



A new outlook on DTH

ProtoStar, a newcomer to the Asia-Pacific region is embarking on exciting and promising times. With a new satellite freshly launched and a new outlook on the DTH business, Helen Jameson speaks to Eui Koh, President of ProtoStar Asia.

Question: Can you please begin by giving us an overview of ProtoStar

Eui Koh: We are a new satellite company and we place an emphasis on DTH services in Asia. Generally, in Asia, each national satellite operator provides DTH for that particular nation. Because of that, other neighbouring countries are reluctant to use their satellite. What is different about ProtoStar is the fact that we recognise that we can provide, with the same satellite, a DTH service for two or three different nations. This is beneficial for the users and we can design our satellites specifically for their countries.

Being small, we can be nimble, be flexible, and much more customer focused. We were really pleased with the successful launch of ProtoStar I from Kourou with Arianespace in the first week of July. The satellite is positioned at the 98.5 degrees orbital location that is the Singapore Government's orbital location. Some people have raised issues about the positioning of the satellite as you may well have heard. This is no surprise to us. As you know, these are incumbent satellite operators. Obviously, they do not feel comfortable with a newcomer launching a neighbouring satellite and I think that this is probably understandable. I do understand their concern. However, this is

not a new story or a new discovery. It happens all the time, from one satellite to another. There is always the possibility of interference with neighbouring satellites and co-ordination issues. So I think that we are fully understanding of their concerns. We have already started co-ordination with those neighbouring satellite operators but, as you know, co-ordination is not a matter of holding one or two meetings and then resolving everything. There are many meetings, and engineering data must be shared with each other, but eventually we will solve that co-ordination problem. Yes, it would be nice if you could co-ordinate fully with the other satellites but as you know, in Asia the geosynchronous orbit is very congested so co-ordination is very important. We have already met several neighbouring satellite operators and this is ongoing and will continue following the launch. There is always an amicable solution to be found eventually.

We already have anchor tenants for ProtoStar I secured in India – Zee TV is one of these and they are ready to use our satellite capacity for their DTH platform. We also have C-band coverage from the Philippines and Taiwan all the way to the Middle East so this will provide a good GSM backhaul and video link service. At the moment, C-band in Asia is almost exhausted so this is also a reason why our satellite launch is very timely. At the same time, we have more Ku-band for India so we are talking with some more DTH operators in India. So we have, at this stage, secured more than 50 percent of our capacity even before launch. We feel like this is the right time to be moving forward and we feel very positive about it. As you know, in India there are four existing operators providing DTH services. There are six more licenses being given bringing it to a total of 10 DTH providers and that equals a lot of requirement for Ku-band. So we are coming in at the right time.

Question: The DTH market is extremely strong at the moment. Can you see this momentum being sustained going forward and what do you feel the new trends are going to be within the DTH market?

Eui Koh: In time, I feel that some consolida-



ProtoStar I C-band coverage.



ProtoStar I Ku-1 band coverage.



ProtoStar I Ku-2 band coverage.

tion will be inevitable because even the US has two DTH providers and the UK has one, France has one, Korea and Japan have one each. I think that although the demand for video services in India, for example, is great, but can they sustain ten DTH service providers? It is very doubtful. However, India is a totally different case to any other country because the country has many different languages and cultures. India is a multinational competition. I think that the DTH providers there would eventually be consolidated into a few. There are a lot of requirements and ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) is capable of providing the satellites but I don't think they can supply enough to meet demand at this moment. I think that the Indian market is good and we are very strong in the Indian market.

In the first part of next year we are going to launch ProtoStar II. And again, for that





ProtoStar I successfully carried to orbit on Ariane 5

ProtoStar I communications satellite has been successfully launched aboard an Ariane 5 rocket that lifted into space from the European Spaceport in Kourou, French Guiana.

ProtoStar I, the company's first satellite, is to be positioned at 98.5 degrees East longitude to provide direct-to-home (DTH) television and broadband Internet service to South and Southeast Asia. Built by Space Systems/Loral on its space-proven 1300 platform, the satellite will enter service following a series of in-orbit tests expected to take no more than two months.

"This successful launch is truly the realization of a dream that began in 2002. That's when we first conceptualized our business plan for a new constellation of satellites to meet the growing demand for DTH television service throughout Asia," said Philip Father, ProtoStar's President and CEO. "Though we are already hard at work on the ProtoStar II and III satellites, the excitement of getting our first bird successfully into orbit is unrivalled. I'm sure I speak for all of our customers and partners when I say how thrilled we all are to have this first important step behind us."

The mission aboard the Ariane 5 rocket also successfully launched the Arabsat BADR-6 satellite, manufactured by EADS Astrium and Thales Alenia Space. It is to be placed in orbit at 26 degrees East.

ProtoStar I is the first in a fleet of satellites aimed at supporting in-country partners in the Asia Pacific region. These partners plan to offer their subscribers satellite television packages with more than 150 channels of digital-quality video (ultimately high definition), audio, and pay-per-view programming, as well as powerful broadband Internet access.

The footprint of ProtoStar I has been customized to meet the immediate and long term needs of the company's anchor DTH-operator customers from an orbital slot that provides coverage to an area with a population of over 2 billion. ProtoStar I has twenty two 36MHz-equivalent Ku-band transponders and thirty eight 36MHz-equivalent C-band transponders. The satellite provides C-band coverage from Southeast Asia across to the Middle East. A portion of the Ku-band transponders are aimed at the Indian sub-continent, with the remainder serving the Southeast Asia region.

Companies which have already leased space on ProtoStar I include Agrani Satellite Services Limited, a division of DishTV India Ltd.; PlanetSky Ltd. of Limassol, Cyprus; and Singapore Telecommunications Ltd. (SingTel).

ProtoStar has contracted with SingTel for that company to augment its operations centre in Singapore to provide telemetry, tracking and control (TT&C) services for the ProtoStar I satellite.

satellite, we also have an anchor tenant assured. This is the number one DTH service provider in Indonesia – Indovision. So we have a very healthy start. We funded ProtoStar I and II for US\$500 million. In the case of ProtoStar II, we raised this funding during the sub-prime crisis so therefore the financial people looked at our business plan and liked it and they opened their wallets – an achievement at this point in time.

Question: Can you give us further details on ProtoStar II's specifications?

Eui Koh: ProtoStar II will have S-band for DTH. Indovision will use S-band. This is unusual, as most other countries would use Ku-band. However, because of the heavy rain in Indonesia, they prefer the low frequency S-band and they have been using it for years already. We also have a Ku-band beam that is switchable between India and the Philippines and Indonesia. We have 22 Ku-band transponders over India from ProtoStar I and another potential 20 for the India market. So I think we have very good Ku and S-band

coverage in ProtoStar II. We can satisfy another DTH provider in either India or Pakistan with ProtoStar II.

Question: Have you selected a manufacturer yet?

Eui Koh: Oh yes, ProtoStar I was manufactured by Space Systems/Loral and ProtoStar II is being manufactured by Boeing and that will be launched by a Proton vehicle. So the programme is all set and everything is running to schedule with ProtoStar II.

Question: At CommunicAsia this year there was a lot of buzz about HDTV. Are you making any provision for HDTV at ProtoStar at the moment?

Eui Koh: Our satellite is ideal for HDTV because HD requires wider bandwidth and we have 28 C-band transponders so that we can transmit HDTV programmes from one place to another. Also, in Ku-band, we have enough power and bandwidth so we can provide HDTV capability to any DTH service provider who needs it. We have already spoken with

ground terminal vendors and we are ready and very excited about HD. Many people are concerned whether the Indian subscribers are ready for HDTV programming but we are optimistic. We see definite growth in HDTV. Right now, HDTV is in high demand in Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Australia and this is gradually moving into the south into India, and Pakistan. Malaysia will only be a matter of time.

Question: What about Mobile TV. Do you have any opinions on this?

Eui Koh: We don't provide any mobile TV services but we are closely watching what is happening because we believe there is a niche market of users, particularly young people. TU Media in Korea is doing quite well but Japan is not doing well. It is the same technology, but Korea was lucky to be tied with the mobile carrier, SK Telecom. SK Telecom developed a very good handheld terminal. Japan did not have the association with the mobile companies so I think that was the difference. And it's also down to the content. The content has to be tailored for a Mobile TV screen so I think that area has to be developed. I still believe there is a market for mobile TV in China and other countries. If somebody can come forward with a good business model it can succeed.

Question: Can I just ask you about your opinion of the satellite industry as a whole in this region. Is it strong?

Eui Koh: In the last couple of years I can say that the Asian market is fully recovered. As a result of the 2000 economic downturn, not many satellite operators launched new satellites, they just replaced old ones. So because of that, the capacity was generally consumed. Now supply and demand is almost equal. Before, there was an oversupply. This year, I have been talking to many carriers and users, and they are looking aggressively for capacity so I think that this is a very good sign and I think that the satellite manufacturers are excited and we also see newcomers like ProtoStar and ABS coming into the market and doing quite well. ABS are planning the ABS-2 satellite at the moment. So the satellite industry overall is very healthy in Asia-Pacific.

Question: What will your main objectives be over the next 12 months?

Eui Koh: We will be looking for further DTH opportunities and at the same time the GSM backhaul side of our business is very strong so we will be talking with mobile carriers in emerging countries. I think that these next 12 months will be very busy as we will be talking with all potential users and mobile carriers. In my view it is a hot market right now especially in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines – so we will be very busy! ■