

CONSUMER GUIDES 2008

A Guide to Consumers of Electronic Communications Services

Choosing your **TELEVISION SERVICE PROVIDER**

CONSUMER GUIDES

FORWARD

*The **Malta Communications Authority (MCA)** is the national authority responsible for the regulation of electronic communications (telephony, Internet and broadcasting transmission), eCommerce and postal services.*

*One of its main objectives in regulating these sectors is to **promote the interests of consumers.***

Amongst others, it performs this role by:

1. Working together with service providers to address issues concerning consumers and ensure that any relevant obligations are complied with;
2. Collaborating with the Consumer and Competition Division; which is responsible for ensuring that service providers abide by general consumer protection rules; and
3. Raising awareness regarding matters of direct interest to consumers.

OBJECTIVE

This guide aims to inform you about:

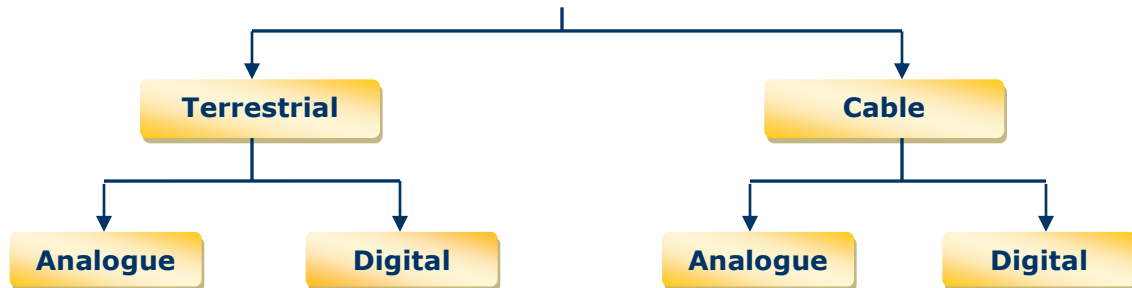
1. The **general principles to follow** when taking up offers made by service providers in the electronic communications sector;
2. The **factors you should consider** before selecting your

TELEVISION SERVICE PROVIDER

3. The steps to take when **lodging a complaint with your service provider;** and
4. **How the MCA can help** you when you have unresolved difficulties regarding a particular service.

CHOOSING YOUR TELEVISION SERVICE PROVIDER

TYPES of Television Services you may choose from in Malta:



TERRESTRIAL BROADCASTING is known as 'over-the-air' television. It makes use of a network that transmits wireless signals that are received using a conventional rooftop television antenna (also known as an aerial).

Terrestrial broadcasting can either be Analogue or Digital:

- ▶ **TERRESTRIAL ANALOGUE** is the traditional TV system. Here, a rooftop antenna enables you to view all the local 'free-to-air' terrestrial broadcasting stations, which include (in alphabetical order): Net TV, One TV, Smash TV and Television Malta (TVM).
- ▶ **TERRESTRIAL DIGITAL TV (DTTV)** is a technology that transmits and receives TV channels by means of digital signals. This requires both a rooftop antenna and a set-top-box (STB), which is required to upgrade your TV set to digital format. In addition to the set-top box, you will also need a smart card (to be inserted in the set-top box) to view channels that are not 'free-to-air'. You can also buy an Integrated Digital Television (iDTV).

CABLE BROADCASTING services are transmitted via a cable network connected to the premises; therefore no antenna is required.

Cable broadcasting can either be Analogue or Digital:

- ▶ **CABLE ANALOGUE** services are services transmitted to you in analogue format, where, depending on the level of service required, you may require an analogue set-top-box, which is connected to the cable network. Note that the service provider may transmit the 'free-to-air' stations and other channels, at a charge and without the need of a set top box.

- ▶ **CABLE DIGITAL TV** services are services transmitted to you in digital format, where you will require a digital set-top box to be connected to your existing TV set and to the cable network. Note that set-top-boxes used for Cable Digital TV are different from those required for cable analogue transmissions.

BENEFITS of **DIGITAL TV** when compared to **ANALOGUE TV**

Digital TV (DTV), whether offered via cable or antenna, provides a more efficient way to deliver television transmissions than analogue TV, that is:

- ▶ A larger **variety of channels**;
- ▶ Clearer and **sharper pictures**;
- ▶ Superior **stereo sound**;
- ▶ **Less interference**;
- ▶ An **Electronic Programme Guide**, which provides channel information. This will help you know what is currently showing and what is to follow on a particular TV channel; and
- ▶ **Interactive multimedia services**. Even though these are not yet available in Malta, they should be provided in the near future:
 - a. *Interactive services*: by using your remote control you will be able to access all kinds of information through digital text. This is much clearer than the present teletext system.
 - b. *Enhanced TV*: this will give you the added enjoyment of having related information running alongside the programme you are watching.

FACTORS to consider when selecting your Television Service Provider

1. When deciding which TV service provider to choose, become familiar with the **DIFFERENT TECHNOLOGIES** used to transmit and receive TV programs and the limitations and benefits of each type of technology (outlined above).
2. It is important to confirm with the service provider:
 - ▶ Whether the **TRANSMISSIONS ARE AVAILABLE** in the area where you wish to receive the service;
 - ▶ The **COSTS OF ANY ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT** that might be required where the service is not fully guaranteed (average/partial coverage); and
 - ▶ Whether you can **TERMINATE THE CONTRACT** without incurring any penalties if you are unable to receive clear transmission of all the TV channels for which you have contracted.
3. Identify whether:
 - ▶ There are any costs payable for **INSTALLATION OF SERVICE**;
 - ▶ The **TV SET-TOP-BOX** is on lease and whether or not a deposit is required;
 - ▶ Whether such deposit will be refunded when the set-top-box is returned upon disconnection; and
 - ▶ Check also what charges apply if the set-top-box is found damaged at the time of return to the service provider.
4. Check whether any **PERMITS** (for example, Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA) permits) or authorisations are required prior to installation of antennas or wiring in specific areas.

GENERAL GUIDES

BEFORE selecting a service provider and/or taking up an offer:

1. Make sure that you are well informed of the:

- ▶ **FULL COST** of the service;
- ▶ **PAYMENT OPTIONS** available;
- ▶ **CHARACTERISTICS**, including any limitations of the service;
- ▶ **CUSTOMER AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT** services provided.

2. **Do not base your choice only on information provided in promotional material**, for example, adverts, leaflets, discussion programmes and so on. This information might not be fully comprehensive and important terms and conditions may be missing.
3. Consider what is most important to you, whether it is **Cost, Quality of service, Reliability, Customer care standards** or any other factor. Consider also your particular usage patterns, for example, how often and at what time of the day you intend to use the service. This will help you identify the most appropriate service provider and/or offer to suit your needs.
4. **Shop around and compare offers** of the various service providers before you take up a particular service. If the level of customer care service is important to you, call the service provider to enquire about the service you need. Such communications with customer care personnel will provide you with an insight into the level of customer service provided by the individual service providers.
5. **Read and understand all the Terms and Conditions** before signing up to a contract. Pay particular attention to the following:

- ▶ **MINIMUM DURATION** of the contract, if any;
- ▶ **BILLING ARRANGEMENTS**: whether pre-paid, post-paid or both;
- ▶ **PAYMENT CONDITIONS**: such as penalties imposed and/or termination of contract if you do not pay your bill on time;
- ▶ **COMPENSATION OR OTHER FORMS OF REDRESS** that apply if the service provider does not achieve the quality of service levels stipulated in the contract;
- ▶ **PENALTIES**, if any, you may incur should you wish to terminate the contract before any contractual period is over; and
- ▶ **MAXIMUM TIME TO DISCONNECT THE SERVICE** by the service provider after you request termination. Note that, more often than not, you will still be billed for the service during this notice period.

6. If there is anything that you feel is **not clear in the terms and conditions**, do not hesitate to ask the customer care personnel or sales persons to explain it further. You can also take a copy of the contract and take up the offer at a later date, to give yourself time to read and understand the terms and conditions thoroughly. If you decide to do so, be careful to take note of any dates limiting the validity of temporary offers.

AFTER selecting a service provider and/or taking up an offer:

1. Always **keep a copy of your contract, receipts, invoices** and any formal communications exchanged with your service provider. If you conclude your contract online, print or save a copy.
2. Ensure that the goods and/or services that are delivered/provided **conform to the description and meet the specifications** set out in the contract of sale/terms and conditions.
3. When communicating with the service provider, take **note of who you speak to, record the date** and the main outcome of your communication.
4. Be aware that in the event that your service provider decides to **suspend or alter the service or the terms and conditions of your contract**, for example, change the price, you should be notified of any changes 30 days before these come into effect. Should you not accept such modifications, you have the right to withdraw from the service without any penalty.

LODGING A COMPLAINT

Lodging a Complaint with your SERVICE PROVIDER

If you are not satisfied with the service you have subscribed to, you should primarily approach your service provider in order to resolve the matter.

Remember these points when making a complaint with your service provider:

1. Clearly **identify what the problem is** and the desired outcomes from lodging your complaint.
2. **Support your case** with copies of any relevant documentation. Remember you should always retain the original copies of any correspondence or official documentation such as contracts, bills and so on.
3. **Keep notes of what you do**, with whom you speak, any relevant dates, what they said or promised to do and copies of all correspondence.
4. **Record the date and time** when you made your complaint and the reference number, if assigned.
5. Give the service provider a **reasonable time** in which to resolve your complaint.

Lodging a Complaint with the MCA

If, after exhausting your service provider's complaint-handling procedures you still feel that your complaint was not adequately addressed, we may be able to help you. We may not always have the faculty to determine whether your complaint is justified and impose a solution, but we can mediate between you and your service provider to assist you in reaching a satisfactory resolution.

We can provide you with all the relevant information on the matter, so that you will have a better understanding of what the service provider's obligations are, what your rights are and the possible courses of action available to you.

We invite you to visit our website for more information on our complaints handling procedure: www.mca.org.mt.