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TOPICS

Complete Digitization of 50 Million Households---The Current Status of and Approach towards Terrestrial Digital Television

The complete shift to terrestrial digital television which is due to be finished by July 24, 2011, is now only 3 years away. At this point, we would like to present an overview of the most up-to-date status of terrestrial digital television as well as the topics that are being tackled.

The significance of the digitization of terrestrial television broadcasting

We would like to start by documenting the significance of introducing terrestrial digital broadcasting.

The digitization of television broadcasting is a project that will be beneficial to the people of Japan as a whole, and that is being tackled on a nationwide basis. Its aims start with the efficient use of frequencies, the realization of high-performance media services, the strengthening of international competitiveness, and the creation of new businesses and jobs. Also, from the point of view of enabling better offerings that are relevant to citizens' lives, they look to respond fully to a variety of needs for the likes of disaster prevention and management as well as education, all of which are necessary for the safe and secure existence of the people.

Japan has a variety of wireless systems including mobile phones and emergency-use government wireless systems, but

the network of 50 million households that widely enjoys television broadcasting is the largest in scale, and it is no exaggeration to say that tackling concurrently the shift from analog to digital networks can be called a national project.

Television broadcasting includes a variety of programs such as news and weather forecasts, sports, variety and the like, deeply penetrating the daily lives of the population, and it has now become a must. In addition, even though the penetration of the Internet is progressing very rapidly, the amount of time devoted to television accounts for more than 60% of all media, including newspapers and magazines, and the radio, leaving no doubt that television broadcasting is the foremost medium in Japan. The shift to digital technology which enables more convenient enjoyment of these television broadcasts through better pictures needs the unanimous solidarity of all concerned, and to make steady progress forward.

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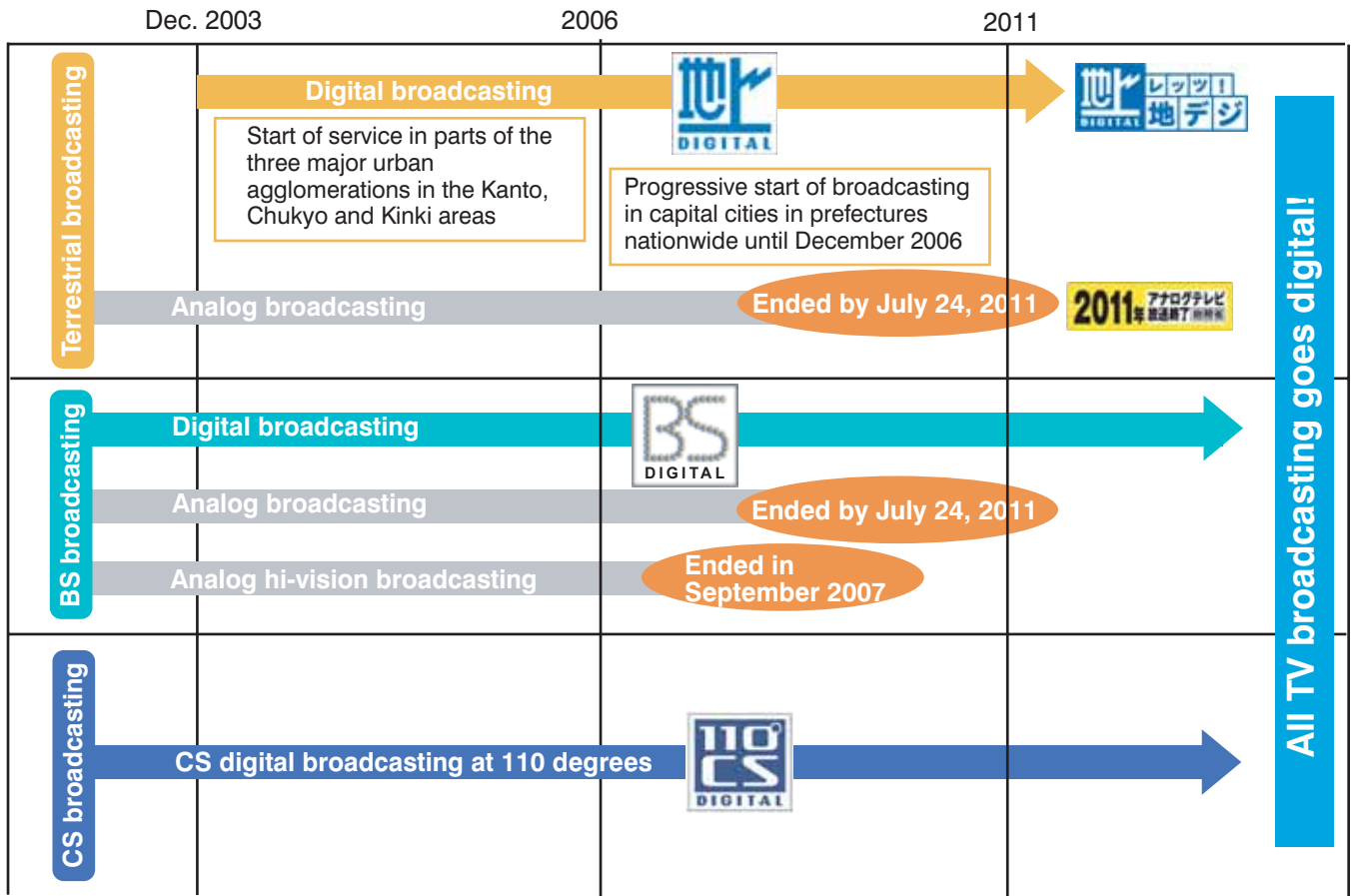
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The status of penetration of terrestrial digital broadcasting

The installation of relay stations by the various broadcasters to enable reception of terrestrial digital broadcasting has been progressing at fever pitch, and the target is to put in place 2,000 relay stations by the end of 2010. There are presently 43.3 million households (92% of the total as of the end of December 2007) that can enjoy terrestrial digital broadcasting through the relay stations that are already operational, so reception has become possible for the vast majority of households.

Penetration of digital receivers has now reached 22 million households, giving a rate of 43.7% (as of the end of March 2008). Penetration has proceeded smoothly until now. In recent years, many appealing models of receivers have gone on the market and further improvements in functionality and pricing are expected in the future, with an expectation of increased penetration.

There are cases, however, where households require equipment in addition to the

receiver, such as antennas or boosters, and the issue is that there are households that, despite having a digital receiver, continue to view analog broadcasts, so further efforts will have to be made to disseminate information to viewers.

Issues to be faced ahead of July 2011

There are only three years left until July 2011, by which time the shift to all-digital broadcasting should be complete, and we are now into the final stage of the completion of the shift to terrestrial digital broadcasting. The administration, broadcasters, receiver manufacturers, retailers, regional municipalities and viewers are coming up with the issues that should be tackled, and it is necessary for all who are concerned to tackle these appropriately, thoroughly, and with a firm resolve. Some of the issues are discussed below.

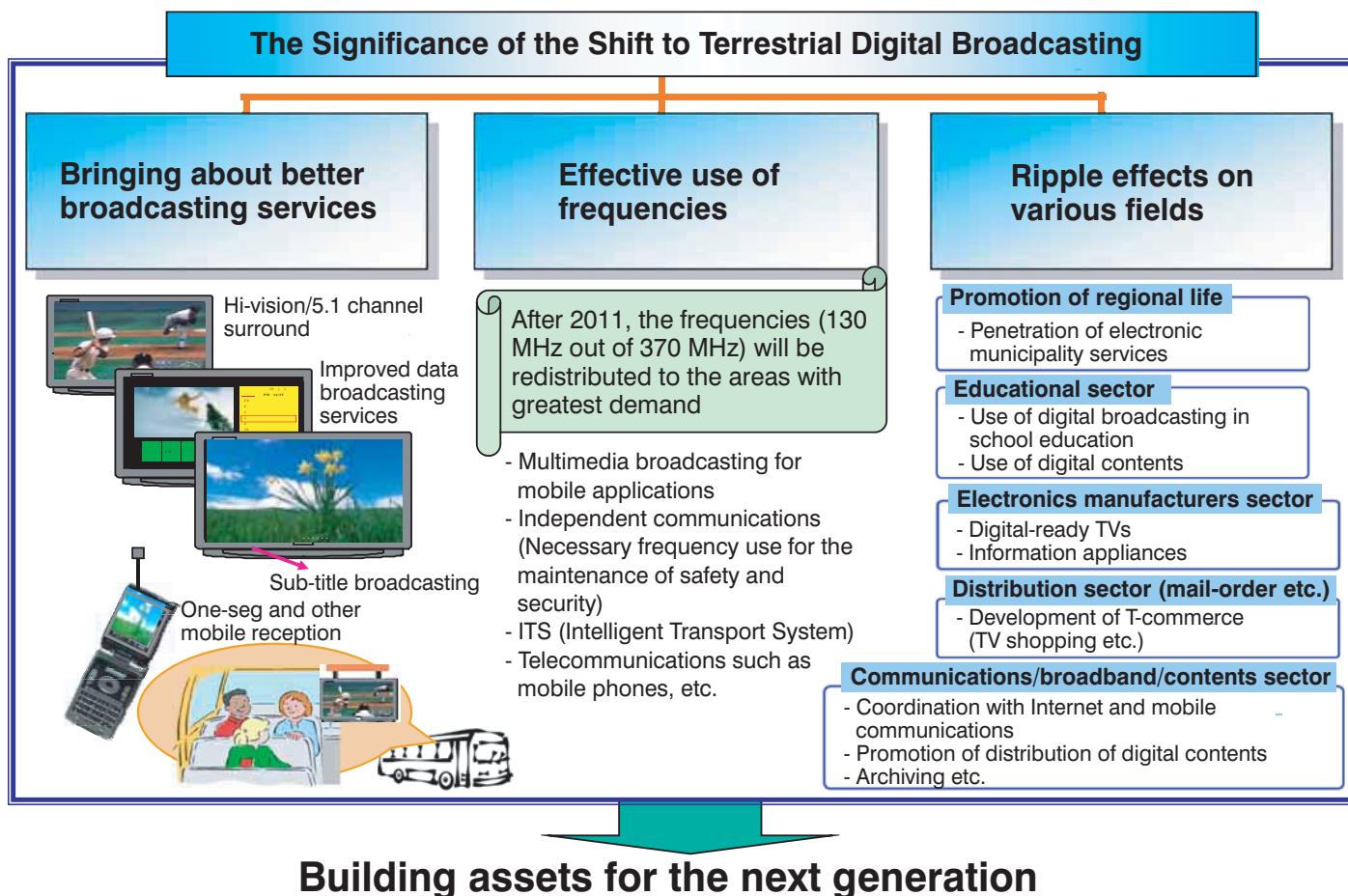
(1) Issues related to the broadcast side

The basic requirement in order to reach every single household with digital broadcasting is to complete the installation of relay stations and

start digital broadcasting as soon as possible. In order to do this, the broadcasters need to move steadily on the installation of relay stations, and other transmission routes such as cable TV and IP networks also need to be exploited in order to be able to provide terrestrial digital broadcasts reliably.

In addition, for mountainous areas where signals from large relay stations get through with difficulty, there are cases where low-power intermediate relays (gap fillers) work well. MIC has already completed the putting in place of a system to make such wireless system installations both easy and cheap, but further efforts are necessary to increase their penetration.

Furthermore, there are unfortunately households that will still not be able to receive these broadcasts despite all of these efforts, and it is necessary, as a provisional and emergency measure, to investigate ways of providing them with terrestrial digital broadcasting programming via artificial satellite (a satellite-based safety net).



(2) Issues related to receivers

The viewing of digital broadcasts by the country's 50 million households cannot happen only through the efforts of the broadcasters. It is vitally necessary for those receiving the broadcasts to also make an effort.

A major issue that is being faced by those receiving broadcasts is the shift to digital equipment in shared viewing. In the case of shared viewing, unlike what is the case in individual housing where one can put up an antenna on the roof and receive the broadcasts directly, multiple households put in place a representative reception antenna, and share the viewing of the broadcasts via wired installations. In Japan, different types of shared viewing include housing complexes (approximately 520,000 buildings), joint viewing in areas with reception difficulties (approximately 50,000 installations) and remote area shared viewing (approximately 20,000 installations), and upgrades

are necessary to make these digital compatible.

In the case of the move to digitization for shared viewing premises, the people who own the facilities are not the same as the viewers, and as multiple households jointly share in the management, it is necessary to give attention to the fact that it often takes time for decisions to be made in cases where upgrades need to be made.

Also, another major issue in the shift to digital broadcasting is to reduce the burden of the viewer. For example, there is a need to promote approaches such as a way to view the signal simply just by diffusing an interior antenna, or to make it possible to continue using existing receivers by creating a simple adapter.

In any event, there is a limit to the number of contractors who can install antennas or do upgrade work, and July of 2011 at which point analog broadcasting is scheduled to stop is the height of

air-conditioning season, so it is necessary to take measures ahead of time so that all work is not concentrated on that period.

Furthermore, there have recently been cases of people claiming to be television researchers or construction workers that have taken advantage of antenna installation works to send scam invoices, requesting fraudulent payments (fictional invoices) by mail. It is necessary to make people aware of dishonest businesses that circulate erroneous information or insufficient information concerning terrestrial digital broadcasting in order to sell related products and services.

(3) Dissemination of information

In order to solve the issues related to receivers that are outlined above, there is a need to put in place a receiver consultation system and for related organizations to cooperate in circulating information on an

ongoing basis.

Various kinds of information such as "a roadmap for relay station installation", "a roadmap by city, town and village" and "a channel plan for terrestrial digital television broadcasting" have been released through publicity activities to date, and efforts have been made to deepen understanding among viewers and regional municipalities.

Additionally, there are plans to set up "television viewer support centers" (provisional name) this year in 10 locations nationwide, with broadcasters and related

organizations cooperating to offer reception advice by telephone and disseminate information. Through these centers, it is planned to broadly disseminate detailed information to people across the country, including the elderly.

Also, the most efficient approach to disseminating information about television is to do so via the television. That is why a plan that is scheduled to start after this summer will have broadcasters inserting a sign saying "analog" on the right-hand side of analog broadcast screens so as to raise awareness of viewers.

(4) Actions by the government as a whole

Looking ahead to the complete implementation of terrestrial digital broadcasting, MIC set up the General Headquarters for Digital Terrestrial Broadcasting in September of last year, headed by the Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications. Also in September of last year, a Ministerial Consultative Committee for the Completion of the Shift to Digital Broadcasting was set up under the Cabinet Secretariat as an integrated approach from the government as a whole. At the same time, concentrated investigations and proposals are taking place at the Committee for the Promotion of Terrestrial Broadcasting of the Information and Communications Council concerning the various issues related to the promotion of terrestrial digital broadcasting.

With only three years remaining before the complete shift to digital broadcasting, we have now entered the final stage of the process. The government will do what it needs to do, and aims to be quite ready for July 2011.

(5) The shift to digital BS broadcasting

Looking ahead to the shift to all digital BS broadcasting, the decision has been taken that BS analog broadcasts, just like terrestrial analog broadcasts, will end on July 24, 2011. In order to do this, it is necessary to get the people who view BS analog broadcasts to shift to the BS digital broadcasts that are already under way. The MIC is taking action via the Liaison Group for the Termination of BS Analog Broadcasting that was set up with BS broadcasters and organizations, and is taking action to move towards the problem-free ending of BS analog broadcasting and the smooth shift to BS digital broadcasting.



Pamphlets about terrestrial digital television that are being distributed by MIC and the Association for Promotion of Digital Broadcasting

Useful websites

o Terrestrial digital broadcasting guide

http://www.soumu.go.jp/joho_tsusin/whatsnew/digital-broad/index_en.html

o Information regarding terrestrial digital television (in Japanese)

http://www.soumu.go.jp/joho_tsusin/dtv/

o Roadmap to construct relay stations for terrestrial digital TV broadcasting revised (March 2008)

http://www.soumu.go.jp/joho_tsusin/eng/Releases/Telecommunications/news080331_1.html

o Tentative list of channels for terrestrial digital TV broadcasting disclosed (March 2008)

http://www.soumu.go.jp/joho_tsusin/eng/Releases/Telecommunications/news080331_3.html

o Action plan for promoting digital TV broadcasting (No. 8) released (November 2007)

http://www.soumu.go.jp/joho_tsusin/eng/Releases/Telecommunications/news071130_2.html

o Municipal roadmap for terrestrial digital TV broadcasting (September 2007)

http://www.soumu.go.jp/joho_tsusin/eng/Releases/Telecommunications/news070913_2.html

o Liaison Group for the Termination of BS Analog Broadcasting to be convened (April 2008)

http://www.soumu.go.jp/joho_tsusin/eng/Releases/Telecommunications/news080415_1.html