



CHAPTER TWENTY NEWS

society of broadcast engineers
pittsburgh chapter

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Antique radios in the National Museum of Broadcasting booth rub shoulders with the latest HD plasma TV at the Chapter 20 Convention in October.

Chairman's Corner



THE FUTURE OF FREE OVER-THE-AIR BROADCAST TELEVISION (DOES IT HAVE ONE?)

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Some trends over the last decade suggest that free over-the-air broadcast TV is headed the way of the dinosaurs!

The majority of US TV households already receive TV service via the subscription services of CATV or satellite direct to home (DTH). Broadcast stations have been slow to convert to DTV and apparently are not interested in using their existing analog TV channels to educate the public of the existence and benefits of over-the-air DTV.

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SCTE DTV Seminar

The Penn-Ohio Chapter of The Society of Cable Telecommunications Engineers will hold an all day seminar on "The Care and Analysis of Digital Signals and 8 VSB Transmissions," Thursday November 13 at Four Points / Pittsburgh Sheraton North — Warrendale, PA.

Our own Sam Zbrowski will be a featured speaker on 8VSB Transmission and Reception. Rich Chernock- Triveni Digital will speak on Digital Cable Basics, Mpeg, PSIP and stream analysis. Registration begins at 8:30 A.M. Call Roger Hughes @ 724-283-0925 to pre-register.

AXCERA ACQUIRES EMCEE INVENTORY

Axcera, has acquired, at auction, a substantial amount of the service and work in process inventory of the bankrupt EMCEE Broadcast Products Inc., and is now offering service and parts support for EMCEE products.

Since the bankruptcy of EMCEE, many of the company's customers have contacted Axcera for service and support, which Axcera provided on a best-efforts basis. The acquisition of this inventory has allowed Axcera to accelerate its level of support, offering complete repairs and service through its technical services group, which is located here in western Pennsylvania.

Next Meeting

Time: Thursday, November 20
12 noon to 1:30 P.M.

Program:

P2

by Larry van Camp
of Panasonic

Place: Gaetano's Restaurant
1617 Banksville Rd.
Use the Rt. 19 South (Banksville Rd)
exit when coming out of town.
Use the Greentree exit when coming in.
Lunch Fee: \$7.00

Chairman's Corner

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Perhaps they have already given up on the notion that terrestrial DTV broadcast can be a viable service.

Consumer electronics (CE) manufacturers initially developed DTV receivers that could not handle real-world multipath and dynamic fading environments. (Fortunately, recent models exhibit improved performance.)

Those same CE manufacturers have evidently decided that the future lies in selling HD displays to be driven by DVD, CATV set-tops or DTH set-tops and don't want to be bothered with providing 8VSB tuners for DTV broadcast in products they call TV receivers.

Salespeople at CE stores are either ignorant of the existence of DTV or intentionally steering customers to satellite-only DTH systems when customers ask about HDTV reception equipment.

Broadcasters are still shooting themselves in the foot with annoying production decisions like running commercial volume levels about 6 dB above program level and chronic use of "teasers" during local news programs. Example: "An accident involving a tanker truck is causing a massive traffic jam – we'll tell you where later in the broadcast!"

Congress remains anxious to auction spectrum taken from analog broadcast use to raise money from other services, with apparently little concern over the slow rate of consumer awareness and slow growth in the ability to receive DTV.

With the trend toward an increasing majority of TV households subscribing to CATV or satellite DTH, politicians will further lose interest in broadcast service. The plan to have simple, inexpensive (\$100) DTV set-top receivers to drive existing NTSC displays and allow consumers to continue receiving terrestrial TV service after analog TV shutdown is in jeopardy because it relies on a mass market to spread out development costs and reach economies of scale in production. The mass market will not exist if no one educates consumers about DTV.

On a more positive note – FCC has acted to encourage the deployment of consumer DTV receivers. CE manufacturers are now required to provide 8VSB tuners in new TV receivers on a phased-in basis starting with the largest display sizes and working down to smaller models over time. Perhaps this will change the pitch from CE salespeople to consumers?

There is a relatively small but significant population of TV households (perhaps 10 to 20% of TV households) that will need to continue

receiving terrestrial TV/DTV for a long time. This is because they are located in low population density areas that are too expensive to cover with CATV infrastructure. This group also needs more local content than satellite DTH alone can provide (news from hundreds of miles away isn't much help).

Broadcasters have a potent conduit to educate consumers about terrestrial DTV through their existing analog TV channels. We see "infomercials" selling an endless array of products we never knew we needed-why not a few infomercials explaining the features and benefits and explaining how to receive terrestrial DTV?

If the mass market doesn't develop in time, perhaps all the subscription services will be assessed a "universal service fee" much like the telephone service fee to subsidize economically disadvantaged viewers and allow analog TV shutdown on schedule.

Broadcasters should also rethink some of their programming practices that amount to a form of "viewer abuse." If the program content and delivery is a pleasant, compelling experience, viewers will do whatever it takes (within reason) to receive that program. This was one conclusion of the FCC study on the "UHF handicap" back in the 1970's.

Am I wrong in my take on the present situation? Let me know what you think.

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November 19 10:15 AM
December 17 12:05 AM



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