

Satellite connectivity is evolving to help shipping process a tidal wave of data

The collective sum of the world's data is predicted to grow by 61 per cent by 2025 – amounting to a staggering 175 zettabytes^[1] and the shipping industry will be impacted by this tidal wave of data.

Already we are seeing a significant rise in onboard data use and ship-to-shore data transfer as digitalisation continues to flood across maritime sectors. Vessel optimisation, data transfer, IoT and compliance with increasing regulations and environmental measures have made digital connectivity a 'must have' for modern shipping, according to satcom specialist IEC Telecom.

"Data transfer and system automation are core components of today's ships, making reliable and efficient connectivity the backbone of operational continuity," said Nabil Ben Soussia, the company's Asia & Middle East CEO, advises that increasing numbers of ships are now operating with multiple lines of connectivity.

"It has become common practise to equip an onboard network with one or two back-up lines. Check the VSAT packages

on offer and you'll notice that operators include L-band by default to any Ka- or Ku-offer. The business is changing," he noted.

By 2025 the prediction is that almost 50 per cent of data will be stored in the cloud, while about 30 per cent of data generated will be consumed in real-time. High tech ships are now offices at sea and the associated requirements for managing large volumes of critical data via reliable connectivity are increasing exponentially.

Onboard connectivity as a system is also becoming increasingly complicated. Nowadays a large vessel's network typically comprises three telecom networks (WANs): VSAT, L-band and GSM. With such reliance on satcoms connections it has become essential to have an automated failover facility to guarantee connectivity at all times, with reliable back-up facilities as well as an extremely robust, agile cybersecurity system maintained and updated regularly in line with well thought out operating protocols.

As this high-volume comms traffic and data transfer grows it is crucial to monitor usage, consumption and access levels for effectiveness, cybersecurity purposes, and to avoid a bill shock at the end of the month!

Network management systems, such as IEC Telecom's OneGate, have become central to onboard connectivity. This technology enables automated failover at least cost routing meaning that, at each given moment, a vessel can direct its comms traffic over the most competitive channel. Maximising onboard technology has also led to optimisation of digital dashboards which in turn has given the opportunity to integrate specialist software for shipping

and offshore users, bringing shore-based effectiveness onboard and enhancing the ship-to-shore data and communications relationship.

"The shipping industry requires software capable of operating seamlessly over GSM and satcom. At IEC Telecom we have invested the past five years in the development of specialised applications optimised for the low-bandwidth environment. In addition to enhanced compression, most of our applications are pre-set to resume data transfer from the moment of interruption in case of any signal loss, saving time and money," explained Mr Ben Soussia.

The pandemic fast-tracked connectivity development for the maritime world. Marooned at sea, vessel operators had to find new ways to connect and communicate with their ships or offshore platforms and the limitations of bandwidth restrictions focussed developers' minds on overcoming barriers and enabling the level of communication required. Necessity may have required such invention, but the benefits have become so clear now that ship-to-shore communications have been permanently transformed.

For example, videoconferencing is now a corporate communication expectation and, whereas previously it was almost impossible to achieve at sea due to bandwidth limitations and latency levels, new software has been developed to enable video-conferencing to be used even over the limited speed of L-band back-up channels. This benefits vessel operating communications as well as facilitating crew services such as telemedicine and e-learning. Technology has also transformed

onboard maintenance. Systems such as IEC Telecom's newly added OneAssist application with its handsfree headset supporting voice, video-streaming and file exchange enable repairs, spare part fitting, or vessel system updates to be completed by a crew member or onsite technician with real-time, two-way communication to specialist support onshore – saving time and money.

"What started as a preventive measure has now become an efficient tool in helping to optimise workflow and decrease operational expenses and the shipping industry is now clamouring for more and more digital solutions as the benefits and opportunities become apparent."

As ships move ever closer towards the possibility of full automation, the number of business-critical applications will increase exponentially, predicts IEC Telecom, which means it is essential to ensure that all these services can be delivered both over VSAT and back-up systems.

"In the modern age, vessel productivity heavily depends on onboard applications. When the VSAT signal is down, vessels can no longer afford to limit communication to the email service traditionally offered over L-band. It is imperative to ensure optimal network performance at all times and new satcom technologies are there to provide business continuity even over back-up. By investing in network solutions you enhance your VSAT experience and secure higher returns due to increased productivity," noted Mr Ben Soussia.

DS

¹ International Data Corporation (IDC) Data Age 2025 whitepaper



Nabil Ben Soussia, IEC Telecom's Asia & Middle East CEO

Providence acquires majority shareholding in Marlink for \$1.4bn

www.marlink.com
www.provequity.com

Private equity firm Providence Equity Partners has agreed to acquire a majority shareholding in Marlink from Apax Partners. The transaction results in an enterprise value for Marlink Group of approximately \$1.4bn; further details were not disclosed.

Apax will retain a significant minority shareholding. Marlink's management team and investment house Ardian has also committed to minority interests.

Karim Tabet, senior managing director at Providence said: "We are pleased to be partnering with such an outstanding business, and, together with Apax and Ardian, we look forward to supporting Erik Ceuppens and his team as Marlink continues to be a market leader and seeks to capitalise on increased demand for satellite connectivity

connectivity and digital solutions."

Michaël Vervisch, managing director at Providence added: "We have been impressed by the company's transformation into a branded broadband provider leveraging its own hybrid network and capturing scale benefits by taking a leadership role in the industry. Furthermore, we see significant future growth opportunities, including through offering value added digital solutions."

Bertrand Pivin, partner at Apax Partners said: "Apax Partners first invested in Marlink 15 years ago. Under the leadership of Erik Ceuppens, the company transformed its business model, tripled its revenues and multiplied its EBITDA by 10. It emerged as the worldwide leading Satellite Service Operator, first in the maritime sector, and now, with the recent acquisition of ITC Global, in the enterprise sector. The 4000+ remote broadband terminals

installed worldwide will serve as a springboard to design and deliver the much-needed digital services which Marlink's direct customers are seeking for their business-critical operations. We believe Providence is the partner of choice to conduct the next stage of this extraordinary

journey. Apax is keen to roll-over part of its investment and hold a significant fraction of the share capital, in order to continue to back this remarkable company."

The transaction is expected to close in the first half of 2022, subject to customary and regulatory approvals.



Providence Equity Partners will acquire a majority shareholding in Marlink for \$1.4bn

Printed from Calameo.com