had already selected the DVB standard. The decision reflected choices already made by its neighbour, the French-speaking St Martin, and historic connections to Europe.

Chairman of the session Mr Alan Downie facilitated a discussion on the choice between Europe's DVB, the USA's ATSC and Brazil's version of the Japanese ISDB systems, based on both technical and non-technical factors. For the benefit of non-technical members of the conference, Mr Downie also gave a short presentation explaining the basics of digital coding, compression and error correction.

### **Workshop II: Creating a digital network**

Mr Keith Potter, CEO, Digital TV Labs, examined receiver planning, starting with the consumer experience and working back up the chain. He too emphasised the benefits of choosing common standards and then explained the available options for receiver regulation and conformance testing.

Mr Karamchand Perai, Executive Officer, Technical Services and Development, Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, described the elements and design considerations in transmission planning and then considered the reception end, with a focus on antenna performance. He discussed spectrum planning and noted the emergence of concerns about interference to broadcasting from LTE telecoms services.

### **Regulation keynote: Regulating the digital switchover**

Hon. Senator Sandra Falconer, Jamaica's Minister without Portfolio (Information) and Chair of Jamaica's Digital Switchover Committee, delivered this keynote where she portrayed a vision of the digital future and of broadcasting's place within it, for the Caribbean. She advocated a blend of national policy development with regional collaboration and described the work undertaken on digital switchover within Jamaica. The subject had been considered and worked through over the last decade, beginning with familiarisation and proceeding through data gathering and analysis to feasibility study. Consultations and stakeholder involvement had been established and policy was being constructed through an evidence-based process. Jamaica looked forward to continuing and growing regional collaboration.

### **Workshop III: Spectrum, licences and best practice**

Mr Cordel Green, Executive Director, Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica, chaired the workshop on the issues of spectrum regulation, licensing policies and best practice.

Mr Ryan James, Manager, Wireless and Broadcasting Systems, Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, explained the concepts of digital dividend (spectrum released as a result of DSO) and digital capital (unused spectrum available for digital terrestrial and other services now). He discussed spectrum pricing and the three main ways of awarding licences for new services – first come-first served, beauty contests and auctions. Best practice, he argued, depended on how much digital capital was available.

Mr Michael Starks, Editor, International Journal of Digital Television, described the different regulatory challenges along the path to full switchover. He emphasised the importance of collaboration with the incumbent terrestrial broadcasters, provided it did not restrict competition and plurality. He covered the issues of subsidy, public communications, and deciding on timing. The ensuing discussion focussed on the digital dividend and whether it was elusive – particularly from the broadcasters' standpoint.

The first day revealed that the two major concerns of the participants were how and when to select the right technical standard on a coordinated basis and how digital switchover could add up to a commercial proposition for the analogue broadcasters.

### **Workshop IV: Business and finance**

Mr Adam Weatherhead, representing the CBA, opened the second day of the meeting by summing up the sessions of the previous day and introducing the specific emphasis on the transition to digital broadcasting.

Mr Patrick Cozier, Secretary-General of the CBU, chaired the session on business and financing aspects of the DSO.

Mr Michael Starks opened this subject by noting the need for three coordinated investments in broadcasting and transmission infrastructure; in the production and launch of new TV and data services; and in the purchase or rental of receivers by consumers. The value proposition had to make sense from all three perspectives and none would work without the others.

Mr Stuart Jack, Partner, Nordicity Consultancy Group, spoke on how to finance infrastructure and achieve a return on investment. He described a variety of options including the broadcasters being able to retain a portion of the released spectrum and benefiting indirectly from the use of auction proceeds to subsidise consumer reception. Granting spectrum free of charge, the easing of restrictions on advertising, and state subsidies for receivers were other policy options. In addition, market forces were at work, driving down the cost of digital equipment and rendering analogue equipment obsolete. Broadcasters could pool resources in purchasing transmission services and, as in Canada, limit digital terrestrial coverage in the light of the dominance of other platforms.

Mr Gary Allen, Managing Director, RJR Communications Group, Jamaica, providing the broadcasters' perspective, stressed that broadcasters were not opposed to digital switchover but had a number of concerns in a difficult economic climate with negative net profit margins. The central issues were the selection of standards, timing and the financing of the required investment. He put forward a set of proposals including a special consumption tax, the revenue from which should subsidise receivers for those for whom the price was a major barrier, with any surplus helping to fund infrastructure costs. He wanted to see policy decisions on technical standards and timing made by the start of 2013.

Ms Myra Moore, Digital TV Transition Group noted how difficult it was for broadcasters to benefit in any direct way from the digital dividend and suggested keeping costs down by purchasing digital equipment from countries which switched some time ago and were now moving to the next generation of technology.

Contributing to the discussion Mr Fred Mattocks stated that broadcasters could not expect a short-term return on investment but that the digital transition was inevitable: the short-term gain was simply staying in business through a technology revolution but in the long-term new services opportunities could bring financial reward.

### **Workshop V: Programming and advertising**

Ms Louella Edwards, Group Technology Manager, Caribbean Communications Network, chaired the session that examined opportunities for new services.

Ms Rosemary Alleyne, Director of Broadcast Services, Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation, Barbados, reminded delegates of the potential value of archive material, citing examples where sales had been made to overseas broadcasters and suggested to repurpose the archives for the digital era.

Ms Corletha Ollivierre, General Manager, National Broadcasting Corporation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, spoke about the value of including radio in digital multiplexes and raised the subject of the digitisation of radio transmissions.

Mr Laurent Pellegrin, CEO, Edumonde, explained a device for providing education-on-demand via digital television.

### **Roundtable discussion: Driving the changeover**

Mr Alan Downie introduced this session aimed at understanding how to help the public through digital switchover.

Mr Paul Hughes, former National Manager, Digital UK informed of his experiences during switchover in the Scottish Western Isles when handling the UK DSO. Rather different from the Caribbean, not least in terms of climate, the Western Isles represented the challenge of implementing switchover across a group of geographically widely spread island communities. He described the advertising campaigns which had been used, the role of the Call Centre, the website, road shows and TV captions, as well as community teams and the importance

of retailer briefing and preparation. It was important in explaining digital switchover to the public to inject a sense of fun, as well as clearly communicating consumer-focused information.

### **Roundtable discussion: Switchover Implementation and Checklist: A round up of the essential activities to make the changeover happen**

Mr Michael Starks facilitated the final session in guiding the participants in developing a Caribbean-based Checklist of the key tasks which needed to be addressed in order to manage the digital switchover, spanning from the early stages of strategy and policy thinking through to analogue terrestrial switch-off and recouping the digital dividend. Based on the outcomes of the previous discussions and their own experiences, delegates formed seven focus groups to consider the seven main aspects of DSO; Technology, Spectrum and Licensing, Regulatory Issues, Funding and the Business Case, Transition Management, Planning Analogue Switch-off, and Collaboration. The final draft will be made available via the websites of the partners of the event, the CBA, CTO and CBU for reference by stakeholders.



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Organisers



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