

HTS Spotlight Series

HTS Profile: Inmarsat

The launch of Inmarsat's Global Xpress (GX) service is one of the most anticipated events in the satellite industry. It marks the introduction of the first seamless global platform for high-speed broadband satellite services, covering virtually everywhere on earth and targeted at both the mobility and fixed markets.

We spoke to Michele Franci, VP Commercial, Inmarsat Global Xpress, for an update on the program, the value it will deliver, and the impact it's likely to have on the future of satellite communications.



Featuring

Michele Franci

VP Commercial,
Inmarsat Global Xpress

Michele Franci is responsible for the execution of the GX programme bringing it to its commercial launch, including regulatory and market access programs, and leading the establishment of distribution agreements across all sectors.

What is the latest on the Global Xpress launch?

The first satellite is scheduled for launch in early December 2013, with coverage over Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Two additional satellite launches are planned during 2014, and we are scheduled to complete global coverage by the end of that year. We have also invested in a fourth satellite, which is designed for back up, but may also be used for additional capacity.

What distinguishes Global Xpress in the market?

First, our primary focus is to provide high-speed connectivity at the same level of quality people experience every day in their home or office. Literally, our mission is to deliver connectivity service that looks the same and performs the same anywhere in the world, anytime.

In essence, this means shifting from the conventional piecemeal approach to high-speed broadband satellite communications to providing reliable, end-to-end global connectivity from a single trusted supplier. The benefits are particularly valuable in the mobility market, where remote units often need to travel across multiple satellites and experience a range of network conditions. In the near future, Global Express customers will be able to rely upon a consistent quality and level of service wherever they go.

Second, from a technology standpoint, Global Xpress is based on Ka-band which will deliver higher speeds through more compact terminals at a lower cost than existing VSAT services, using spectrum that is far less congested. For extra resilience, Global Xpress will be complemented by our standard broadband services on the Inmarsat-4s, which deliver 99.9% network availability. In fact, it will be the only multi-band satellite network of its kind.

How will Global Xpress be distributed, and how can GX service providers differentiate?

Fundamentally, Global Xpress is a vertically integrated service. We will go to market through a large network of Value Added Resellers (VARs). The GX service is intended to be very open; end users simply turn on their device, and they are connected. Yet the service can be highly customized by our VARs. The GX user interface is an IP-based access platform that provides a wide range of tools by which VARs can tailor their offerings.

This will be implemented based on an “app store” model. Each VAR has a menu of options they can leverage to customize their service. Inmarsat will develop a range of apps, but our VARs don’t necessarily need to use them. They can develop their own market-specific apps as a way to add unique value for their customers. So services from distributor A and distributor B could look very different from one another.

Can you give us some examples of these apps?

In the maritime market, this would include specialized apps for weather routing, engine monitoring and other aspects of ship management. In addition, there is great interest in telemedicine apps, as well as broadcasting apps that offer customized content distribution.

We are also developing apps that allow organizations, especially in the media world, to book capacity for short periods of time. We call this “occasional use”. So when a major event takes place in a specific location, for instance, people can automatically book bandwidth precisely where they need it for only as long as they need it.

What vertical markets are you targeting?

Our core Global Xpress markets are maritime, enterprise, aviation and government. We have a wide partner distribution team already signed up and active in the maritime sector. And we have a transition plan for users to upgrade to GX once it is available. We have identified strong partners in the government sector that are very eager for our service. In fact, we expect the military sector

to be one of the early adopters of Global Xpress, which has been built to complement WGS capability, augment regional Mil-Ka and provide a global Mil-Ka capability. Aviation is another key market. There are highly effective solutions locally, but GX is actually the ideal solution for both local and international airline connectivity due to the global and seamless coverage.

How do you see High Throughput Satellites driving the satellite industry forward?

The peer-to-peer model, represented by Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and other social media networks, is driving the future of communications. And clearly, the need for connectivity is gaining greater momentum going forward.

HTS deployments are changing the game by introducing faster data throughput with significantly better economics, enabling a multitude of high-value, high-bandwidth applications. HTS takes us closer to providing an economically sound way to support the heightened need for connectivity, and at the same time meet end users’ rising expectations for both value and quality.

This is perfectly aligned with what Global Xpress is designed to do – position satellite as an integral part of the larger global network, enabling connectivity at a level the end user expects, in any location. I think this is something that industry has been anticipating for quite some time.

What has been the most exciting aspect of Global Xpress for you personally?

I’ve worked in the space industry all my life, for several different companies. What makes Inmarsat so special, and such an exciting part of my career, is that Inmarsat actually acts much more like a telecommunications company. With GX we have a complete, very high-profile service element, and a dedicated service mindset.

To take something like a satellite, which is inherently complicated, and be able to connect it all the way to the end user through a complete system – that’s tremendously gratifying.

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