

# Gabonese free-to-air, pay TV operator looks to Africa

TNT Africa is the brand name of Digital TV, a private Gabonese company that offers FTA and pay TV bouquets using a digital DTT platform. As in many African countries, the private sector is outpacing the Government in moving ahead with the digital transition. Sylvain Béletre from Balancing Act talked to Morgan Juteau, development manager at Digital TV about the ambitions of the company.



TNT Africa carried out a DTT pilot in Gabon in October 2009 and launched shortly thereafter, making Gabon the first in Central Africa to get DTT, and the fourth on the continent (after South Africa, Morocco and Kenya). It is offering a bouquet of 40 channels costing between FCFA 2500-21 000 per month. It claims to have connected 200 000 households and to be targeting 300 000 nationally.

The company could become a serious contender in some other western and central countries on the continent if its ambitions are realised.

## **Q: How did you fund your company? Was Gabon's government involved in the funding?**

A: No, our company funds are 100% private and the company is located in Gabon.

## **Q: Is the company profitable?**

A: Yes it is. Our expenses are covered over 12 months of operations. We exceeded the threshold of profitability.

## **Q: How long does it take to reach the point of return on investment for the equipment?**

A: We have an equipment amortisation plan of over 10 years. Film rights are the largest part of our investment.

## **Q: How many homes exactly are connected to your bouquets' free DTT channels in Gabon, and what are the figures from the competition?**

A: Our coverage is extended to 200 000 households in Gabon. It's hard to know the exact number of households connected to our free channels. We are expanding our network to 300 000 homes in the cities of Libreville and Port Gentil. I assume that eventually all homes will be connected, since the analogue signal should disappear.

On the Pay TV side, Canal Satellite has around 40 000 subscribers in Gabon and has been present on the country for about 12 years.

Regarding broadcast piracy, there is a small operator in Gabon which has an MMDS of about 50 pirated international channels. It has about 5 000 subscribers. The phenomenon of cable operators does not exist in Gabon.

### **Q: What is the price of your bouquets in Gabon?**

A: The National Council of Communication of Gabon has set at 10 000 CFA francs per year per subscriber/household the tax fee owed to the government for getting terrestrial or satellite operators in Gabon. Four national channels are available for free on our signal: RTG1, RTG2, Téléafrika, RTN.

We have different prices depending on the bouquet and the channels they include.

For 2500 FCFA per month - the price of our basic bouquet - you can get 20 TV channels, a digital signal, a stereo sound without the need to purchase a satellite dish (your standard TV aerial will do).

You can also opt for seven different bouquets with between 2 and 6 channels per bouquet: i.e. our Cinema bouquet (2500 FCFA per month, 4 channels), sport, information, etc. These options cost between 1500 and 2500 FCFA per month.

When you subscribe and for 49990 FCFA, you get the digital TV box (branded 'D box TV') and access to all bouquets until the end of the month. So the minimum fee for the DTT box is set at 49990 FCFA including taxes.

### **Q: Which technology do you use?**

A: We use the DVB-T standard.

### **Q: What is the proportion of African content versus other content that you broadcast?**

A: The proportion is 50 % of African channels on our bouquets.

### **Q: Do you plan on acquiring more African content if available?**

A: Not in the short term.

### **Q: What feedback have you had so far from your viewers?**

A: The feedback we have is very good so far. Clients are satisfied with the value for money. However, there are still a few people who can't get our signal because it has not been deployed in their region.

### **Q: What are your future projects?**

A: In the short term, we have the desire to expand our business in Francophone Africa. Studies are underway to identify the ideal countries where we could roll out. We'd like to hear from potential local partners who can facilitate our implementation in different African countries to get in touch with us. We are looking for commercial partners, not really content or equipment partners.

### **Q: Do you think your model can be applied to any other country in Africa and elsewhere? If so why or why not?**

A: Yes indeed with the same price and level of service.

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