

But the technologies are also developing further. The latest marketing research shows that when the price for a smartphone will hit the USD30 to 40 range, this will drive mobile traffic growth in Africa. And based on the latest developments by cellphone vendors, this level will be reached soon. So we need to be prepared for this.

"Africa is a rapidly developing region and its people also want to have access to information. It is technology that will accommodate this demand and at an affordable price. And we all know how important cellular communications are in Africa. The mobile is usually the only access to services, including banking and entertainment. That is why potential demand for mobile data traffic is tremendous.

"Furthermore, we see that cost-effective 'open interface' solutions for remote BSTs have been developing very fast. This is a very promising market as only satellite can provide effective backhaul connectivity for remote BSTs in most parts of the continent.

"Another solid market remains corporate networks. It is satellite that enables a communication channel to a remote corporate site with minimum switching and the shortest deployment time. It also provides wide geographical coverage as well as very high availability, because satellite channels do not depend on the local terrestrial service providers. All this is still highly valued by enterprise customers and users in the oil and gas industry.

"We are looking forward to the launch of our three new satellites covering Africa in 2014 and plan to put them into commercial service by the beginning of 2015.

"Also, by that time we plan to launch service platforms together with our technology partners and will be ready to offer African customers flexible terms, as well as various business models and solutions for almost all satellite communications and broadcasting applications."



Lim Kian Soon,
Head,
SingTel Satellite

SingTel Satellite is a division of Singapore's incumbent telecoms carrier. It is positioned to be Asia's leading satellite operator outside of Japan, and has more than 35 years of experience in providing fixed and mobile satellite services (MSS).

Kian Soon explains that SingTel was one of the founding members of Inmarsat which was set up in 1979 by the International Maritime Organisation. "Inmarsat was an organisation formed by

the various incumbent carriers around the world. That was when SingTel started its involvement in satellite and so we began with maritime MSS." Now, 35 years later, as well as operating its own fleet of satellites, SingTel also has access to many others across the world. "We have three teleports in Singapore that allow us to cover the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean regions. From these three teleports we are pointing to more than 30 satellites. We own the capacity on some of those satellites while on others we lease it and provide managed services to our customers. We also have partnerships with teleports around the world to cover other regions."

SingTel's first satellite *ST-1* was launched in 1998 but has since reached end of life and was retired last year. *ST-2* was introduced in 2011 as a joint venture with Chunghwa Telecom, and SingTel also has long-term capacities on *APSTAR 5*.

On 6 February 2014, Asia Broadcast Satellite launched *ABS-2*. Its footprint covers the Africa, Middle East and South East Asia regions, and as part of a transponder purchase agreement signed with ABS in June 2009, SingTel is now marketing its satellite services in Africa under the *ST-3* brand.

"We have been successful in South East Asia, South Asia and the Middle East with *ST-1* and *ST-2*, and we wanted to capitalise on the growth in Africa and its increasing demand for satellite capacity, as feedback from our customers [tells us]. That is why we have extended our coverage to the continent," says Kian Soon.

Condosat arrangement

So why did SingTel go for a condosat arrangement with ABS rather than launch its own satellite for the continent? "The ABS opportunity came when we were working on the *ST-2* project. Working with Asia Broadcast Satellite gave us a good fit at that point in time as we were able to embark upon two launches – one on our own and another one with a partner. So it came at the right time and at the right cost model."

ST-3 delivers high power C-band services across most of Africa, the Middle East, and South East Asia. SingTel says that its orbital location of 75°E makes it particularly suitable for a variety of services ranging from GSM backhaul and enterprise data to primary distribution of HDTV channels. Among other offerings, it plans to include support for transponder leasing, VSAT and maritime applications, IP services, and more.

"We are looking at mainly enterprise customers that require connectivity to

"Working with Asia Broadcast Satellite gave us a good fit as we were able to embark upon two launches – one on our own and another with a partner."

remote areas. In fact, we already have customers in Africa that we provide VSAT links to in mining areas. We are also focusing on mobile backhaul and of course broadcast distribution to the headend. I believe that the enterprise and broadcast requirements are going to offer the higher demand. But we still see the need for backhaul. *ST-3* is C-band and because of the rain fade issue that many African countries face, this provides better performance for mobile coverage.

"SingTel is a full telecoms service provider; we have satellite capacity and a very comprehensive suite of submarine cable services available, too. We are able to integrate both the cable systems and the satellite platforms as well as our data centres in Singapore. So we are not just satellite operators. We provide end-to-end services."

Kian Soon says SingTel is already providing some customers in Africa's maritime and mining sectors with complete services that include satellite links, connectivity to the internet, data centres and private MPLS networks, as well as LAN integration and other managed services.

So who are these customers? As SingTel is more of an established name in Asia, will *ST-3* be of greater appeal to APAC enterprises who want to do business in Africa, rather than African users who may not be so familiar with the company? Kian Soon says SingTel adopts an "inside out" as well as an "outside in" approach to engaging both local and international organisations.

"There are many customers in Asia, the US, Australia and even China who have requirements in Africa. We have global offices in all major cities in the world and this gives us a sales reach through which we are able to meet the end user, understand their needs, and put together the solution for both the 'inside out' and the 'outside in' requirement for Africa."