

Brazil Wants Digital TV That Will Cost Zip to the Consumer

Contributed by Lourenço Melo
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Brazil's Minister of Communications, Hélio Costa, will soon travel abroad to check on the chances for technology transfer, which will make it easier to decide on the country's digital TV format.

According to the minister, there is interest by some countries in installing factories in Brazil, which would reduce the cost of new technology. Brazil is specifically interested in semi-conductor industries, said Costa.

"In Brazil, 93% of the TV sets receive open TV broadcasting. What we want is a system that is robust enough to reach that 93%," explained the minister. "What Brazil really wants is a format that will have zero cost for the Brazilian consumer."

Among the various countries Costa will visit are Japan and Korea.

The announcement of Brazil's choice for digital should have occurred March 10, but the committee studying the issue, which consists of nine ministers, asked for more time to make a decision.

Theoretically Brazil has three choices: it can select the Japanese format (ISDB), which is what broadcasters want, because it has good high definition, interactivity and mobile reception, but is not widely used outside Japan,

A second choice is the European format (DVB), which also has good high definition with more levels of interactivity and is used in 78 countries.

The third option would be the American format (ATSC), which has good high definition and interactivity, but no mobile reception, Canada, South Korea and Mexico say they will use it.

There is, at least on paper, a fourth choice for Brazil: a kind of hybrid digital TV standard, which would mean adapting a foreign format but including technological advances developed by Brazilians in the area which are significant and known as the Brazilian Digital TV System (SBTVD).

There is no lack of opinions on which format is best. Everybody seems to have one. Recently University of Brasília professor of Journalism, Murilo César Ramos, said he favors the European format because it offers more channels, more programs and more interactivity.

And the former secretary of Telecommunications at the Ministry of Communications, Mauro Oliveira, says he favors the hybrid format. "I don't think we should be forced to pick "A" or "B" or "C" - Japanese, European or American. Brazilian scientists have done a lot of work on this and should not be left out in the cold," he declared.

The Ministry of Communications estimates the digital TV market in Brazil will generate US\$ 10 billion in business over the next decade. And there is a strong desire to make a quick decision because the Brazilian government would really like to test the new format with broadcast images from this year's World Soccer Cup which takes place this summer in Germany.

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