Satellite Operators at WSBW 2025

(Based on the review of the plenary sessions "Global Operators: The New Growth Paths" and "Leading Regional Operators Defining Their New Ambitions" at the international industry forum World Satellite Business Week in Paris)

The key message of this year's main conference for the satellite community is that the satellite business is changing dramatically, and the tried-and-true schemes that have been in place for decades — order a satellite and lease huge capacities to broadcasters for 15 years — are no longer as reliable as they used to be. Success in this new reality depends on the ability to quickly respond to changes and find innovative solutions. Global satellite operators have been extensively exploring new opportunities and developing strategies for further growth and development.

Non-linear video

Video remains a top demand, but it is non-linear video, so the Direct-to-Home (DTH) business is experiencing a steady decline. As session moderator Nathan Ruiter reported, the decline over four years amounted to a total of 20%.

Dan Goldberg, CEO & President, Telesat, shared how his company failed to justify the purchase of a new satellite because it could not find a major DTH platform willing to sign a long-term contract to lease broadcast capacity.

However, market players benefit from the fact that the decline is not as progressing rapidly in other regions as it is in North America and Europe.

Users need to be able to watch what they want and when they want, but then the demand for satellite capacity for this service will simply be off the charts. Can a satellite meet this demand? A LEO system can theoretically do this, but it doesn't always have enough bandwidth. Mark Dankberg, CEO & Chairman, Viasat, noted that people have exaggerated expectations of LEO systems, as if they can provide unlimited bandwidth anywhere. But in areas with extreme demand, e.g. when several cruise ships meet in a single port, the overload of the NGSO system precludes even the basic voice calls. Not to mention video on demand. In this case, only geostationary satellites can provide the required throughput. Thus, a viable option is a seamless GEO and LEO combination, where low-orbit systems primarily provide non-linear services, and geostationary systems are responsible for the throughput to prevent overloading of low-orbit systems. Dan Goldberg expects the share of LEO systems to gradually increase with the emergence of new players and the growth of existing constellations. But in the foreseeable future, geostationary satellites will remain an essential complement to low-orbit satellites, adding stability to the entire infrastructure. And we should

also keep in mind that traffic via geostationary satellites is cheaper, and in some countries it's easier for these systems to get market approval than for low-orbit ones.

Broadband is not a very profitable business

As for broadband systems that require large investments and consume a lot of capacity, their services can be made profitable, but in the operator's service portfolio broadband ranks lowest in terms of profitability. In this situation, government initiatives to connect rural regions are of particular importance. Paul Gaske, Chief Operating Officer, EchoStar, believes that the problem can only be solved holistically – by combining satellite systems in different orbits and ground networks. Therefore, EchoStar strives to become exactly this kind of holistic operator. We can see its obvious wish not to leave the satellite inclusion in the 5G ecosystem to cellular operators, but to take matters into its own hands.

Eutelsat (Jean-Francois Fallacher, Eutelsat, CEO) does not plan to operate in the consumer segment at all, as this is a low-end industry. Operating in the corporate sector by providing clients with guaranteed connection parameters is much more promising for the operator.

Dan Goldberg noted that the global broadband market has significantly greater potential than the targeted market for multi-channel video services. However, it is unlikely that several million Starlink subscribers today generate more revenue than direct satellite TV subscribers. However, the TV market keeps going down, so the Canadian operator is also focusing on corporate broadband access.

The discussion on satellite broadband suggests that operators do not expect to generate revenue from consumer broadband and either do not plan to engage in this business themselves (such as Eutelsat and Telesat), relying solely on partners, or clearly understand that this service will not be at the top of the company's revenue structure. Or, like EchoStar, they are building their own infocommunications ecosystem.

Sovereign communications

It is generally accepted that global low-orbit constellations do not ensure sovereignty, so many countries have been developing their own geostationary networks. However, global operators take a different view: government customers, who are concerned about security and sovereignty, still use multi-orbit services because they care about communication parameters, particularly signal delay.

Eutelsat has secured a $1 billion 10-year contract with the French Ministry of Defence, while Telesat is confident of strong public-sector prospects for its Lightspeed low-orbit system. EchoStar also sees government procurement as a significant growth opportunity.

Many countries now have the opportunity to create their own sovereign geostationary system, and they are taking advantage of this opportunity. However, NGSO systems, their development, launch and operation are too expensive. That is why operators at WSBW 2025 agree that sooner or later these countries will have to use the services of global NGSO systems. And this will include the interests of government and security agencies. Moreover, the boundaries between public and private satellite networks have been gradually blurring. Therefore, operators of global multi-orbit systems need to engage with regional operators, who ensure greater credibility with national telecommunications administrations. However, operators strongly believe that the advantages of having both GEO and LEO capabilities will be a decisive factor for national government customers. The issue of sovereignty and data protection is a technical one. And it will undoubtedly be resolved.

This part of the discussion suggests that operators have a strong interest in government contracts. In particular, and this was voiced at the session, they expect that increased funding for NATO participation will have a positive impact on their orders. Other countries were discussed as a prospect, with the need to convince potential customers that a global NGSO system would ensure their digital sovereignty and data protection.

Regional operators

Global operators and global mega-constellations have been changing the satellite communications market, while regional operators have been searching for their own business model, growth and path to success.

The main advantage of a regional operator is its knowledge of local market environment, consumer requirements, and connections with all market players, including regulators. No global mega-constellation can adapt its services to all users in all countries without the involvement of regional operators. In many countries, a foreign company cannot own 100% of a telecommunications business. And, of course, local operators see their role in developing sovereign satellite networks and creating reliable infrastructure that the government would trust.

To fully leverage their knowledge of local markets, operators have been moving into service provision and becoming service providers. For example, half of Hispasat's business (Ignacio Sanchis, CCO, Hispasat) is value-added services. Thaicom (Patompob (Nile) Suwansiri, CEO, Thaicom) provides earth monitoring and data analysis services. This and some other non-communication space business sectors of the operator are fuelled by the current geopolitical situation in the region. Hispasat is involved in a quantum encryption project with orbital key generation. JSAT is developing a space debris removal project.

And the third aspect is integration into the regional 5G infrastructure. Close ties with regional players in the telecom market, including shared ownership, also contribute to this trend. For

example, KTSat is a satellite subsidiary of Korea Telecom, and company representative Kevin Choi (CTO, KTSAT) noted this as one of the decisive factors for success. Security is also a key factor here: it is easier to create a network that consumers trust within 3GPP standards, than within proprietary standards.