

Digital TV on a budget

The cheapest way to get digital TV is with a Freeview set-top box – two of our Best Buys cost less than £70

Digital switchover is speeding up – in many parts of the UK the analogue TV signal is being turned off this year. If you don't upgrade your TV or get a set-top box, your TV screen will go blank when the analogue signal is turned off.

If you've been ignoring digital switchover until now, it's time to find out when your region is switching – see our map of hotspots, right, or visit www.which.co.uk/switchovermap.

Also, look out for public information campaigns alerting you if your TV region is about to switch.

The Border region and the Isle of Man switched in June. Much of the West Country began switching in July, with other parts of Devon, Cornwall and many parts of Wales following from August through to November. When the Granada region switches in November, it

will also receive high-definition (HD) programmes (see below).

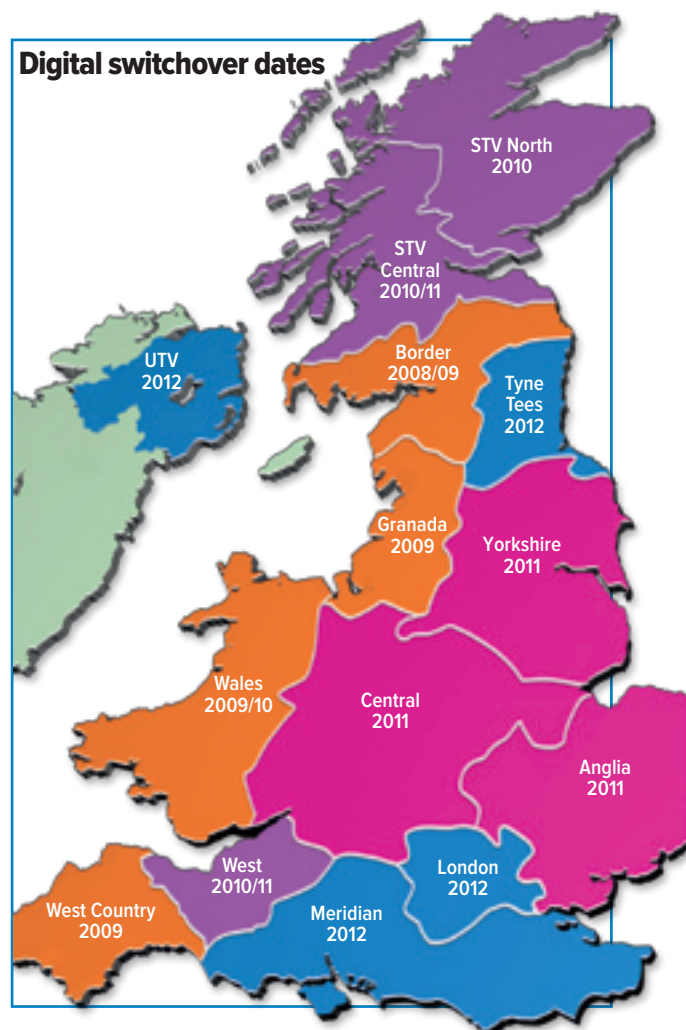
Don't worry if you're not on the list above – other regions are set to follow in 2010, and the BBC has applied to bring the London switch forward to next year so that viewers can watch the World Cup in HD. By 2012 the whole country will have switched to digital TV.

Our Best Buy Freesat and Freeview set-top boxes will give you access to free-to-view digital TV. The cheapest – the TVonics MDR-250 – costs only £40.

Alternatively, you could go digital with a subscription service from Sky or Virgin Media.

If you're 75 or over, registered blind or partially sighted, or receive certain disability benefits, help is available. Find out more by calling 0800 408 5900 or going to www.helpscheme.co.uk. We found

Digital switchover dates



that the Best Buy TVonics MDR-300 is particularly good for people with impaired vision.

For more information about digital switchover and your options, go to our online advice guide at www.which.co.uk/switchoverexplained.

Freeview HD explained

Free high-definition TV is coming to the UK – our expert Dave Holes explains the equipment you need

To date, high-definition (HD) TV has been available only on Sky, Virgin or Freesat. But that changes in November, when the Granada region becomes the first area to receive Freeview HD transmissions via roof-top aerials.

Other regions will have access to HD when they switch

to digital TV. Visit www.digitaluk.co.uk for more details.

Initially, three HD channels will be available – from the BBC, ITV and Channel 4. A fourth channel, from Five, will follow in 2010.

But there's a catch. Although existing equipment will continue to work, it won't be able to access the new HD services, so



anyone who's already made the switch to Freeview will need to buy a new set-top box to access the HD channels. However, Freeview HD set-top boxes

aren't for sale yet – we're expecting the first ones to be launched around October. As soon as they are available, we'll put them through our tests.

The introduction of Freeview HD services will also result in a big shake-up in the allocation of frequencies to each channel. This means you'll have to retune your Freeview set-top box when the Freeview HD transmissions start. The instruction manual should explain how to do so.



Humax Foxsat HD

£130

Which? test score? 76%

PROS The best Freesat box we've tested. It gives you access to high-definition channels. It's easy to set up and use, and the remote control is well designed. Power use in standby is low. Humax set-top boxes have a reliability rating of 79% (above average).

CONS It's more expensive than other Freesat boxes. If you don't have a satellite dish, you'll need to install one.

Full review www.which.co.uk/HumaxFosathd

We found it cheapest at* Currys and John Lewis
Also available at Comet and Argos

By 2012
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TVonics MDR-250

£40

Which? test score? 74%

PROS An energy-efficient Freeview box that connects to any TV, whether it has a Scart socket or not. The electronic programme guide is easy to use.

The remote control infrared receiver is connected to the set-top box with a cable, so the box can be hidden behind the TV, leaving only the receiver visible.

CONS No significant cons, but the instructions could be better.

Full review www.which.co.uk/tvonicsMDR-250

We found it cheapest at* Comet and John Lewis
Also available at n/a



TVonics MDR-300

£67

Which? test score? 70%

PROS This Freeview set-top box was designed in conjunction with the RNIB – the instructions are written in a large font, it receives audio description, and the remote control beeps every time a button is pressed. The electronic programme guide is easy to read and use.

CONS Some labels on the set-top box could be clearer.

Full review www.which.co.uk/tvonicsMDR-300

We found it cheapest* Online
Also available at (Available online only)

MODEL		SPECIFICATION							TEST PERFORMANCE			SCORE (%)	
		PRICE (£)	FREEVIEW OR FREESAT	SIZE (hwxwd) (cm)	SCART SOCKETS	UHF OUTPUT	SCART LINK	ANALOGUE AUDIO OUTPUT	DIGITAL AUDIO OUTPUT	TV GUIDE	EASE OF USE	POWER CONSUMPTION	SCORE (%)
1	HUMAX Foxsat HD	130	FS	5x29x23	2		✓	✓	✓	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	76
2	TVONICS MDR-250	40	FV	4x20x9	2	✓	✓		✓	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	74
3	TVONICS MDR-300	67	FV	3x20x13	2		✓	✓	✓	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	70
4	BUSH LPDV210HDMI	34	FV	5x30x22	2					★★	★★★★	★★★★★	64
5	HITACHI HDB73 HDMI	40	FV	4x30x20	2			✓	✓	★★	★★★★	★★★★	61
6	ASDA Twin Set Top Box STB0802	16	FV	4x23x18	2			✓		★★	★★★★	★★★★★	59
7	PHILIPS DTR2520/05	50	FV	5x24x17	2		✓	✓	✓	★★	★★	★★★★	57
8	GOODMANS GDB10CA Setanta	24	FV	4x23x23	2					★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	55
9	GOODMANS GDB12	24	FV	4x25x21	2		✓	✓	✓	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	53
10	GRUNDIG GUD1500	27	FV	4x25x21	2		✓	✓	✓	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	52

FS = Freesat (the free-to-view satellite service from the BBC and ITV) FV = Freeview

USING THE TABLE

The more stars the better.

Specification

Price For Best Buys we give the lowest widely available high-street or online price as we went to press. Prices for other products are a guide to what you should expect to pay.
Scart sockets These connect the set-top

box to your TV and other equipment.

UHF output Can connect to an older TV without Scart sockets using the aerial input.
Scart link Allows you to set compatible VCRs and DVD recorders to record using the set-top box's electronic programme guide (EPG).

Analogue audio output

Sockets for hooking the box to a hi-fi system.

Digital audio output

Socket for hooking the box to a surround-sound system.

Test performance

TV guide Whether the EPG is well laid out and easy to navigate. **Ease of use** How easy it is to set up and operate the

set-top box, remote control and EPG.

Power consumption

How energy efficient the box is in standby and in use.

Score

Ignores price and is based on:

Ease of use	60%
Features	30%
Power consumption	10%

Contacts

Asda
0845 300 1111
www.asda.co.uk

Bush
0845 640 3030
www.argos.co.uk

Goodmans
0870 873 0080
www.goodmans.co.uk

Grundig
0871 230 1777
www.grundig.co.uk

Hitachi
0870 405 4405
www.hitachi.co.uk

Humax
0870 247 8800
www.humaxdigital.co.uk

Philips
0845 601 0354
www.philips.co.uk

TVonics
0870 803 0551
www.tvonics.com