

Singtel Satellite's success story has more pages to fill

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APB sits down with Tan Tian Seng, Director, Business Development, Singtel Satellite, to discuss the company's first forays into the broadcast sphere, and how it continues to evolve to meet customers' diversified needs today.

Singtel Satellite has come a long way in establishing itself as one of the leading global providers of one-stop satellite communications and ICT solutions today.

When the company's first satellite earth station was established on Singapore's picturesque island resort of Sentosa in 1970, its main focus was on providing voice for IDD services. Today, Singtel Satellite operates three earth station sites that provide a whole suite of satellite services for various customer segments, including the broadcast industry. Specifically, the Bukit Timah earth station today, serves as Singtel Satellite's main broadcast station, revealed Tan Tian Seng, Director, Business Development, Singtel Satellite.

He told APB: "In the early years, our focus was on providing voice for IDD. Once we had set up our earth stations, we then looked at deploying them for various applications and, of course, broadcast came along, because satellite is a core technology platform behind the delivery of content."

The '80s and '90s proved to a boon period for Singtel Satellite, as Singapore continued its transformation into one of the region's leading broadcast hubs. As more companies set up their Asia-Pacific operations in the republic, the demand for Singtel Satellite's broadcast services grew in tandem. "Our broadcast services were very much, then, focused on providing uplinking and downlinking of content

for broadcast customers," Tan added.

Another milestone was achieved in 1998 with the launch of the ST-1 satellite, which was followed by the 2011 launch of the ST-2 satellite. As more satellites came online, Singtel Satellite continued to expand its infrastructure; for instance, the company's antenna farm was expanded to improve uplinking and downlinking capabilities. And over the past decade, the move into adjacent services has also become a priority.

Tan explained: "To enable our core business to continue to expand in terms of reach and coverage, we will continue to invest in our current satellite infrastructure. But at the same time, we are also looking at the adjacent value-add services that we can offer to our broadcast customers — for example, hosting and disaster recovery services."

A key trend that Singtel Satellite is observing and following very closely, revealed Tan, is outsourcing via the cloud. "Many customers are now looking to outsource using the cloud. We have cloud infrastructures that we have built ourselves or with partners, and we are looking at how we can leverage our cloud infrastructures to provide the next generation of services for our broadcast customers. One area we try to look at closely now is cloud storage for media content, which traditionally has taken up a lot of space. We are looking at how we can be an outsource partner in

terms of the cloud."

As content continues to proliferate, the kind of infrastructure required to support content management will make the adoption of cloud technology an inevitability, Tan suggested, while acknowledging that it is a technology concept that may not be readily embraced by many companies yet, including broadcasters.

He continued: "For broadcasters, where content is still the most important asset, our conversations with them about outsourcing to the cloud indicates that reservations remain. Slowly, it is being embraced, but the methodology involved in outsourcing — whether public or private cloud — can make a lot of difference."

As the broadcast industry continues to ponder the possibilities offered by cloud technology, could this also be a wider representation of IP being more deeply ingrained into traditional broadcast workflows?

"There is no running away from the fact that IP is becoming the de facto way in which people are connected, how networks are connected, and how businesses are connected," Tan replied. "The move to IP will be inevitable over time and it's also being accelerated by 'disruptors' such as Netflix. If you are going to move content around, whether between businesses or to the consumer, IP will be the future, although it depends very much on the level of acceptability and penetration of broadband networks into the consumer space."

Tan urged caution though, stressing that in traditional markets, with varying land mass and sheer population size, traditional networks such as point-to-multipoint satellite technologies will still be very much the way to go for the



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foreseeable future.

He added: "Having said that, the trend of moving to IP will open up opportunities for the satellite industry. With emerging video compression standards and satellite broadband technology more advanced and affordable, the industry needs to view this as a real chance to open up markets that may not be able to be tapped currently by cable or direct-to-home (DTH) networks."

And perhaps more crucially, the determining challenge will always be to drive down satellite operating costs, stressed Tan.

Looking forward to the future, he concluded: "Singtel will look to further penetrate the satellite business, not only in Singapore and Asia, but around the world as well ... This will continue to be very much a big part of our business strategy. **APB**