

Pay TV in India at an Inflexion Point; what can Satellite TV do to stay competitive?

Prashant Butani, MEASAT Senior Sales Director – South Asia gives his perspective on how satellite operators can pave the way for DTH Operators in India’s fast-changing Pay TV landscape.



The year 2018 began with Direct-to-Home (DTH) operators such as Sun Direct adding more than a hundred channels SD and HD channels to their platform thereby increasing viewing options to millions of homes across the country. In addition, complementary Over-The-Top (OTT) services such as My DishTV, Tata Sky mobile app and others have tried to keep viewers glued to the platform, irrespective of their choice of viewing device. Pay TV providers, DTH and cable alike, have invested huge sums of money to ensure that the final phases of Digitization are successfully implemented.

However, Reliance Industries Ltd’s recent entry into India’s Pay TV industry is being viewed by many as a serious threat to traditional Pay TV providers. To start with, it gives Reliance access to 20 million homes and resolves the issue of last mile connectivity. These homes become ripe for upgrade to their Fibre-To-The-Home (FTTH) service thus enabling bundling of TV, Internet and voice services all of which are currently being served piecemeal to end users. For the near term, three to five years, the impact of churn may be limited to urban households and digital cable subscribers but eventually satellite DTH operators also stand to lose ground. If the impact of Reliance Jio on the telecom industry is anything to go by, this may be the time for DTH operators to leverage technological innovation to stay ahead in the game.

DTH services in India are currently limited to one-way broadcast which restricts the amount of interactivity they can provide the home viewers. DTH operators have tried to overcome this limitation by offering advanced set-top boxes with a host of features such as recording, Wi-Fi enabled USB dongles and even karaoke. However, the inherent convenience and interactivity of OTT services is providing to be tough competition, especially with falling data charges. As broadband and mobile bills continue to shrink, suddenly it is the TV subscription that becomes an expensive utility and the next likely

target for price wars akin to the 4G landscape.

Clearly the time is ripe to allow DTH operators to offer two-way connectivity services over satellite in order to incorporate broadband using the same dish catering to satellite TV. In case DTH and broadband

services are working over satellite transponders at the same orbital position, there are companies offering compatible LNBs capable of delivering both services. This would not only improve the competitiveness of DTH operators vis-à-vis terrestrial services but would also allow for 100% coverage in rural areas thereby contributing to India’s national broadband objectives.

Furthermore, broadband services could also be availed from Ka-band spot beam satellites at a different orbital location while TV channels could continue to be received from Ku-band wide beam satellites such as MEASAT-3b. As long as the satellites are a few degrees apart, the same antenna dish can be used for both services. MEASAT currently supports more than six DTH platforms across its fleet of satellites covering Asia Pacific, Middle East and Africa. MEASAT also provides broadband services over satellite across Malaysia using High Throughput Satellites with spot beams and frequency reuse.



Prashant Butani