

Background

Like broadcast television, cable television and other video media distributors are also transitioning to digital delivery technologies. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has adopted rules that will help smooth this transition for millions of Americans. The FCC's "plug-and-play" rules will ensure that most cable systems are compatible with digital television (DTV) receivers and related consumer electronics equipment. This compatibility is crucial to developing products and services to help spur the digital transition.

Plug-and-Play Digital Television

Increasingly, cable services are being provided in digital format and broadcast stations are in the midst of a transition from analog to all-digital service. Currently, analog cable-ready TVs are available for basic analog services over cable, but not for digital services over cable. A "plug-and-play" DTV is a television that you can plug directly into your cable system to receive analog and most digital cable services without the need for a set-top box.

Benefits of Plug-and-Play

- Many consumers prefer the convenience (and cost savings) of receiving cable programming without the need of a set-top box.
- You will be able to take your plug-and-play set virtually anywhere in the country and know it will work on cable systems offering digital services.
- Plug-and-play will allow you to fully utilize the features and functions provided by the television set that often are unavailable when connected to a cable set-top box.

Will Digital Plug-and-Play Work Like Analog?

Digital plug-and-play is a new technology. To use it, you need to get a security card (also known as a "CableCARD™") from your cable provider. The CableCard will plug into a slot on your plug-and-play set and will permit you to receive scrambled programming, including premium services, to which you've subscribed.

Will I Need A Set-Top Box if I Have a Plug-and-Play Set?

The first generation of plug-and-play sets will be able to receive one-way programming only, including analog basic, digital basic, and digital premium cable programming.

If you want to receive certain advanced digital cable services like pay-per-view, video-on-demand, cable operator enhanced program guide, or interactive data enhanced television service, using a first generation set, you will need a set-top box. You may also need a set-top box to receive other cable operator-provided services, such as those that incorporate the features of a personal video recorder.

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Will I Need A Set-Top Box if I Have a Plug-and-Play Set? (cont'd.)

Negotiations are underway between the cable and consumer electronics industries to establish standards that would permit plug-and-play sets to provide advanced two-way services as well.

Availability of Plug-and-Play Sets

Plug-and-play sets built pursuant to the new standards are currently in retail stores. To verify that you are buying a plug-and-play set, ask your retailer if the set is "digital cable ready" and look for the label. Manufacturers that use that label must meet certain technical standards and must complete a testing and verification process.

Viewing High-Definition Programming On Plug-and-Play Sets

Plug-and-play will permit you to watch digital programming, but not all sets will display full high-definition quality. To be sure, check with your retailer on whether the set displays full high-definition quality or a lower resolution. You can also ask your local cable provider if it offers HDTV programming.

For More Information

For more information about DTV in general, visit our DTV Web site at www.dtv.gov or see our DTV consumer fact sheet at http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/digital_tv.html. You may also call our Consumer Center at: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice, 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY, or send an e-mail to fccinfo@fcc.gov.

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