



Editor - Amy Saunders ●●●

Getting back to broadcast

When we talk about satellites with the general public, the first thing most people think of is broadcasting. However, this is far from the case for many of us active in the sector. We might talk about mobile communications, the IoT, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), remote data applications – pretty much anything but broadcast. Indeed, satellite TV has become so ubiquitous that it's no longer impressive, or a hot topic for conversation. Today, we need new innovations in the market to make us remember what a big part broadcasting has to play in the satellite sector.

Broadcast provides the largest source of revenue for all of the major satellite operators: In the 2015 financial year, video comprised 67 percent of SES's revenue, 63 percent of Eutelsat's, and 38 percent of Intelsat's. Broadcast is not only the top source of revenue; it has also historically been the most reliable. While paid-for satellite TV may have stabilised in the Western world with the relatively recent growth in the OTT market, in much of Asia, Africa and Latin America, subscription-based DTH packages are on the rise as connectivity becomes more affordable and ubiquitous. However, this is often overlooked by the media, who instead focus on exciting new applications, rather than the well-established, reliable markets.

The International Broadcast Conference (IBC) in September 2016, therefore, was a refreshing re-introduction to the world of satellite broadcasting. With 15 halls, we were provided with many reasons to step back and re-focus. There may well have been more than 100 stands dedicated to UHD/4K and 8K broadcasting technology, showcasing the latest in screens and other hardware; some of it was truly breath-taking. On top of this, there were also a great number of stands featuring new set top boxes, demodulators, modems and BUCs designed specifically for the 4K market.

For me, the most astounding technology on display was the virtual reality units present in the IBC Future Zone and in Hall 1. Far from a niche market, virtual reality appears to be spreading its reach, with units becoming more affordable, programming becoming more extensive, and capabilities expanding. Today, virtual reality allows the consumer to be fully immersed in sporting, concert or other live events, making them feel like they are actually there. The technology opens up a whole new avenue for the broadcasting industry, particularly satellite operators, given the massive virtual reality programme data that will someday be transmitted over DTH channels.

One of the most jaw-dropping demonstrations was SES' and Fraunhofer HHI's ground-breaking transmission of a 10K x 2K panoramic video via satellite to an Ultra HD display and head-mounted virtual reality headsets. One of the biggest advantages of virtual reality viewing evidenced in the demonstration was the capability for the consumer to pick their own viewing angle and consumption device, be it headset, TV, or tablet. Speaking after the event, Thomas Wrede, Vice President Reception Systems at SES confirmed that the virtual reality demonstration had been a big hit.

"Virtual reality applications work very well over satellite," said Wrede, "and visitors at our IBC exhibition stand were thrilled experiencing the VR 360 showcase that we had set up jointly with Fraunhofer Heinrich Hertz Institute HHI Berlin. SES is certainly going to continue exploring VR technology and respective broadcast applications."

For me, and doubtless countless other IBC attendees, I've come away with a renewed passion for the broadcasting industry and all of its capabilities. I'm truly excited to see what the world of broadcast is going to bring next...



Photo courtesy of Crystal ●●●