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BT turns on to TV

Small beer

 [Kieren McCarthy](#)

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BT has made its first move into broadcasting by applying for a "non-exclusive local delivery service licence" from the Independent Television Commission (ITC). The licence - which still has to be approved by the DTi and Oftel - will allow the monster telco to provide "television services" over cable or phone networks (we're talking ADSL here).

The move will put BT along the same lines as competitors NTL and Telewest and allow it to make a further shift toward becoming a services company. And then of course there is the fact that the new chairman Sir Christopher Bland used to be the chairman of the BBC and before that the boss at London Weekend Television. So he should know a thing or two about broadcasting.

BT would not have been allowed to run such a service until this year when rules were relaxed. The rules, which were written in the year BT was privatised (1984), were intended to give competitors a chance to work their way into the market.

We're not entirely sure how all this works and the ITC is fobbing off queries onto BT, but according to an ITC press release: "The applicant [BT] has committed to serve the minimum 1001 homes in the 15-year licence period. A nominal cash bid of £1 has been made and the ITC has set the percentage of qualifying revenue to be paid for non-exclusive licences at zero."

A decision should be made by early next year. ®