

MARINE ELECTRONICS

& COMMUNICATIONS

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Crew are given pre-paid Internet access in upgrade

Stratos has expanded its pre-paid crew calling service to include Internet access, as well as halving the cost of sending an e-mail and revamping its newswire service

In a major enhancement to its existing ChatCard maritime calling service, Stratos Global has introduced ChatCard Data. This new facility enables crew members to expand the use of their pre-paid card to include Internet access, while allowing shipowners to easily differentiate between crew Internet usage and that for business-related communications.

A pre-paid calling card that can easily be reloaded, ChatCard can be used on all Inmarsat and Iridium terminals, as well as FleetBroadband.

With the addition of ChatCard Data, crew members can use their FleetBroadband Internet connection for instant messaging or web browsing and have the usage in megabytes deducted from their ChatCard allowance. They can use their credit cards to load their pre-paid ChatCards, thus minimising a ship manager's administrative responsibility.

Stratos marketing manager for maritime services, Michiel Meijer, said there has recently been a dramatic increase in the importance that ship managers attach to the quality of communications systems they offer to crew members. He said one of the most effective ways to improve shipboard life for seafarers is to provide advanced voice and communications systems that are economical, easy to use and available away from the bridge.

"With the new ChatCard Data pre-paid Internet feature, ship managers can offer crew members pre-paid voice, e-mail, SMS and Internet on the same FleetBroadband terminal with a single card. Both business and crew traffic can now be managed on one FleetBroadband terminal simultaneously, and the costs will be kept completely separate," Mr Meijer said.

In a separate development, the company has released an upgrade to its AmosConnect Crew service. Known as CommCenter, this latest version boasts an enhanced user interface and new features including an announcement board, an enhanced daily news service and a doubling of message-length limits from 400 characters to 1,000 for a single credit.

The announcement board facility enables ship



A new Unicode interface can handle non-Latin scripts such as Cyrillic for Russian users

managers to send internal corporate bulletins to all crew members simultaneously and ensure they see it as soon as they log-on to the system. This was deemed necessary as e-mail was not reliable, since crew members sometimes have private addresses which are not always known to the ship manager.

The news service offers means customised global and local news are delivered directly to crew. Previously, these were sent only to the captain, who then had to print them out and pass copies around. Significantly, the feed is encoded in Unicode, allowing non-Latin alphabets, such as Cyrillic for Russian crew, to be displayed correctly.

AmosConnect Crew is an all-in-one

communication solution. Combining AmosConnect and ChatCard, two of Stratos' most successful services, AmosConnect Crew enables personnel at sea to stay in contact with home via calling, e-mail and SMS. Furthermore, individuals can be assigned a vessel-independent personal mailbox and an international SMS number that can be used on any ship and on shore.

The product was originally developed in response to requests from ship managers who wanted a crew-communication solution that would run entirely separate from business communications on their vessels. As such, it provides an easily manageable, separate account for each member of a crew. **MEC**

Global view of fleet satcoms usage

Inspired by discussions with shipowners prior to the launch of Inmarsat's FleetBroadband service, Stratos has also introduced a web-based service that provides fleet managers with global fleet communication monitoring and vessel tracking.

Dubbed StratosOceanView, the new utility provides a convenient, map-based view showing each ship's location, heading, speed, satellite communication traffic data and contact details on a single web page. Satcoms traffic data includes an overview of monthly Inmarsat and Iridium airtime costs and AmosConnect mail queue information (ie, how many messages are pending transmission to/from the ship). If necessary, managers can then log into AmosConnect and override manually which

mails are sent/received in order to minimise wasted data airtime.

Stratos states that the system is intended for shipmanagement companies operating fleets of all sizes, as well as shipowners and charter companies. Position reporting is based on existing Inmarsat C DNID reporting. The resulting GPS information is typically updated every two hours, but this can be varied according to the needs of individual fleets.

"In contrast to competing services, StratosOceanView provides a wide range of critical information in a single online interface. This eliminates the need to open multiple applications to determine vessel positions and fleet-communications details," comments Mr Meijer.