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“Hybrid Broadcast Broadband. A SWOT Analysis.”

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ABSTRACT

Public policy identified Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) as a basic access point to the Information Society. The social penetration of the platform and its public service orientation backed that perspective. In fact, that was one of the main arguments put forward by public administrations in order to support and to foster the digitalisation of terrestrial broadcasting. As a result, most of the DTT initial development plans included ambitious proposals of interactive and online services.

However, neither technical nor social circumstances favored the success of those services. In many cases, the penetration of broadband – in terms of data transfer speed and geographical spread – was not enough to ensure a correct performance or profitability. Establishing a proper return channel has always been a major problem for DTT. Concerning social factors, interactivity was not among the most relevant added values that the audience was expecting. The still incipient state of the Internet in many countries could be a cause for that. Therefore, a better image and sound quality, together with an increase in the offer, became the basic reasons for the viewers to migrate to the new broadcasting system.

Today, twelve years after the first DTT implementation plans were launched in Europe, the situation of both, the terrestrial broadcasting platform and the broadband, as well as their relationship have changed significantly. On the one hand, the terrestrial platform is facing its way towards the switch-off of analogue broadcasting. It is a compulsory process but this fact does not ensure its success. As a result of the weaker technical features of DTT, the audience can decide to migrate to satellite, cable or iptv. In front of the triple or even quadruple play offers available in those platforms, DTT players are forced to seek formulas that improve the value proposal of the terrestrial one. On the other hand, broadband penetration and data transfer speed are growing constantly. This has resulted in an exponential growth and diversification of the Internet, including new online video services that might also become an added risk for traditional broadcasting.

Nevertheless, in the current scenario, the convergence between terrestrial broadcasting and broadband services has more chances to be successful than in the past. As terrestrial spectrum is a very scarce resource, most of DTT implementation strategies have limited the bandwidth dedicated to interactive services in favor of the increase in the number of channels. That is why now, thanks to broadband and the popularization of domestic wi-fi networks, DTT could finally have a proper return channel and therefore advanced interactive services. DTT receivers can pull from the Internet those applications and data that cannot be broadcasted. Moreover, tv screens can become a new display for web services.

These advantages are not exclusive of the terrestrial operators, but if they try to be pioneers in this field, by means of connecting their broadcasted content with their online offer, they might obtain relevant benefits. Moreover, DTT can again become a serious option for spreading the Information Society.

In this presentation, I analyse the opportunities and challenges created by the relationship between Digital Terrestrial Television and broadband services, which is known as Hybrid Television. First of all, I describe the current situation of DTT and broadband, which favors their approximation. Secondly, I briefly describe some technical details as well as some current market initiatives. Next, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Hybrid TV are analysed (SWOT analysis). To conclude, I raise some questions concerning the implementation of this new technology and how it can contribute to the consolidation of the Information Society paradigm.

Keywords: Broadband, Digital Terrestrial Television, Digital Switch-over, Information Society.