

## **Opinion**

### **Satellite and the digital divide: more than a stopgap solution**

*Broadband satellite solutions can have a major role in bridging the digital divide, argues Juan Aguirre, UDCast.*

The digital divide is receiving increased attention from Europe's public authorities, broadband equipment providers and broadband operators. Satellite, with its global coverage, is often touted as the ideal solution. However, satellite service providers are still carving out a viable business model that's sustainable for the near and long term. The general attitude among users and broadband experts is that satellite broadband connections are a last resort, stopgap solution. When all else fails there is satellite. This is hardly the kind of solid base to build a lasting business.

Satellite service providers have only just started to take into account users' expectations – expectations that have risen dramatically through the establishment of DSL as the de-facto standard. The inability to meet basic expectations such as smooth web surfing, or to offer essential enterprise applications and network services such as VPNs, has damaged satellite's credibility and limited its market penetration. Enterprises in particular are not benefiting from the productivity gains usually associated with broadband, resulting in the sidelining of satellite. A sustainable broadband business model will only come about if satellite is an integral part of global network infrastructures. Satellite must become a transparent, seamless extension to terrestrial networks by offering the same levels of performance, services and security. This will happen not only through technological advances, but through the evolution of satellite service providers' mindset beyond their satellite niche. Satellite service providers must give proper thought not just to the satellite segment, but to the whole network environment in which enterprises evolve.

Several providers are responding by investing in solutions that make satellite viable for enterprises. Divona, a Monaco Telecom subsidiary, is rolling out much needed services such as VPNs that not only work with satellite connections but also combine satellite and terrestrial connections. Providers will know they have succeeded when terrestrial operators look to satellite to seamlessly extend their networks, signalling that satellite is at last a true member of the global IP broadband infrastructure.

With the digital divide impacting the economic development of many regions, satellite service providers have an essential role to play in putting broadband engendered productivity gains within the grasp of all. Ironically, satellite must become just another part of the global broadband infrastructure.

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