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2006 FIFA World Cup™

What widescreen 16/9 HDTV really means

High-Definition Television (HDTV) offers a high quality picture that delivers a much sharper image than Standard Definition TV because the picture consists of 1080i horizontal lines instead of 625i, resulting in a much higher resolution. When combined with the widescreen 16/9 format, HDTV delivers an almost cinematographic image.

Standard TV has an effective picture resolution of about 400,000 pixels. In the highest resolution digital TV formats, each picture contains about 1-2 million pixels. This means up to five times more picture detail on the HDTV screen.

HDTV is the highest quality format in digital television, with improved transmission, better resolution and colour and superb surround sound. HDTV is also the first complete digital 'end-to-end' solution.

HDTV reception requires an HD-ready TV set, an HD video source (usually via satellite or cable set-top box, but not needed if the HDTV set has an integrated tuner). A widescreen HD television set without an HD video source will only produce a larger picture of the same quality obtained on a standard television.

The FIFA World Cup™ on HDTV

At the 2002 FIFA World Cup Korea/Japan™, 48 matches were covered in HDTV, with a maximum of 8 cameras per match. EURO 2004™ also produced a single HDTV feed, available only at the stadium hence there was limited take up of the signal in this format (one broadcaster).

For the first time in FIFA World Cup™ history, in 2006 all 64 matches will be originated in wide-screen 16/9 HDTV digital format with 25 HD cameras per match and a package of Super Feeds delivered at the stadiums and at the International Broadcast Centre (IBC).

Infront Sports & Media has concluded a substantial number of broadcast agreements including the right to utilise the turnkey HDTV signal produced by HBS. More than 70 territories worldwide are covered by such a license - however, the commercialisation is not expected in all territories due to limited HD infrastructure or market penetration.

Anyway, the 2006 FIFA World Cup™ is the first truly global event to commit to and showcase HDTV on a significant scale - it is demonstrating to the world that HDTV is here to stay.

The decision to produce in widescreen HDTV became an obvious option for HBS for several reasons:

- The prestige of the FIFA World Cup™ calls for cutting edge production and the market is showing that it is ready
- Widescreen is fast becoming the common platform for home entertainment and many widescreen displays can offer HD quality
- The high quality of HDTV also makes it possible to achieve better quality pictures for tiny formats like mobile handsets. It is because the entire HDTV picture is perfectly focused that the editor can select any part of the picture and be confident that it won't be blurred

Adoption of HDTV around the world

In Japan, South Korea, Canada and the USA, HDTV is already strongly established.

- Japan's public broadcaster, NHK, launched its digital terrestrial broadcasting, fully applying HD technology, in December 2003. The number of households who can enjoy the service reached approximately 28 million (60% of all households in Japan) by the end of 2005
- The Canadian broadcaster Rogers Digital Cable already offers 33 HD channels on its Personal TV platform
- The U.S. cable television network ESPN HD was launched in March 2003. Today it is available to over 81 million homes and broadcasts 24 hours a day, 7 days a week a HD simulcast of all programs from ESPN including live sports

In Europe, leading channels and platforms such as BskyB, Canal+, Premiere, and Sky Italia have started HDTV in 2005 or have plans to do so in 2006.

Although many European broadcasters are committed to HD, it is necessary to invest in the higher (than analogue or SD) shooting and post-production costs in the short-term. On the other hand, existing programmes - movies, plays, documentaries - are rapidly being converted to HD ('upscaling' the SD signal) and stored electronically. Because creating new programmes in HD is more costly, only the largest broadcasters can afford to do so at present. Foremost among these is the BBC, which sees the potential of not only the huge consumer pull in Britain, a nation with the highest concentration of digital (and interactive) TV, but also the prospect of sales of HD content abroad.

Market research suggests that 12 million households in Europe will switch on to HDTV by 2010 and it is expected that 66 million European households will be equipped with HD-ready TV sets by this time.

- Premiere World, Germany's multi-channel pay-TV platform, launched three HDTV channels in November 2005. HDTV went from largely ignored to centre stage when Premiere announced its plans to offer three HD channels - for films, documentaries and sports, respectively - to subscribers in Germany and Austria

- In May 2006 the BBC has launched the UK's first free-to-air HD consumer broadcasts for a 12 month trial. The BBC's 2006 FIFA World Cup™ coverage will be simulcast in HD
- The Launch of Sky HD, the high definition television service of British Sky Broadcasting, is scheduled for May 2006. The initial Sky HD channel line up will consist of six programs, including Sky Sports HD
- In France Canal+, M6, TPS and TF1 are all introducing HD services in 2006
- The Belgium-based HD media company Euro1080 launched the first commercial satellite broadcasts of HDTV in Europe at the start of 2004 and two additional stations in summer 2005. For the 2006 FIFA World Cup™ Euro1080 has also acquired broadcast rights for theatrical venues on a pay basis and is entitled to distribute the HDTV feed to cinemas in 23 European countries

The cost of HD production equipment is also coming down and broadcasters hope viewers will share their enthusiasm about the superior quality of high definition images compared with standard definition. The 2006 FIFA World Cup™ in Germany is expected to be a major driver for the sales of HDTV sets in Europe.

HBS coverage of the FIFA World Cup™ in 2006 will provide an important source of widescreen HDTV content. HBS will issue 1,500 hours of programming in HD, which will be of considerable value to future users and will also enhance significantly the quality of the viewing experience for handset users.

"What seemed radical in 2003 has emerged as a clear trend," said Dominik Schmid, Executive Director, Broadcast Operations, for Infront Sports & Media, owner of HBS. "When HBS first considered the use of HDTV production facilities, it was not obvious that the application of this advanced standard would evolve as fast as it has. Now, it is almost certain that HDTV will be the future standard in television. FIFA is yet again at the forefront."

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For further information please contact:

Jörg Polzer
Manager, Communication & PR
Infront Sports & Media AG
Event Tel. +49-(0)89-949 32 077 *(until 5 July)*
Event Mobile +49-(0)171-56 40 477 *(until 10 July)*
press@infrontsports.com
www.infrontsports.com

Nicola Taylor
Director, Communication
Host Broadcast Services (HBS)
Event Tel. +49-(0)89-949 32 442 *(until 10 July)*
Event Mobile +49-(0)151-1 20 06 603 *(until 10 July)*
press@hbs.tv
www.hbs.tv