

New broadband solutions help contain costs

SAT-COM The long-term value of efficient maritime communications is no longer a subject of debate. Shipowners and managers are constantly looking for systems that can offer faster, more reliable and more economical data and voice connectivity.



Integrating maritime operations on land and at sea

The sharp focus on cost containment has recently compelled satellite communications service providers to demonstrate how new systems can actually help operators save money and run their businesses more efficiently. IT officers at some of the world's largest shipping companies have to cope with huge organizational structures that require sophisticated management systems. They have found that the only way to meet their daily challenges is to use a standardized solution seamlessly integrating all maritime operations on land and at sea.

Using new services efficiently

When evaluating new services such as Inmarsat FleetBroadband, Iridium OpenPort and various VSAT systems, maritime companies are chiefly concerned with the efficient use of available bandwidth, monitoring costs and minimizing unnecessary usage. Most innovative service providers thus offer value-added services en-

abling ship managers to obtain the highest possible performance and support from their communications networks, at the lowest possible cost. These value-added services provide users with cost and traffic control, firewall management, data optimization, high security options, easy VPN access, messaging services and full IP range. One example of these helpful services is the online Stratos Dashboard, which provides real-time information on the amount of FleetBroadband traffic used for voice and data and the associated costs. This fully automated tool offers high-usage alerts to ensure budgets are not exceeded and enables customers to manage consumption per vessel or groups of vessels.

Another tool that helps customers increase transmission speed and reduce airtime costs is StratosNet Accelerator, a free internet optimization application. Stratos' tests on FleetBroadband found that by utilizing the latest data-com-

pression techniques the application reduced the amount of web and FTP data transmitted between terrestrial and mobile terminals by more than 80%. FTP documents are compressed for transfer between client and server. Web page content is compressed by reducing the file size of images. Client-based users can select from four different levels of web page compression, with the highest compression level yielding the lowest image quality. Transport optimization techniques are also applied to overcome the limitations of TCP when used in high-latency satellite networks.

Reducing crew churn

Recruitment and retention of well-trained seafarers is a major concern of chief executives at ship management companies, even during the current economic downturn. Executives know that by reducing crew turnover they can cut expenditure associated with crew training and boost overall crew morale and productivity.

One of the most effective ways of improving shipboard life for seafarers is to provide advanced voice, private e-mail, SMS and GSM services that are effective, economical, easy to use and available away from the bridge. A vessel-independent personal mailbox and access to global and local news services are well-received features. It is also worth noting that "Chat-Cards" for prepaid voice calling and internet usage without cost to the ship manager have been widely used by seafarers and welcomed by operators.

Cutting operation costs

Major shipping lines have already found that higher-per-

formance communications systems can reduce costs by improving the efficiency of ship management. New broadband services are helping onshore experts to perform more accurate engine performance analysis and emissions monitoring, resulting in significant fuel cost savings.

These experts are also using their broadband connections to reduce downtime and spoilage via remote monitoring of engines and cargo. Remote monitoring also enables headquarters office personnel to perform IT maintenance on the ship's computers, thus eliminating the need for costly vessel visits.

Quick, online access to critical weather data, port information, classification societies and suppliers also helps to ensure accurate decisions, meeting the strict cost containment objectives.

It is also notable that, during its recent FleetBroadband field trial, Albacora Group's fishing vessel Albatun Dos was able to increase the effectiveness of the fish-finding programs Cat-Sat and SeaStar. The greater speed and functionality of the broadband service helped the Albatun Dos locate tuna more efficiently.

When all these benefits are considered together, it is easy to understand why an increasing number of ship managers see the deployment of new broadband services as essential in their ongoing efforts to reduce costs, improve operating efficiency and maintain crew satisfaction.

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