

DD Free Dish is a fighting chance to gain our space back: Jawhar Sircar



Jawhar Sircar
Prasar Bharati

Jawhar Sircar, CEO, Prasar Bharati, speaks about DD Free Dish, calling it a regular man's substitute and how they plan to increase the number of channels from currently 59 to 112 channels shortly. Excerpts.

Has terrestrial TV been making losses for Prasar Bharati?

There is no question of losses because we don't follow a balance sheet theory. When you give something for free you don't ask how free am I giving it to you. Terrestrial has had its day, it is going to go down. Nobody acknowledged it in Doordarshan till two years ago. I am acknowledging it because I study figures but we need a poor man's substitute or a normal man's substitute. And that substitute is going to come through our Free Dish.

How has Free Dish been doing in terms of reach?

Free Dish is just about Rs.2,000. We have 59 channels as of now, if we can increase it up to 112 channels and you can get channels like Hindi Discovery, which we are trying, then you don't need anything more. Because Star Utsav, Zee Anmol, etc. is there as everyone has a free-to-air (FTA) option. That (Free Dish) was done with this in mind. See there are three revenue models, one is subscription, the other is pure subscription and pure ad, and a mix of both. This is going to be pure ad, zero subscription. That model has worked in many countries where there was nobody offering this platform. We are offering this platform and I feel that it is fighting chance to gain our space back. You see the last figures of Dish were is about 69 million figures out of which 39 million active users. What I am trying to say is where did 30 million disappear? Have they all gone to Free (Dish)? So we don't know until we have a digital addressable system exactly what we are. So this will be from the new phase. I think in two years we will be able to find out how much we have covered. The competitors tell you are 15 million and the nearest competition which is [Tata Sky](#) which I think is 9 million, so you know where we stand.

Will the existing people have to buy a new set-top-box for the 112 channels?

Those who want to migrate from 59 channels to 112 channels will have to buy the new set. You cannot get 112 without the new one. The new set is taking time because there is extreme digitization competition. The same people

who wanted us do it, so we have competition and we are also on the marketing game.

What is the status on the channel for the Northeast region that was announced during the interim budget last year?

We are working on it. There was funding problems this year but we are working on it.

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