

# Set-top boxes

## NEED TO KNOW

A Freeview set-top box allows you to receive digital services via a rooftop aerial without having to pay a monthly subscription. You can get more than 30 TV channels, over 20 radio stations, interactive services and digital text.

### COVERAGE AREA

Most UK homes can receive Freeview but before you buy a set-top box, check whether you're in the coverage area on [www.freeview.co.uk](http://www.freeview.co.uk) or by calling 08708 80 99 80. If you are, you should be able to receive Freeview with your existing rooftop aerial. However, if your aerial is old or in bad condition, you may have to pay for a new aerial, which costs from £80.

### SWITCHOVER

The government plans to switch off the analogue TV signal by 2012. The only way to watch TV then will be via Freeview (either through a set-top box or an integrated digital television), or through cable or satellite services. Digital switchover will happen between 2008 and 2012.

The government has announced a scheme to provide help with equipment, installation and follow-up support for people aged 75 and over and those with disabilities. It will be funded through the licence fee. For more information on this and switchover, go to [www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk](http://www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk).



## BEST BUYS

Our Best Buys are easy to use, have decent reception and are quick to access digital text.

The top-scoring **Humax (1)**, £80 from John Lewis, has a very user-friendly EPG. It includes all the features you'll need, from interactive services to digital text. It has two Scart outputs for linking directly to your TV or other equipment but can also connect to older TVs through the aerial socket.

The **Sony (2)**, £100 from Argos, Comet, Currys and Dixons, has similar features and a good EPG, but can only be connected via Scart sockets.

### OTHER OPTIONS

You will need a viewing card slot on your set-top box if you want to access Top-up TV – a subscription service that offers a package of extra digital channels for £8 a month plus a £20 connection fee. The Goodmans (4) is the only model in this test with one, but see '17 more set-top boxes on test', opposite, for more models offering this.

The Humax (3) combines a set-top box with a DVD player. However, it's not as good as our Best Buy set-top boxes or DVD players so it's best to buy them separately. See p62 for our Best Buy DVD players.

We also tested the Humax MG-TU1 but didn't include it in our table as we found that its EPG doesn't list all programmes. Humax is aware of this and is trying to fix it.

## SEVEN-DAY ELECTRONIC PROGRAMME GUIDE (EPG)

This gives you on-screen information about digital programmes for the week ahead, including brief summaries of each show. Although cable and satellite digital services have had full EPGs for some time, the seven-day EPG for Freeview was launched in August 2004. Not all set-top boxes have the full seven-day EPG yet. The EPGs on these Humax and Sony models are easy to navigate and allow you to search by category, such as film, or scroll through the listings to check what's on at a particular time.



### USING THE TABLE

We tested the latest set-top boxes from best-selling manufacturers.

#### Specification

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

#### Features

**EPG** Whether it displays the full seven days of programme listings.

**Scart sockets** These let you connect 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.

**Aerial socket** This is essential if your TV doesn't have a Scart socket.

**Timer** This lets you set the box to switch channels for recording.

#### Outputs

**An** Analogue audio output allows you to connect the box to a hi-fi.

**Dig** Digital audio outputs allow you to connect to a digital audio recorder, such as a minidisc recorder.

#### Using

**EPG** How easy it is to operate the EPG. **Box** How easy it is to operate the set-top box and remote control.

#### Performance

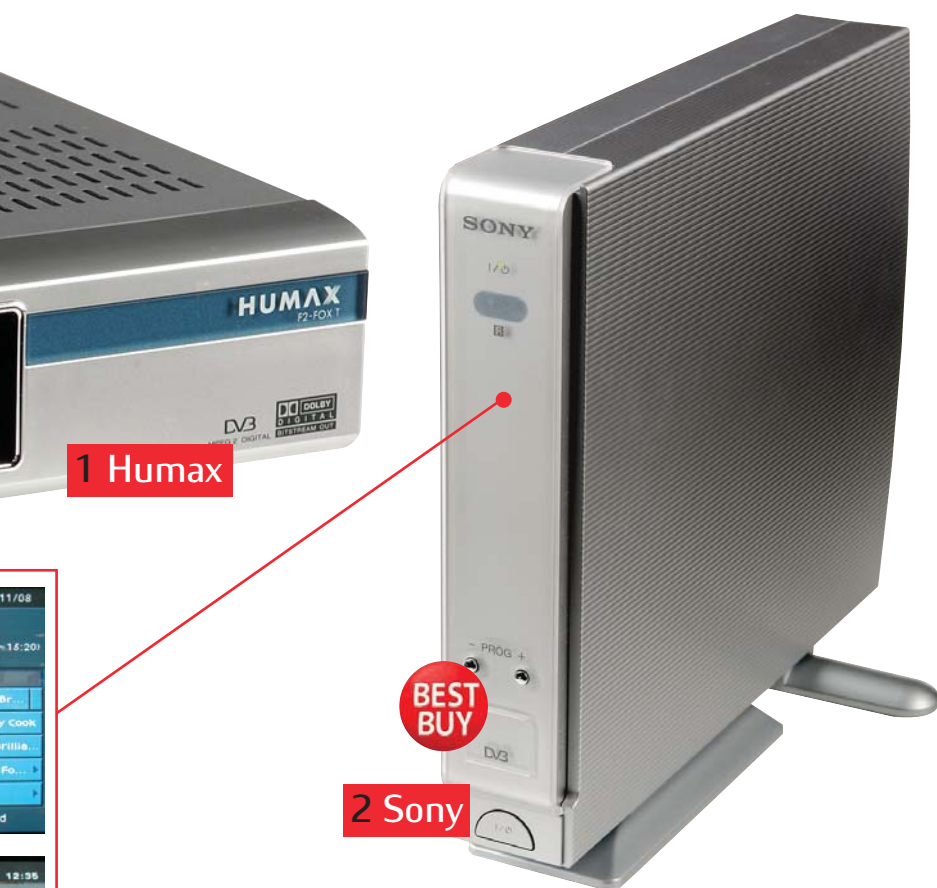
**EPG speed** How quickly the EPG accessed the listings. **Text speed** How quickly you can access digital text. **Power standby/in use** How energy efficient the box is on standby or in use.



## SCORE

**Ignores price and is based on:**

Performance & ease of use	50%
Features	40%
Power consumption	10%



## What's on digital?

As well as receiving the main five analogue channels, Freeview gives you access to extra digital channels. The most recent BBC digital channel, BBC Four, shows documentaries, music, international film, and current affairs. Freeview also includes other BBC channels such as BBC3 and the children's channels, CBBC (for school-age children) and CBeebies (for under-fives).

ITV launched its latest digital channel, ITV4, in November. It shows crime dramas, comedy, movies and sport. ITV2 and ITV3 are also available on Freeview. These channels include behind-the-scenes shows and a chance to catch up with popular ITV1 programmes. ITV has also announced that a new children's channel will be available from February.

Channel 4 launched More4 in October. It targets the over-35s with documentaries, contemporary drama and films. E4, which was made available on Freeview last summer, includes top US shows such as *ER*, *Six Feet Under* and *Lost*, as well as continuous broadcasting of reality shows such as *The Games* and *Big Brother*.

In addition to these channels, Freeview includes several 24-hour news channels such as BBCNews24, the ITV News channel and Sky news. It also offers documentary, music and shopping channels. Go to [www.freeview.co.uk](http://www.freeview.co.uk) for a full list.

## 17 more set-top boxes on test

The main table shows all newly tested set-top boxes as well as Best Buys from previous tests – but there are 17 other models from previous tests that can still be found in the shops or online. You can see the results for them on [www.which.co.uk/settopboxes](http://www.which.co.uk/settopboxes)

**Models with Top-up TV** Of the recent boxes we've tested, only the Goodmans (4) has a viewing card slot necessary for accessing Top-up TV (see 'Other options', opposite). But four models from previous tests have this feature. Below, we show how they compare.

Model	Price (£)	7-day EPG	Use	Score (%)
Nokia 221T	80		☆	71
Digifusion FRT101T	90	✓	☆	60
Thomson DTI2300	77	✓	○	56
Echostar T-105	85	✓	●	51

Last report May 2005. Online prices in *italics*



## Set-top boxes

### MODEL

	Specification		Features				Outputs		Using		Performance				Score (%)
	Price (£)	Size (cm) wxdxh	EPG	Scart sockets	Aerial socket	Timer	An	Dig	EPG	Box	EPG speed	Text speed	Power standby	Power in use	
1 Humax F2 Fox T	80	26x21x6	✓	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	☆	☆	★	○	☆	☆	81
2 Sony VTXD800	100	25x15x3	✓	2		✓	✓	✓	☆	○	★	○	○	☆	74
3 Humax DV-1000T	80	43x32x5	see <sup>a</sup>	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	see <sup>a</sup>	○	see <sup>a</sup>	●	☆	●	61
4 Goodmans GDB7-CA	50	28x18x4	✓	2		✓			●	●	☆	●	○	☆	57
5 JVC TU-DB1SK	90	28x18x4	✓	2		✓		✓	○	○	☆	●	●	○	55
6 Goodmans GDB6	40	30x21x5	✓	2		✓	✓		○	○	☆	●	○	☆	54
7 Inverto IDL-3000T	70	31x19x6	see <sup>b</sup>	2	✓		✓		●	○	★	●	●	○	51

a Two-day EPG b Fourteen-day EPG