

10 things you need to know about...

Migrating to HDTV



1 – Migrating to HDTV is inevitable for public broadcasters.

Naturally, the timing and extend of a migration will depend greatly on individual national market conditions. EBU Technical considers that migrating to HDTV is a very strategic phase for the public broadcaster. We have dedicated substantial efforts to assist EBU members and broadcasters in assessing quality, working with standardisation bodies and manufacturers to ensure good quality and interoperability across the whole media value chain.

2 – First step: Broadcasters need to perform a feasibility study.

Perform a HDTV feasibility study covering fundamentals such as your distribution model. Are you going to simulcast and existing SDTV channel or have a dedicated HDTV service?. When should you launch the HDTV channel? You need to take into account the unique market conditions in which you operate: what is the penetration of flat panel displays? What are your competitors doing?

3 – Second step: A migration path to HDTV needs appropriate planning for programme, technical and marketing departments.

Broadcasters should define a migration path that includes appropriate planning for all these departments and is clear on the financial implications. Such a plan should include quality training for all those involved from the camera man through the editors to the marketeers.

4 – Once you've decided to launch HDTV, you must ensure that all your HDTV broadcasts are worthy of the name. No unconverted SD please!

HDTV's reputation is based on quality. So, once you're taken the plunge to launch HDTV, the public must be able to see immediately that the service is worthy of the name. In an effort to cut costs and fill schedules, broadcasters sometimes fall into the trap of employing unconverted SDTV instead of native HDTV material.

5 – Define which programmes or channels should be in HDTV and when.

In your planning, there should be a clear definition of which programme or channels should be produced or purchased in HDTV and when. HDTV production needs to start well in advance of a launch. Once there is a clear picture of where the HD content is coming from, you can determine which studios and outside production facilities should be converted to HDTV and what the timescales are.



6 – Invest in HDTV early and intelligently

Production equipment is typically bought in the course of normal re-investment cycles. By having a forward-looking investment plan for HDTV, you avoid having to depreciate your equipment outside of these cycles. Broadcasters should also investigate whether national funding is available to aid the migration to HDTV. Broadcasters should also be wary of the plethora of formats, compression schemes, etc. Not all of them are worthy of the HDTV experience. Low cost equipment (camera and lenses) will impact on quality. Choose where to save money carefully.

7 – Assess your current production workflow and it's suitability for HDTV

It is useful to note that IT-based HDTV production is not yet as technologically advanced as that for SDTV. Archives are a particularly critical area in this regard. HDTV quality requirements, storage, media and workflows do impact costs and they require particular consideration. At the request of several members, EBU Technical has convened a group to work on Archiving - a particularly complex problem in a transition scenario from SD to HD.

8 – It not just the pictures that need to be top quality with HDTV.

HDTV thrives on high quality content presented in stunning HD. Before launching a service, broadcasters should already be producing and archiving in HDTV. And once the service is launched, be sure to provide a help-desk to help the consumer get the most from HDTV.

9 – Don't forget about audio - it's really important for HDTV.

It has been proven that multichannel (surround sound) audio greatly enhances the HDTV experience for the viewer. Whilst normal stereo is sometimes the only option for productions which don't have surround-sound, this should be of top quality.

10 – EBU Technical is a pioneer in the area of HDTV and continue to innovate. We're here to help!

We've been doing it for years, and many of our experts are familiar to the industry for their knowledge and insight. We're published recommendations, test results and technical papers and all are available on <http://tech.ebu.ch>.