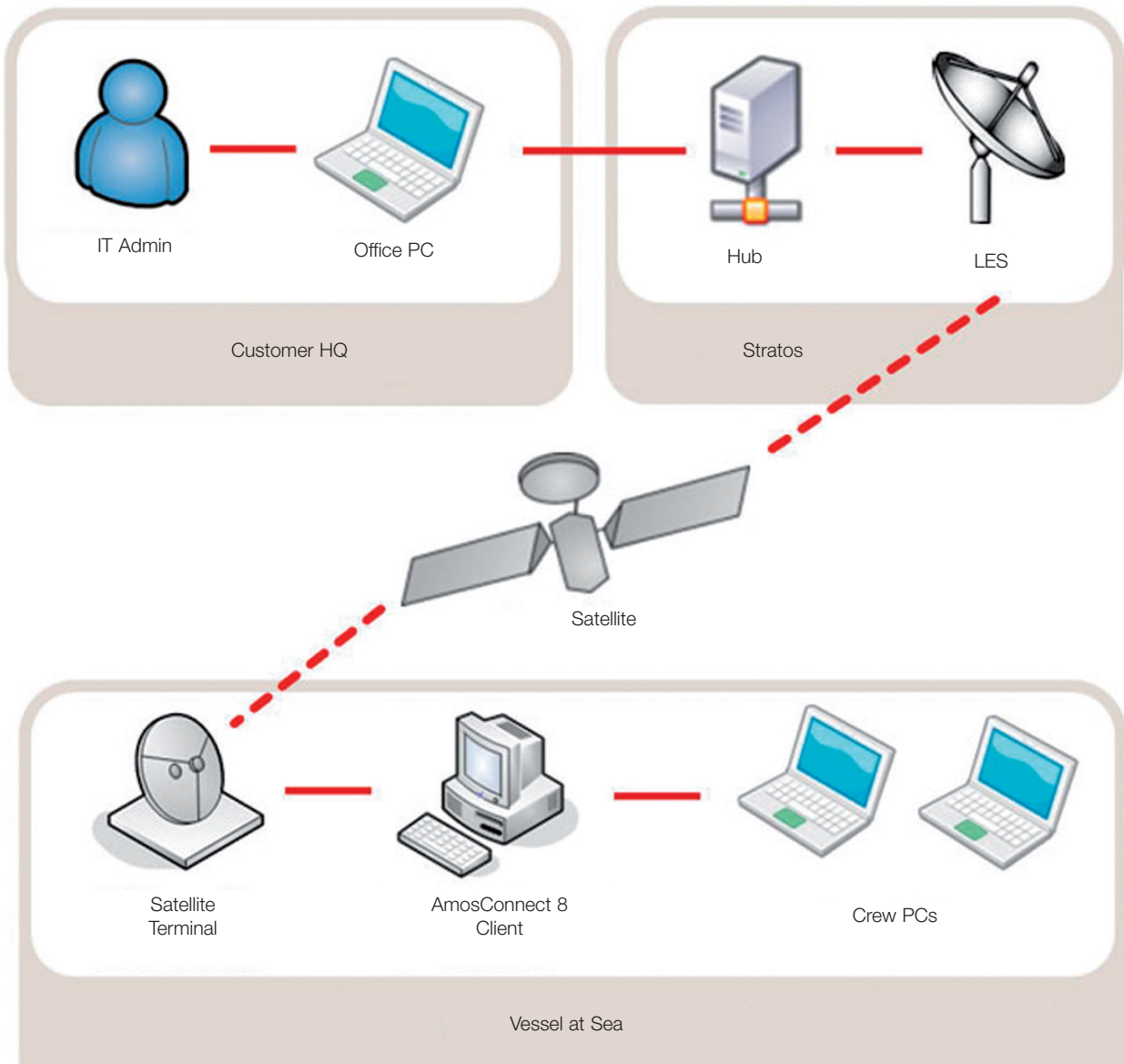


Integrated platform aims to streamline communications



AmosConnect 8 is used for remote IT support via a satellite connection

For the past couple of years, broadband uptake at sea has begun to rise sharply. Inmarsat's FleetBroadband offering alone has 10,000 installations, with around half of them connecting through Stratos' products. This is one of the reasons why the company has updated its AmosConnect maritime communications solution.

"Broadband connection at sea is happening faster than expected; it is quite exceptional," Michiel Meijer, Stratos' maritime marketing manager, told *MEC*. Indeed, AmosConnect passed

With the introduction of AmosConnect 8, Stratos believes it has a powerful system which can enable access to many functionalities in one portal

a milestone on 21 July, with the announcement that 250 million messages have been sent over this maritime satellite communications service. "AmosConnect has been in service since 2001

and is already active on over 20,000 vessels; now we have developed a new generation version called AmosConnect 8, said Mr Meijer.

"We started this project four years ago, and we carried out interviews with some of our key customers. The result was a list of 600 requirements! We then began development two years ago." Subsequently, AmosConnect 8 was launched commercially in June.

One of the specified requirements was that the system needed to be backwards compatible with narrowband connections.



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POSITION

Latitude: 0.00
Longitude: 0.00
Heading: 0.0 degrees
Speed: 0.0 knts

CONNECTIONS

Email Exchange Status

Last Connection:
Connection Status: OK
Next Connection: N/A
Msgs to Send: 2 Msgs

[Send/Receive Messages](#)

[Mail Administration](#)

Broadband Connections

Reported on 2010-05-26 14:21:53 UTC

[Manage Connections](#)

EMAIL

Inbox is empty

The AmosConnect 8 onboard portal view can be customised

“It works with the thousands of vessels still using smaller network connections but it also utilises all technologies, including FleetBroadband, Iridium OpenPort or VSAT,” according to Mr Meijer.

“This version is not just an e-mail system, it is a network where all kinds of communications can be undertaken and customers gain a greater benefit from a network connection at sea.” Capabilities include instant messaging, position reporting, crew Internet, automatic file transfer and weather updates.

The e-mail application now includes a calendar function as well and is designed to have the flexibility to use other familiar e-mail clients, such as Outlook Express. These features enable crew to manage voyage data more easily, since all the information is accessed through one portal. Additionally, multiple users can login at the same time.

The program also features a form engine, where shipowners can make their own forms using the HTML/XML standard. They have full control of the data submitted and can control costs by choosing to submit either a fully formatted form or only the field variables. The forms are able to automatically integrate any data points available in AmosConnect 8, such as GPS position information, voyage data and third party applications.

Shipowners can use the system for internal announcements for everyone on board a vessel, and it is also possible to optimise Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds to provide a local or international news service. “The portal is a single point of entry for all of these applications,” said Mr Meijer. “Third parties

can also add their own applications to the system, or customers themselves can create their own applications.”

According to Robert Binnekade, Stratos’ product manager, AmosConnect, “We are actively reaching out to service providers such as chart update companies, with regards to adding their own applications to the portal. We will be able to offer a marketplace where our customers can pick and choose applications.”

Mr Meijer believes that the technology’s remote configuration capability makes it unique. “The IT manager need not bother the captain to configure the system; it can be done remotely from shore, so no at-sea visits are needed. The administrator is onshore and he can initiate the settings that will apply on the vessel.”

Troubleshooting can also be carried out remotely. The system synchronises all settings between the hub and client on board, and it works on both IP enabled and legacy dial-up satellite services.

Furthermore, user access profiles can be defined remotely. There are three pre-defined roles – administrator, operator and crew – with various levels of access rights. Additional roles can be created as needed, and all options can be configured on board too. “Many customers are concerned about satcoms costs, so user profiles ensure efficiency,” said Mr Meijer.

The platform is fully integrated with FleetBroadband, and fleet managers can control sessions directly without using Launchpad or the terminal web interface. It allows for both business traffic and crew communication data.

AmosConnect 8 is a web-based portal accessed through any Internet browser.

However, the software only needs to be installed on one server, and users then access it through the onboard network of computers. According to Mr Meijer, “This makes it easier to roll out shipboard systems.”

There are two versions of the portal: AmosConnect Basic, which is free of charge and includes a complete mail and web server on board, one mailbox via a webmail client, a limited vessel portal, mail compression, limited remote management and position reporting. With the other option, AmosConnect Full, any of the following features can be included for a monthly fee: a complete vessel portal, multiple mailboxes, automatic file transfer, forms engine, fleet announcements, remote document repository, role based access, instant messaging and crew Internet.

Another recent augmentation to Stratos’ offerings was to its AmosConnect Crew CommCenter, which was updated in July. “Essentially, it is an onboard Internet café,” said Mr Meijer. “Crew can access the Internet with a prepaid Stratos ChatCard. Through a web browser, a crew member can e-mail, check news and use instant messaging, all with one prepaid card. It is a complete solution; the same card can be used for voice calls as well.”

Costs are calculated by units, with rates charged per megabyte. Mr Meijer commented: “AmosConnect Crew CommCenter has been in the market for a couple of years as an offline system but the difference now is it has online functionality, including the use of a web browser. Furthermore, we will optimise the costs to crew, by removing some images or displaying them at lower resolutions.” **MEC**