

Contact: Harold Bergin Tel: +44 (0)20 7799 3100
 WHD Public Relations E-mail: news@whdpr.com
 P.O. Box 3035,
 London SW1P 3BH
 United Kingdom

DESIGNING INTERACTIVE TV FOR A UNIVERSAL PLATFORM

Key Standards Bodies Worldwide Cooperate To Foster iTV.

Geneva – 8 December 2003 – The DVB's objective to create a write once, run anywhere environment for interactive television applications is now closer to realisation. With the earlier announcements from CableLabs and the ITU, followed by the ARIB in Japan and now the ATSC all endorsing the principle of a global standard for interactive television, DVB's market driven initiative will foster dynamic creative content and the future development of interactive television. The main thrust behind these announcements has been these standards bodies adoption of the DVB-GEM (Globally Executable MHP) specification, which is at the core of MHP.

Up until now, the world has been dominated by a multitude of proprietary middleware systems and application developers are anxious to ensure that the advent of open middleware systems does not mean that they simply have yet another platform to target for their applications. DVB, by developing GEM, and the set of measures around it, has ensured that those organisations wishing to adopt MHP for non-DVB environments can now do so.

With market analysts predicting that by the end of 2005 there will be over 250 million iTV enabled homes around the world, harmonisation under a single platform is seen as a major breakthrough that will drive the success of iTV. Content that has a universal appeal and can be formatted to a single standard has a far greater degree of mobility and therefore a larger audience potential. The costs of producing such interactive content for a larger audience base progressively decreases. This results in a higher profitability for the given content, based on the premise that the greater the audience for a given content, the greater the revenue and lower costs.

The latest developments have been greeted favourably by the interactive content community. Guy Templer, Commercial Director of Two Way TV – a UK-based interactive TV production company – commented, "Interactive TV production should be about content, not about technology. So GEM is a great initiative and should speed up the process of creating a single set of technical standards that we can all work to. At Two Way TV, we want to focus on creating compelling consumer propositions, not worrying about how to make them work on different networks."

Commenting on the development, DVB's Peter MacAvock said, "This development will help remove the element of uncertainty from the interactive television environment, promote stronger investment, and allow the creative developers to

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design imaginative applications unhindered by the limitations of proprietary systems and territorial reach.”

Background

The DVB Project

The Digital Video Broadcasting Project (DVB) is an industry-led consortium of over 250 broadcasters, manufacturers, network operators, software developers, regulatory bodies and others in over 35 countries committed to designing global standards for the delivery of digital television and data services. The DVB standards cover all aspects of digital television from transmission through interfacing, conditional access and interactivity for digital video, audio and data. The consortium came together in 1993 to create unity in the march towards global standardisation, interoperability and future proofing.

To date, there are numerous broadcast services using DVB standards. There are hundreds of manufacturers offering DVB compliant equipment, which is already in use around the world. DVB dominates the digital broadcasting world. A host of other services is also on-air with DVB-T, DVB-S and DVB-C including data on the move and high-bandwidth Internet over the air. Further information about DVB can be found at: www.dvb.org.

DVB Multimedia Home Platform (MHP)

DVB-MHP was ratified in 2000 by the DVB Steering Board and was formally adopted by the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI) (ETSI TS 101 812 (MHP)). This action paved the way for the deployment of the open standard API (Application Program Interface), which now facilitates seamless services across broadcast, telecommunications and computer platforms. MHP defines a generic interface between interactive digital applications and the terminals on which those applications execute. The standard enables digital content providers to address all types of terminals ranging from low to high-end set-top boxes, IDTVs and multimedia PCs. With MHP, DVB extends its successful open standards for broadcast and interactive services in all transmissions networks including satellite, cable terrestrial and wireless systems. With the launch of the MHP conformance testing regime, MHP implementations are now commercially available. Further information on MHP can be found at: www.mhp.org.

Globally Executable MHP (GEM)

The DVB-MHP GEM specification, standardised by ETSI (TS 102 819), is set to become the first ever common world-wide standard for interactive television. The GEM specification defines the APIs, protocols and content formats that can be relied upon in all interactive television standards and specifications that support globally interoperable MHP applications.

GEM provides a means of ensuring that MHP applications can be carried over networks other than DVB. Where DVB has not been adopted, and therefore where the full MHP standard cannot be implemented, application interoperability can be assured by combining MHP based GEM with the appropriate specifications from another body to produce a GEM receiver.

Two Way TV

Two Way TV offers broadcasters and programme makers the widest range of enhanced and interactive TV products and services available in the world. From award-winning creative and pre-production services through to interactive software solutions, Two Way TV's clients include the biggest interactive broadcasters today.

Recent Two Way TV enhanced TV successes include ITV's Pop Idol; BBCi's Test The Nation (where 26% joined in via their remote) and Antiques Roadshow; Channel 4's Big Brother and 15 to 1; Sky Sports' Beat The Pundits; and numerous formats for Flextech Television, Cartoon Networks, Sony's Go Play TV and others.

Two Way TV also has its own games channel carrying its own games and branded games from major names like Fox Kids. Two Way TV also licenses games to broadcasters and networks worldwide. Its games are now available in over 10 million homes.

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