

Continent's comms costs cut

South African-based company Evosat, which distributes Inmarsat's Broadband Global Area Network (BGAN) service across Africa, has secured a major deal that will see satellite communication costs to provide simultaneous voice and broadband data, virtually halved on the continent.

On the back of the dramatically revised cost structure that Evosat has negotiated with Inmarsat, Nashua Mobile is to become the first cellphone service provider to offer mobile satellite communication services to its client base, making it possible to cost-effectively access even the remotest parts of Africa.

Going live from November 14, the Nashua Mobile-enabled services will mean "immediate gap filling of cellphone and 3G coverage throughout Africa," according to Evosat's managing director, Harry Tayler, thus helping to close the digital divide.

He says the deal will act as an important catalyst for economic activity on the continent, increasingly earmarked not only by South African retailers, manufacturers, bankers and mining companies for its still largely untapped growth potential, but also by offshore investors and NGOs seeking to provide health, educational and infrastructural support in the continent.

Mark Taylor, managing director of Nashua Mobile says: "Until now, Africa's satellite connectivity has been impeded by prohibitively high costs, presenting a major difficulty for many companies and aid organisations in doing business. The deal between ourselves and Inmarsat, which we believe is the first of its kind anywhere in the world, makes it possible to run a virtual office anywhere on the continent, irrespective of on-the-ground infrastructure. A single terminal that can be purchased from us will allow users to access data applications and make a voice call at the same time. They will have cellphone-quality connectivity, access to the Internet, their e-mail and even video conferencing."

Taylor adds that multi-user support offered will allow teams to share a single unit. However, subscribers can opt for just a satellite phone, if that is all they require.

Inmarsat's satellites, positioned over the Indian and Atlantic Ocean regions, cover 85% of the world's land mass and 98% of its population. A third satellite, due to be launched early next year, will extend coverage to the Pacific Ocean region, delivering mobile broadband throughout the entire world, except for the extreme polar regions.

"Any Nashua Mobile subscriber to the service will be able to make satellite contact anywhere in the world at the preferential rates secured by Evosat," Taylor says.

"No specialist technical expertise is required to set up and connect to the network," he adds. The user interface is also standard and equipment is light, robust and integrates seamlessly with existing networks. "There are never any compatibility issues with local telecoms, because you connect directly to the satellite. Cellphone SIM cards are also compatible with the

satellite phones making it possible to use the phone as a GSM phone by simply swapping the SIM card.”

The company is offering the satellite service via its nationwide network of 140 outlets with staff trained to provide sales support.

Evosat, launched in 2005, was established by a group of UK and South African investors. It has been actively involved in providing equipment and technical support this year to famous explorer Kingsley Holgate, who is now in Sierra Leone.

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