rising STAR

SPACECOM, A NEW PLAYER ON THE AFRICAN SATELLITE MARKET, HAS LAUNCHED ITS SERVICES WITH OVER 50% OF CAPACITY PRE-SOLD.
BY GEORGINA GUEDES

On 11 December 2011, Spacecom launched the AMOS-5 satellite, one of the first satellites designed and launched specifically to cover Africa. With over 50% of its capacity sold pre-launch and a market with an appetite for access, Spacecom believes the time is right for success on the African continent.

'During 2011, we began pre-selling capacity on AMOS-5 and signing agreements with new partners and clients in the region,' says Eyal Copitt, who leads Africa sales for Spacecom. 'We also solidified and expanded our sales team as well as conducted detailed market studies of the various regions and countries that we are addressing to ensure the success of our efforts in Africa.'

With the successful launch of AMOS-5, Spacecom is now poised to leverage its continent-wide access and make further deals with the telcos, mobile operators, broadcasters, governments, educational facilities and other potential clients across the continent. 'We're excited by our official entrance into this market and look forward to announcing new deals for commercial service once the AMOS-5 commences operations,' says Copitt.

A satellite for Africa

At the time of writing, AMOS-5 is on track to commence operation in the second half of January 2012. The satellite's location at 17°E will be a powerful platform offering a pan-African C-band beam connecting Europe and the Middle East, alongside three Ku-band regional beams.

The satellite's fixed pan-African C-band beam and three steerable Ku-band beams will cover Africa with connectivity to Europe and the Middle East, and support multiple transponders in both C-band and Ku-band. Thus AMOS-5 is positioned as an attractive source of capacity for a variety of African and African-related businesses.

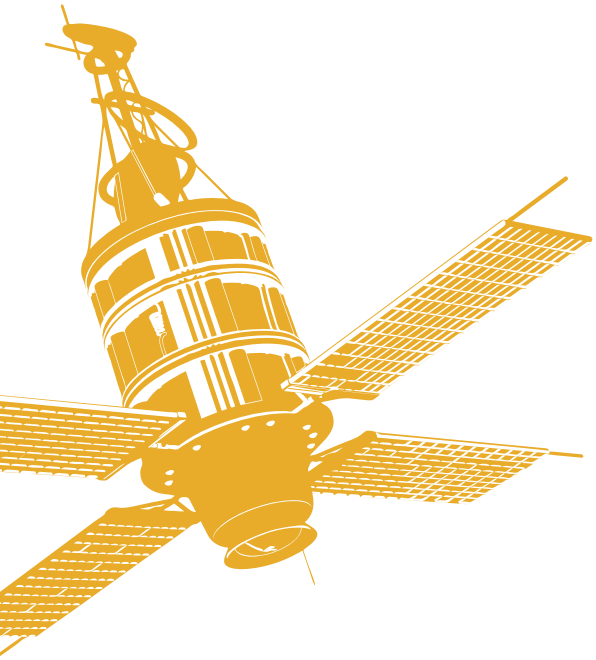
In a press release issued last year at the time of the conclusion of a US$12- million deal for AMOS-5 capacity, Copitt stated: 'The market for Ku-band and C-band is growing in Africa because technology has greatly negated rain interference and has also brought down customers' initial setup costs. AMOS-5's orbital position at 17°E will provide superb signal strength in answer to broadcasters' needs, as well as those of the data market throughout Africa.'

He is confident that the satellite is the ideal solution to cater to the needs of this market. 'AMOS-5's key differentiator is that it is one of the first satellites designed specifically to serve Africa, rather than be moved from one area to another, so it has optimal cover from the design phase,' says Copitt. 'AMOS-5 has hotspots in the right spaces to ensure the widest coverage, using one hop from anywhere to everywhere else in Africa, parts of Europe and the Middle East. So, we have three major benefits: a high-power satellite, with wider coverage, designed specifically for Africa.'

Continental market

Africa is an exciting market for Spacecom for a number of reasons. 'Already in 2006, our board of directors decided that Africa's communications market was evolving and growing, making strategic sense for the company to begin working on providing AMOS coverage for the continent,' says Copitt.

'Today, we believe that we have made the right decision. Africa, with a growing population and its ability to capture infrastructure investments – which has led to the modernisation of communications platforms and its overall attractiveness for business – is a place that represents an important element of our overall business strategy.'



‘The AMOS-5 enables us to reach our vision of becoming a multiregional satellite provider’

Millions of TV viewers and other communications users make use of television programming, audio channels and voice and data services over Spacecom’s network of satellites. The company’s vision of becoming a global satellite services provider operating a fleet of advanced satellites at multiple orbital locations is underpinned by this move into the continent.

Making this happen for them is Copitt, who has more than 20 years of experience in the telecoms industry. He began his work in Africa in 1996 and later joined Gilat Satcom as vice-president of Sales Africa. ‘At the time, the internet was in its early days in Africa, through kiosks,’ he recalls. ‘The continent is huge and requires lots of attention.’

He moved on to netApp, where he was in charge of developing new markets in Africa. He has travelled extensively and done business in just about every country on the continent. Of course, Africa is not without its challenges, and Copitt lists the lack of infrastructure as chief among these – especially for the representative of a company trying to build its business across the continent.

‘Africa is huge and untapped,’ Copitt says. ‘It’s a challenge to get from one country to another, and the very same lack of infrastructure that opens doors for us makes it very difficult for us to operate. AMOS-5 enables us to reach our vision of becoming a multi-regional satellite provider.’

Synergies with fibre

One can hardly contemplate connectivity in this region without considering the mass of undersea cables currently landing or planned to land in sub-Saharan Africa in particular. However, Copitt is insistent that these do not represent direct competition to the satellite coverage offered by his company. Rather, he says, the two technologies will complement each other in growing the continent’s appetite for connectivity.

‘The undersea cables are a good reason to boost business,’ he says. ‘Areas that can’t be reached with cable can use satellites, which means we’ll be seeing hybrid networks that use both tools to push cheaper content further into Africa. This will increase usage where there is no other means, and whet users’ appetites for further consumption.’

He explains that the synergies created will accelerate a trend towards developing more local communication hubs on the continent. These local hubs enhance communications speeds and quality, open broadband internet for mass consumption and lower the barriers for enterprises to add internet services.

‘Having more local hubs, telcos and service providers are seeking improved quality and reach,’ he says. ‘Satellites such as AMOS-5 will offer this. With its powerful beams, AMOS-5 will reach rural as well as urban areas and be a highly reliable aspect of the communication landscape for years to come by supplying services to these telcos and other providers within its pan-African geographical reach.’

Here to stay

Though AMOS-5 was launched at the end of 2011, Copitt has been putting together an international team for Spacecom’s African activities since 2009. The company has established partnerships and co-operation agreements with local players on the scene and with European based agents as well to facilitate Euro-African business. Currently, he has a solid sales team that has sold over 50% of the satellite’s capacity in pre-launch sales.

‘We may be newcomers to Africa, but we are veterans in the industry and our team is well connected on the continent,’ he says. ‘We want to state that we have invested a huge amount of money into this expansion, we’re expanding our coverage and capacity, and we’re here to stay.’

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