



2008 – a year for optimism, growth and change

Over the past twelve months alone there has been an incredible spurt of growth in the Middle East satellite communications market. With CABSAT 2008 less than two short months away, companies are preparing themselves for what should be the most successful event ever, especially for those in the satellite industry.

Investment in satellite has been considerable in the region and this trend may be put down to the huge demand for Direct-to-Home TV services and broadband connectivity and also to emerging technology such as HDTV and Mobile TV. This growth in the industry has been accompanied by the emergence of new players in the field. New operators are vying for a share of the market and plans for satellite launches are lined up to give greater coverage to a region that is hungry for services.

The Middle Eastern and African regions are both prime candidates for satellite communication technology. Their vast expanses of land are often lacking in terrestrial infrastructure making communication a challenge. But it's not only that - the market is changing and is liberalising and this is creating business and competition. There is now great demand for services, particularly broadband services from all sides, whether that be education or health or residential. The demand is there and needs to be met. It's an exciting time for the satellite industry in the Middle East. The Arab League has stated that the regional operators must be favoured over foreign operators and new and emerging companies such as Noorsat and Yahsat are taking full advantage of this.

In Africa, meanwhile, there is a struggle for bandwidth. The lack of capacity is a substantial problem for which no resolution has yet been found. The irony is that the African people are hungry for technology as this will aid them in their development goals and will help to spread much needed services to those in hard to reach locations where there is no terrestrial infrastructure. Before the wonders of satellite technology can help to pull Africa from the Digital Divide, the issue of the lack of bandwidth has to be addressed. No bandwidth, no means of communication. In this issue, we speak to AFSAT Communications to find out how they feel this problem should be addressed and what challenges the satellite industry in Africa faces today.

Overall, there are many things to be optimistic about in the EMEA region at present. It is going to be an eventful year and we are sure to see considerable advances made and more and more people using satellite technology. However, at the other end of the scale, there are major issues that still need to be addressed. For example, there are still countries in Africa and the Middle East who have not yet taken steps to liberalise their communications sector. We must hope that this will begin to be remedied during the course of this year and that all those who are entitled to ICT – and that means everyone – are able to gain access to the services that can change their lives. ●

Helen Jameson - Editor
Satellite Evolution EMEA

