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111 Docket No 07-268



Federal Communications Commission
Mass Media Bureau
1919 M Street, NW
Washington DC, 20554

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Tel: 202-418-2600
Fax: 202-418-2828
sshapiro@fcc.gov

May 9, 1996

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF SECRETARY

Mr. Steven Spielberg
100 Universal Plaza
Bungalow 477
Universal City, CA 91608

Dear Mr. Spielberg,

Thank you for your recent letter regarding the presentation to the Commission of a recommendation for an Advanced Television standard.

On November 28, 1995 we received a report from the Commission's Advisory Committee on Advanced Television Services (ACATS) making its recommendation for a broadcast standard for digital television. This matter is currently still under consideration by the Commission, and no final decisions have been made. The FCC will be considering a total of at least three Notices on this issue which, when taken together, will provide a complete and current record on all aspects relating to the introduction of digital broadcast television to American consumers. I hope that this process will be completed sometime over the next year

The first of this trilogy was released August 9, 1995 in anticipation of the final report and recommendation made by ACATS. The Commission adopted the second of these three today. For your information I have enclosed a copy of the press release explaining the nature of the action, as well as a separate statement from Chairman Reed Hundt that I am sure you will find of interest. We expect to release one more Notice this year to consider the methodology of assigning channels for digital broadcast to eligible parties. Through the process of notice, comment and reply the Commission is able to consider a wide variety of proposals.

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While your concerns for insuring future innovations are not stifled are shared by many here at the Commission, you are not totally correct in your assertion that "many of these standards were arrived at over ten years ago." As you well know, the basic foundation for NTSC was agreed upon some fifty years ago and, I am told, certain fundamentals of filmmaking still in use today pre-date even that event. So it should come as no surprise that there are some aspects of the proposal we are considering which can be traced back ten years or more. Nevertheless the first proposal for an all digital broadcast standard was not made to the Commission until 1990. The detailed technology recommended by our Advisory Committee was not finalized until sometime last year.

Many in the cinematic community have expressed concern regarding the appearance of their work on the small screen of television, whether it be today's 4:3 aspect ratio, the proposed wide screen 16:9 dimension or, as you suggest, 2:1. As to the presentation of existing 4:3 programming on a 16:9 wide screen, for those who choose such a system, the receivers could adjust the picture to fill the screen in a manner chosen by the consumer. This may mean black bars on the edges of the screen, automatic cropping of the top and bottom or even the use of "pan and scan" to fill the screen according to the director's artistic vision and the broadcaster's decisions on how to present the material. For the consumers who choose to purchase less costly 4:3 receivers, or use set-top convertors with their existing sets, similar options will be available to best fill the screens to their preference.

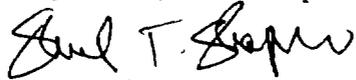
Similarly, many computer enthusiasts are concerned about the impact the standard's adoption would have on scanning formats of advanced displays and the integration of digital broadcast with the NLE. I think all informed parties agree that the most important format to achieve this is progressive scanning, typically found today in computer monitors, which many find preferable for still images or high resolution graphics. The other format is interlace, typically found in analog television sets, which some feel is more appropriate for preserving consumer's access to the vast body of work already created for television. Both have advantages and disadvantages and, as you may be aware, have generated many spirited debates during the process leading to the ACATS recommendation.

Your letter suggests that progressive scanning is somehow precluded from this recommendation. In fact, of the eighteen formats proposed by ACATS, fully fourteen are for progressive displays. Of those defined at the 24 Hz frame rate most often used in filmmaking, all are progressive. Only four of the eighteen are defined by interlace scanning. Filmmakers and other content developers would be free, as they should be, to choose the most appropriate way to format their work.

As you are well aware, the issues raised in this proceeding are many and complex, and I regret I am unable to do them all justice in a short letter. I would encourage you to get more information from Mr. Stan Baron, President of the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers at 914-661-1100 or 212-664-7557. Stan has been integrally involved in these matters for many years and will be able to present a well balanced perspective on all issues of concern to you. If you would care to discuss this further with me, please feel free to call at 202-418-2600.

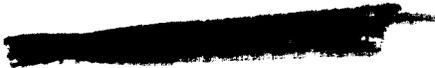
Rest assured that this proceeding, far from being over, has in many respects just begun. The Commission welcomes and encourages you to actively participate in this process and to share your concerns so that we may make the best decision in the interest of all Americans.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Saul T. Shapiro". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Saul" being the most prominent.

Saul T. Shapiro
Assistant Bureau Chief for Technology Policy
Mass Media Bureau

S T E V E N S T E F E L B E R G



May 2, 1996

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF SECRETARY

Mr. Saul Shapiro
Assistant Bureau Chief for
Technology Policy, Mass Media Bureau
Federal Communications Commission
19191 M Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20554

VIA FAX: 202/418-2801

Dear Mr. Shapiro,

The decisions that are about to be made regarding Advanced Television are of great concern to me. I am afraid there is a rush to make commitments to standards that ignore over 40 years of wide screen motion picture production.

I am told that many of these standards were arrived at over ten years ago. Technology will continue to become more advanced in the future; shouldn't we be making a decision that embraces current advances, and future-proofs the standard so as to take advantage of what the future has to offer?

From a creative standpoint, there is an opportunity to mitigate the conflict between cinema and television compositions. While it is likely that producers for television will adopt a wider screen aspect ratio, it's unlikely film producers will want to limit their scope to the proposed 1.77:1 or 16x9 aspect ratio. Since Hollywood is the principal library of wide screen entertainment material, it is wrong that this aspect ratio is being adopted without true input from the Hollywood community.

Since "wide screen" television will draw upon the vast library of film titles to take advantage of a wider screen, it should be an aspect ratio that is supported by those whose craft has been responsible for composing those images for four decades. I understand that one technical paper justifying the current ATV aspect ratio referred to wider motion picture compositions as only containing "visual fluff." I know of several filmmakers that would take strong issue with that comment.

The other standards I would like to see considered are progressive scanning, and the use of transmission technology that allows the viewer to see a film in its original composition.

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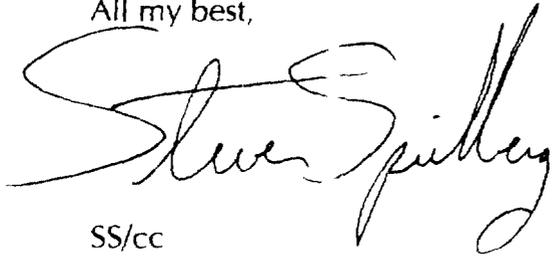
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With progressive scanning there would be the flexibility of multiple frame rates, an end to interlace artifacts, and greater access to the educational and informational opportunities offered by the Internet.

Many complain that we're late getting involved in this process; does that make our points any less valid?

We are about to embrace a standard that will dictate how people will view our images for another several decades. Don't make the mistake of excluding a creative medium and industry that is the primary reason this television technology is being created.

All my best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Steve Spilberg". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "All my best,".

SS/cc