



Education, Education, Education

It seems that, even now, there is still a stigma attached to satellite communications, a belief that they are too expensive, sometimes unreliable and difficult to install and use. This couldn't be further from the truth and it is amazing that the industry is still trying to demystify satellite in some areas, and educate those who are not aware of its huge array of capabilities.

In this issue, we have looked at rural telephony and its growth in Asia. The rural market is a huge one in the region and there is a drive to help connect even the remotest villages to the towns and cities where they can become involved with the marketplace, gain education and new skills, network with other communities in similar circumstances, form partnerships with those in the towns, learn the prices of crops so that they can actually begin making money for the hard work they put in – I could go on. But the main point that must be made is that, in many cases, satellite is the only way that communications will reach many of these places, whether it be on the side of a mountain or in the middle of a jungle, it doesn't matter – satellite can and will enable them to communicate with the outside world and in doing so, change people's lives.

The prices of satellite hardware have plummeted over the past ten years making satellite-based services more accessible to those that it would never have been available to before. For those communities who have adopted some form of satellite-based communication the rewards have been rich. Sat-Ed is a project set up in Southeast Asia that addresses the problem of the

digital divide for rural or remote communities. Their 'Room for Life' uses IPSTAR satellite technology to deliver high speed broadband, IPTV, VoIP and other services to a dedicated place within the village where several computers and other equipment is situated, creating a focal point for education in the village. The users can gain access to the outside world in order to establish partnerships to sell goods made in their village all over the world.

They can access information on health or e-government services. They can take courses and gain qualifications. Sat-Ed opens many, many doors that would otherwise have been firmly closed to the people living in places with no infrastructure. They staunchly believe that education is the way up and out of poverty and their Room for Life is a gift for those who wish to enrich their lives.

Through more projects like Sat-Ed and their partnership with satellite companies, people who have previously been dubious about satellite can be educated and introduced to the world that can open up to them if they are willing to trust in the technology.

The ITU have just announced that Thailand has signed an agreement with them to build ICT capacity in Asia-Pacific. Part of this agreement will relate to boosting rural ICT development – a very positive step. Satellite is not a threat. In fact, it is a turning point that can help benefit a whole village. Satellite communication is the key that just needs to be turned to make a world of difference. ■

Helen Jameson
Editor