[GB] Interactive Television Guidance Published

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Last year, the Independent Television Commission opened a consultation on the approach to regulation concerning interactive services (see ITC news release of 29 February 2000). The key elements of interactive services were recognised to be (a) viewer choice and (b) viewer responsibility. The spin-off is the potential for certain rules to be amended or disapplied.

The consultation related to the two main forms of interactive services: "dedicated interactive services" and "enhanced programme services".

The former are "stand-alone services not related to a broadcast programme but accessed primarily directly via an Electronic Programme Guide. This links the viewer to a series of commercial ("Shopping Mall") entertainment and information services. In such an environment the principal concern of users is likely to be issues such as misleadingness with much less accent on matters of taste and offence." The latter are "services linked with traditional "linear" programme services. Using digital technology, viewers will have the opportunity to leave the linear programme and to interact both with programmes and with advertisements." The publication of guidance to licensees on interactive services (published on 12 February 2001) is based on the approach that "viewers come first and must be allowed to benefit from an innovative, emerging market." However, two current programme standards will continue to be important: the separation of advertising from editorial content and the protection of children. There were 32 responses to the consultation. The ITC also had discussions with "interested parties".

As regards "Dedicated Interactive Services" (including electronic shopping malls; entertainment services; and betting and gaming services) the ITC states that its "regulatory role in this area will be very limited." e.g., not regulating the content of such services "before viewers make a choice to enter an electronic 'High Street'." However, content will still be subject to national laws (as compared to the ITC's own Codes). Therefore, viewers should be clear about "which content is subject to ITC rules and which is not."

As regards "Enhanced Programme Services", the ITC's main concern is to safeguard viewers against "any confusion amongst viewers about when they are being sold to, and that programme content remains effectively safeguarded from

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commercial influences."

The applicable rules, contained in the Guidance Note, are separated into (a) general requirements and (b) more specific rules for news and current affairs; consumer advice; and children's programmes.

ITC news release 16/00 of 29 February 2000 "ITC Consults on a Light Touch Approach to the Regulation of Interactive Services"

ITC news release 09/01 of 12 February 2001 "ITC Publishes Guidance to Broadcasters on Interactive Television Services"

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