

Can satellite be an integral part of OTT era?

BY HANS MASSART

As millions of subscribers continue to indulge in streaming sites, over the top (OTT) services are replacing traditional viewing behaviour. The demand for streaming services is skyrocketing, as people binge on applications to watch the latest and most talked-about shows.

In Asia specifically, the number of users streaming services is expected to reach 693 million by 2024.

Streaming has opened new possibilities for content creation and distribution, with iflix – the Malaysian streaming service – heating up regional competition. South-east Asia is now firmly a part of the global streaming industry.

The expected growth of OTT services, however, did not take into account the current global pandemic uncertainties. And as a result of this, demand has suddenly spiked significantly. With several stay-at-home initiatives in place across the world to slow down the spread of Covid-19, streaming services are being used more than ever before. This can create challenges if everyone wants to use the service to its full potential at the same time.

The question for broadcasters is, how can they meet this demand both in the short and long term? Previously, satellite wasn't thought to be compatible with OTT services – but it actually has a critical role to play as we move towards the future of video delivery in the OTT era.

Rising to the challenge

As millions of people go online for entertainment, utilising streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, Internet usage has surged between 50% and 70% amid the global pandemic. In fact, 68% of Internet users have been searching for Covid-19-related updates, with 58% listening to music and 49% of users streaming movies or TV shows, according to the *Global Web Index, Coronavirus Research Report*.

These figures show that the number of quarantine Internet activities are increasing, with pastimes varying among different age groups.

The situation in Asia is similar. Online video streaming weekly consumption in four major South-east Asian markets – Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand – reached more than 58 billion min-



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utes, according to research by Media Partners Asia.

If service providers are to deliver on the promise of OTT, they must also evolve and look beyond traditional methods of connectivity – and it is crucial that they are able to deliver it both seamlessly and cost-effectively.

Unrivalled connectivity

Video consumption on second screens, such as smartphones, tablets, and PCs, is also increasing dramatically. In addition to being able to stream content onto a range of devices, consumers expect to receive their content on-demand, at any time, at any location and with the best image quality and uninterrupted playback.

Satellite transmission is the ideal solution for keeping costs under control, which is something operators and service providers have historically struggled with. And as satellite's ability to multicast is unrivalled, it is integral to successful content distribution.

It is widely expected that OTT viewership will replace traditional TV globally within a matter of years. The attractive price point of satellite transmission is just one advantage it brings, with the capability to multicast as one of the main drivers.

Another benefit is that the technology can also deliver content efficiently over a vast geographical

area, which is essential for the major South-east Asian markets. It can be cost-effectively scaled to a growing population of receivers and can be easily scaled to address more content. For example, as almost the entire global sporting calendar has been suspended to help reduce the spread of the coronavirus, media organisations have had to react quickly with new programming schedules to fill the void and to stay in touch with fans at home.

Reinforcing satellite's role as an enabler of OTT delivery, DVB at IBC 2019 teamed up with ST Engineering iDirect to demonstrate the future of universal OTT television services. Using Newtec MCX7000 Multi-Carrier Satellite Gateway as a receiver, DVB showcased its 'single hybrid offering' known as DVB-I. This is an important ongoing initiative to develop technical standards for delivering TV-over-IP services.

The future of broadcasting

A decade ago, online streaming services were still in their early stages, and the announcement of a global lockdown was unimaginable. Today, growing traffic is a profound challenge for service providers, especially when they have to broadcast popular content to wider audiences.

This being the case, bandwidth needs to be used efficiently and traffic needs to be minimised as the

hours of content being streamed rises exponentially and stay-at-home initiatives continue to expand across the globe.

The solution, thus, lies with satellite – and the industry is already out there working where it fits into the future of broadcasting. Indeed, satellite is constantly developing and evolving, making it the perfect solution to provide streaming services and, ultimately, remains an integral and critical part of the OTT era.



Hans Massart, the head of Media & Broadcast, ST Engineering iDirect, has more than 15 years' experience in the broadcast industry, including eight years at Newtec which is now part of ST Engineering iDirect.