

France: Mobile TV on trial
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Canal+, Nokia, SFR and
Towercast launch the first
major trial in Paris



Nokia 7710 telephone

Television on mobile phones will soon be more than just a dream. The first channel bouquets should start to be commercialized in France in the second half of 2006. In the meantime, the various consortiums* that obtained the green light from the CSA (French broadcasting authority) to conduct full-scale trials are racing each other for the finishing line. The TPS bouquet will soon be launching a trial involving 400 users in the greater Paris region who will receive about a dozen channels on Sagem cell phones.

But the first to launch is the group comprising Canal+, Nokia, SFR and Towercast. In the next few days, 500 people recruited in equal proportion from among the subscribers of Canal+ and SFR (mainly teenagers and single executives) will be given a Nokia 7710. During the six-month trial they will be able to watch 13 channels and listen to four radio stations free of charge (see box). The Finnish supplier claims this test terminal has three hours use time between charges.



Interactive services

“We want to measure in detail just how this new type of television will be used,” explained Guy Lafarge, CEO of Canal+ Distribution. *“From trials in other countries we already know that the time spent in traffic jams, etc. and on public transport (during stops) are when people choose to watch these programmes.”* The trial is also to determine whether *“it is the abundance of content, the relevance of the offer, or the interactivity that interests users most”*.

These programmes are designed in DVB-H (digital video broadcasting – handheld). This format enables companies to broadcast between 10 and 30 times more than in DVB-T (terrestrial DVB) since the image is reduced and adapted to mobile terminals. Each programme is encoded in 270 kbit/s (compared to 4 or 5 Mbits/s in the case of TNT). When the user turns on the telephone, she discovers a mosaic showing the channels available. Using a stylus pen she can consult a guide to find out about future programmes. She can then, for example, program her phone so that it warns her when one of her chosen programmes is about to start. This trial will not only be broadcasting audiovisual content. It will also be testing interactivity. In this case the communication goes via the operator’s mobile telephony network. By clicking on a logo users will be taken to the channel’s site.

Canal+ intends to go even further in the second stage. It will be asking the CSA for authorization to offer pay-per-view programmes. The return channel will be tested for ordering a video clip or voting during a programme. Finally, the offer will also be complemented by other content and other terminals such as small mobile TV sets.

France is not the only country to be testing mobile TV, and roughly a dozen trials are currently under way

around the world. The first results appear to be encouraging for operators. *“People watch these programmes for about 20 minutes a day,”* according to a statement from Nokia. So this is a long way from the average three hours’ consumption in the case of TV at home.

* On 13 September 2005 the CSA authorized four mobile-TV trials in greater Paris by four consortiums: TDF (DVB-H), TPS (DVB-H), Canal+ (DVB-H), and TF1 with VDL (T-DMB).

A bouquet worthy of the big screen

This first full-scale trial will enable owners of the Nokia terminal to watch 13 channels: Canal+, iTÉLÉ, Planète, CinemaCinema Premier, Sport+, L’Equipe TV, Equidia, Jimmy, Canal J, France 2, France 3, MCM Top, and NRJ 12. There are also four radio stations: Europe 1, FIP, NRJ, and Skyrock.

It is of course too early to find out how much would be charged for a bouquet but a basic package, comprising highly targeted TV channels, might cost around €7 a month. In Finland the basic package, comprising mainly general-interest channels, is on offer for €4.90 a month. The Premium package costs €3 more.