Satellite technology can unlock SA's development and economic potential

To stimulate the economic growth potential of South Africa, it is imperative to address the need for connectivity in the farthest-reaching regions of the country. This is the view of Victor Stephanopoli, COO at MzansiSat, who reiterates the company's readiness to provide fast, reliable satellite infrastructure to South African telecommunications stakeholders.

Victor Stephanopoli, COO at MzansiSat

His call for action follows the recent underwater sea cable breakage, which left countless South African consumers frustrated with access to little or no internet connectivity. And although some service providers experienced minimal disruptions, it was reported that some providers were experiencing significant downtime as a result of the breakages of both the SAT3/WASC and WACS cable systems. Running along Africa’s western coastline, the breakage in these cable systems disrupted international connectivity between South Africa and Europe.

Further, the plight that many South Africans can attest to is the hassles associated with providers digging up pavements in order for fibre lines to be laid in a bid to further enable connectivity in urban areas.

According to Stephanopoli, satellite broadband technology presents a more stable connectivity link that is not influenced by factors such as breakage or other terrestrial impacts.

“As satellites are orbiting in the atmosphere, there is a notable difference in where satellite connectivity can reach as opposed to that of physical cable. If you can see the sky, you can be connected.”

Stephanopoli reiterates that such technology is in place in other nations, and often acts as a back-up for when conventional internet broadband connections are interrupted. It is this sort of technology that if it were already in place, would have been an ideal backup solution to mitigate the frustrations of South Africans when the cable breakages occurred.

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Connectivity in far reaching areas

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The World Bank’s The Broadband for All Working Group’s report indicates that African countries will need to bring about 1.1-billion more people online, stating that the working-age population in Africa is expected to increase by some 450-million people between 2015 and 2035. If current trends continue, less than a quarter will find stable jobs. Broadening internet access can translate into creating millions of work opportunities in the future.

So, why not simply install fibre to the far-reaching areas? The answer to this involves doing the sums. Given the immense financial layout required to this far outweighs the number of customers in the area, and this in mind, MzansiSat believes that a very compelling answer to this dilemma would be via the use of satellite broadband technology.

Satellite broadband technology an advantage

Although the speeds the physical cable enables are highly attractive, it is the dispersal of connectivity that gives satellite broadband technology advantage over its counterpart, enabling a wider and more far-reaching availability of broadband connectivity.

Once the infrastructure is in place, all that is then required is a suitable base station to be constructed in the designated area so that the broadband signals can be sent and then dispersed between hotspots in the area.

Stephanopoli says the costs of broadband via satellite technology makes economic sense, especially when considering outlying areas and the ability to connect South Africans with the rest of the world in an affordable way.

“The technology is there to enable the efficient connectivity of the African continent with the rest of the world. The more stakeholders appreciate the potential that this technology holds the closer we will get to seeing roll-out becoming a reality,” he adds.

MzansiSat is currently working with various investors and stakeholders to make the widespread connection of South Africa a reality, with Stephanopoli saying that the company is aiming to launch its satellite in the near future.

“Our mission is to provide affordable stable satellite broadband to the Southern African market, and we know that by utilising satellite broadband technology, more South Africans can have easier access to the outside world, increasing their potential and thus growing the South African economy,” he concludes.