

The Crew Report Issue 5 – Electronic Guru

Why you need High Definition TV to enhance your “off watch” pleasure

Whilst visiting some of the world's most luxurious and highly specified new builds at the Monaco Show last week I became aware that you, the crew, are not being looked after well enough. I visited various yachts and witnessed some of you guys “off watch” watching the TV, but only on old fashioned TV screens. OK, so there were some pretty cool flat screens around, but not quite cool enough!

What you need to ask the boss for is a High Definition screen with a Sky High Definition Box and subscription. If he needs any persuading, you could always tell him that the increased resolution and enhanced picture quality will be much better for your eyesight. So obviously, from a health and safety point of view....

In all honesty, it would have been tricky for the yachts at the show to have been watching TV at all this summer if they had been waiting for Sky HD boxes, as they have only become available during the last month. However, they were definitely worth waiting for, as any of you who visited our stand at the Monaco Show can verify. We had installed a 50” HD screen, with a Sky HD box and satellite dish, which attracted a permanent, appreciative audience. Perhaps it was the Ryder Cup that was the main draw, rather than our stunning technical display, but it was being shown on one of the Sky Sports HD channels, and the visual effect was stunning.

If you have ever looked at one of these sets, you can see that the image they display is sharp and wide, more like a cinema screen than a TV set. The higher resolution produces a picture with more clarity than you have ever seen before, and would ever have believed possible. I personally think HD comes into its own when watching the nature and exploration programmes, like the recent Planet Earth series on the BBC for example, or practically anything on the Discovery Channel. As we witnessed, it is also brilliant for major sports events. The depth of focus, zooming and colour quality are phenomenal.

The equipment required consists of a new Sky TV HD receiver, a new High Definition TV with HDMI (High Definition Multimedia Interface), and a Sky TV HD subscription. With Sky Plus and Sky HD, you also have the option to record and watch channels simultaneously. If you want to do this, you will need a second cable to be run from the LNB on the dish to the new Sky HD receiver.

With regard to the yacht, you will have a distribution system from a single antenna to a number of locations with multiple Sky boxes and TVs using a multi switch. In this case you will need to double up the inputs and outputs of the multi switch in addition to the cabling.

There is a new format HDMI cable between the Sky HD box and the new HD TV.

In both the above cases your dish will need to be big enough to receive the Sky signal. Bear in mind that the strength of the signal varies depending on your location, the channel you are watching, the time of day and weather conditions.

And for the complete package, don't forget the HD DVD player and HD DVDs!

The high definition experience requires the use of big and heavy equipment, not the sort of thing you can wander around with. So if you want to compromise your eyesight but you like the idea of portability, then IPTV (Internet Protocol TV) is for you. This also means you can keep up with the golf when on watch! I was on the bridge of a rather fine yacht at Monaco that had a hidden, but installed, TV for those long boring watches. What a kind captain!

IPTV is the delivery of TV programming to your mobile, your home, yacht or office via your broadband data connection rather than your terrestrial TV or satellite TV antenna.

What does this mean for crew? Without any dependency or interference with the yacht's systems you will be able to watch TV on your mobile phone, if it is HSDPA enabled and you have HSDPA coverage. (If you're still in the dark about HSDPA, have a look at my column in the last issue.)

IPTV is already available on 3G/HSDPA mobile phones in Europe. As early as February, I was watching the Winter Olympics live on my mobile phone, and it is now available here in Mallorca. A few weeks ago I helped with a yacht delivery from Croatia to Palma via Malta, and was very impressed with the GPRS, 3G and HSDPA coverage. What a vast improvement from last year. Various yacht captains have told me that the coverage around all the islands in Croatia was excellent this year.

I am sure a number of you are thinking "we may be able to watch IPTV on our phones, but we won't be able to afford it as the data costs are so high!" As we expected, Vodafone made a dramatic reduction in their data tariffs earlier this summer and we are expecting further reductions to make all these services more affordable. The scary cost, as most crew are now discovering as summer draws to a close, is the roaming charge. This is an area that can only be improved internationally. Our best advice is to use Vodafone, as it is the only service provider which has its own service in every country bordering the Med, and if you make sure you roam on their services, there are preferential and cheaper roaming charges.

Finally, one of the most fascinating possibilities of IPTV is being able to watch anywhere in the world where you have Internet access. I guess this will be controlled and regulated, but in theory we should soon be able to watch Sky in

New Zealand. When more details emerge we will be the first to keep you informed.