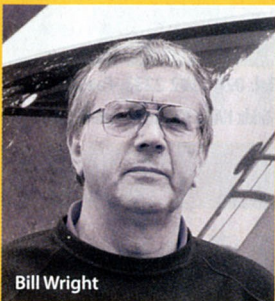


Pro Talk

Riggers should sometimes forgo massive aerial installations and offer Freesat, says Bill Wright

Freesat is well established, yet there are very few Freesat integrated TV sets on the market and Sony and LG are now discontinuing theirs. What's gone wrong?



Bill Wright

In areas with poor terrestrial reception, or where the local transmitter only carries three out of the six multiplexes, Freesat is a no-brainer and IDTVs and boxes should fly off shelves. But Freesat seems to be Britain's best-kept secret.

People are subscribing to Sky or cable because they don't know the alternative. I work in some poor reception areas and almost every day I have someone wailing about the cost

of the Sky subscription, 'just so I can get the ordinary channels.'

I know Freesat has sold a million set-top boxes in 18 months, but given the potential this is rather pathetic. The unscrupulous or shortsighted aerial contractor (they do exist) wants to sell a massive aerial rig, which provides a bigger profit than a Freesat installation. Meanwhile, Sky's publicity machine is ubiquitous.

As for TV dealers, we all know about the general standard of advice handed out by sales droids in large multiples. Some don't know the difference between Sky's Freesat, the BBC/ITV Freesat, and Freeview. That leaves the independent dealers, and as many of them are also aerial riggers (or have a rigger on a good commission) they too might not explain the virtues of Freesat.

This is misguided because Freesat installations can still pay well and you know it's going to work. Those annoying comebacks with marginal DTT reception won't happen. Most customers assume that Sky equals satellite, and satellite equals Sky.

Freesat is subscription-free, as the name suggests, and eventually the penny drops; I install Freesat, probably saving the client £300 and certainly giving them better reception than they could ever get terrestrially. The last time this happened the customer said: 'I still can't believe this is possible!' With luck, they will tell their friends and the truth about Freesat will spread.

Freesat is subscription-free

Last year I completed a TV distribution system in a sheltered housing scheme where terrestrial reception is hopeless and will remain so even after DSO. The system gives every flat two satellite feeds with the option of two more. With DSO looming, I went overboard with these people, holding meetings and showering the place with leaflets to explain that the digital future for them was Freesat (or Sky if they want). Since then the housing association has received endless complaints that the tenants have 'been forced to subscribe to Sky'. It's hopeless!

For normal domestic jobs with DTT problems it's best to explain the Freesat option and let the customer choose. Lots of installers feel Freesat robs them of a juicy aerial job, but it can work out nicely for you. I stress that since satellite will be the primary (or only) means of receiving TV, the installation should be of very high quality. Don't use a minidish – use a decent 60/65cm dish such as a Hirschman. Every TV location needs two feeds to allow for recording devices, so an octo LNB will be needed for a small job, and a multiswitch for anything with more than four TV locations. Use a switch with lots of spare ports if there's any possibility of later expansion. Installers must decide whether or not to sell Freesat receivers and recorders. Personally, I don't because the margins aren't enough to support the guarantee liability.

If one house has serious problems with terrestrial reception, it's likely the neighbours will too. There could be scope for a multi-dwelling system. This can be cost-effective for the customer and profitable for you. You must earth-bond every feeder cable individually, though, if the system serves more than one dwelling. Fibre-optic systems will become more affordable and this will make the Freesat option even more attractive.

So join the awkward squad, and sell Freesat!

For more from Bill, see www.paras.org.uk