

Finland Public TV Services

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1. Finland in the vanguard of digital TV service development

The launch of digital television in Finland originated in a government resolution taken in 1996 on the digitalisation of television networks, and on August 27, 2001 Finland became the fourth country in Europe to begin digital broadcasting. In March 2004 the Finnish Government made a policy decision according to which all television broadcasts should become digital in Finland from August 31 2007 onwards. This is based on the principle that all Finns should have the opportunity to make the switch in good time and without difficulty. The decision was based on a unanimous recommendation of a special parliamentary committee and is likely to make Finland the first country in Europe to switch to solely digital broadcasting when it does so at the beginning of September 2007.

2. Digital TV transmissions and coverage in Finland

There are three multiplexes, or channel packages, nationwide. At the end of 2004 the terrestrial multiplexes A (reserved for the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE) and B (reserved for use based on licences; MTV3, Subtv, Nelonen) covered 94 percent of continental Finland. The current objective is to build more stations in order to increase the coverage to 99.9 percent by the end of 2005. The coverage of channel package C, which is reserved for use based on licences, and includes pay TV and local channels, served some 72 percent of the population.

Finland has several local cable operators. Cable TV networks have already been digitalised throughout the country. Cable operators distribute the programmes of terrestrial network license owners and various individual channels, some of which are bundled into pay TV packages.

3. The digital TV receiver situation

The diffusion of digital television has progressed well. As of February 2005, 25 % of Finnish households had digital receivers (600 000 households). Receiver penetration of terrestrial broadcasting stood at 44 % or 456 000 households while cable accounted for 11 % or 114 000 households. 3 % of the digital receivers are MHP (Multimedia Home Platform) capable. It is common for households to have more than one receiver; the total number in Finland is 722.000.

The spread of digital television is consumer driven. Viewers must be provided with the type of programming and services that make the move to digital television attractive. Receivers or other functions associated with the digitalisation of television have not been subsidised in Finland, leaving consumers free to decide independently on the content they choose and on the technical properties of the receiver they buy. Viewers must be kept informed of the possibilities of the new service and reminded of what they have to do if they do not want to be left behind at the big switch over.

4. Public services on digital TV

An electronic programme guide EPG and digital teletext is the first services to come on stream in Finland. EPG is an application that shows information about upcoming programs. The programme guide used by the main Finnish national channels is an MHP application transmitted with the TV signal. It has same functionality between different channels and broadcasters. For those requiring more information there are page links to digital teletext.

Digital teletext is a service platform based on an MHP application which enables the easy provision of content-based services. Superteletext is in use on the channels of the biggest broadcasters. The application is the same for every broadcaster but the content differs. News is the most popular form of content but there is also information produced by the public sector, such as consumer information, employment services, weather and public transport timetables.

The Finnish broadcasters offer programme related services which can be accessed by pressing the blue or red button on the remote control. Interactive services give the viewer the possibility of participating in the game or in the programme either via MHP returns channel or SMS messaging.

The Ministry of Transport and Communications has launched ArviD, a two-year digital TV cluster programme to facilitate a smooth transition to the era of digital television.

The ArviD programme promotes the use of digital TV by:

- sponsoring the development of service innovations ranging from entertainment to business applications;
- initiating cluster-wide measures to achieve synergies in service production; and
- creating a network for cluster-wide collaboration.

The ArviD programme is driven by a vision of a future in which by the end of the decade digital TV - by exploiting the best features of broadcast service and evolving consumer habits - will have assumed a well recognised role as a con-

duit for entertainment, information, participation, learning and business. The main objective of the programme is to promote the development of programme related and interactive services for digital television. As of summer 2005 fourteen service development projects are being run based on the ArviD cluster programme open call (autumn 2004). The interactive services developed in these projects are for the most part based on MHP (Multimedia Home Platform) specifications.

5. Some examples of ArviD projects and services coming on air

More information about health, the Finnish Broadcasting Company, Sofia Digital

Akuutti is a national television programme about health and well-being. A new interactive service offers viewers additional information and such things as health tests related to the themes of the programme. This will also make it possible to utilise the expertise of patients organisations in shedding light on current topics.

Communal learning experience through digital TV, the Finnish Broadcasting Company, Axel Technologies

The objective of the Tuu Juttuun (Get Along) service is to provide schoolchildren between 9 and 11 years of age with an environment for communal learning and entertainment for the afternoon hours after school.

In addition to a TV programme the community members have a web club and mobile services, where they can produce content of their own and deliver it to other members. A personal express message service included in the application makes it possible to comment on the content of programme or on material other viewers produce.

Capital of Finland on digital TV, City of Helsinki, Sofia Digital

Digital TV is the latest way of reaching residents and visitors in the City of Helsinki - besides the Internet, the phone and the print media.

Through digital TV they can get information on topical news about Helsinki and its services and events calendar, the city's main tourist attractions and information and advice. A pilot version of the service is bundled with the digital teletext of the Finnish Broadcasting Company.

Libraries extend their services to digital TV, Helsinki City Library/Central Public Library of Finland, Sofia Digital, Blue Meteorite

Finnish libraries have provided award-winning network services since 1995. The multi-channel portal includes information about libraries, culture and library services. Now this portal is to be published on interactive digital TV.

The new digital TV version contains selected features of the Libraries.fi service, such as:

- Contact information, opening hours and library news;
- Searches of library catalogues;
- The “Ask a Librarian” service: the members of the public can ask anything and most answers are then published for all to see.

A pilot version of the service is bundled with the digital teletext of the Finnish Broadcasting Company.

Subtitles become speech, the Finnish Broadcasting Company, Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired, Bitlips

Through technology, the visually impaired now have the chance to follow foreign television programmes. Subtitles can be transformed into speech through voice synthesis.

The new soundtrack is created on air from a pre-produced subtitling file, and viewers can choose this audio on any digital television set without extra equipment.

More information:

www.digitv.fi contains information on the progress of the digital TV network, technical development, channels and equipment

www.arvid.tv ArviD, Digital-TV cluster programme