



IEC Telecom: Digital Solutions to Harness the Power of Data

IEC Telecom Group, an international satellite service operator, enables business continuity and crew welfare onboard all vessel types. The satcom expert joined the Saudi Maritime Congress to explore the latest trends in the digitalisation of maritime operations and present its vision for future development in the region.

As a gold sponsor of the event, IEC Telecom, represented by Nabil Ben Soussia, CEO Asia, Middle East & CIS, addressed the soaring demand for digital solutions as a means to gain a competitive edge. In addition, guests of the Saudi Maritime Congress had an opportunity to visit IEC Telecom's stand in the exhibition pavilion and discover the full portfolio of the satcom provider, including a wide range of optimised applications, IoT and tracking solutions, and of course, IEC Telecom's state-of-the-art OneGate network management system.

Robban Assafina had the chance to meet Ben Soussia for a quick chat about the industry and the company's lookouts.

- With everything recently going on in the industry, how has IEC Telecom managed to overcome challenges during the last couple of years?

The COVID-19 pandemic spiralled demand for onboard connectivity, both for corporate and welfare needs. Yet, this market shift took place in a very challenging environment. Due to social distancing, port closures, and restrictions on crew interchange, a simple installation would take weeks to complete. These circumstances motivated us to expedite our digital agenda. Moving to the virtualisation of services allowed us to minimise dependence on logistics and maximise immediate value-added benefits to our clients.

After the pandemic, the world faced a shortage of semiconductors and chips. The satcom industry felt this like no other. At IEC Telecom, we overcame this challenge by implementing a new procurement strategy involving diversification of supply channels and an optimised logistics cycle.

- Being an active key player in the industry and the region's market, how do you evaluate the Middle East market?

The maritime industry in the Middle East is on the rise, with KSA leading the way.

Saudi Arabia's maritime sector has doubled in the past decade, and this is just the beginning. Saudi Vision 2030 has set a target to make the country a global logistics hub. The Kingdom is heavily investing in the modernisation of its port infrastructure. The current investment range is at \$8 billion, and I believe we'll hear about new mega-projects soon enough.

Supporting the Saudi Maritime Congress, we reinstate our commitment to expanding our presence in the region. We are now considering a range of potential partnerships, including a couple in the KSA.

- How is IEC Telecom dealing with the decarbonisation process?

Digitalisation and decarbonisation are two faces of the same coin. Digitalisation optimises operations, enhances navigation, and improves logistics. The cumulative effect of these improvements leads to decreased fuel consumption and decarbonisation.

In this context, satcom providers act as enablers because any operations related to decarbonisation will have a mandatory digital component. I am a strong believer that the future of digitalisation is deeply rooted in synergies. At IEC Telecom, we are always open to new ideas. We are continuously expanding our capabilities through new partnerships. The Saudi Maritime Congress was exceptionally fruitful in this regard.

- What about IEC Telecom's short-term goals?

There are a lot of technological changes to support the 5G rollout. Vessel owners will no longer seek competitive airtime packages alone, but ask for new operational opportunities onboard. In other words, satcom providers won't trade data as such. Instead, the market competition will be centred on value-added services and smart applications.

Our bespoke OneGate network management system was designed as a scalable and future-ready solution from the very start. The system as well as any software within can be replaced, updated or upgraded as and when the opportunity arises. Hence, our existing customers are already covered with respect to the upcoming changes. The same shall apply to all new subscribers who entrust their marine comms to IEC Telecom.