



# Going digital

## Best Buys that let you receive and record Freeview, Sky and cable TV channels

The start of a TV revolution that will see the whole of Britain switch over to digital viewing is just a few months away.

This is our last such test before the process begins in Whitehaven, Cumbria, in October, so we've brought together products that help you receive and record digital TV: set-top boxes and personal video recorders (PVRs). We also look at possible future developments including video on demand.

A PVR records digital TV and radio on a large internal hard disk so there's no need for tapes or DVD discs. The picture and sound of the recording should be as good as the original – unlike on a video cassette recorder. These PVRs work

only with digital TV and are made for Freeview, Sky satellite or Virgin so make sure you know which one you need.

PVRs should be simple to program and use and key to this is having a good on-screen electronic programme guide (EPG). See 'What you should look for', p56 for more on the features you need.

We looked at all the latest PVRs on the market at the time we tested. New kid on the block TVonics, which sells under the Currys' own-brand name of Logik, has taken this market by storm. Its Freeview PVR and set-top box are both Best Buys.

All the UK will go digital by 2012. The website [www.digitaluk.co.uk](http://www.digitaluk.co.uk) will tell you when your region will be affected.

### 1 CABLE AND SATELLITE PVR

**91% Sky+ £99**



The excellent Sky+ sets the standard by which other PVRs are measured. It's easy to use and does well in all our tests.

The EPG is great and twin tuners let you record two channels while at the same time watching something already recorded on the hard disk. One useful feature is remote record, which lets you phone, text or go online to

request that the box records a programme for you – handy if you're delayed on your way home. The box costs £99 but there's a £60 installation fee unless you take out a multi-room subscription. There's also a £10 monthly charge unless you subscribe to two or more premium channels such as Sky Sports and Movies – plus whatever you spend on your channel package.

**WE LIKE** It's a doddle to use.

**Cheapest store** Sky Digital **Works with** Sky Digital **Capacity** 40 hours **TV guide** 7 days **Record/watch** Yes **Record subtitles** Yes **Editing** No **Audio description** Yes

### 2 CABLE AND SATELLITE PVR

**91% Sky+ HD £299**



You can receive and record high-definition (HD) television with this box (you'll also need an HD-ready TV) but otherwise it's almost identical to the Sky+ box. It's simple to use and can record subtitles. The remote is similar to that for the Sky+ but the internal fan is louder. It can record and store around 80 hours of standard-definition TV, 20 hours HD.

It costs £299 for the box, £60 installation, plus £10 a month for a Sky digital subscription. See [www.sky.com/hd](http://www.sky.com/hd) for more. You can access 12 HD channels. Results can be spectacular, but not all the channels are on all day and HD quality can vary.

**WE LIKE** The cable and satellite PVRs have audio description to describe action for visually impaired viewers.

**Cheapest store** Sky Digital **Works with** Sky Digital **Capacity** 80/20 hours **TV guide** 7 days **Record/watch** Yes **Record subtitles** Yes **Editing** No **Audio description** Yes

## Insider information

### Our expert Dave Holes on the Sky vs Virgin row

Virgin customers can no longer get Sky channels such as Sky One, Sky Travel, Sky News and Sky Sports News because of a price row. Virgin (the former NTL and Telewest cable businesses) says that a price increase from Sky meant it was being asked to pay too much to show these channels. Other Sky sports and movie channels are not affected. Virgin has issued legal proceedings against Sky over the matter.

In a separate move, Sky plans to replace its Freeview channels (Sky

Three, Sky News and Sky Sports News) with a pay-TV option of film and sport channels, including live Premiership football. You'd need a new set-top box to get it – as existing Freeview receivers won't be able to pick it up.

The plan still has to be approved by media regulator Ofcom.



### 3 CABLE AND SATELLITE PVR

**73% Virgin V+ £10-£15 a month subscription**



The colour of the machine has changed but in every other way this is the old Telewest TVDrive. It receives both normal and HDTV and, like the Sky boxes, has series link to record a whole series with one button and category link to do the same for programmes of the same type. The fan is noisy and while the EPG is fast to navigate, you go to a different menu to make recordings. The V+ is available only from Virgin. The box itself is free but you pay £10 to £15 a month subscription (depending on your TV package). Installation is £25 for new customers, £75 for existing digital TV subscribers.

**WE THINK** A great PVR but we'd like more HD content for this sort of money.

**Cheapest store** Virgin **Works with** Virgin cable **Capacity** 80/20 hours **TV guide** 8 days **Record/watch** Yes **Record subtitles** Yes **Editing** No **Audio description** Yes

MODEL	SPECIFICATION		FEATURES					WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE			SCORE %
	PRICE (£)	WORKS WITH	CAPACITY (hours)	TV GUIDE (days)	RECORD/ WATCH	RECORD SUBTITLES	EDITING	EPG EASE OF USE	OVERALL EASE OF USE	PICTURE/ SOUND QUALITY	
CABLE AND SATELLITE											
1 SKY+	99	Sky	40	7	✓	✓		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	91
2 SKY+ HD	299	Sky	80/20	7	✓	✓		★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	91
3 VIRGIN V+	10-15 <sup>a</sup>	Virgin cable	80/20	8	✓	✓		★★★	★★★	★★★★★	73
FREEVIEW											
4 LOGIK LPV 2250	180	Freeview	125	8	✓	✓		★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	86
5 HUMAX PVR9200T	190	Freeview	80	8	✓	✓	✓	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	79
6 TOPFIELD TF5800PVR	280	Freeview	80	8	✓	✓	✓	★★★	★★★	★★★★★	78
7 EVESHAM PVR160	150	Freeview	80	8	✓	✓		★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	73
8 PROLINE PDFV70	140	Freeview	80	8	✓	✓		★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	73
9 SHARP TU-R160H	170	Freeview	80	8	✓	✓		★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	73
10 DIGIHOME PVR80	100	Freeview	40	8	✓	✓		★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	70
11 GOODMAN'S GHD8015F2	108	Freeview	40	8	✓	✓		★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	70
12 DIGIFUSION FVRT400	150	Freeview	80	14	✓	✓	✓	★★	★★	★★★★★	66
13 THOMSON DTI 6300-16	180	Freeview	80	14	✓	✓		★★	★★	★★★★★	61
14 EVESHAM iplayer 7680	300	Freeview	60	8		✓		★★	★★	★★★★★	51

<sup>a</sup> This is the monthly subscription cost. New customers pay £25 installation. Existing Virgin customers pay £75

#### USING THE TABLE

We tested all the latest set-top boxes and PVRs that were on the market when we did our research. The more stars the better.

#### Specification

**Price** For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available price as we went to press. For others, we give a guide. For models

available only online the price is in *italics*.

#### Features

**Record/watch** A ✓ shows the PVR has twin tuners so

you can watch one digital channel and record a second. **Editing** PVRs that do edits such as cutting out ads and/or topping and tailing recordings.

#### Score

Ignores price and based on:  
**Features** 40%  
**Ease of use** 40%  
**Picture** 10%  
**Sound** 10%

#### 4 FREEVIEW PVR

### 86% Logik LPV 2250 £180

Our top-scoring Freeview PVR lets you record 125 hours – more than any other PVR we've seen – has twin tuners and a decent eight-day EPG that's well laid out and simple to use. Logik has clearly thought carefully about the design of this box. It's available at Currys.



**WORTH KNOWING** It's also known as TVonics DVR-250.

WHICH? BEST BUY

Cheapest store Currys Works with Freeview Capacity 125 hours TV guide 8 days Record/watch Yes Record subtitles Yes Editing No Audio description No

#### 5 FREEVIEW PVR

### 79% Humax PVR9200T £190

This can record two channels and play back a third. Its remote is clearly labelled and basic functions are easy to use. The EPG is well laid out, but you lose the information on standby and it takes half an hour to reload. You can use the timer to switch it on/off automatically during normal viewing. It's available from Comet, Currys and John Lewis.

**WE LIKE** The EPG is well laid out.

Cheapest store John Lewis Works with Freeview Capacity 80 hours TV guide 8 days Record/watch Yes Record subtitles Yes Editing Yes Audio description No



WHICH? BEST BUY

The Humax can record two channels and play back a third

#### 6 FREEVIEW PVR

### 78% Topfield TF5800PVR £280

The Topfield TF5800PVR is packed with features. Its EPG is easy to use and it has twin tuners. There's an unofficial website for owners, [www.toppo.org.uk](http://www.toppo.org.uk), which gives extra info and has a forum where you can chat to other users. The Topfield is available at John Lewis.

**WE LIKE** This PVR is easy to use.

Cheapest store John Lewis Works with Freeview Capacity 80 hours TV guide 8 days Record/watch Yes Record subtitles Yes Editing Yes Audio description No



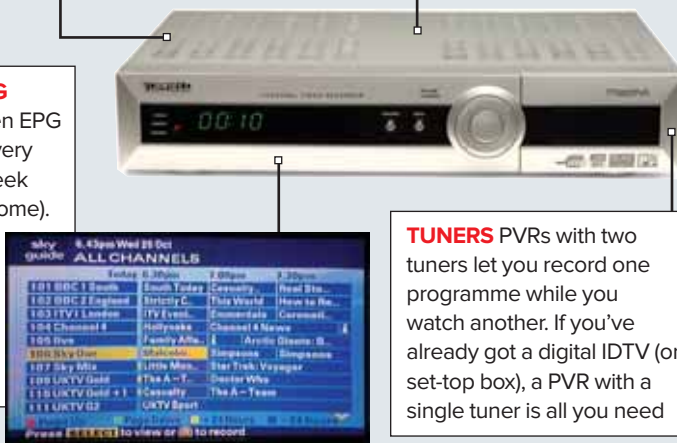
WHICH? BEST BUY

## What you should look for (PVRs)

**CAPACITY** A typical hard disk gives around 80 hours of standard recording time. High-definition TV, which is available on the cable and satellite PVRs, uses about four times as much space

**EDITING** Only a few models (including the Humax and Topfield) let you do basic edits of recordings afterwards. It's useful if you want to chop ad breaks or top and tail programmes that started early or overran

**EASY PROGRAMMING** PVRs have an on-screen EPG which lists what's on every channel for the next week (up to a fortnight with some). All models on test can record at least 20 programmes. You can also download recordings to a VCR or a DVD recorder



**TUNERS** PVRs with two tuners let you record one programme while you watch another. If you've already got a digital IDTV (or set-top box), a PVR with a single tuner is all you need



**Making sure the machines are easy to use**

A recording on a PVR should be indistinguishable from a live TV show, unlike with a VCR. We play back a variety of shows to check this. PVRs should be easy to use, so we devote a substantial amount of testing time to making sure this is so. The EPG is crucial to this, but some manufacturers get it badly wrong when it comes to how information is displayed on-screen, with EPGs that are hard to navigate and awkward to use. We also check they don't chop off the start and end of programmes.

## Contacts

### Digifusion

0845 600 4923  
www.fusiondigitec.com

### Digihome

0870 600 8990  
www.argos.co.uk

### Digilogic

0845 600 4411  
www.tesco.com/direct

### Evesham

0870 160 9500  
www.evesham.com

### Goodmans

0871 230 1777  
www.goodmans.co.uk

### Humax

0870 247 8800  
www.humaxdigital.com/global/

### Logik

0870 609 7493  
www.currys.co.uk

### Matsui

0870 609 7493  
www.currys.co.uk

### Philips

0845 601 0354  
www.philips.co.uk

### Proline

0870 542 5425  
www.comet.co.uk

### Sagem

0870 343 1111  
www.sagem.co.uk

### Sharp

0870 527 4277  
www.sharp.co.uk

### Sky

0870 240 4040  
www.sky.com

### Thomson

0870 054 3210  
www.topuptv.com

### Topfield

01795 429 666  
www.topfield.co.uk

### Virgin

0800 052 2525  
www.virginmedia.com

## Neat tricks

**Download programmes while you sleep and make sure you never miss a favourite show**

### Freeze live TV

If you're interrupted in the middle of a favourite show, pause the remote and the PVR starts recording. When you're ready, hit pause again and it plays from where you left off while continuing to record.

In a similar way, you can usually start watching a show before it's finished recording.



Chase play lets you skip ads so by the time the show's over you've caught up in real time.

### Series link

New Freeview PVRs should soon have this feature, which

lets you record all episodes of a series. Older models will be updated by a broadcast through the TV aerial, usually overnight. The PVR must be switched on or in standby at the time. See [www.dtg.org.uk](http://www.dtg.org.uk) for a schedule of updates.

### While you sleep

Programmes are downloaded while you sleep with the Thomson DTI 6300-16 PVR (13). You pay £180 for the machine plus £30 for a starter pack and a £9.99 monthly fee. You get Freeview channels, extra subscription channels and programmes downloaded at night from 19 channels including Paramount Comedy and the Cartoon Network. You choose the channels but not the shows. The machine's hard disk stores

seven days of the downloaded programmes plus 120 hours' normal recordings. The system's satisfactory but programme choice, uninspired.

### Video on demand

The Evesham iplayer 7680 (14) (pictured above) can connect to a computer, so pictures and video from the computer can be seen on your TV and PVR recordings saved to the computer. It can also access the internet on your TV. It's claimed that video on demand and streamed TV will be available but they're not working yet. We found the iplayer hard to set up and use. There are better PVRs and to get the extra features, we had to download software and reconfigure our PC, which was complicated.



## MORE CHOICES

### FREE website

Visit [www.which.co.uk](http://www.which.co.uk) for more on personal video recorders and set-top boxes. For help with logging in, see [www.which.co.uk/loginhelp](http://www.which.co.uk/loginhelp)

# Freeview set-top boxes

If you want digital TV without paying a monthly fee, you can get Freesat from Sky for £150. Sky installs a dish and receiver that gives about 200 TV channels and 95 radio stations. You get BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Five plus Film4, and music and shopping channels, but not Sky One or premium movie and sports channels.

The other option is Freeview which is received through your rooftop aerial (though this may need an upgrade) and requires either an integrated digital TV (IDTV) or a set-top box (£20 to 50). You'll get around 40 channels and 30 radio stations. Visit [www.freeview.co.uk](http://www.freeview.co.uk) to see whether your postcode is covered.

You should look for a Freeview box with an EPG and Scart link so you can connect it to a compatible VCR or DVD-R to record programmes. If a box doesn't have Scart link, you'll need to set timers on the box (to switch to the correct channel) and the recorder (telling it when to start and stop) if you want to record from different channels while you're out.

**The Logik Vesa set-top box was the only one on test that is worth buying**

## 1 FREEVIEW SET-TOP BOX

### 73% Logik Vesa Digital TV Receiver £50



This was the best set-top box on test and is the only one worth buying. It's easy to use with a well-designed, simple eight-day EPG. There are two Scart

sockets to connect it to a TV and recorder. Scart link lets you program a compatible DVD or video recorder via the on-screen TV listings. It can

hook it up to a hi-fi for even better sound, and it's also the most energy-efficient box on test – using 1.5 watts in standby, four watts in use. It's available at Currys, Dixons and PC World.

**WORTH KNOWING** It's also known as the TVonics MDR-200.

**Cheapest store** Dixons, Currys, PC World **Scart sockets** 2 **Scart link** Yes **Timer** Yes **Hi-fi output** Yes **Audio description** Yes **Audio description** No

WHICH?  
BEST  
BUY

## Don't Buys

This Sagem set-top box (6) is one to avoid. It has hardly any features and is so basic that it doesn't even have an EPG, which is very poor. It also has just one Scart socket which can make it tricky to hook it up to VCR or DVD recorder.

Thumbs down to Sagem, too, for producing the most energy-greedy box on test. With growing concerns over CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, many manufacturers are doing all they can to drive down power consumption. But this box gobbles a shameful nine watts when switched on and a truly awful eight watts when in standby. It's not even the cheapest model on test.

WHICH?  
DON'T  
BUY



MODEL	SPECIFICATION						WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE			SCORE %
	PRICE (£)	EPG (days)	SCART SOCKETS	SCART LINK	TIMER	HI-FI OUTPUT	EASE OF USE	EPG USE	ENERGY USE	
1 <b>LOGIK Vesa Digital TV receiver</b>	50	8	2	✓	✓	✓	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	73
2 <b>DIGILOGIC DSTB1000</b>	20	8	2		✓	✓	★★	★★	★★★	58
3 <b>LOGIK LDR1</b>	40	8	2		✓		★★★★	★★	★★★★	58
4 <b>PHILIPS DTR210/05</b>	40	8	2	✓	✓		★★	★★	★★★	58
5 <b>MATSUI DTR3</b>	25		2		✓		★★★★		★★★★	45
6 <b>SAGEM ITD58G</b>	28		1				★★		★★	31

### USING THE TABLE

We tested all the latest set-top boxes from all the leading manufacturers. The more stars the better.

### Specification

**Price** We give the cheapest widely available high-street price for Best Buys and a guide price for other models.

### Features

**EPG** The number of days worth of programme listings it displays on-screen. **Scart sockets** For connecting the set-top box to your TV and other equipment. Two sockets are useful if you want to connect the box to a VCR, for example. **Scart link** Set record timers from the

box's EPG and compatible VCRs and DVD recorders can be triggered to record by the box. **Timer** This lets you set the box to switch channels for recording. **Hi-fi output** Stereo audio outputs for hooking the box to a hi-fi system.

### Test performance

**Ease of use** How easy it is

to set up and operate the set-top box and remote control. **EPG use** How easy it is to use the EPG. A ★★★-rated box is fairly easy to navigate around to find out what's on over the coming week. The Matsui DTR3 (5) and Sagem ITD58G (6) don't have EPGs. **Energy use** How energy efficient the box is

in standby and in use. A ★★★★★-rated box uses around 1.5 watts in standby, four watts in use.

### Score

This ignores price and is based on:  
Performance and ease of use **50%**  
Features **40%**  
Power consumption **10%**