

BGAN services still poised for growth in APAC

Why is BGAN very popular with media organisations in the Asia-Pacific region? What benefits can this MSS offer broadcasters? **Millette Manalo-Burgos** finds out more.

In its latest report, Paris-based Euroconsult has given a forecast that mobile satellite services (MSS) revenue would have an annual 7% revenue increase over the next decade.

This development is good news to MSS operators such as Inmarsat, Iridium and Thuraya, as these three currently capture about 90% of the MSS market revenue worldwide, according to the research firm.

In 2010, Euroconsult revealed that MSS operators generated total consolidated revenue of US\$1.38 billion, up 8.8% over the previous year. Euroconsult estimates that MSS wholesale service revenues alone will exceed \$2.2 billion in 2020, with equipment revenues slightly down over the next 10 years due to declining hardware prices.

One very popular MSS service, pop-

ular with broadcasters in particular, is the Broadband Global Area Network (BGAN). Gerbrand Schalkwijk, Stratos' vice-president of Global Enterprise Sales, reveals that Stratos is the largest

distributor of Inmarsat BGAN solutions in the Asia-Pacific region and worldwide. Currently, Stratos has activated more than 20,000 BGAN systems in 185 countries.

BGAN is a mobile satellite offering that uses portable, lightweight terminals to provide video (guaranteed up to 384kbps streaming), high-speed data (up to 492kbps) and voice connectivity anywhere in the world.

"As a laptop-sized device, BGAN is ideal for the roving journalist to take on field assignments, particularly

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those embedded with the world's militaries or travelling to harsh environments," says Schalkwijk.

Most media organisations use BGAN from Stratos for two key purposes: 1) to send back store-and-forward video clips to the newsroom for editing; and 2) for live broadcasting, to introduce these clips on air by the journalist who is in the region.

BGAN is said to offer reliable satellite communications in a form factor that is easy to deploy. BGAN, Schalkwijk adds, is a service that offers a reliable L-band solution that eliminates the need to coordinate VSAT connectivity and provides the ability to be on the air in less than five minutes.

When BGAN became commercially available in 2005, media networks took interest.

"Media organisations that were early adopters of BGAN are so-called 'Tier 1' agencies, such as the BBC, SABC, Al Jazeera and Fox News," notes Schalkwijk. "They use BGAN for live broadcasting and store-and-forward video clips from remote locations or areas where communication infrastructures have been badly damaged."

However, the expanded use of BGAN comes from two areas. First, Tier 2 broadcasters (including speciality sports, music and financial networks) now see BGAN as a viable alternative. They are drawn to BGAN by its relative affordability, Schalkwijk reveals.

He explains: "They also appreciate how BGAN enables them to use low-cost video codecs, bypassing expensive leased lines and delivering video back to their headquarter locations.

"Second, affiliate broadcasters for the major networks have discovered BGAN's appeal. More than ever, these broadcasters are considering BGAN as a portable rapid-deploy solution. BGAN can be used for broadcasting in remote parts of their territories, or in situations where a VSAT truck is not available or cannot be physically deployed."

"For this group of broadcasters, BGAN is making mobile satcoms af-



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fordable in terms of the hardware, air-time and delivery options," Schalkwijk continues.

Thus, BGAN has begun to be seen as an affordable way to enable journalists to quickly file stories from remote regions. "The key to BGAN's appeal is portability. It consistently meets the ease-of-use and rapid set-up requirements of our customers. New premium BGAN services are helping make BGAN an indispensable tool for media organisations," says Schalkwijk.

The new BGAN X-Stream service, which became commercially available in 2009, delivers video at a guaranteed data rate of 384kbps. This quality of video from a laptop-sized device allows unmatched video quality (for the form factor) and truly delivers portability and rapid deployment for journalists.

For more cost-effective options, Stratos says its customers fully utilise its Stratos Advantage, a suite of value-added services that helps elevate BGAN from Stratos far above baseline offerings. These value-added services, including Stratos Dashboard, provide users with cost control, firewall management, full traffic information, pre-paid facili-

ties, high security options, easy VPN access, messaging services and a full range of IP options.

Furthermore, Stratos Dashboard offers the end-user full control of SIM card services, including activation, credit control and access control. Stratos Dashboard is a powerful online tool for complete SIM management and features a firewall solution called Stratos Trench. Users can set credit alerts, automated barring of their services, whitelists and blacklists for Web browsing — all in one package.

"For the media organisation, quick access in this way is a vital part of its ability to deliver the news on time and to make changes at a moment's notice," states Schalkwijk. Stratos is said to be the only Inmarsat Distribution Partner to offer such a comprehensive range of services.

Right now, Inmarsat sees the Asia-Pacific region as one

of the key growth drivers for its BGAN services. Stratos expects demand for BGAN among Asia-Pacific broadcasters to remain strong.

"Media organisations are regularly challenged with reporting important events from remote locations. BGAN remains the most effective and affordable solution for reporting from those locations," says Schalkwijk. "Those organisations understand that Stratos is the most experienced BGAN provider, and is continuously introducing creative solutions to help them achieve optimal communications performance, management control and cost-efficiency."

For now, Stratos has recently finalised joint-marketing agreements with Streambox and Quicklink to enable close cooperation between these two codec developers and Stratos technical-support teams.

These codecs add forward error correction to the video stream immediately after it is downlinked from the satellite, and then transmit the video to the customer's premises with added packet redundancy and recovery for smooth video playout with minimal latency and the highest-possible picture quality. **APB**