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**Satellite TV – The First Fifty Years**

**By Frank Johnson**

Dish Network, and other satellite TV providers didn't just appear over night. The development of satellite television took years and its origins can be traced back to the 1950s and the space race.

The original concept of satellite television is often attributed to writer Arthur C. Clarke, who was the first to suggest a worldwide satellite communications system. Funding for satellite technology in the U.S. began in the 1950s, amidst the space race, and the Russian launching of the satellite Sputnik in 1957.

The first communication satellite was developed by a group of businesses and government entities in 1963. Syncom II orbited at 22,300 miles over the Atlantic; the first satellite communication was on July 26, 1963, between a U.S. Navy ship in Lagos, Nigeria and the U.S. Army naval station in Lakehurst, New Jersey.

Overloaded land based distribution methods had the telephone companies utilizing satellite communication way before the television industry even came into the picture. In fact, it was not until 1978 that satellite communication was officially used by the television industry.

In 1975, RWT's co-founder and BBC transmitter engineer Stephen Birkill built an experimental system for receiving Satellite Instructional Television Experiment TV (SITE) transmissions, beamed to Indian villages, from a NASA geostationary satellite.

Birkill extended his system, receiving TV pictures from Intelsat, Raduga, Molniya and others. In 1978, Birkill met up with Bob Cooper, a cable TV technical journalist and amateur radio enthusiast in the U.S., who invited him to a cable TV operators' conference and trade show, the CCOS-78. It was there that Birkill met with other satellite TV enthusiasts, who were interested, and ready to help develop, Birkill's experiments.

Interest in Television Receive Only (TVRO) satellite technology burst forward. The American TVRO boom caught the attention of premium cable programmers, who began to realize the potential of satellite TV. Back in the mid-1970s, TV reception was the under the control of international operators, Intelsat and Intersputnik.

## Satellite TV – The First Fifty Years

On March 1, 1978, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) introduced Public Television Satellite Service. Satellite communication technology caught on, and was used as a distribution method with the broadcasters from 1978 through 1984, with early signals broadcast from HBO, TBS, and CBN (Christian Broadcasting Network, later The Family Channel). TVRO system prices dropped, and the trade organization, Society for Private Commercial Earth Stations (SPACE), and the first dealerships were established.

Broadcasters realized that everyone had the potential to receive satellite signals for free, and they were not happy. But the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) was governed by its open skies' policy, believing that users had as much right to receive satellite signals as broadcasters had the right to transmit them.

In 1980, the FCC established the Direct Broadcast Satellite (DBS), a new service that consisted of a broadcast satellite in geostationary orbit, facilities for transmitting signals to the satellite, and the equipment needed for people to access the signals. In turn, broadcasters developed methods of scrambling their signals, forcing consumers to purchase a decoder, or a direct to home (DTH) satellite receiver, from a satellite program provider.

>From 1981 to 1985, the big dish satellite market soared. Rural areas gained the capacity to receive television programming that was not capable of being received by standard methods.

The Satellite Broadcasting and Communications Association of America (SBCA) was founded in 1986 as a merger between SPACE and the Direct Broadcast Satellite Association. But by this point, American communication companies had soured on the prospect of satellite TV. Broadcast cable was very successful at this time, and the satellite industry received a lot of negative press coverage. Fifty percent of all satellite retailers closed their businesses.

Business eventually recovered, but the illegal theft of pay television signals was still a problem. Ultimately, encryption has proven to be the ultimate salvation of the satellite industry as it has made the transition from a hardware to software entertainment-driven business.

Early successful attempts to launch satellites for the mass consumer market were led by Japan and Hong Kong in 1986 and 1990, respectively. In 1994, the first successful attempts in America were led by a group of major cable companies, known collectively as Primestar.

Later that year, Direct TV was established, and in 1996, the DISH Network, a subsidiary of Echostar, also entered the satellite TV industry. DISH Network's low prices forced competing DBS providers to also lower their prices. And an explosion in the popularity of digital satellite TV ensued.

I am first and foremost an observer of life. I enjoy analyzing and exploring all aspects of life on planet Earth, and expressing my personal perspective on the nitty gritty of it all. As a result of my observations, I have become a freelance writer.

<http://www.dish-network-satellite-tv.ws/>

## **How a Satellite Dish Works**

**By Gary Davis**

### How a Satellite Dish Works

Satellite technology has made leaps and bounds over the last decade, introducing the world to a whole new era of television entertainment. But have you ever wondered just how a satellite dish works? So did we.

#### Satellite Dish – A Parabolic Antenna

A satellite dish is basically just an antenna that is designed to receive signals from a specific broadcast source. The dish itself has a bowl-shaped (parabolic) surface to "catch" the signal and send it to the central feed horn as a narrow beam of energy.

To provide you with that quality satellite programming you enjoy so much, your satellite dish must receive a signal from the appropriate source. Man-made satellites orbit around the Earth at just about 20,000 miles into the sky. These satellites receive digital signals from your programming provider, encrypt them and then send them back out to subscribers.

How does your satellite dish know which satellite to receive?

#### Satellite Dish – Azimuth, Altitude and Skew

Each satellite is put into the sky at specific coordinates, similar to a longitude and latitude for navigating on land. These coordinates, the azimuth, the altitude and the skew, tell your dish exactly where to look. The azimuth is the East/West location while the altitude or elevation tells you how far North of the horizon (ground level) you need to go. The skew is a calculation to compensate for the natural curvature of the Earth itself. With these three coordinates, you can accurately point your satellite dish to receive transmission from the right satellite.

There are some systems that can receive signals from more than one satellite, having multiple horns to pick up multiple signals. To prevent any mix-up, each signal must be accurately reflected to separate feed horns so that there is no interruption.

When your satellite dish catches the signal, it sends it through the feed horn where it is transmitted to your satellite receiver. To make sure you receive a strong satellite transmission, your satellite dish should be mounted in an open area without obstructions such as trees and buildings.

Gary Davis is owner of

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an authorized DIRECTV retailer, has over five years

experience in the Satellite TV business and has written numerous articles on the subject.



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