

Train antenna system - the system allows a train to travel through a tunnel without degradation of the signal.

Innovation and reliability

The Orbit Technology Group has been providing state-of-the-art communications solutions for over 50 years. Their in-house development and innovative products have brought them great success. Helen Jameson speaks to Dr. Ehud Netzer, President and CEO of Orbit Technology Group to find out more about the company and the directions in which it is heading.



Question: Many thanks for speaking to us today. From humble beginnings as a technology shop serving the Israeli market, Orbit has grown into a very successful international company covering many areas of satellite business. What are the secrets behind the company's success?

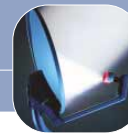
Dr. Ehud Netzer: I think there are three main points that illustrate why Orbit has been so successful. Firstly, excellent people work for the company. They are very professional, experienced and mature. Secondly, we feel that moving into new areas of business and developing new technology is very important. We have been very good at identifying emerging and niche markets. Finally, our success is built on good decision-making. We

must know which directions to take the company in and when - which areas to break into. For example, the area of maritime communications has been a very important one to us, a very successful area that is growing. Most of the US Navy's ships are now equipped with Orbit systems, for example.

The company is seeing growth of about 25 percent every two to three years.

Professional people, innovative technology and good decision-making. These are the things that have made Orbit Technology so successful.

Question: What are Orbit's principal areas of business and which markets do you serve?



Dr. Ehud Netzer: There are three main areas that Orbit serves. The first area is ACS or Avionics and Communications Systems and this part of the company offers audio management systems for aircraft, naval and ground-based applications.

The second one is tracking systems. We offer a range of tracking solutions for point-to-point connections between shore-to-shore and shore-to-sea, tracking for telemetry applications, radar systems and surveillance applications, weather tracking systems and tactical communications tracking.

The third area is satcom and this part of the business can be divided into four sub-areas - marine, trains, airbourne and ground.

This year the company will be doing business in Israel and the US. We do not yet do enough in the Far East but we will be working on that this year and we will also be looking at Eastern Europe, which we haven't done before. We are breaking into new markets and we are also going to be developing new products.

Question: Orbit has recently received Type Approval from GVF and Intelsat for the OrSat maritime stabilised antenna. How significant is this for Orbit?

Dr. Ehud Netzer: It's a tricky question as, at present, antenna systems may be sold without type approval. Our biggest competitor is selling their systems without these endorsements. However, we see the type approval as more of a selling point. I think things are changing. As time goes by, type approvals will become more and more necessary as the systems are increasingly regulated. It is now becoming a requirement of a system. For example, a particular Navy is now stipulating in their tenders that the systems must be type approved. So we see that it is becoming more and more mandatory. We are trying to promote our systems in Brazil. In Brazil the regulator, Anatel, requires any satellite system to have type approvals for satellite operations there. So we are taking this into account. Let's face it - there are so many antenna systems around in the world today, and so many satellites in the sky that some control has to be exercised. We are great believers in type approvals and we are proud that we have obtained this. We believe in staying one step ahead.

Question: You have recently introduced an antenna system for trains. Can you tell us more about this product and its capabilities?

Dr. Ehud Netzer: Yes, we are very excited about this. As far as we know, we are the very first company to come up with this solution. This is a system that we have developed together with an Italian company. The system allows a train to travel through a tunnel without degradation of the signal. A major European company has been using the

system for several months along with other customers too. We have had great feedback from the market. People are using the Internet on board the trains and that is down to our system. When you go into a tunnel you will lose the connection to the satellite so we have developed a system where, once the train emerges from the tunnel, the satellite signal is re-acquired in about 20 seconds. On entering the tunnel, a Wi-Fi signal is employed via a stationary antenna at the mouth of the tunnel. Therefore, the passenger retains the Internet connection and there is no loss of signal but as soon as the train emerges from the tunnel the satellite signal is re-acquired very quickly. We are very proud of this system. The antenna is very low-profile and sleek. We are looking forward to increased roll-out of this system and we believe that this system will be a world leader for on-board communications for trains.

Question: Can you please also tell us more about the airbourne antenna?

Dr. Ehud Netzer: Yes. This system is aimed primarily at the business jet market. In the past Orbit supplied hundreds of system for TV reception on commercial and business airplanes. In the last few years Orbit has been working towards a two-way broadband solution. Two approaches were taken in the development of the system. Firstly, a prototype of a circular antenna to be tail mounted was developed by Orbit. The system was successfully tested during flight. Secondly, several versions of a flat antenna were built and tested in cooperation with Starling (another Israeli company). These are designed to be fuselage mounted. These include versions for both commercial and business jets.

In parallel to working with potential customers, Orbit is in the process of employing a new strategy in this field. This strategy will be finalised by the end of the year.

Question: You have recently launched a US website and you made an impact at Satellite 2008 in Washington. You are obviously looking to expand into this market. What business is Orbit doing in America and has it been a challenge to break into the US market?

Dr. Ehud Netzer: Our activities in the US are growing very quickly. We did very well at Satellite 2008. We came out of the show with several leads, which is very impressive. We have a good relationship with companies in the US. We are leveraging our good relationships with US companies to gain access to the US market. We are trying to bring more and more technology into the US market, with an emphasis on marketing and support in terms of making customer support easier and more available. We are also developing a support network in the US instead of making the US rely on teams back in Israel. Shipping from Israel to the States is also expen-

sive so it makes sense to establish a base there.

Question: What projects is Orbit currently working on in terms of research and development?

Dr. Ehud Netzer: Orbit has several areas of research and development at the moment. Our first is in the field of avionics. We are developing a naval audio system that is suitable for smaller vessels with some reduction in capabilities and a low-cost design. Also in the field of avionics, we are developing an audio management system on IP. This will be the next generation of audio systems.

In tracking, we are working on system engineering for full telemetry systems and also on a point-to-point communication system, and on modern digital controllers for future designs.

In satcom, we are developing a small, 60cm naval antenna system for medium and small vessels. We are also working on an industrial version of the train mounted antenna, plus upgrades for the existing selection of marine antennas - a dual frequency antenna and additional type approvals, for example.

Question: What are Orbit's plans as a company for the coming year?

Dr. Ehud Netzer: In the coming year Orbit will concentrate on the following issues:

- Advanced systems with the highest quality - this is the combination of putting money into R&D to be one step ahead while constantly improving the processes within the company to achieve better quality and reliability;
- Business development - it is the strategy of Orbit to become a more global company. We will strengthen our daughter company in the US bringing more sales capabilities with technical support. We intend to build upon a strong European base and to set our footprint in the Far-East. Orbit also will put more emphasis on South America. Orbit will accelerate its activity in the field of mergers and acquisitions. Furthermore, Orbit is in the process of establishing strategic partnerships with various companies worldwide; and
- Customer support - even though we have made tremendous progress in this field, we believe that the best customer support is mandatory. We intend to get closer to the customers, put in place better means to listen to feedback and improve ourselves in this area constantly.

At Orbit, we are in the process of reviewing and updating our company strategy. We intend to complete the evaluation by the end of the year and implement any improvements immediately. ■