



Analog Shut-Off Test Preparation

Analog shut-off tests are intended to inform over-the-air television viewers with analog sets that they will need to take action in order to keep viewing television signals when the analog broadcast is discontinued. Providing such messaging to only over-the-air viewers, while continuing regular programming to cable and satellite subscribers, requires that cable and satellite systems obtain the station's signal by some direct means other than over-the-air pickup. Stations should factor in how their signal is picked up by cable and satellite systems before deciding whether to participate in an analog shut-off test.

Pre-Test Checklist:

1. Notifying pay service carriers

Stations should consult with cable, satellite and telco providers at least one to two weeks prior to a test. This will give cable, satellite and telco companies an opportunity to install digital receiving equipment. If a cable system receives a broadcaster's analog signal via an antenna at the head-end, then the system's reception of the off-air signal will be impacted by the soft test. In this case, cable subscribers will be receiving the same information as over-the-air viewers about the DTV transition and may be advised to take unnecessary action. Remember, a station may have carriage outside its immediate Direct Market Area. Make sure to contact all cable operators that are receiving a station's signal.

Dish Network and/or DirecTV also deliver local stations to subscribers in markets where local into local service is available. In many instances, these companies receive signals over the air at the satellite companies' local receive site. DirecTV and EchoStar are in the process of converting these receive sites. The satellite coordination/conversion schedule can be found on www.mstv.org. Please note, however, that the conversion in some markets is behind schedule. Accordingly, stations are encouraged to check directly with the satellite companies to see if the station's market has been converted. Stations should determine in advance which pay services, if any, will be negatively impacted by a test and coordinate informing those subscribers to disregard messaging geared strictly for antenna TV viewers.

2. Notifying local retailers

Stations should update large retailers (Best Buy, Radio Shack, Target, etc.) so that adequate supplies of digital converter boxes are in place for consumers following the test. Additionally, retailers should be invited to state broadcast association meetings to receive the latest updates on stations' DTV initiatives.

3. Getting all departments at a station involved

Coordination among news, creative, production, engineering and other departments is essential to ensure a successful test. Making on-air talent familiar with all the DTV issues, coupled with precise script writing, should be stressed, along with at least seven to 10 days of promotion. For more information, refer to NAB's messaging guide at www.DTVanswers.com/membertools.

4. Displaying information (or not) during the test period

For stations conducting an individual test, create a simulated graphic (with snow) that's loaded into the server, in loop mode, and broadcast over the analog signal. The graphic should also feature a phone number and/or Web site for viewers to consult for additional DTV information.

For a market-wide test, the easiest option is going to black for a timed window as every station may not have the same facilities. Viewers already watching in digital, or through cable or satellite, would see a checkbox on the screen indicating that they're ready for the transition.

5. Preparing for calls and emails

Make available station personnel who can answer viewer questions on DTV, via phone and email. For market-wide tests, set up one number for viewers to call following the test to get questions answered. An automated system can help determine which areas had the highest volume of calls and the most popular questions so resources can be targeted more effectively in the future. Additionally, with a phone bank set up for at least a few hours following the test, stations should run a crawl periodically to remind viewers to call for more DTV information. Stations with a large number of translators should also reinforce the message of making sure viewers purchase digital converter boxes with the analog pass-through feature.

[Master Antenna Systems: In most markets, large apartment complexes often use a master antenna system. A master antenna system is an over-the-air antenna that feeds multiple apartments throughout the complex. While difficult to track down, stations may receive calls from consumers in apartments that rely on these systems.]

Test Details:

1. Duration

Stations may wish to consider, as the optimum amount of time for the test's shut-off period, a test of approximately 2-5 minutes. This allows viewers with multiple televisions in their households ample time to move around to different rooms to check if sets are digital-ready.

2. Frequency and Promotion

Rather than just being a one time event, stations should conduct a test across multiple time periods over multiple days.

Each test should receive ample promotion, at least one week in advance, to allow viewers to plan accordingly.

3. Slate Language

If information is presented on the screen during the test, in the form of a simulated graphic, messaging should reinforce that only viewers who watch their local channels via an antenna are affected by the test. The following is sample slate language for stations to use:

“This is a 2 minute test shut-off of *Station’s* analog television signal.

If you can see this message, and your television set is not connected to cable or satellite, your set needs to be upgraded to digital before June 12, 2009 at *Time* a.m./p.m., when *Station-TV* goes all-digital.

Now is a good time to check if the other antenna TV sets in your house are upgraded to digital.”

If possible, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recommends that stations also provide this information in audio-format during the test.

4. Additional Information

Preceding and/or following any test, stations are encouraged to run DTV-related news stories or reports that discuss the action required by affected viewers, including the following:

To continue receiving free over-the-air television signals, upgrade to digital now with a converter box or a new TV set with a digital (ATSC) tuner.

Stations should also address cable and satellite subscribers whose service is still picking up and delivering a station's over-the-air analog signal. Those subscribers should be informed that their provider is in the process of handling the upgrade to digital and they do not need to take any action.

5. Viewer Questions

Stations should make engineers or other personnel available to handle highly technical questions and scenarios that require expert-level advice. Local customer service is critical to enhancing the value of any test. If stations are unable to provide a local phone number for viewers to call, general DTV questions should be directed as such:

For more information call 1-888-CALL-FCC or visit www.DTVAnswers.com.

Callers to the FCC hotline have the option of requesting DTV information to be mailed to their address. Another option connects them to a recording that describes why the digital transition is happening and what actions, if any, they need to take. The FCC hotline is staffed with live operators during business hours, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. ET, Monday through Friday.