

Farhad Khan, CEO, YahClick

Landmark year for YahClick

Farhad Khan, CEO, YahClick looks at the goals the company has achieved in the past year and what this means for Africa's broadband connectivity landscape.

It has been a landmark year for YahClick and indeed for Africa's broadband connectivity landscape.

This time last year, our Al Yah 3 satellite achieved commercial readiness, paving the way for a major step forward in our efforts to further extend satellite broadband services across the continent.

We believed that the investment of $200 million in this project would provide a launch pad for the introduction of affordable VSAT technologies to new markets across Africa, on top of the markets we have been servicing already since 2012.

Thanks to outstanding collaborations with local service partners, we have made great progress.

When Al Yah 3 became commercially operational last summer, it opened up YahClick's Ka-band coverage to 19 additional new markets across Africa, and combined with the coverage provided by Al Yah 2, over 60 percent of the continent's population can now look forward to the benefits of affordable, uninterrupted satellite broadband.

This is a development that we hope, in time, will provide a significant leap forward in how business is conducted across these countries.

Much remains to be done. Poor infrastructure in many underserved and remote areas means that many existing internet connections remain notoriously unreliable, costing economies millions of dollars a year.

Affordable always-on Ka-band satellite broadband, however, can provide fibre-like speeds with a fraction of the investment typically required for a traditional terrestrial based telecommunications infrastructure, having discarded with the expensive capital investments needed to develop these on the ground.

It is too early to detect significant changes for markets served by Al Yah 3 after just one year. However, we remain confident that, given the desire shown by these countries to expand connectivity, positive change will come to remote areas that were previously lacking in either cable or satellite broadband internet. Similar positive transformation is expected among the outlying areas of more developed inner cities that have also suffered from poor connectivity.

It is to our good fortune that in many cases, the conditions to enter those new markets have been favourable, with the Governments having already set ambitious penetration targets under federal campaigns and initiatives.

'Ghana 2020' is one example. The nation of 28 million people is striving to be the first African state to become a developed country between 2020 and 2029, and a newly industrialised nation between 2030 and 2039. To meet these ambitions, Ghana has made connectivity and digitisation two of its main priorities.

Many factors will determine whether such targets will be met in time, and the introduction of VSAT technologies will certainly play a part – especially for SMEs and business owners.

We only have to look at the progress made in neighbouring markets to see just what can be achieved.

In 2012 Nigeria became one of YahClick's earliest market entries, and within months positive change was evident.

In September of that same year, around the time YahClick entered the market, then President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan implemented The Nigerian National Broadband Plan 2013 - 2018, aiming to grow internet penetration to 30 percent (from four to six percent) in the following five years.

Today, Nigeria's broadband penetration stands at almost 34 percent, and the nation of 200 million people has Africa's highest GDP (Nominal) and second highest by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP).

Thanks to collaboration with service partners, the introduction of Ka-band satellite broadband played a big part in Nigeria achieving such impressive connectivity figures.

Improved connectivity and affordable rates have transformed businesses, elevated the provision of quality healthcare and education, and enabled civil services.

Universal Service Provision Fund

The Universal Service Provision Fund (USPF), established by the Federal Government of Nigeria with a view to improve connectivity and access to information and services in rural and undeserved areas of the country, has also seen marked progress in recent years.

According to USPF, hundreds of public secondary schools - both rural and urban – are being provided with computers and connectivity under the School Knowledge Centre (SKC) project. Other programmes have also been set up to improve connectivity for main campuses at universities.

Where Nigeria has succeeded, new markets can surely follow. In fact, with so much new ground to explore, and so many remote areas still to reach, other African markets could do even better. The communications landscape is witnessing great transformation, and progress in new markets today could even outpace that seen just a few years ago.

Key partnership

The recent partnership between Yahsat and Hughes is an indication of our belief in equal access to the internet and a commitment on our behalf to accelerating the realisation of the mass market potential of VSAT.

Such a collaboration should be viewed as a positive development for countries like Ghana, Cameroon, the Ivory Coast, and other new markets we launched in last year, as well as those we'll arrive in imminently. The latent potential is there to be mined.

With the introduction of affordable Ka-band based VSAT communications, the aim is not only to improve existing conditions but to also provide fresh opportunities for new ventures, both local and foreign.

Often, multinationals looking to expand into new continental markets can be put off by infrastructural weaknesses and the prohibitive cost of connectivity. The availability of affordable VSAT connectivity should increasingly ease such concerns.

Only three years ago, Africa's average internet penetration was expected to hit 50 percent by 2025. That date is creeping slowly towards us.

As our Ka-band satellite connectivity expands to eventually replace legacy C, Ku, and L-bands in the coming years, we will thrive to make sure YahClick plays a full part in making this connectivity ambition a reality.



Photo courtesy of YahClick