



Simon Twiston Davies, CEO of CASBAA

Despite being an essential component of telecoms, broadcasting and a host of other industries, the satellite sector suffers from a problem of visibility. Simon Twiston Davies, CEO of the Cable and Satellite Broadcasting Association of Asia (CASBAA), explains how the 2003 Satellite Industry Forum to be held in Hong Kong on 28 October, will help raise the profile of the satellite industry.

Talk about the revolution

▶▶ **We were sitting with a couple of Asia-based** broadcasters when one of them said something startling. "The fact is that we will be using almost zero satellite capacity within five years. By then I reckon it will be almost all fibre outside of Direct-To-Home DTH (platforms)", said one Chief Executive Officer (CEO). His colleague from a Hong Kong-based entertainment channel agreed.

Both these executives are at the top of their profession in Asia. They are the decision-makers. They call the shots. They sign the cheques. So watch out satellite operators, equipment suppliers and the providers of other services. Of course, things will not be as bad as our broadcasting executive might suggest. DTH will only be a part - an important part - of the Asia-Pacific satellite picture.

The reality of video services such as broadband via satellite will take up increasing levels of capacity. Backhaul of video will remain a key driver and intra-Asia business continues to increase. Plain old television is not going to entirely migrate to fibre. A steady stream of new entrants are arriving in the Asian video market. All that video capacity via mobile handsets will need to be largely back-hauled via satellite. And never forget the inevitable Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth that the Asia-Pacific economy will achieve over the next decade.

However, one problem remains: the global satellite industry, let alone the Asian segment, has largely failed to fully communicate its unique strengths to its customers - ie, the broadcasters and the telcos, governments, regulators, the retail and business media, and the public at large.

Despite revolutionising communications in Asia - changing the face of both the economic and civil societies across 14 markets for three billion people by delivering telco-based and television services that have radically altered people's conceptions of themselves and the rest of the world - Asia's satellite industry has been almost silent in terms of general self promotion.

Meanwhile, over the past five years ground-based delivery systems such as undersea fibre cable networks have captured the imagination of the business and general community and satellite is now viewed by many as little more than an occasionally interesting adjunct to the general telecommunications landscape.

It is really a poor state of affairs given that there are some 20 commercial satellite operators in the region accounting for more than 80 satellites providing as many individual TV packages, long-haul TV services, telecoms backbones, and as much broadband back-haul as anywhere on the planet. Without satellite services the Asia-Pacific economy, social and political system would be a lost cause.

Yet the message of the dramatic advantages that satellite has as a point-to-multi-point delivery system has been overwhelmed by the background noise from the debt-ridden long-haul fibre industry. If the Asia-Pacific satellite industry is to hold its own in a very competitive world, it must stand up for itself, and most importantly sell itself to the greater community, including investors.

One way to ensure that the message is clearly delivered could be by undertaking a generic industry-backed corporate campaign designed on the lines of initiatives such as the 'Drink Milk' campaign in the US a few years ago or the major messaging undertaken by national governments to promote their countries as tourist destinations.

One of the key objectives of the CASBAA 2003 Satellite Industry Forum in Hong Kong on 28 October is to address these customer awareness issues by targeting telcos and broadcasters alike with programme pods such as 'Satellite: the life line for telecoms' and 'Satellite: limitless benefits for television.'

Via keynote addresses at the CASBAA Forum from world leaders such as Conny Kullman, the CEO of Intelsat, and Giulano Beretta, the Chairman and CEO of Eutelsat, as an industry we have to make our voices heard. Otherwise we are going to lose our customers and businesses. ■

