



Operations control centre. Photo courtesy of WorldSpace

Finally coming to Europe

John Balding, Correspondent of Satellite Evolution EMEA, takes a look at the development of satellite radio outside the North American market.

When WorldSpace was founded in 1990 by Noah A. Samara, its Chairman and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), with a mission to provide digital satellite audio, data and multimedia services primarily to the emerging markets of Africa and Asia, the satellite industry was left stunned by the fact that such a revolutionary technology was about to be introduced in the developing world before the rich markets of North America and Europe.

In fact, the company's mission was then, and still is, to provide a variety of high quality programming through a subscription-based service that uses low-cost portable satellite radios and is available in underserved markets that lack programming choices. To this day, WorldSpace is the only company with rights to the world's globally allocated spectrum for digital satellite radio. Its broadcast footprint covers over 130 countries including India and China, all of Africa and the Middle East and most of Western Europe – an area that includes five billion people and more than 300 million automobiles. Its two fully operational satellites and ground infrastructure are based on proprietary and patented technology.

And yet, despite the undoubted advantage of being first to market, WorldSpace has failed to reach the subscription levels achieved by its US counterparts XM Satellite Radio and Sirius Satellite Radio. But while this was largely expected, given the fact that the company for years has been targeting markets with income levels far below the Western average, there are now signs that WorldSpace has decided to expand its operations into richer marketplaces delivering niche content to a potentially huge audience.

Niche content is key

Satellite radio's ability to target and program for niche markets will be the key to its lasting success, according to the industry experts gathered recently at a WorldSpace Satellite Radio roundtable event.

"It appears that there are three major barriers facing all communications industries today: language, culture, and geography," said Steve Kovsky, Senior Analyst, digital industry, at Current Analysis

who served as the moderator of the roundtable session. "Satellite radio enables us to overcome geography on a global scale. What it also enables us to do is customize content to best serve niche markets - groups of like-minded listeners and groups formed by common language or common culture. The path to breaking down those barriers is clear, and with satellite radio doing so seems possible."

When exploring the necessity of addressing niche market needs, experts focused on availability and variety. They also keyed in on the satellite radio opportunity to deliver a level of diversity unparalleled in mainstream terrestrial radio, thus creating a captive and appreciative audience.

According to Neil Curry, commissioner for BBC World Service English networks, BBC: "The beauty of satellite radio, especially on the international scale, is that you can offer programming that people want and need but that previously was unavailable to them. I love that I can listen to the quality of the BBC programming anywhere in the world, and there are people out there who want the same thing. Marketing to niches means they can get it."

"There are niche markets out there that desperately want to be served and are willing and able to pay for the content they are seeking," added Miles Copeland of the Copeland Group. "That's the great thing about satellite radio - you can create and offer up so many channels that it is possible to serve those previously underserved niches."

WorldSpace has always been committed to providing quality content to niche audiences. The Company has assembled an extraordinary combination of news, sports, music, and talk, which it delivers to Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Western Europe. WorldSpace currently broadcasts 62 channels - 32 of which are content provided by international, national and regional third parties and 30 WorldSpace -branded stations produced by or for WorldSpace. These stations represent some of the most popular and diverse international music and talk formats and include: Radio Amore (love songs), Farishta (retro Hindi film music), Gandharv (Hindustani clas-



sical music), Moksha (spiritual and inspirational compositions), Radio Tara (from traditional to today's Bengla pop), Play (India's first 24-hour sports station), and many others.

"The identification of niche audiences as key to the success of satellite radio is a concept that WorldSpace embraces fully," said William Sabatini, Vice President of global content, WorldSpace. "Our production centres in the Washington, DC area, India, Singapore, Dubai, and Nairobi create content for 30 original music and lifestyle channels - all aimed at reaching these types of subscribers. We look forward to continuing to meet their needs by offering the highest quality and most diverse programming available."

Making an inroad into Western markets

As we saw earlier in this article, WorldSpace is making an inroad in the developed world market at several levels.

Recently, the company announced its support for the recent adoption of a satellite digital radio (SDR) standard in Europe. After a comprehensive review lasting nearly two years, the Satellite and Earth Stations and Systems (SES) technical Committee of the European Telecommunication Standards Institute (ETSI) approved the technical specifications of SDR. WorldSpace Europe contributed technological proposals to the SDR working group from the beginning of the ETSI process.

"With the SDR standardisation, a significant step for satellite radio in Europe has been achieved," said Samara. "As a leader in the global satellite market, we not only recognized the importance of SDR technology but also understood the positive impact it would have on the industry as a whole."

ETSI's approval is necessary for communication systems in the European Union. The SDR standard is the core of the technology that WorldSpace is implementing in its satellite radio communication networks in Europe, combining terrestrial repeater networks and satellites. The standard permits the most efficient use of the allocated spectrum, maximising digital capacity while maintaining excellent service quality, even in difficult reception environments such as urban centres.

In the meantime, WorldSpace is also trying to get into individual European markets. WorldSpace Italia, S.p.A., a subsidiary of WorldSpace, Inc. has recently announced it has entered into an agreement with Telecom Italia that brings digital satellite radio one step closer to European consumers, starting with Italy. Under the terms of the agreement, Telecom Italia, utilizing its extensive telecommunications expertise and infrastructure, will design and deploy a terrestrial repeater network throughout Italy, for WorldSpace Italia.

Terrestrial repeaters or 'gap fillers', are towers that enable WorldSpace Italia to re-transmit its satellite radio broadcasts to consumers who do not have a direct line of sight to WorldSpace's satellite. These towers are most commonly used in urban areas where the satellite signal may be blocked by large buildings or other man-made obstacles. WorldSpace Italia intends to deploy its repeaters in the major Italian urban areas while the rural areas of Italy will be serviced directly by the satellite signal. By deploying terrestrial repeaters, WorldSpace Italia can ensure that subscribers driving automobiles or using portable devices can enjoy a seamless listening experience as they move about the country.

In May 2006, WorldSpace Italia received approval from the Italian Ministry of Communications to launch a subscription-based satellite radio service in Italy, utilizing 12.5MHz of the L-band frequency spectrum, the only frequency band harmonized for satellite radio over Europe. Today, WorldSpace, Inc. has two operational satellites that cover nearly two-thirds of the world's population. Its AfriStar satellite covers Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

WorldSpace's strategy is to roll out a European service on a sequential, country-by-country basis, beginning with Italy. A third satellite, already built and in storage in Toulouse, France, is expected to provide additional capacity over Europe, enabling consumers to have access to approximately 50 channels per country of diversified

WORLDSPACE SATELLITE RADIO LAUNCHES INDIA'S FIRST 24-HOUR GUJARATI CHANNEL

WorldSpace Satellite Radio has introduced 'Radio Umang', the first ever 24-hour Gujarati radio channel for subscribers in South Asia including the Company's primary market of India. 'Radio Umang' (channel 111) presents a unique platform, ranging from the pulsating tunes of the Garba and Dandia Raas to the melodious Sugam Sangeet and Ghazals, that showcases the rich diversity of musical traditions of Gujarat. There are over 50 million people in India alone who speak Gujarati.

"We are continually looking to enhance our subscribers' listening experience with the addition of unique, compelling, and fresh content," said William Sabatini, Vice President, global programming, WorldSpace Satellite Radio. "This most recent addition to our lineup demonstrates our commitment to further rounding out the breadth of our branded channels and differentiating ourselves from the offerings of traditional radio in India and around the world."

'Radio Umang' joins a growing portfolio of Indian regional language channels available on the WorldSpace Satellite Radio Network. WorldSpace currently offers eight other regional channels with dedicated programming in Tamil (KL Radio), Malayalam (RM Radio), Telugu (Spandana), Kannada (Sparsha), Bengali (Tara), Punjabi (Tunak Punjabi) Urdu (Falak) and Marathi (Surabhi). These WorldSpace channels also reach Indian listeners living within the AsiaStar satellite coverage area, including in the Middle East where there is a large Indian population.

This newest addition and ninth regional language channel in the WorldSpace line-up captures the rich folk music traditions of Gujarat and recognizes the various aspects of Gujarati music that has a strong repertoire of film and non-film music. The channel also features shows that are dedicated to Gujarati theatre, Garba music, Retro Gujarati film music, Gujarati poetry and literature, comedy, modern Gujarati music among several other interesting shows hosted by well-known personalities from the world of Gujarati music and entertainment. Several of these unique programs include:

- Suravali Ashit Ni - This program is hosted by one of the most respected names in the Gujarati music industry, Ashit Desai, and features some of his popular songs from various genres of Gujarati music;
- Taajgi - An invigorating breakfast show hosted by popular radio entertainer, Ajinkya Sampat. It showcases the best of Gujarati music from film songs, garba, folk songs and light music and also provides interesting music facts and trivia;
- Be Ghadi Anand - An evening show that features insight and perspectives on Gujarati culture, literature and music from playback singer Hema Desai; and
- Makhmali Mehfil - Highlights rhythms of Gujarati ghazals and is hosted by Gujarati actor Aanand Goradiya.

sports, talk and commercial-free music programming at the service's maturity.

Commenting upon the deal with Telecom Italia, Luca Panerai, CEO of WorldSpace Italia stated: "This agreement is a critical step toward commencement of our satellite radio service in Italy. When completed, the complementary repeater network will enable us to provide subscribers with country-wide access to a wide variety of unique content. We are pleased that Italy will be the first country in Europe to receive satellite radio services and we are honoured to work with a strong partner such as Telecom Italia for deploying the critical terrestrial backbone of our network."