

Leap-frogging to DVB-T2 is a viable option

KUALA LUMPUR – With the intent of providing some discussion points on the viability of leap-frogging to DVB-T2, *Asia-Pacific Broadcasting (APB)* organised a workshop during the three-day ABU Digital Symposium in the Malaysian capital last month. On hand to facilitate the discussion was Andrew Yeo, publisher of APB, who introduced the four-member panel of presenters and encouraged the audience to share their views on the challenges of going the T2 route.

John Bigeni, the DVB Project's Asia representative, said that DVB-T2 is a "beautiful" system that will provide broadcasters with maximum efficiency in terms of deploying a larger number of spectrum capacity, compared to its predecessor DVB-T1.

However, Bigeni admitted that he really did not have an answer as to whether broadcast-

ers should go directly to T2 from analogue. "I'd say whether you're going to T2, or going to T1 first, is really a matter of horses for courses," he said.

Even if there are already receivers and other solutions configured for DVB-T2, the choice of going in that direction has a lot of implications. "Different countries will have different viewpoints, and with good reason," Bigeni added. Moreover, the decision to go to T2 would be tied to the economics of a country.

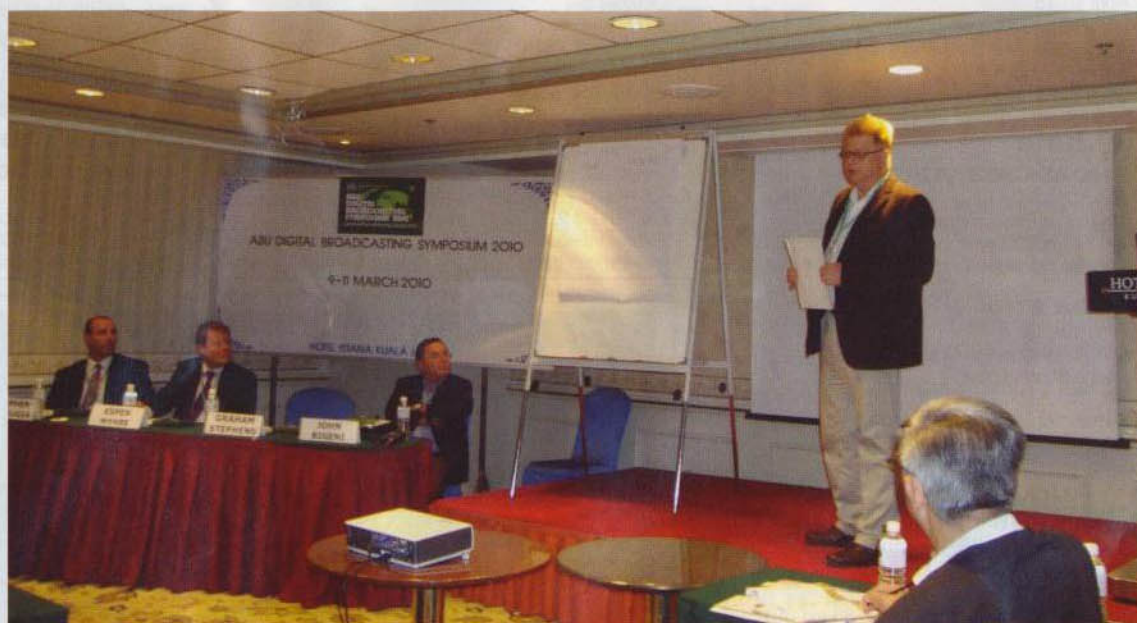
But the bottom line is, he said, consumers are oblivious of how many services the broadcasters are deploying. "They don't care if its DVB-T or DVB-T2; they are not getting any extra," he declared. "We produce the technology, but it is really up to the governments to decide which direction to go, and whatever they decide, it should be the right thing."

But the cost of T2-enabled set-top boxes (STBs) is clearly a push factor for broadcasters going digital, if at all.

Graham Stephens, a consultant from Saffron Consultants and an APB panellist, revealed that when he was a member of the ASEAN common STB working group, his main concern was, if broadcasters in the region are going to have a common STB, then they should also need to have a common business model.

"And when you are talking about countries like Singapore versus countries like Myanmar, then there is no common business model," he said.

Stephens' advice is, each country makes its own decision



The panellists presenting their opinion on the issue of leap-frogging to DVB-T2 are, from left: Stephen Farrugia of Broadcast Australia; Espen Myhre of T-VIPS; John Bigeni of the DVB Project; and Saffron Consultant's Graham Stephens (on stage).

on what kind of digital scenario it will carve out for its broadcast landscape. But he advised free-to-air networks (FTAs) to check out what the competition is offering — FTAs versus satellite and cable TV broadcasters, which can deploy more than 100 TV services.

What could FTAs possibly offer to beat the competition, if they do not even have HDTV service?

"It's content that matters, it's content that people want to watch and it's content that they pay for," Stephens pointed out.

Free content is in the heart of the free-view platform, so he believes consumers would not mind paying for a T2 box as long as they will have access to free content afterwards — unlike the pay-TV model where consumers have to pay as long as they access the pay-TV's bouquet of programmes.

Stephens also thinks that broadcasters planning the leap should not be held down by the price of T2-enabled STBs. Broadcasters need to do research — as

he did and discovered that the box costs only around US\$87, and not the \$300 price range originally perceived by many within the industry.

"With the time frames at your disposal, and if you do your own research, I am sure you will come to the same conclusion as I did, that leap-frogging to DVB-T2 is the only way to go," he concluded.

Espen Myhre, vice-president of sales for Norway-based T-VIPS, agreed that it is a good plan to go directly to T2 from day one, but cautioned that broadcasters still need to look at the big picture.

How much would it cost them to build the infrastructure and supply the T2 STBs, Myhre asked, if the price of the box is still an important factor? In Norway, where broadcasters are using T1 and MPEG-4, the question is whether it is worthwhile to consider T2, as MPEG-4 already has the ability to transmit in HD, or whether it is still necessary to have DVB-T2 in the short term, as MPEG-4 can already enable HDTV deployment.

Myhre said T2 can be considered for Norway's long-term plans, if broadcasters there want to deploy 3DTV.

The thought of deploying stereoscopic 3D in the future was also in the mind of Stephen Farrugia, engineering director of Broadcast Australia. But his country needs to move to T2 first, he said. Farrugia also raised the question of whether or not Australia was right in choosing DVB-T1 and MPEG-2 (Australia started deploying DTV in in 2001) for its current broadcast deployment.

"We chose DVB-T because it was right for us at that time; we chose MPEG-2 because it was the leading edge at that time," he said. "We even tried to push the standards and the receiver manufacturers to make

[DVB-T1] as long-living as it could be in the Australian market."

But does Australia need to go to T2? Yes, Farrugia said, as broadcast spectrums are actually being utilised more by mobile broadband providers than by broadcasters.

After the presentations, the audience gave their comments. Colin Prior, director of International Sales for Strategy and Technology, pointed out that with the market moving towards TV sets with integrated T2 receivers, the need for T2 boxes are actually for the short term, to serve as adapters for older TV sets.

Luc Haeberle, director, solutions for broadcast at Rohde and Schwartz, maintained that if the time frame for a T2 switchover is 12 months from now, then it would probably be too early. However, as a manufacturer of transmitting solutions, Rohde and Schwartz has noted an increased demand for DVB-T2 test equipment from their customers.

Haeberle also cited Indian broadcasters' decision not to order any more DVB-T1 solutions — a sign that the country may leapfrog to T2.

Dr Bertold Heil, senior vice-president for strategy & media policy for Media Broadcast in Germany, revealed that in his country, broadcasters are already fighting for spectrum, with FTAs' competitors coming from satellite and cable operators. Thus, he cautioned broadcasters taking the leap to look carefully at what the competition is doing and make sure they know what they really want as they also have to consider what advertisers want.

Dr Heil also advised broadcasters not to shut analogue cold but to try to simulcast first in digital and analogue before switching off analogue altogether.



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Colin Prior of Strategy and Technology (standing): With the market moving towards TV sets with integrated T2 receivers, the need for the T2 boxes are actually for the short term, to serve as adapters for older TV sets.



Dr Bertold Heil (extreme right) of Germany-based Media Broadcast: In his country, broadcasters are already fighting for spectrum.