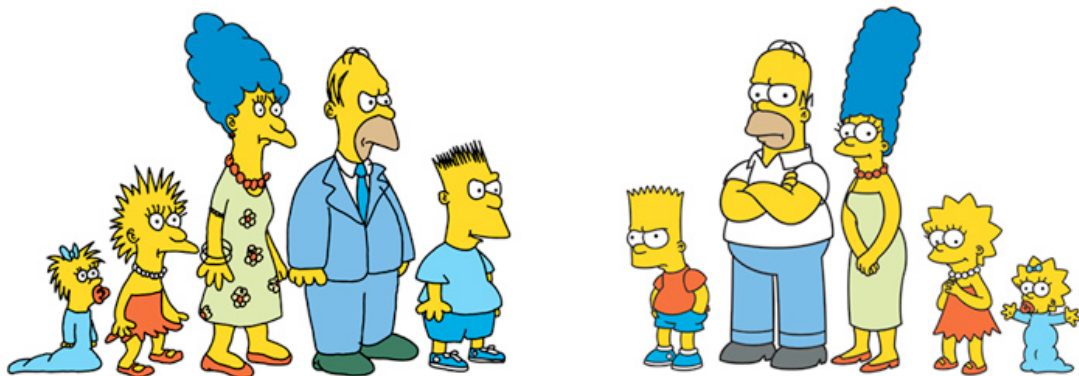


Television 1987 to Today

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The Simpsons

Introduction to 1987

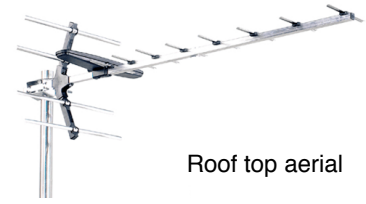
I was born into this world on February 3rd 1987 which was the year The Simpsons hit our screens on The Tracey Ullman Show in the United States and also the year the BBC had there corporate identity BBC Globe to zoom in for the first time.

The original BBC Globe was a model with mirrors and the Globe that was used from 1985 through to 1991 was made digitally, so in 1987 the BBC could make it zoom in easily on the logo. This slight change was to symbolise a "glance into the world of the BBC" as at the time the BBC televised the annual report to show where the publics license fee was going, the programme was called "See for Yourself".

Meanwhile on the other side of the Atlantic in the United States the very first Simpsons episode was shown and was very different compared to nowadays. As they were shown before and after commercial breaks during the first three seasons of The Tracey Ullman Show and the way they were animated, was more crude but they were meant only as sketches for the Show. Then the Simpsons grew more popular and teamed up with Fox Television to develop into a half-hour prime time show which aired its debut on December 17th 1989. The Simpsons are still going strong and they have had a massive success on the big screen with The Simpsons Movie in July of last year and it looks like there may be another film on the way.

Introduction to Television

In the late 1980's the main television channels were BBC1 and BBC2 from the British Broadcasting Corporation, Independent Television known as just ITV and Channel 4. Channel 4 started broadcasting in the early 80's but ITV and the BBC had been around a lot longer, however Channel 5 known as just Five now a days was the last national channel to be added to the analogue terrestrial television service in 1997. This was the main way to receive these 5 channels through your roof top aerial but starting this year this service is being switched off region by region and is called the digital switchover.



Roof top aerial

Other Transmissions & Switchover

There are 2 other main television platforms which are satellite and cable based, these systems of sending & receiving television signals also started life with analogue transmissions.

Nowadays cable is known as Virgin Media which still is not 100 per cent digital and they are only just starting to switch off their analogue transmissions starting with Coventry in May 2008. Virgin Media have still not upgraded all of their network for digital and in those areas Virgin only offer customers analogue still, they seem to be working out a solution.

Satellite television at the moment is known as Sky Digital and as you can tell by the name they are now 100 per cent digital. Sky was the first to be all digital and have been for some time, to be exact they discontinued there analogue transmissions seven years ago in 2001.



Satellite dish

Analogue terrestrial television is being turned off as I said above but not to worry as Digital terrestrial television (DTT) is replacing it but it has actually been around for about ten years and is known as Freeview. However DTT actually started of as a pay television subscription service like Sky and Virgin, it was originally known as On Digital back in 1998 but then later re-branded as ITV Digital in 2001. Following the re-branding, in 2002 the company was placed into administration on 27 March and shut down, however a consortium made up of the BBC, Sky and Crown Castle International was granted the old broadcasting license. This is who launched the Freeview service later that year on October 30 and now offer a totally free television service, all you pay is a one of payment for the box. Pay subscription services also got setup along side Freeview to give the option of more channels in 2004, and is known as Top Up TV.

"Satellite television at the moment is known as Sky Digital" I had said earlier but starting this year in May, the BBC and ITV have teamed up to offer a new free satellite television service. This new service is called Freesat and is to help offer free television to the whole country as Freeview can only offer about 73% of households where as Freesat will offer about 98%, the same as Sky Digital.



Recording Television

Having all this television means you would want to record it and you can, in my life time it started of with VHS which stands for the Video Home System. It was basically a cassette that was 187 mm × 103 mm × 25 mm in size and 12.7 mm wide magnetic tape wound between two spools, allowing it to be slowly passed over the various playback and recording heads of the video cassette recorder. This was a separate unit from the television, but later on in it's life they were found built in to some television sets eliminating the need for wires, most units used the tv aerial connection and or scart cables. Now most if not all retailers don't even sell these units any more because of new modern day technology.



Cassette

The next method of playing and recording video is DVD and has evolved from the same technology as CD's. It started off with the ability of these units able to play DVD's first, to be able to record onto this format came later on. With this type of media you get extra functionality with the addition of subtitles, multiple sound tracks and interactive menu's to navigate these features and more, this is still the most common used media for movies. When you could record onto this media, it was a bit confusing as there was different recording formats, these were DVD-R / RW, DVD+R / RW and DVD-RAM. The R and RW in each format mean different types of recording, recording once and rewritable, multiple times. When recording you don't get as many extra features, as you just have the direct recording from the television. The format war had resurfaced in the shape of DVD, before it had been with videos VHS versus Betamax and we know who won that. Now the most commonly used DVD's are either + or - R / RW, the RAM format did not take of a well as the others but is still used, any way most production of DVD units are multi disc compatible with most or all types of disc's able to play or record.



DVD disc

The recording device of the moment is PVR's which stands for personal video recorders and is most commonly associated with Sky Digital's sky plus box. These devices have more advanced interactive menu's than DVD units and the best interface for ease of use is once again Sky's. These devices also eliminate the need for removable storage such as VHS cassette's and DVD's as they use an internal hard drive which is found in computers. As television is changing from analogue to digital transmission's the recording devices are changing with them as VHS's record only analogue and will not work at all after the digital switchover. However DVD recorders can record both transmission's but analogue is being phased out of these devices, with PVR's because they use hard drives, it is only common sense to use digital as hard drives are a digital format.



Sky plus HD box

Sky have their own stand alone PVR as well as Virgin Media does but however Freeview lets all manufacturers make their own version but must incorporate the basic principles. This also leaves the manufacturers to come up with new and innovative interactive menu ideas, as they make the hardware as well they are free to try anything. The basic principles are the ability to record one or maybe more programmes at the same time you can watch one, pause & rewind live television and an electronic programme guide of about 7 days. An electronic programme guide is basically an electronic version of the radio times but with extra functionality, as you can easily record straight from it, you can also set it to record an entire series like for instance Doctor

Who but not all PVR's can do a series record. These devices also come with different sizes of hard drives as some people want to record lots of content, the size is measured in giga bytes GB for short. I also have one of these as I prefer the free aspect of Freeview and for an example my device is made by Wharfedale and has a size of 250GB and will record about 80 hours, other makes will be different as they use different compression technology and hard drive sizes.

High Definition on Different Platforms

As we are now in the digital era it's not just the digital switchover every one is on about, there has also been even more development than just switchover in the form of high definition HD for short. High definition television is taking off and is available on Sky Digital and Virgin Media only at the moment, but it will also be available on the new Freesat service very soon. You may think I have forgotten about Freeview but no, it is the only main television service that does not have high definition yet but it will be getting it. Freeview at the moment does not have enough bandwidth to carry HD and is down to analogue transmissions taking up that space so you've guessed it HD will come to Freeview during the digital switchover, between now and 2012. Sky Digital and Virgin Media have both incorporated HD into their PVR's so that you can record any brilliant and stunning moment you like, with the launch of Freesat they are to set about building it into some HD ready television sets like Freeview has been, so no need for a box for HD.



HD logo

About High Definition

High Definition is a higher resolution than standard definition which is what digital television is known as on a whole. It is not just the resolution of the screen it is also better sound quality, HD sound is similar to what you get on film DVD's, most commonly known as Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound. The screen of a high definition television set will also have a better colour index, meaning that the black's are even darker and so have a better contrast between the colours. The high definition signal is also broadcast in wide screen so that for example like films it is as true to how the director wanted it to be viewed, and also that most modern, if not all televisions now a days are wide screen any way, it's become the television standard size. High Definition also comes in different formats, in which I mean different resolutions these are most commonly known as 720p (1280x720 pixels), 1080p and 1080i (1920x1080 pixels) the p and i mean progressive scanning or interlaced scanning, the way the signal is received and processed on screen. The best resolution and sound quality is actually still in cinemas so don't give up going to see films just yet, and any way it's better with loads of people for the feel of it all.

High Definition External Storage

High Definition television can be recorded as we have found out onto PVR's but what about external storage? Before that another big thing with HD is that most films are being made into high definition so they need the next best media for selling to the public. It comes in the form of a disc the same size as DVD's and once again there is a format war. This time there are only two types and they are called HD-DVD and Blu Ray, BD for short. However it looks like it is already over as major organizations have pulled out due to cost's and the high influence of Sony's Playstation 3 as it plays film's and games in



HD-DVD & Blu Ray logos

the same format, plus that Blu Ray has a bigger storage capacity than HD-DVD. It looks like the new high definition format is Blu Ray as the American retailer Best Buy who owns 50 percent of Carphone Warehouse has decided to only sell this format.

So as the high definition winner Blu Ray format of choice has only just come out on top recently this year, most recording devices are in the early stages of development still. However some are already available to buy but I would wait until it has settled down completely and any way you need high definition in your home remember plus they will still work with standard definition television transmissions.

Transmissions over the Internet

I have said there are three main television services Terrestrial television transmissions through your roof top aerial, Satellite and Cable but there is a fourth I haven't mentioned yet. The reason I haven't is that it is only just starting to take off, but it has been around for a while delivering television to your home, it is called IPTV and this stands for internet protocol television. This is if you haven't guessed, television transmissions over the internet and there are two main rivals and they are Tiscali TV and BT Vision, they both offer similar services. As this is television over the internet everything is transmitted digitally and therefore will not be affected by the digital switchover. These two new services are a selection of bundled television offerings, BT Vision have agreed deals for the rights in a joint bid with Sky for on demand coverage of 125 matches each season from the Football League and Carling Cup. They will also have Wimbledon tennis to World Title boxing with the added Setanta Sports bringing other sport, also music videos and films all for on demand pay per view basis. Tiscali TV have actually got the bid that Virgin Media turned down from Sky for the "basics package" as well as Sky movies, sport channels and Setanta Sports. Both of these new services also have access to all the Freeview television, radio and interactive services. Tiscali TV and BT Vision both offer a box with all this, and it also has a PVR bolted on. As these are both telecoms companies they also offer telephone and broadband as a triple play package, Virgin and Sky also do this.



Tiscali TV & BT Vision logos

Video on Demand

These services incorporate VOD, video on demand services which are having the ability of watching anything when ever you want it. The first place video on demand was being used was actually cable before it was known as Virgin Media. Now Virgin Media have the newly BBC and Channel 4's service on their platform and is known as the BBC iPlayer which you also get on the internet. The BBC iPlayer only launched officially back in Christmas 2007 but had been around since summer of 2007, the iPlayer is now integrated into Virgin, Tiscali TV and BT Vision. The iPlayer is mainly internet based where you can stream your favourite television programme with the help of the popular Adobe Flash Player and also the ability to download but the downloading is only available to Microsoft users where streaming is available to everyone. Channel 4's version is called 4OD and is also integrated into Virgin, Tiscali TV and BT Vision, this started as an application you downloaded from Channel 4's website but is only available to Microsoft users, again at the moment, they hope to make a Macintosh version available.



Sky and Virgin Media both have their own version of video on demand services but Sky are slightly different as satellites work in a different way so Sky have a 'best of selection' downloaded to Sky plus boxes every so often. Sky have also a VOD service on the internet so that customers can access anything at any time, this feature downloads programmes, this service also relays live channels over the internet, it is called the Sky Player. ITV also have their own VOD service and is similar to the BBC iPlayer by which I mean they are based on the internet, however they only stream their content instead of downloading. The ITV service also includes advertising between videos but it is only usually one for the main programmes that you select to watch, they also relay live channels over the internet.

Again in my lifetime the internet has sprung up from now where, when I was at school we only had a dial up connection at home. I remember the speed of the connection was so slow it was taking about 10 minutes to load only one web page. With the explosion of download speeds ever increasing it is getting easier to work with high quality video content on the internet. This advance in the internet has allowed more developers to experiment more with television and is allowing people to share new ideas for interactive content on delivering TV where you want it.

New Ideas

Each television provider is always looking for new ways of getting their content to the customers and television over the internet is just the latest way. As you can't go anywhere without being affected by the power of the internet the BBC have made a cutdown version of the BBC iPlayer for the revolutionary new Apple iPhone and iPod Touch. These two devices use WiFi to connect to the internet so the BBC have made it Apple friendly, it still has the full programming available which you get on your computers at home or in your workplace. You can access the iPlayer through the data networks on the iPhone but they are a bit too slow at the moment, these need upgrading in the future. The BBC hope to make other cutdown versions for other mobile devices like Nokia, when networks are upgraded.



Apple iPhone

The BBC have also struck a deal with the massively popular YouTube website, they have set up a BBC channel on the site and show trailers and popular video clips of what the BBC television has to offer. There are funny clips from programmes like the Mighty Boosh and upcoming trailers off, for example Doctor Who. As this is YouTube you can then embed your favorite clip into your own website or MySpace account.



You Tube logo

Starting this year, Apple's iTunes has started offering downloads of popular television programmes in the UK and all the main channels BBC, ITV and Channel 4 have joined in as it's the most new and popular way of downloading your favorite show. iTunes has already got quite a large collection of content and is growing, this seems to be the way forward that most people want to get their favorite show in the twenty first century.

Future of Television

The digital world seems to be the way forward for television, more so the internet in particular. With the explosion of all this development in television I don't see it stopping any time soon but you never know. As I love Mac's the thing I'd love to see is if iTunes turned into it's very own television service. iTunes have the very successful Apple TV and what would be brilliant is if they developed Apple TV to incorporate the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 channels, on demand services, interactive services into one with HD channels. This would be the ultimate IPTV service as then you could download to keep your favorite shows straight from iTunes and Apple TV. This could then be viewed through iTunes as well, as they would be integrated together meaning you could then access this on any computer running iTunes in the world. Teaming up with Sky would be brilliant to offer movies, sport and the latest Simpsons one of my favorite programmes.



Apple iTunes logo

I have broadened my knowledge of television and it's not just on your TV it is also now on your computer, the internet. It has got a lot more interactive and will continue into the future. I have enjoyed looking up all these different types of technologies, I do like my gadgets and tech. I like to help my family with these sorts of issues and they know I will be right most of the time.

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(this will open the application)