[DE] Betaresearch Launches Programming Interface for the Set Top Box

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On 12 January, betaresearch, the Kirchgruppe R & D company, published the "betanova" Application Programming Interface (API) for its digital set top box (d-box). The set top box is necessary to decode the digital datastream into a television picture. With the publication of the programming interface it will now be possible for any programme supplier to develop its own new applications for the decoder. These can be electronic programme guides, for instance, and to implement these applications betaresearch has put a software development package on the market.

The decision to open up the d-box to competition was highlighted by the working group chairman of the public service broadcaster (ARD) as doing away with an obstacle to the introduction of digital television. Along with the disclosure of the programming interface, betaresearch announced on the same day that it had concluded a development contract with Philips Digital Video Systems. Consequently, in the future, Philips will also be making the d-box alongside Nokia. Technisat, which had been refused a construction licence, aims to acquire the right to build a d-box decoder through the courts. It has instituted proceedings at the Mainz District Court (file No. 11 HKO 91/98) , referring inter alia to the decision by the European Commission forbidding participation by Deutsche Telekom in betaresearch. The reason was, inter alia, the fear that with betaresearch partly controlled by Deutsche Telecom, obstacles could be put in the way of other service providers entering the market through its licensing policy (see IRIS 1998-6:14).

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