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## How will the transition of free-to-air TV to digital affect me?

Maltese free-to-air television is going through the biggest technology change since the introduction of colour television in 1981. We are now approaching another significant change – the switch from analogue to digital transmissions. This is expected to take place by the end of 2010.

Today, Maltese consumers can experience the benefits resulting from the conclusion of the first phase of the transition to digital TV, whereby increased competition in the TV distribution services market led to greater choices and better prices for consumers. The past two years have witnessed a constant growth in commercial TV subscriptions, with over 84% of households now subscribed to local pay TV services, such as Melita and GO, in June 2009 as against 71.3% in June 2007.

According to a recent survey carried out by the Malta Communications Authority (MCA), it is estimated that 18.5% of all Maltese households still watch free-to-air analogue TV, by means of the regular aerial.

The second and final phase of the transition to digital is meant to ensure that viewers, who are not subscribed to Melita and Go, can continue to enjoy free viewer-ship of up to six Maltese channels but with the increased benefit of better picture quality.

By the end of 2010, although all TV transmissions will be in digital format, households that are still using the standard aerial to view free-to-air stations, will not need to change the aerial, but may need to purchase a digital set-top-box. A digital set-top-box is a good option where fully functional televisions within the household need to be upgraded to digital. These boxes are relatively inexpensive, currently selling for approximately €30.00 across Europe. More importantly, they are not difficult to set up. Alternatively, if one is thinking of changing their current TV set, one may opt for a TV set that typically comes with in-built digital tuner and avoid the set-top-box altogether.

Subscribers of commercial TV packages offered by Melita or GO, will largely be unaffected, as they will be able to watch any Maltese free-to-air digital television channel via the set-top-box or other equipment provided by their existing operator.