

# Zenith DTT900 DTV Tuner

## DTV FOR THE ANALOG HOLD-OUTS

**T**he demise of analog TV is nearly upon us. Less than one year from now, on February 17, 2009, as decreed by the federal government, broadcasters will cease transmitting analog wave TV signals from their towers. At that point, millions of Americans may be in for a shocker if they haven't prepared themselves ahead of time. The Zenith set-top-box profiled here is one tool analog TV users can enlist to help them glide through the digital transition.

First, a few housekeeping facts: The analog TV shutoff will not affect most Americans. The only TVs that will be affected are those that receive their signals from off-air analog broadcasts (antenna). If you get your programming from cable or satellite you are not affected. If you use an antenna and bought your TV within the last year you probably already have a digital ATSC tuner in it because all TVs sold since March 2007 were required to have a digital tuner (or be clearly marked as lacking one). I doubt that it'll affect many *E-Gear* readers, but it may impact their analog aunts or grandparents. The National Association of Broadcasters estimates close to 20 million households rely exclusively on off-air broadcasts.

So what if you're one of those 20 million households or you have an old TV in the garage that you still like to watch now and then? That's where this Zenith

box steps in. It's a DTV tuner that will receive the new digital broadcast and convert it to an analog signal your old TV can handle. Aside from allowing you to use that 1970 TV for a few more years, it'll also deliver an

improved picture over the old analog one plus give you a rudimentary on-screen guide and extra channels that are only available digitally.

The government doesn't want your old TV to go dead just yet, which is why it's offering to help pay for a converter box. This Zenith box and others like it qualify for the federal DTV coupon program. Every household who applies is eligible for two coupons toward the purchase of two DTV boxes. Each coupon is worth \$40, and the DTV boxes cost around \$60 (you can't combine the coupons to buy one box). The coupons will be honored at most major electronics stores like Best Buy, Circuit City and Radio Shack, but it's best to ask first. To apply for the coupon go to [www.dtv2009.gov](http://www.dtv2009.gov) or call 1-888-dtv-2009.

So what do you get for the

Zenith DTT900
About \$60, minus \$40 NTCA coupon
Digital ATSC tuner
Antenna inputs
RF and composite output
Remote
<a href="http://www.zenith.com">www.zenith.com</a>

\$60 (minus \$40)? From the Zenith DTT900 you get a fairly robust digital tuner, remote and all the cables needed to hook it up. The tuner is only about the size of a bedside clock radio and very easy to use. Even

your analog aunt will be able to figure it out.

To test it out at our Philadelphia offices we enlisted a 1994 Sony CRT TV and a tabletop antenna. I hooked up the antenna to the DTV box and then the box to the TV via basic composite video cables. Instantly, the box started scanning for available digital signals and found 35 of them—about 15 more channels than the TV received with its own analog tuner. Most of the channels, many from New Jersey and some all the way from Reading, came in extremely clear compared with their analog counterparts. Being digital, there was no ghosting or picture noise of the kind we're accustomed to seeing on analog broadcasts. While this wasn't getting me HDTV (the TV's resolution was only 640 x 480), it was probably the best picture the TV had ever seen. The additional channels, provided by the broadcasters' ability to multicast over their digital bandwidth, were mostly news and weather info channels.

A word of warning—if you think you need one of these boxes, apply for the coupon early because the government is only allocating a

limited number and is handing them out on a first-come, first-served basis. If you don't need one, don't apply, because you may be taking the coupon away from someone who does. ■

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