Connecting the unconnected

As the new year begins, Africa’s total international internet bandwidth is expected to exceed 1Tbps imminently. The total design capacity of submarine cables serving sub-Saharan Africa at the end of the year will be around 24Tbps. This has been boosted by the launch of a number of new cables in the past year including LION2 and SEAS on the east coast, WACS and ACE on the west coast, and EIG.

Africa’s growing inventory of submarine cable systems is revolutionising the continent’s connectivity. However, their ongoing success will very much depend on the development of comprehensive terrestrial backhaul and local area network providing access to Africa’s many inland cities and land-locked countries.

In order to meet this demand, WIOCC has - through its shareholders and selected partners - created a unique network, seamlessly integrating more than 50,000km of terrestrial fibre-optic network with its strategic investments in 40,000km of submarine cables. This has created the most comprehensive footprint in Africa, extending connectivity to many land-locked African countries, including Botswana, Burundi, DRC, Lesotho, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

In recent years, governments, incumbent operators and mobile carriers have invested billions of dollars in building and enhancing terrestrial networks. In countries such as Kenya and Malawi almost the entire population now lives within range of mobile networks. Since mid-2011, an average of 100km of new fibre-optic network has entered service every day, and the amount of network in deployment, planning or proposal continues to increase. Just in the year to June 2012, Africa’s total inventory of terrestrial transmission networks increased by 11%, passing 700,000km during Q1 2012. Of this over 400,000km is fibre-optic, representing the vast majority of new deployments.

Development of these fibre-optic networks is being driven by a number of factors:

- Cost reduction for mobile operators – fixed-line incumbents’ high prices make it economical for mobile operators to either build fibre networks themselves (or in partnership) or to buy from alternative providers. Regulatory conditions have also encouraged network construction in many countries.

Two years of dynamic growth

It has been just over two years since the EASSy submarine cable system began carrying commercial traffic, and during that time WIOCC - its largest shareholder - has established itself as one of the leading providers of end-to-end, managed service connectivity in Africa.

Our aim has always been to provide international and African telcos and ISPs with unrivalled high-speed, resilient and diverse capacity into, within and out of Africa, supported with the very best service and solutions. Our success in delivering just that was recognised at AfricaCom 2012 when we were presented with the Best Pan-African Initiative Award.

The judges commended WIOCC for ‘charging ahead with the task of fusing African communication channels’, acknowledging our achievement in seamlessly linking over 50,000km of African terrestrial fibre and more than 40,000km of submarine cable. The result is our unique network footprint connecting over 700 cities in 70 countries globally - including 100 cities in 29 European countries and more than 400 locations across 30 African countries.

In this new year, we recognise the opportunities and challenges that carriers face in the coming months and we are committed to continue delivering the very best service and solutions for those needing capacity into, around and out of Africa during 2013 and beyond.

Chris Wood, CEO, WIOCC
Africa embracing the cloud

Until very recently, broadband availability in Africa was a major issue for both businesses and individuals. Limited access to modern business programmes and applications, including access to the cloud, that are taken for granted in many countries. Cloud computing has the capability to transform how businesses in Africa operate, whilst the rise of smartphones and tablet devices is increasing consumer use of the cloud to access a rapidly expanding mix of applications in areas such as social media, entertainment and education.

A symbiotic relationship exists between cloud computing and bandwidth – each supporting the growth of the other. Cost-effective access to reliable, high-capacity and affordable bandwidth is vital to the evolution of cloud computing in Africa, which is itself a driver for the continuing deployment and activation of terrestrial and submarine fibre-optic network capacity.

An emerging ICT industry in Africa is anticipating that its future will be dependent on serving customers and businesses through mobile cloud applications. With the rapid uptake of smartphones in Africa, many region-specific mobile device applications are being developed and the continent is gaining a reputation as a centre for innovation in this sector - one prime example being iHub in Nairobi, Kenya, an open space for technologists, investors and technology companies interested in developing innovative IT products. The space is a community technology facility, with a focus on young entrepreneurs, web and mobile phone programmers, designers and researchers. The concept of the iHub is the first of its kind in Kenya and there is great expectation it will spur on the technology revolution throughout Africa.

Cloud computing was initially developed for business use, offering opportunities for increased mobility, flexibility and scalability and the ability to move from capex to opex. However, it has also turned out to be of enormous benefit to the millions of people in rural areas who don’t own a computer and whose lives can be changed dramatically by a couple of mobile applications. Safaricom’s M-PESA mobile payment system, for example, allows its customers to transfer money to each other via mobile phones, without the need to visit a bank or ATM, and has largely replaced cash transactions in Kenya. Governments are also supporting such technological developments, anticipating cloud-based technology will help transform economies, improve education and public health, and even protect the environment.

However, there is one other group of potential beneficiaries linked to the emergence of cloud computing - telcos and ISPs selling connectivity and services to their customers. Development of the cloud services market in Africa depends heavily upon continued service provider investment in network infrastructure to maintain a reliable, high-quality service. As Africa’s carriers’ carrier, WIOCC is ideally placed to observe changing bandwidth requirements. Its ability to provide cost-effective, reliable, international connectivity to carriers in Africa will keep it at the forefront of future developments in the cloud arena.

For further discussion on Cloud Computing for Africa see WIOCC’s January 2012 Connected newsletter at: http://wiocc.net/downloads/Connected%20Newsletter%20Jan%202012%20(2).pdf

2013 Events

During 2013, WIOCC will be attending the following events in Africa and internationally.

20th – 23rd January
Pacific Telecommunications Council, Hawaii, Honolulu

13th – 15th May
International Telecoms Week, Chicago, USA

September Dates TBC
Capacity Africa 2013
Dar es Salaam

12th – 14th November
Africa Com
Cape Town, South Africa

To arrange a meeting, please contact your WIOCC Account Manager or email: info@wiocc.net

WIOCC Appointments

Jason Tutty has been appointed Director, Network Planning and Operations. His role covers service and network operations, specialising in building relationships with key external and internal stakeholders to deliver exceptional customer satisfaction, revenue and margins and operational efficiency. Jason is spearheading the push to grow WIOCC’s relationship with shareholders and customers.

He joins WIOCC from Reliance Globalcom (former FLAG Telecom, Vanco & Yipes) where he worked in a number of key roles over a period of 12 years, including lead of the Global Network Operations Centre and Director Service Management. Most recently he was Director, Engineering & Operations Support reporting to the CTO. Jason holds a Bachelor of Science degree from the UK’s Open University and he is interested in technology, cycling and travelling.