

DTH operators, analysts to tune in digitally

TV ratings provider aMap will use a new method to measure viewing habits in 1,500 homes nationwide

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Direct-to-home (DTH) television service providers and TV rating analysts are tuning into the critical zone of digital TV audience measurement as more Indian households abandon cable operators and opt for personal dishes to receive satellite programmes.

To begin with, TV ratings provider **Audience Measurement and Analytics Ltd (aMap)** is installing a network of digital people meters—a tool to measure the viewing habits of TV audiences—in 1,500 DTH homes nationwide. The network would provide audience size and market share of each DTH operator, and viewership data of each channel and programme on the platform.

"Test data is already rolling out now for this DTH panel of 1,500 metered homes. Viewership data would be available on a daily basis and then we plan to extend this to real time (data as and when a programme is happening on TV)," said Amit Varma, chief executive officer of aMap.

DTH has a relatively small share of India's TV audience, but it is expanding its reach. The number of digital pay TV subscribers is expected to rise to 28 million by 2012, according to a study released last year by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and audit firm **Price-waterhouseCoopers**.

The viewership metrics would ultimately provide a window to the real-time, 24X7 viewing habits of high-income television viewers, who are the prime target of marketers and ad campaigns. They would also help channels on and off the DTH platform to independently validate viewing patterns of this segment of television viewers with advertisers.

TV viewership analysis firm **TAM Media Research Pvt. Ltd** already provides digital data

for CAS (conditional access system, in which digital media or satellite TV signals are transmitted to subscribers only) and DTH television homes on a weekly basis. TAM has 8,000 people meters.

L.V. Krishnan, chief executive of TAM Media, said the current penetration of DTH in the country is 15% and that's the ratio of people meters in its overall sample.

DTH operators such as **BIG TV Ltd**, part of the **Reliance-Anil Dirubhai Ambani Group**, have aspirations of getting into audience mapping themselves.

BIG TV's chief executive Sanjay Behl said while digital set-top boxes (STBs) have the capacity to pull out viewership data, BIG's Mpeg-4 set-top boxes also allow for two-way transmission and interaction. It also has wireless infrastructure that can be used for transmitting data.

Behl said BIG TV has been in dialogue with TAM Media on a joint initiative in DTH research. "With TAM, what we are trying to do is to build the eco-system. They understand data better and their expertise lies in modelling, cutting and analysis of data while we have the technology and infrastructure," he said.

Another DTH operator, **Dish TV India Ltd**, a part of the **Essel Group**, is also eyeing the digital TV audience mapping space, according to a senior communications industry executive familiar with the development. The company is seeking price quotes for 50,000 two-way STBs from a Chinese firm, among others, that can provide real-time viewership patterns of DTH channels, said the executive who didn't want to be named.

Jawahar Goel, managing director of Dish TV, denied that it was venturing into digital TV audience mapping or had placed any orders for STBs. "In which industry has a broadcaster or DTH operator been also a party to providing research numbers? If Airtel or BIG or anyone else initiate this, then there would be no sanctity to the data. Research data is only respected and used as industry currency when it's done by an independent party." An Airtel spokesperson declined to comment for this story.