DTH still main delivery platform in Asia-Pacific

As the most effective content delivery platform in Asia-Pacific, DTH, as yet, has no peers, despite viewing habits gravitating to multi-screen consumption. **Shawn Liew** finds out why.

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Measat currently operates six DTH platforms across Malaysia, Brunei, India and Indonesia, serving 20 million pay-TV subscribers.

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> **— Yau Chyong Lim, Chief Commercial Officer, Measat Satellite Systems**

Few would argue that consumer behaviour, when it relates to content consumption, has changed irrevocably. With viewers exerting more control than ever before on the content they want to watch, operators have had to correspondingly shift from a traditional delivery model of linear distribution to one which incorporates multi-screen delivery.

Although this is a conundrum faced by operators across the globe, including in Asia-Pacific, the region's sheer economic, cultural and geographical diversity should ensure that direct-to-home (DTH) remains the pre-eminent delivery platform for the foreseeable future.

This, at least, was the consensus reached by delegates who spoke at last month's APSCC 2016 Satellite Conference and Exhibition in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (read more on pages 11 and 12).

Crucially, Asia-Pacific will continue to post some of the biggest DTH growths globally, including in India, which already boasts the largest DTH market in the world. As of May 2016, there were in excess of 84 million DTH subscribers in India.

In Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, mobile viewing is on the rise, but DTH remains the "number one distribution platform", said Rudy Tanoesoedibjo, president director, MNC Sky.

Speaking at one of the conference tracks during the APSCC 2016 Satellite Conference and Exhibition, he explained: "In Indonesia, cable is not practical while broadband infrastructure is not yet readily available — and is costly for the average Indonesian."

The potential for DTH growth in Asia-Pacific remains strong, and can be attributable to multiple factors, Yau Chyong Lim, chief commercial officer, Measat Satellite Systems, tells *APB*.

These, he elaborates, include:

- The advantage of satellite over terrestrial networks in distributing content over wide coverage areas.
- The ability to provide reliable, high-quality, large-scale transmissions.
- Economic growth in emerging Asian countries, which will increase consumer ability to afford pay-TV services.

Measat currently operates six DTH platforms across Malaysia, Brunei, India and Indonesia, serving 20 million pay-TV subscribers. In the interim, much of the content delivered to these viewers will be in HD. Yau explains: "HD content on DTH platforms is increasing across Asia-Pacific, particularly in the more developed nations. In emerging markets where SD is still dominant, HD penetration is expected to grow as well — in line with their economies."

And what about 4K/Ultra HD (UHD)? Measat is already offering two 4K/UHD channels on its 91.5°E video neighbourhood, and has been involved in a number of high-profile 4K/UHD trials in Asia-Pacific.

4K/UHD will represent the next wave of growth for the region's DTH market. This development, however, will take some time to come to fruition, accesses Yau. "The key development in the DTH sector will be the upgrading of SD to HD in the short-to-medium term. 4K/UHD, on the other hand, is still in its infancy with limited content currently," he elaborates.

The next few years is also likely to see the traditional wide-beam fixed satellite service (FSS) challenged by geostationary high throughput satellite (HTS) systems. These provide multiple, polarisation/frequency diverse, contiguous, narrow spot beams with Ka-band and Ku-band footprints.

Conceptually, geostationary earth orbit (GEO) satellites and non-GEO HTS will enable satellite operators to "expotentially increase" capacity delivered to the market — at a much lower price, says Yau.

"The satellite industry is going through a paradigm shift in how data services are being delivered to customers," he continues. "[However], while these concepts are timely to meet the increasing consumer demand for data, there are some uncertainties on the impact of multiple HTS satellites and constellations on the market as a whole."

The challenge, Measat believes, comes in making investment decisions on emerging technologies when, GEO satellites' lifetimes, for example, span 10-15 years.

What, then, are the most appropriate strategies to adopt in order to take full advantage of HTS?

Yau describes: "You can bet big and help shape its future, you can be conservative and follow trends, or you can hold back on investments until a clearer industry view emerges."

Or, perhaps, you can simply emulate the Measat approach, which is to adopt a multi-pronged strategy. This includes: Building Measat's own HTS capacity for specific markets and customers; partnering with other operators on large-scale projects to enable the lowest cost per bit; and exploring alternative technologies to meet "rapidly evolving" customer demands.

Away from the discussion on emerging technologies and consumption habits at the APSCC 2016 Satellite Conference and Exhibition in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, a live online poll conducted during a conference session on WRC-19 provided some sobering contemplation.

A total of 71% of voters think more spectrum in C-band will be lost to the IMT (International Mobile Telecommunications) industry, while 42% believed that even Ka-band spectrum will not remain unscathed.

At WRC-15, a "No Change" position adopted saw the bulk of C-band preserved for FSS services. The consequences of which might see mobile operators return more agressively to WRC-19, which will be held from 28 October-22 November 2019.

Yau ponders: "There is the possibility of mobile operators once again requesting to be given spectrum currently used for FSS. These issues may affect industries that rely on FSS, including the broadcast industry."

Start the road to WRC-19 now, he urges, by coordinating and aligning efforts to inform regulators of the need to preserve spectrum for satellite services in Asia-Pacific, and the negative impact of spectum re-allocation on these services. APB