

# **Six myths of digital migration**

Guy Berger

5<sup>th</sup> Annual Digital Broadcasting  
Switchover Forum 2010, 21-23 April,  
Johannesburg

# Conventional “wisdoms”

1. Digital broadcasting will end the digital divide and bring internet access to the masses.
2. Frequency scarcity is why Africans have to get cracking with digital migration.
3. DSO will induce more channels.
4. The deadline is fixed at 2015.
5. Over-run that countdown, and we face ruin.
6. We have to avoid tech obsolescence.

# **Correcting false impressions**

# Myth 1: Digital divide

- Digital broadcasting is one-2-many comms.
- Internet mixes one/many-2-one/many
- They *should* be related:
  - Eg. a return path (eg. sim card enabling an IP link via GPRS) *should* be built into a Set Top Box.
  - But in SA, at least, it's not.
- Broadcast & Internet = different universes:
  - Generally different technologies & operandi
  - Even though the content may overlap!

# Myth 2: Frequency scarcity

- Most African countries still have analogue space for more broadcasters, TV & radio.
- For example, in July 2009, the Kenyan authorities started to cancel two-thirds of the licences issued for 258 radio frequencies which had been awarded but not taken up.
- The obstacle to more broadcasting in Africa is not a shortage of frequencies.
- Agenda of DM mainly reflects First World conditions where there is scarcity.

# Myth 2a

- A secondary reason for DM in Africa is freeing up some analogue broadcast spectrum for cellular telephony expansion.
- This too is not terribly urgent, and benefits are outweighed by time & cash to conclude DSO.
- Most cellphones in Africa still generations away from being able to get digital broadcasts.
- Ample potential to expand current cellular use for basic internet and m-commerce functions.

# Myth 3: Will lead to more channels

- The limit in African conditions is not technical
- Biggest barrier = lack of licensing liberalisation
- 2<sup>nd</sup> biggest: lack of a viable business model
  - Language challenge = fragmented markets
  - Limited market size and wealth
  - Lack of market research for advertising logic
  - Weak business skills in broadcasting (even SABC)

# Myth 4: deadline set for 2015

- 2006 Regional Radiocommunications Conference (RRC-06) did fix a deadline.
- But as Yoshio Utsumi, at the time secretary-general of ITU has noted, RRC also allows for five extra years.
- *Almost 30 countries in Africa have up to 2020 to switch off analogue TV:*
  - In Band 3: 16 countries (Bands 4-5, 2015 holds)
  - Bands 3, 4-5: 13 countries

## Myth 5: sky falls after 2015

- Post deadline: extent of cross-border interference with signals is limited anyway.
- African audiences welcome spill-over across borders: it expands their limited choice!

## Myth 6: avoid obsolescence

- Good pickings of cheap analogue from developed countries;
- Worth delaying so you can leapfrog into latest digital standards...

# 7a and b: bonus myths on radio

## A. Many mistakenly think 2015 also applies to radio.

- "Beyond broadcasting. The future of state-owned broadcasters in Southern Africa  
<http://nml.ru.ac.za/files/fesreport.pdf>.
- Study shows **confusion** in African radio:
  - They think that DSO applies to them
  - They think they are OK 'cos they have digital production

## B. But this is \*not\* DM-readiness!

- "Digital migration" in TV and radio refers primarily to transmission and reception!

## Implications:

It's TV only.

It's not all Africa by 2015.

Avoid the “catch-up” hype.

There is no need to rush.

Enter the fray down the line.