



Whether you enjoy reality shows, classic movies, or documentaries, there's no denying that it's an exciting time to be a television viewer. Advances in technology along with competition from the Internet and video games have driven more choice, variety and some of the most sophisticated and noticeable enhancements in picture quality in television's 80-year history.

**A "DTV SURVIVAL GUIDE"
FOR CONSUMERS**

The changes are coming quickly and for some it can be difficult to keep up. "HD" seems to be getting attached to everything TV-related these days, and "DTV Transition" commercials are becoming more frequent, while at the same time, less clear. So what exactly do you need to know to keep that warm, glowing box in the living room glowing? As the leading television provider in the area and Louisiana's Technology Company of the Year, EATEL can help you make sense of all the digital television hoopla.

Some Basic Definitions

DTV is an acronym for digital television. It's simply a different way to broadcast programs, versus "analog," which was the traditional system. Digital is a more advanced and efficient technology for broadcasting.

HDTV is an acronym for high-definition television, and it's a particular kind of DTV that offers the highest picture quality currently available.

"The bottom line with both of these technologies is that they improve the clarity of the picture," explains EATEL President Robert Burgess. "In the case of HDTV, significantly so. What's great for viewers is that they get to see the 'whole picture.' For sports, that means seeing more of the playing field and for movies, the viewer gets a true theater experience – widescreen format."

Getting the Most out of HD

To actually get a true high-definition picture, viewers need three things: an HD television set, a program that has been produced and is being broadcast in HD, and HD service, which typically requires a set-top converter box even with an HDTV set. If you only have one or two of these elements and not all three you are not seeing HD.

EATEL delivers its television service over an all-fiber optic network the company built in Ascension over the past four years, and which was the primary catalyst for the company being named technology company of the year by the Louisiana Technology Council in April. Ashley Phillips, EATEL's Director of Network Engineering & Operations says the quality of EATEL's HD over fiber is superior, because it can be delivered 'uncompressed' due to the greater bandwidth of fiber versus traditional coax cable.

"Both cable and satellite companies often compress their HD, which means you're not getting the clearest HD picture possible," explains Phillips. Burgess adds that the capacity of fiber also means EATEL will likely be able to continue offering more HD channels than its competitors.

"Fiber is often called a 'future-proof' technology, because there's always room to add more and more channels," notes Burgess. "The reason cable and satellite often compress their HD is so they can squeeze more channels into their lineup. We just don't have that problem with fiber."

In the last 15 months, EATEL has added 16 new HD channels and plans include adding more in the next few months.

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What's Happening in 2009

Regarding the DTV transition coming in February 2009, Burgess says a lot of the information has been misleading. He says the most important thing to understand about this transition is that most of us won't need to do a thing to begin enjoying the benefits of DTV.

"If you already have any of our FiberEdge TV services, you're fine," says Burgess. The simple truth, he explains, is that if there is currently a cable between your TV and the wall (other than the power cord, of course), you literally need to do nothing to "get ready" for the DTV transition. In fact, experts estimate that fewer than 15% of homes in the U.S. will need to change any equipment. Even without HD equipment or services, viewers should notice some improvement in picture clarity on programming that was previously delivered in analog.

The folks at EATEL advise taking a look in sheds, workshops, outside kitchens, boats and campers – any place customers might have an extra television set currently not hooked up to their home service. In those cases, customers can either look into adding those sets to their existing service, or getting a DTV converter box from just about any electronics retailer. Because the switch to DTV is being mandated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the U.S. government is providing coupons to help offset the cost of these boxes (details at www.dtv2009.gov).

"All that is happening in 2009 is that old-fashioned analog broadcasts are being replaced with digital," explains Phillips. "You probably don't need a new television unless you only have a TV with a 'rabbit ears' antenna."

With that in mind though, Burgess says there's never been a better time to consider upgrading. "At the very least, consumers should start taking a look at what services and options are available and become a bit more educated about the different technologies," he says. "Even if you only watch a few hours of television each week, why not make the most of that little time now that you can get picture quality like you've never seen before?"



The simple truth is if there is currently a cable between your TV and the wall you need to do nothing to get ready for the DTV transition.



PICKING THE RIGHT TV TECHNOLOGY FOR YOU



HD JUNKIE

I've had an HDTV set since they first came out a few years ago and I have it on pretty much every day.

I order HD Movies On Demand all the time.

I know what "1080p" means.



SET: Flat screen HDTV (but you probably already have it).

SERVICE: Top-of-the-line with all the bells and whistles: Try EATEL FiberEdge Premium service with all digital tiers, the HD Premium lineup, DVR, Video On Demand, etc.

ACCESSORIES: One of those cool recliner chairs with a built-in fridge.



DTV CONNOISSEUR

I'm a pretty big sports fan/movie buff/music lover and watch the comedy and movie channels a lot.

I record (or would like to record) my favorite television programs.

I knew the difference between DTV and HDTV before reading this article.



SET: Digital TV (which you probably already own). You may want to consider an HDTV set so you're ready when more great stuff becomes available in the future.

SERVICE: Mid-range service: Consider EATEL FiberEdge Digital Edge with DVR and a few select tiers based on your personal interests.

ACCESSORIES: Subscription to popcorn of the month club.



OCCASIONAL VIEWER

I really only watch the major networks and PBS.

I rent a few movies each month.

Before I read this article I thought "HDTV" was a 24-hour hot dog-focused cable station.



SET: Whatever you have is probably fine, but consider upgrading to a digital TV if you don't have one so all your favorite programs will look that much better. You may need a DTV converter box (see www.dtv2009.gov).

SERVICE: FiberEdge Basic or Basic Plus will do it for you. Consider upgrading to Digital Edge to rent movies any time without leaving your home with Video On Demand.

ACCESSORIES: "I ♥ DTV" t-shirt.

STEP 1

Pick your Profile: What's your TV personality?

STEP 2

Get set up: What you need.