



Canadian Radio-television and
Telecommunications Commission

Conseil de la radiodiffusion et des
télécommunications canadiennes

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Let's talk TV

A report on comments received during Phase I

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Let's talk TV: A report on comments received during Phase I

Message from the Chairman

In October 2013, the CRTC kicked off Let's Talk TV: A Conversation with Canadians on the future of their television system.

During this initial phase, we invited Canadians to share their personal views on the programs on television and how they receive them. We also asked Canadians to talk about whether they have enough information to make choices about television programming and whether they know where to turn if they are not satisfied.

The response from participants was immediate and enthusiastic. It confirmed without a doubt that Canadians are not only passionate about their television system, but also have interesting ideas regarding how it should evolve in response to their needs and interests.

The report that follows summarizes what participants said. It will serve as the basis for the next step in our conversation: the Let's Talk TV Choicebook. This interactive questionnaire will provide an opportunity to consider some of the issues that have been raised, as well as the perspectives of other Canadians, and explore some of the trade-offs associated with certain options. Ultimately, this input will help shape a proposed framework that is flexible and responsive to a communication environment that is in constant flux.

I would like to thank everyone who took the time to participate in Phase 1 of Let's Talk TV: A Conversation with Canadians. The conversation will resume in early February with the Let's Talk TV Choicebook.

This will be followed in by a formal proceeding this spring, which will include a public hearing in September 2014.

Jean-Pierre Blais

Table of Contents

What participants said — An overview	4
I Programming	5
II Technology	10
III Viewer toolkit	16
Next Steps.....	20

Introduction

On 24 October 2013, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) invited Canadians to express their views about Canadian television.¹ Canadians expect a diverse and affordable television system that is responsive and forward-looking, a system that showcases the best of what Canada has to offer alongside the very best international content.

The CRTC's goal is to ensure that Canadians are placed firmly at the centre of their television system as:

- citizens, so they can participate fully in the life of their country, province and community;
- consumers, so they have programming choices on many competitive platforms such as cable, satellite, the Internet or mobile devices; and

¹ See *Let's Talk TV: A conversation with Canadians about the future of television*, Broadcasting Notice of Invitation CRTC 2013-563, 24 October 2013.

- creators, so they have opportunities to produce content for Canadians and international audiences.

The first phase of this process sought to engage Canadians in a conversation about Canadian television. They were invited to participate by way of an online discussion forum, filing their comments using the CRTC's website, by letter, fax, or by telephone, or by hosting a "Flash!" conference.

This report focuses on the comments received through the online discussion forum, the CRTC's website, by letter, by fax, or by telephone. The CRTC will address comments received through "Flash!" conference participation at a later date. The focus is therefore on the comments received between 24 October 2013 and 22 November 2013.

Participation

This report provides a summary of what participants said during phase 1. It does not provide detailed analysis related to regional or other demographic breakdowns since participants were not asked to provide any demographic information along with their comments.

The report consists of sections that reflect the areas on which the conversation has focused so far: programming, technology, and a viewer toolkit relating to the information and mechanisms Canadians need to make informed choices and seek solutions when dealing with their television services and service providers.

The CRTC received 1,320 comments from all regions of Canada. Most comments were from the online discussion forum (450), followed by e-mails (322), phone (304), and the intervention webform (244) which includes letters (10) and faxes (4).²

To make sure that the CRTC has richer demographic-based information to help ensure that the interests of all Canadians are considered in the shaping of a renewed television system, it will launch, among other mechanisms, an interactive questionnaire to which all Canadians may respond.

What participants said — An overview

Most who participated in Phase 1 of this process want more from their television services. They call for greater choice in content and meaningful competitive alternatives. Participants generally state that Canadian television should be more responsive to their demands for

² A full record of the online consultation may be found at http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/talktv-parlonstele.htm?utm_source=crtc&utm_medium=rotator-banner&utm_campaign=conversation. A full record of all remaining comments may be found at <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/proceed-process.htm>.

entertainment, information and local reflection. They say that Canadian television should be more consumer friendly with barriers to change eliminated and regulation created to facilitate change. They also say that the broadcasting system should be more responsive to their needs as citizens including access to content to facilitate their participation in the democratic and cultural life of their country, region or city. This includes content for those in official language minority communities, in third-languages, and for persons with disabilities.

Participants are not completely satisfied with the way in which Canadian television is currently delivered. Some believe that the CRTC is primarily responsible for this situation, and actively suggested that the body be abolished, suggesting that its regulations have created an impediment to consumer choice. Others suggest that there could be room for different regulation to help ensure that Canadians' interests as consumers, citizens and creators are better represented. Either way, participants want things to change so that Canadian television responds better to their needs.

I Programming

Canadians are drawn to all kinds of programming and all sorts of channels. They were asked what programs are most important to them – news, films, sitcoms, children's programs or anything else. Many participants say they are shifting away from linear (scheduled) television toward a more on-demand model. On-demand programming can be received from broadcasting distribution undertakings (BDUs) such as cable and direct-to-home (DTH) satellite services and Internet Protocol Television (IPTV). However, viewers are increasingly viewing such programming online.

Others stress the importance of traditional television viewing either over-the-air or via a BDU. Many want to receive a broad diversity of programming regardless of how it is accessed.

Participants want to receive a broad array of programming from diverse sources. They mention movies, sports, news and information, documentaries, children's and cultural programming, among others. Participants want to be able to receive this programming from throughout the broadcasting system including from public, private or community stations.

Quality

In general, participants say that programming of interest to them is available from the licensed or unlicensed system. Many, however, comment on the decreasing quality of programming, particularly that available in the licensed system.

Some state that, in some instances, they can clearly identify Canadian content by its lower quality

"If our Canadian TV shows were as good as our Canadian Olympians, then more people would want to watch, follow the series and cheer on the characters."

"Canadian content has become better in some aspects i.e. "Showcase original programming" and worse in others i.e. "CBC original programming and CTV original programming."

"We [have made] some decent TV in recent years."

although some argue that, particularly recently, Canadian programs have increased in quality. What constitutes quality programming is not fully articulated by all participants, although some indicate that Canadian productions need to have increased production value, creativity, and tell compelling stories. Some point to the need for television content to be original (including programming that does not rely on pre-existing formats such as the program “Canadian Idol”), intelligent and enriching. It should not appeal to the lowest common denominator. Others point to types of programming from other countries including France, the United Kingdom and other European nations as well as the United States as being emblematic of quality programming.

Some participants in both the French- and English-language markets³ are concerned about the high level of program repeats and recycled programming on many Canadian channels including shared news and other programming on local affiliates.

Diversity

In line with the general feeling that the broadcasting system should cater more to individual choice, some participants highlight the desire for a great diversity of programming to be offered within the broadcasting system in both the licensed and unlicensed environments. Some suggest the need for a greater amount of international content including international news and information programming. This applies not only to more American programming but also for more programs coming from other French-language speaking countries. Others call for greater access to more niche and specialty programming, in particular in an environment that should cater more to individual choice and taste.

Some participants say that diversity and the relevance of programming need not be limited to Canadian programming. They argue that relevance is not necessarily limited to national

“The Big Bang Theory is reflective of me even if it’s “American”. It is also part of our/my demographic diversity.”

borders and that programming from another country that touches upon the daily interests of the individual (science, technology, geek culture, other subcultures) may be of greater relevance than programming that focus on Canadian culturally

relevant stories.

Some participants watch television only for reality shows broadcast on specialty channels. Others – particularly French-speaking participants – cite the poor quality and excessive amount of reality television shows on all channels. Those who self-identify as a part of Canada’s creative community are also critical of reality shows, arguing that they have a cheap production value and make limited use of Canadian creative resources.

³ Note that, unless specifically stated, the French-language market includes both Francophones in Quebec and Francophones outside Quebec. Similarly, the English-language market includes Anglophones in Quebec and Anglophones outside Quebec.

Some suggest that channels such as History and Discovery are no longer delivering the programming that they were licensed to broadcast. They think that these and other channels have changed their format or, in some instances, their brand altogether, with little to no notice, in order to replicate the programming that can be found on other channels.

News and information

Many participants are concerned about news and information. Some want access to all licensed and operating news services. Others do not think that access to these services is necessary because they can access a diversity of news and information sources and content online that matches or exceeds what they are able to find on traditional platforms.

Some, particularly those from rural Quebec, see a need for more locally relevant news. They believe that the quality of local news should also be addressed, with some expressing concern over sensationalist journalism or a lack of in-depth reporting on local issues.

Other participants who self-identify as consumers of third language programming talk about the need for more third-language programming that contains local news and information. They note that while there are many ethnic and third-language channels in Canada, many of these channels rebroadcast content obtained from non-Canadian sources with little time or concern given to local news and information.

Canadian programming

As noted above, some participants ignore the national origin of the programming they watch and do not consider where a program comes from when deciding whether or not to watch it. Others actively seek out and easily recognize Canadian programming with some identifying Canadian children's and information shows as a priority.

Participants are mixed on the notion of Canadian content. For some, regulations that require exhibition of and financial support for Canadian programming are no longer relevant. They think that Canadian content should be permitted to succeed or fail on its own, and that a system that does not establish quotas would lead to more compelling Canadian content. Such programming would have to survive financially and be broadcast because it is actively wanted by Canadians rather than broadcast to fill a quota. Others feel that such a revised system would cause Canadian content to be accessed and watched both domestically and abroad. On the other hand, some including participants from Canada's creative community -- including those from official language minority communities -- feel that Canadian content should continue to be well supported financially as a means to ensure that jobs in the creative sector are protected.

Some participants suggest options about regulatory models to support Canadian programming. Some see a continued need to maintain minimum levels of Canadian content with some Canadians actually preferring Canadian content over other content, particularly in French-language markets. Others suggest that the current quota based system is responsible for inferior productions. Some suggest other methods of regulation, including that the CRTC focus on increasing the quality of content by supporting script and development through a fund instead of simply imposing quotas. Others feel that promoting Canadian content more actively would yield benefits, such as higher ratings.

“The concept of “forced” Canadian content is the reason Canadian produced shows are by and large, inferior.”

“Canadian content is very important to a Canadian economy so guys like Rogers, Bell, CBC and CTV must all do their part in providing Canadian content.”

Many argue that Canadian programming must be made available on multiple platforms to ensure its success. However, for some in the French-language creative community, the lack of training or opportunity to exploit multiple platforms appears to be a challenge as they endeavor to make sure that Canadian programming continues to reflect official language minority communities.

Participants are split on whether programs with a Canadian perspective are important. Some think it is important for Canadian content, particularly children’s programming, to be nationally relevant as a way to ensure a cohesive national identity. For others, the relevance of the programming they watch has little to do with the program’s national origin or flavor. It has more to do with its entertainment value, relation to personal experience or taste, or quality.

In the French-language market, there appears to be a stronger preference for Canadian-

*(Translation) On community stations:
“Are they important? Certainly.”*

(Translation) “I note that community television broadcasts programming that borders on amateurism, and that’s exactly what I object to.”

“I believe that local television is a valuable resource because it presents information about our community and encourages the community’s growth”

“I don’t watch local programming. Not interested in community TV. I get my local news from the paper, online or from the radio.”

produced entertainment programming despite the desire noted above for greater international diversity in the content that is available. However, many Francophones call for better news, information and cultural programming with a particular focus on programs related to public affairs, politics, finances and other programming related to public institutions.

Local programming

There is some debate on the relevance and continued need for local programming. As noted above, the importance of local news varies among

participants. Support for community programming also varies. Some call into question the relevance of community channels as well as the quality of the programming they broadcast and whether the Community channel has become nothing more than a promotional tool for BDUs. Others openly support their *raison d'être* as well as the support they give to volunteers and members of the community in terms of a professional environment to develop and produce their programming. In certain regions of Quebec (such as Trois-Rivières and Chandler) and Ontario (such as North Bay), the need for a strong and well-funded community channel providing locally reflective and relevant programming receives much support. This support comes from individuals, the creative community and other institutions such as parish churches. Some participants argue that local commercial network rebroadcasting transmitters provide little news or information relevant to their communities – a gap that is filled by community television. Others identify cultural, democratic and economic need for a strong community television sector.

Some participants are concerned about distant signals. Some actively seek out time-shifted services, looking for programming that is available on Canadian networks but outside of their local markets. Some of these participants believe that they are over being charged to obtain these services while their local network affiliates are available for free over-the-air or as a part of their basic package. On the other hand, others feel that the distant signals provided in packages by satellite services in particular are of no relevance to them.

Programming that reflects Canada's diversity

Some participants are concerned about a lack of cultural and regional diversity on Canadian television, but some think that such reflection is less important than quality. Some believe diversity and reflection for diversity and reflection's sake does not help improve the quality of a show and has no impact on their choice to watch. Even so, several participants argue that television needs to do a better job of reflecting Canada's multicultural nature, particularly Aboriginal cultures. Others are concerned concern about the negative portrayal of ethnic and cultural minorities. Some mentioned that the broadcasting system does not adequately represent Canada's cultural diversity with some suggesting that visible minorities are under-represented.

Some think that most programming reflects only Toronto or of Montréal, depending on the language. They argue that programming decisions should be made by regional representatives across the country, and that the technology exists to make this easier.

Public broadcasting

Canadians are divided on the role of the CBC. Some participants flat out reject the need for a national public broadcaster, objecting to the material it broadcasts and the amount of public funding devoted to it. They think that they should not be forced to receive the CBC as part of their package of broadcasting services. Others think that there is a need for a strong national

public broadcaster as it is currently constituted, with some suggesting that it could do a better job of reflecting Canada’s cultural and regional diversity. Others see a continued need for the CBC but objected to the CBC’s practice of broadcasting advertising given that it is already well funded by the tax payer. Many feel that the CBC and other provincial public broadcasters should be offered by BDUs for free across the country, particularly in French-language minority communities outside Quebec.

Advertising

Many participants express concern about advertising. They dislike both the amount of advertising and the extent to which advertisements are repeated. Others note that they have to pay subscription fees for channels that also broadcast advertising and question why they are effectively charged twice for the same programming. They voice a similar concern about provincial or national public broadcasters. Some participants cannot understand why these broadcasters should be funded by advertising dollars when they already receive substantial tax payer subsidies through direct government contributions. Others think that an increase in advertising minutes is driving viewers away from live television to on-demand and online platforms.

(translation)“The number of commercials has become mind numbing.”

Several participants complain about the practice of simultaneous substitution (replacing American signals with Canadian ones). They raise concerns about the poor quality and timing of the substitution, which causes them to miss the beginning or the end of a program or miss advertising content, particularly in the Super Bowl. Some actively question why Canadian broadcasters should receive additional advertising support and why American networks are not permitted to broadcast their programming, without alteration, in Canada. Some participants suggest that this practice be restricted or banned outright.

A number of participants are concerned over the loudness of commercials. They stated that, despite CRTC regulations to the contrary, many commercials still appear louder than the programs that are being broadcast.

II Technology

Canadians are not bound to traditional means of watching television. The CRTC asked Canadians how they prefer to watch television, in terms of both devices (television set, tablet or other) and platform. Canadians were also asked to indicate how they think they will receive and watch television in the next 5 to 10 years, and whether they will be satisfied with that situation.

How Canadians watch television

While many participants state that they still watch television using a television set fed through either a set-top box or an antenna, some have shifted their viewing habits. Some state that they now obtain their programming from a mix of platforms. These platforms include BDUs and multiple online-based offerings including those from established Canadian broadcasters as well as Netflix, YouTube, iTunes and sports leagues such as the NHL Network. They note that these other platforms are offered through devices other than the television set, such as tablets, mobile phones and computers. However, some acknowledge that the traditional television set, with its larger screen and other capabilities, remains their preferred choice.

Cost

Participants often cite costs as relating to their viewing habits. Many participants feel that subscriptions to BDUs are becoming more and more expensive. Some are frustrated by packaging practices and the costs and perception of value related to the purchase of equipment such as set-top boxes. Some participants cite these as reasons that are encouraged to migrate from traditional to new platforms.

Some participants say they are concerned about an increase in cost for the “basic” packages of services offered by the BDUs. Some think that the basic package to which they must subscribe in order to have access to other channels and packages has become too large and too costly. Others question why local television stations, which are available free over-the-air, should be sold to consumers by BDUs. As well, some participants are concerned about the shift of hockey programming from free-over-the-air channels to channels that require a paid subscription. Some suggest that the CRTC should encourage the expansion of over-the-air television, especially in rural areas and in official-language minority communities, where over-the-air television is not widely available, particularly since the transition to digital transmission.

While certain participants favour a market-based solution to costs related to obtaining audio-visual content, many consider that such costs should be kept in check. Some think that costs for receiving services from BDUs should be regulated. To that end, some suggest that certain services, such as those from public and educational broadcasting services, should be broadcast for free, given that they are subsidized by the taxpayer. Others suggest a flat per-channel rate regulation for all channels.

Choice

Participants said that the ability to choose how they receive audio-visual content is important. The emergence of multiple platforms has given many participants greater control over the content to which they have access. However, despite the emergence of these platforms and their increased availability, many say that the broadcasting system still leaves them without

meaningful choice. For instance, some Canadians express dismay at having to purchase standard definition (SD) channels from their BDU when all of the programming they view is in high-definition (HD). They are at a loss to understand why, when the programming already exists in SD, they are forced to pay more for the exact same content in HD format.

When I go to the dealership, I'm looking for one car. Nobody expects to walk out with several cars. If I have access to all these cars, why would I consider driving the lemons, when I can driver a Porsche instead?

Others are concerned at being forced to purchase programming in the licensed system that they not only do not find compelling or relevant, or that is in languages that they do not understand. Some participants also do not feel any need to subsidize certain channels that are distributed on a mandatory basis to all subscribers.

Finally, the ability to choose between platforms remains out of reach for many. In many rural and remote areas of the country, Canadians do not have high-speed broadband access, which they would need to access on-line platforms. Other participants are concerned that they do not have access to many, or in some cases, any over-the-air television services. Even in larger urban centres, some say that choice can be curtailed by factors beyond an individual's control such as living in an apartment or condominium where access to satellite services is difficult or impossible. Demographic factors such as age, income and whether someone lives with a disability were also stated as ways that decrease access to multiple delivery platforms.

While each person might have a specific preference, many participants state a preference for a diverse and unfettered selection of different kinds of programming. This includes a desire to source programming from non-traditional and international sources. To this end, some identify geoblocking – in which access to programming from certain countries is restricted – as a source of frustration. Some argue that this practice unfairly keeps them from accessing online content from non-Canadian sources (such as the American Netflix). Others set out the steps they take to get around geoblocking and gain access to the content they want.

Satisfaction with channel packages

BDUs most often offer channels of television programming in packages. Some participants support packaging, considering that channel packages provide diverse content at a reasonable price, which meets their own needs or the needs of their families. However, many participants want the ability to pick the channels that they want and to pay for only those they have chosen to purchase. As a result, the current use of packages, their costs and their implementation by BDUs was the source of some discussion.

Packaging generally

Many participants feel that basic packages have become too large, and that they are forced to purchase services that are neither compelling nor relevant. Some object to the CRTC's approach under which it requires that BDUs to carry certain services. Others object to the need to purchase any form of basic package before they can access the content they actually want, no matter how large or small that package may be.

This is not to say that the notion of a basic service package is entirely rejected. Some suggest different approaches to the basic service that would see a reduced number of channels offered at an affordable price. Some suggest that the basic service should include a "Canadian-only" package in order to protect Canadian jobs. Others think that a basic package should include over-the-air television stations along with news, educational and other channels such as TV5, Radio-Canada and the CBC, RDI, Télé-Québec, CTV, Global, RDI, Citytv and CPAC.

"Bundling is really a form of bullying to make me take what they want."

(translation) "If cable operators offer me less expensive packages that include only the services that interest me, I would consider it."

"Imagine the next time you go to the grocery store and all you want is a jar of pasta sauce but when you get to the checkout they say sorry you also have to buy a grapefruit, a large package of diapers, container full of ice cream, loaf of garlic bread and a bottle of prune juice. Sounds ludicrous but that is what Canadian television consumers are forced to put up with."

Comments also address other aspects of the packaging practices of BDUs. Some wonder why children's programming is packaged with American news programming such as Fox News. This raises the question of why unlike services are forced on individual consumers who are looking for a certain type of programming. Others object to having to subscribe to several packages and multiple services to obtain the few programming services they actually want.

Some are concerned about what they view as the arbitrary deletion and movement of channels by BDUs without notice or recourse for subscribers. Francophone participants in official language minority communities are particularly concerned about this, given that they already feel that their ability to find and choose the programming they want is curtailed by the limited number of channels available to them through their service providers. For instance, some say that they are concerned about the dropping of French-language channels by their BDUs, including such services as TFO.

Costs

While some view packaging as a means to reduce overall price, many say that packages place an undue financial burden on the consumer. Some compare the price they currently pay to the lower prices that consumers pay in other countries.

A majority of participants say that channels should be made available on a pick-and-pay basis. Many consider that this approach would reduce overall costs for subscribers. However, some note that, under a pick and pay approach, costs for individual services may increase to a point where the overall cost of BDU service for consumers is actually higher. In any event, participants clearly want to have access to content at a reasonable cost. Some feel that market forces can control these costs. However, many consider that in the current environment, where large players control most BDUs, some sort of rate regulation, whether for services offered in a basic package or on a service-by-service basis is necessary.

Francophones in official language minority communities are concerned about the high costs to access French-language services. Some note that, while they may want to watch only a small number of channels, they are forced to purchase a much larger French-language bundle of channels.

What types of services do Canadians subscribe to? What makes them switch service providers?

Canadians subscribe to many different services and obtain their programming in several ways. Many have access to cable, satellite, IPTV and over-the-air as well as to other platforms such as Netflix or iTunes. While some participants are relatively satisfied with their current providers, others want to change.

Cost

Some state that they are compelled to stay with their current service provider due to the equipment costs associated with change. The lack of a set-top box standard and the requirement to purchase new equipment when changing service providers are said to be reasons why they remain with a service provider.

However, costs can be a reason to change. Increased costs of packages, and incremental and unannounced billing increases are said to be incentives to seek out new providers whether from licensed BDUs or from unlicensed digital media platforms.

Market structure

Some feel that they have no viable alternative service that would offer something that is sufficiently different or competitive to make change appealing. They suggest that the broadcasting system would benefit from additional competition among distributors whether from Canada, the United States or internationally. Some would welcome regulatory intervention to ensure a more competitive market and to prevent control by large players. Others note that while competition from unlicensed sources may exist, their ability change to

these platforms is curtailed somewhat by cost and the limited availability of broadband, notably in rural areas and the North.

Required hardware

Participants identify a number of issues related to the hardware used by Canadian service providers. Some are concerned about the price, usefulness, and user friendliness of set-top boxes. Others argue that licensed BDUs are not pressured to stay competitive which some say means that BDUs are not forced to bring new functionality and features to the market, or to introduce new hardware or upgrades to satisfy the consumer. In that respect, some think that the ability to access services such as Netflix and YouTube using many different devices of their choice has provided an impetus to leave the licensed distribution system.

Some note that BDUs have made strides toward meeting consumer needs in an effort to maintain their patronage. Some BDUs offer TV Anywhere solutions that allow consumers to stream audiovisual content from their television subscriptions on a number of devices such as laptops, tablets and smartphones. However, some think this flexibility often involves additional costs to purchase different receivers or decoders as well as when broadband cap limits are exceeded.

The future of receiving and watching television

Many feel that choice will be a principal driver with regard to the manner in which audio-visual content is made available and consumed in the future, and that Canadians will view programming in a more on-demand environment. These participants want and expect to see programming available on many different devices from several platforms. They want this content to be available when they want to watch it -- for some, without commercial interruption. Many point to Netflix as an affordable, on-demand, commercial free model that should serve as an example for the future. Generally, they see more Internet/on-demand/personalized television to be future, and argued that broadcasters would have to offer better quality programming or risk losing subscribers to the Internet. Despite the lower availability of French-language programming online, Francophones also cite the growing attraction of online content. Francophone participants in particular think that public broadcasters should be required to broadcast their content for free across all platforms, including via Internet-based platforms, given that they are already publicly funded.

“The day when I can get the services that interest me or, better yet, on the programs that interest me, I will cancel my subscription.”

Some predict that programming will be delivered by Apps on mobile devices. Others feel that the delivery of programming will be done in a manner on a per-program basis similar to the transition currently experienced by the music industry. Others feel that programming will increasingly be funded through crowdsourcing.⁴

(translation) "I think that we are going to see the convergence of television programming with Internet technology, the web and the speed of its bandwidth."

"With Netflix, I have choice and control over what I watch, when I watch it, and even on what device I watch it on. I don't have to buy or rent another expensive converter box for each device."

Some go so far as to speculate that programming will be made available directly to consumers in a way that bypasses BDUs, thus establishing a direct link between programmer and consumer.

Many participants think that certain channels and services will no longer be financially viable as the broadcasting system evolves, but are hopeful that companies will strive to improve the quality of their programming so that they can compete. In this regard, some participants suggest that the CRTC should be mindful of smaller services that offer niche that could go dark in a pick-and-pay world.

While new platforms appear to be increasingly important for Canadians, some suggest that the distribution of audio-visual content, including the distribution of services by over-the-air signals, will continue to play an important role. In this regard, some suggest that over-the-air services should be encouraged to multiplex their offerings and make full use of the spectrum they have been licensed to occupy.

III Viewer toolkit

The CRTC asked participants to comment on their need to be informed about the choices in programming and programming sources available to them. The CRTC also asked about whether participants know how to seek solutions when problems arise. Participants provided the fewest comments on the viewer toolkit compared with other issues, but those who did address this matter raised a number of concerns.

Information on services, including packaging and pricing

Some participants are satisfied with the information that they received from television service providers. Others think that BDUs are less than forthcoming about their packaging and pricing, leaving them at a loss to understand why they do not receive the services to which they thought they had subscribed. Some think that the information BDUs provide is either misleading or confusing.

Inconsistencies

⁴ The practice of obtaining needed services, ideas or content by soliciting contributions from a large group of people and especially from the online community rather than from traditional suppliers.

Some participants believe that the pricing and packaging information that BDUs provide is inaccurate. They cite dissatisfaction with price changes and channel offerings that apparently happen without warning, as well as frustration about not knowing when costs will increase and by what means. Although some concede that their BDUs provide some notice on rate increases, they think that other aspects of the service, including channel placement and when channels are dropped or occasionally blacked out, are not made widely known. Some advocate for a greater transparency in contracts and bills.

Customer service

Some participants feel that BDUs provide poor or inconsistent customer service. They identify long wait times when calling the customer service line, a lack of follow-up from customer service representatives (CSRs), or a seeming unwillingness of CSRs to address complaints and find solutions within the organization. Others think that the service that CSRs provide over the phone is not as good as that provided by in-store representatives.

Other concerns

Some participants believe that service providers could make better use of their existing infrastructure to provide better information. For instance, they suggest that the electronic programming guide should provide better information on the channels offered and the programming that is broadcast. One participant suggests that BDUs in French-language markets should make better use of banner channels to describe the services they provide.

Some participants are concerned about service interruptions and recommend that BDUs be required to refund subscriber fees for time when service is not available to the consumer.

Barriers that prevent Canadians from changing television packages or switching to another distributor

Barriers that participants identify with regard to changing packages or service providers can be broken down as follows: the lack of meaningful choice, contracts, and technology. All of these relate to the costs of switching.

The lack of meaningful choice

Some participants identify an absence of meaningful competition in the market as a significant barrier. This can manifest itself in a lack of options that meet consumer demand or taste between multiple providers in a market, or an absence of competitive distributors in rural or remote areas. In markets where multiple service providers exist, some argue that there is no real competition in terms of price. Others, particularly in the French-language markets, note that not all BDUs provide the same types of channels so a switch to another provider would mean having to forgo certain content for some other benefit.

Contracts

Some participants feel that their contracts with their service providers, particularly those service providers that are vertically integrated, impede their ability to change. They are concerned about certain contractual clauses such as early cancellation fees. Others note that, for vertically integrated entities in particular, the costs of cancelling one service can affect bundling discounts, either significantly reducing them or eliminating them altogether.

Technology

The need to purchase new equipment is seen as a barrier to change. In this regard, participants note that there is currently no standard for set-top boxes. As a result, each BDU employs equipment that is effectively locked to its own service. This requires subscribers who switch providers to purchase or rent equipment that will quickly become obsolete at what some perceive as high rates. In that regard, some note that there is ambiguity about when the rental charge pays off the costs of the equipment in question. In other cases, the rental charge continues even when the equipment is paid for. Some also question why many existing customers are compelled to pay a monthly fee or buy the equipment outright, while new subscribers or those that threaten to leave can get substantial or total discounts.

"I am an educated consumer and would try other services such as Fibe but I am unwilling to sign a 2 year contract."

"I also currently rent one of the first PVRs on the market. Both my Dada and my cousin were given free PVRs for switching their services. Feeling I have paid more than enough in rental fees over the years for my PVR, I called and asked for that charge to be eliminated. I was told absolutely not."

"As nearly all providers require some hardware device sourced from them to be utilized, it can often be costly to change providers or even to remain with the provider."

Information to make programming choices

While some participants appreciate the CRTC's need to balance community standards and freedom of expression, many express a preference for self-censorship and a need for tools that permit such choice. Some appreciate the parental guidance features currently available on set-top boxes. Others think that this tool could be buttressed by the ability to not subscribe to channels within a package that they find offensive. It is important to note, however, that some participants do not see a need for any content they deem to be offensive (e.g., violence or coarse language) in the broadcasting system at all. Some call for better regulation of content with respect to violence, language and other matters.

Tools available to persons with hearing or visual disabilities

"Television, like many technologies, is not user friendly."

The satisfaction of persons with hearing or visual disabilities with the tools that are provided to them to share in television varies. Some highlight the

usefulness of certain services such as Apple TV to access online video content and express some satisfaction with the current offerings of described video and closed captioning. Others are not as satisfied. For example, some mention the need to pay for equipment upgrades from which they cannot benefit.

Many say that the Canadian television system is not fully accessible to many persons with a hearing or visual disabilities. Some participants with hearing disabilities are concerned about the overall quality of closed captioning and feel that the CRTC is not doing enough in this regard. For instance, one participant notes that closed captioning is often inserted right over the action in sports programming, which is an obvious nuisance. Some also note that there is sometimes a significant delay in the closed captioning, that captioning is not always well synchronized, and that the captions do not always provide a full and complete transcription of what is spoken.

Those participants with a visual disability state that they are significantly limited in their ability to participate in an online environment. Participants indicate that many platforms, including personal video recorders and other set-top boxes, mobile applications, and other platforms that require on-screen interaction are not accessible. Program guides are generally not usable by persons with visual disabilities, and remote controls are not fully accessible given that the small keys and colour schemes make it difficult to differentiate between buttons. Some express concern that they must pay for equipment to access televised content even though many of the features of this equipment is of little to no use to them.

Some participants are concerned that the amount of described video is limited and the quality of what is available is not very high. They note that it often takes a long time to describe what is actually occurring on screen. This renders described video more of a distraction than anything else. These issues appear to a particular concern in the French-language market, which also suffers from a general lack of French-language described video.

Raising concerns about billing or content

Some participants do not know how to raise concerns with television service providers. Others are aware that they can register complaints about billing and content either through the CRTC or the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC). While some express satisfaction, particularly about this process in providing Canadians a voice to raise concerns particularly with BDUs, some think that complaining to the CRTC doesn't generally provide satisfactory results. These participants think that the CRTC cannot or will not do anything with complaints.

Some believe that the CRTC could do a better job of publicising its role through better outreach or through Service Canada kiosks. They also feel that the CRTC could improve how

it explains its regulations to the average Canadian. Some stated that the CBSC is mentioned only occasionally – usually when a station or service is up for licence renewal.

The future of informed choice

Help-lines and other self-service options such as FAQs are suggested as methods for dealing directly with service providers, as are more collaborative options such as user forums and online chats with CSRs. Some participants think these options for interaction should be made more accessible for persons with disabilities.

Some feel that web content and social media will help them make informed choices about the content they receive. Others think that reviews and a move to greater on-demand consumption of programming would facilitate informed choice of content going forward.

Next Steps

The CRTC intends to use the information that participants have provided and is summarized in this report to create interactive questionnaire that will serve as the second phase of this process. This questionnaire will permit Canadians to engage in a more in-depth and deliberative level on the issues they have been raised.

Responses to the questionnaire will serve to validate the input participants have provided with the goal of helping to inform the third phase of this process: shaping a renewed television system. All Canadians are encouraged to participate in this questionnaire.

Phase three, which will commence in Spring 2014, will propose a new framework for the Canadian television broadcasting system. The Commission will discuss this framework with Canadians at a public hearing that will take place in September 2014.

All Canadians will be invited to participate in the next phase of the conversation and continue to help frame the discussion on how television will be shaped in the future. All input to date will form a part of the record of the public hearing and further details on how to continue your participation will be provided in a notice of consultation to be published at a later date.