

## **Information and support for digital switchover is not reaching those who need it most, Consumer Panel report says**

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People who need it most aren't getting the information and technical support to make a smooth switch to digital TV, according to the Going Digital report from the Consumer Panel, the independent voice for the consumer and citizen interest in communications markets.

The Consumer Panel's latest research tracks the experience of vulnerable consumers as they 'go digital'. It shows that some consumers are confused about what equipment they should purchase and are not confident about installing digital TV themselves. This is particularly important as Christmas approaches when many people will be spending a lot of money to treat themselves to new, digital TV equipment.

Going Digital is published alongside research from the Scottish Consumer Council (SCC), which has also found that many television viewers are being left "confused and anxious" about the technological choices facing them in the run up to switchover. SCC plans to follow the day-to-day experiences of consumers until switchover in November 2008 in the Digital Diaries project.

According to the Ofcom Consumer Panel research, the People who lack the technical confidence to start the conversion process really didn't know where to go for information. Even buying the equipment was proving difficult. Going Digital participants told the Consumer Panel that in most cases an easily accessible telephone helpline would meet their needs. They also said that older, disabled and technically unsupported participants should have more specifically targeted information.

The Consumer Panel understands that much of the information and assistance that people want, such as their call for a helpline, already exists, but that they are not aware of it. That is why the Panel calls for a more concerted and targeted communication campaign to ensure that consumers are aware of all of the options, information and assistance available to them.

Colette Bowe, Consumer Panel Chairman, said: "We wanted to understand the experience of vulnerable consumers as they 'go digital', and our research is an important step in tracking their experiences. They told us clearly that they don't want money; they want easily accessible assistance and advice to help them through the process."

"Going Digital has raised urgent, practical issues about targeting information and support to vulnerable groups that need to be addressed and be part of the regional planning before the first region, the Borders, switches to digital in 2008."

### Key Ofcom Consumer Panel recommendations

1. Digital UK should deliver a targeted national information campaign by posting its Helping Hand Packs to all who are eligible for the DSHS
2. Better promotion of the Digital UK helpline

3. A rolling information channel on Freeview that provides switchover information
4. 'Power Questions' to be available at retail outlets to inform people of their choices at the point of purchase

"Our research is a practical contribution to the work that Digital UK and others are doing to remove the barriers that are preventing the consumers who are most in need from receiving the support they require. The switch to digital is an exciting move for the UK. To realise its full potential we need to ensure that every consumer has the ability to make informed decisions about the digital TV package that suits them," Colette Bowe added.

Ends

#### NOTES FOR EDITORS AND CSEs

The Consumer Panel was established to advise Ofcom on the consumer interest in the markets it regulates. The Panel is independent and sets its own agenda. Visit [www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk](http://www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk) for more information.

The Panel's members appointed by Ofcom are:

Colette Bowe, Chairman  
Ruth Evans, Deputy Chairman  
Fiona Ballantyne  
Roger Darlington  
Simon Gibson  
Graham Mather  
Kevin McLaughlin  
Jeremy Mitchell  
Kate O'Rourke  
Bob Twitchin  
Allan Williams

Going Digital: Supporting consumers through digital switchover. A qualitative research study is available in PDF format from the Ofcom Consumer Panel website [www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk](http://www.ofcomconsumerpanel.org.uk). For a hard copy please ring 020 7783 4021. The research, carried out by Opinion Leader Research, is a qualitative study that tracked the experiences of 41 consumers as they converted to digital television. As such, it should be treated as indicative, rather than representative, of the barriers and problems that people face as they go digital.

The Scottish Consumer Council (SCC) Digital Diaries project will look at the day-to-day experiences of consumers in the run up to digital switchover in November 2008. For a copy of the report with the seven-point action plan go to the SCC website <http://www.scotconsumer.org.uk/>

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