



Advent factory in the UK. Photo courtesy of Advent.

Pushing back the boundaries

Vislink Group has recently appointed Mather Al-Ali as its Regional Sales Manager covering the Middle East and North Africa. He is based out of the new regional office at Jebel Ali Free Zone. Mather brings with him over 11 years of broadcast sales experience gained with companies such as Sony and Avid. We speak to him about Advent Communication's activities in the Middle East and North Africa region.



Mather Al-Ali, Regional Sales Manager

Question: Advent is renowned for the supply of high quality and innovative satellite equipment for the broadcast of news and events all over the world. How significant is the Middle East and North Africa market to Advent?

Mather Al-Ali: I can say that the Middle East and North African market is both strategic and significant to Advent Communications. Advent has had a very high level of success in this region over the years and has a very large and profitable customer base in the region today. My objective within the Vislink Group is to reflect the success that Advent has had in this region to the other sister companies including Link Research and Microwave Radio Communications.

Question: What do you think it is that has made Advent so successful in the region?

Mather Al-Ali: I think that it is a combination

of things and is down to the fact that Advent is a pioneering company in the SNG and satellite communications sector. We developed the first commercial SNG system in 1989. At Advent, there has been a focus from a sales and business development point of view in the Middle East and North Africa region. In addition to this, the offering of solutions are perceived and considered by the customers to be of high value. For example, the ability to move from standard definition to high definition, through licensing and hardware changes.

Question: Today we live in a 24 hours a day, seven days a week news culture. How is Advent meeting the demand and providing broadcasters with the most suitable satellite equipment for on-the-spot coverage of breaking news?

Mather Al-Ali: Advent meets the demand for



on the spot coverage and breaking news in two ways. First of all, Advent has continued to change its position in the SNG field through continuous emphasis on product development and research. From this, products such as the flyDrive and flyaway have been delivered which are ultra portable in design, to comply with IATA baggage requirements which are the weight limitations when you go through an airport. So, for example, the Mantis 1 metre flyaway system can weigh approximately 22kgs complete with its carbon fibre carrying case. I have seen them put together in front of me and they can actually be assembled in 20 minutes.

I have hand carried it myself. It's very light and very simple to assemble. In addition to this, Advent can also leverage technologies from its sister companies such as Link Research and Microwave Radio Communications to provide customers with a total communications solution. Each one of these companies offers a complementary form of telecommunication which is typically required by customers. It is possible to integrate solutions to encompass two of these, if not three, working in one system.

Question: What impact is the emergence and popularity of HDTV having on Advent's services for sports event broadcasting, for example?

Mather Al-Ali: The bulk of the customers today in the Middle East and North Africa are still using standard definition systems. However, for some time now, it has been considered very critical to have a smooth and practical upgrade to high definition. So basically, we will continue to invest in standard definition equipment but as and when we want to upgrade and to high definition we do not want to re-invest in new technology. And to that extent, Advent has a solution. It's a simple HD licensing investment in the future as and when we require the move to high definition.

Question: In terms of newsgathering and broadcasting in general, what does satellite offer that other technology cannot?

Mather Al-Ali: As I have mentioned there are different technologies for news gathering such as the types offered by our sister companies which are electronic news gathering (ENG) wireless camera systems for example. But the unique strength of the Advent SNG solution is that it offers maximum geographical flexibility in terms of the journalist or reporter's movements. The only limit is the footprint of the satellite. You can literally go out into the mountains, desert, very remote areas that are way away and broadcast. So that really is the practical benefit of SNG. You have portability because you have small systems that have been

made available through new technology and development. It is also considered to be a very reliable telecommunications tool and provides connectivity of a very high quality. It's very resilient and there is very little downtime.

Question: Is the uptake of VSAT technology for broadcasting high in the Middle East region? If so, what makes it so popular?

Mather Al-Ali: In terms of data links for broadcasters it is becoming popular and a number of broadcasters are looking at the technology. However, most of the broadcasters still have a preference for video satellite links rather than data which is possibly partially due to the skill and training levels of the local staff. But it is certainly something that will become increasingly more in demand in the future. At this time SNG video links have to be small like the 1m Mantis – lightweight, small volume and ruggedised with the electronics to go with it. It has enabled the practical use of SNG for video as opposed to data links.

Question: Advent is also involved with the provision of satellite communications equipment for other market sectors, aside from broadcast. Can you explain which other sectors you are involved with and why the technology is so suitable for these sectors?

Mather Al-Ali: The other sectors we deal with are defence, law enforcement and security and satellite communications technology characteristics are considered essential for the DLES market. These include

reliability, rugged design, portability, support of data communications in addition to audio and video. They are very much in demand.

Question: Do you see any specific trends or developments emerging in the Middle East region in terms of SNG and broadcasting over satellite?

Mather Al-Ali: What we do see is investment in existing news channels. This is continuing, in addition to new news channels coming out in the region.

The Middle East is a location that actually generates much of today's world news and certainly from a local perspective the appetite for news consumption is very high per capita, generally within the Middle East and North Africa.

Question: What are Advent's aims in the Middle Eastern region for the remainder of 2008?

Mather Al-Ali: The aim is to strengthen the Advent brand in the Middle East through the new regional office and additionally to provide a regional sales and business development focus for Link Research and Microwave Radio Communications. So the plan is to do this through Dubai based staff starting with myself. I joined the company on 1st January 2008 as the regional sales manager for the MENA region and so I will be based out of the Dubai office which we expect will expand in the course of the coming months to include administrative and support staff etc. So it certainly is a focused and clear investment from Vislink to service the requirements of this region in an even more effective manner than earlier.



Advent Flydrive. Photo courtesy of Advent.