

Which firm will win the phone-a-friend battle?

Telecoms rivals aim to get crews connected

Craig Eason

THE battle to provide affordable and reliable crew calling is heating up as a new Austrian-based company looks to begin voice-over internet services next year through onboard wireless hot spots.

As satellite providers spend millions upgrading their vehicle deployment, telecoms providers are creating competitive deals, providing the types of connectivity that shipowners and their crews are demanding.

Inmarsat's launch and continuing deployment of its third, final satellite in its I4 constellation, and Iridium's development of its next generation of satellites, indicates the level of activity and the level of business that is expected in the marine communication market.

Austria's 7CCell is preparing to launch the VoIP-based crew communication network over the Vsat network, which — it says — will rival GSM services being developed by its competitors.

The venture capital-funded start-up has developed the mobile VoIP service for shipboard and offshore use, claiming the capability of providing 64kbp or better

wireless connection, with a narrow bandwidth that means more calls can be made simultaneously.

It is currently developing its distribution network and starting onboard trials with a number of shipowners this month, prior to launching full services in spring 2009.

Services offered include voice-messaging, email access and internet use through a prepaid or post-paid set-up.

"We are not a GSM provider, but we do sell ship-to-shore-to-ship traffic," said founder Peter Martin. "We are building our distribution network and will appoint them once we have done these tests. We are also in discussions with end manufacturers and will announce this soon as well. If there are existing installations on board that we can add to, it will help greatly," he said.

The concept is to provide a wireless network by establishing hot spots around a ship, giving the crew their own dual-mode handset and then using the 7CCell wireless network. The system will also allow crew members to access services when ashore as the handsets will be able to access ordinary wireless hot spots and to have any GSM operators' SIM card installed in order to allow ordinary mobile phone calls.

The company claims its costs are competitive, quoting €4,000 (\$5,400) as a basic package of a single-access point, a single-voice module and controller. A second access point costing around €480 would



Putting you through: enabling crew to make calls is proving a spur to competition.

be added for an extra 30 callers. The company is also hoping to provide Vsat antenna package and installation, if needed.

As well as Vsat, the company is also

looking at how it can develop some of its services with Inmarsat, despite costing limitations, with the UK-based satellite provider, but has decided that the Iridium service is too slow for its needs.

News in Brief

Blue Ocean/Navarino tie-up

BLUE OCEAN WIRELESS, the niche Irish company offering GSM crew calling, has partnered with Greek satellite communications group Navarino Telecom.

Blue Ocean Wireless, formed in 2007 by Claret Capital and Irish IT Group AltoBridge, has developed an Inmarsat-based service allowing ships' crews to use ordinary mobile phones when off-shore, albeit with a Blue Ocean SIM card.

The tie-up with Navarino, which claims a client base of over 400 shipping companies, will allow its customers to place Blue Ocean Wireless systems on board to give crew members their own GSM access.

Blue Ocean has also secured up to \$25m sharia-compliant funding, through a partnership with the Bank of London and The Middle East, for further funding of the continued roll-out of its service.

Iridium's set-rate option

IRIDIUM, the US-based satellite service provider, has launched its latest crew-calling plan, providing a set rate, rather than prime and off-peak rates.

"By removing time-of-day restrictions for discounted pricing, we are making it more convenient for crew members to call home during their off-watch hours," said Iridium executive Greg Ewert.

Iridium said it will work with service providers to ensure a seamless transition to the new calling plans.

Vizada's shipboard systems

VIZADA GROUP has unveiled a new suite of shipboard communication solutions aimed at improving ship connectivity, mostly within the areas of security, crew communications and data connectivity. These include anti-virus software and a single ship-wide firewall for onboard use.

The company, which was formed in September 2007 with the merger of Telenor Satellite Services and France Télécom Mobile Satellite Communications, said it has also developed a full set of crew communications tools for both data and voice connectivity over broadband and IP-based mobile satellite services.

Crews can now be offered, or sold, scratch cards for prepaid services for private web, email and file uploading through the Inmarsat Fleetbroadband satellites, and with voice on both Iridium and Inmarsat systems.

Sperry goes wide-screen

SPERRY MARINE, the marine business unit of Northrop Grumman, has gone wide-screen with a new bridge console that can assimilate and display additional information alongside an ECDIS display. The display is part of the company's Visionmaster series of marine navigation systems.

The new display has also been designed to incorporate a view of underwater topography matched to the electronic charts data, which will allow a three-dimensional picture of the charted sea bed to be displayed.

The Visionmaster FT series is the first of the company's systems to bring multiple functions into a network based around a common shared database.

"The open architecture, Ethernet-based design allows for infinite upgrading to add new functions and features," said Sperry Marine vice president J. Nolasco DaCunha. "In 2009 we intend to leverage the network with intelligent communications and satellite communications to integrate shipboard navigation with shoreside business management."

OMC launches under keel system in Europe market

AUSTRALIAN underwater clearance specialist OMC International is hoping to develop its position in the European market with a demonstration of its services in Portugal this week, writes Rob McKay in Melbourne.

The creation of a UK-based satellite office is also a mark of confidence for the Melbourne-based company following contracts signed for its Dynamic Under Keel Clearance software system with the Port of Lisbon in Portugal last year and the Federal Waterways Administration in Germany for installation in four ports on the Weser River this year.

"Other interested ports and waterway authorities are awaiting the operational advantages of sailing under DUKC advice for the Weser River ports when the system becomes operational in mid-December this year," the company said.

Before then, OMC hopes to impress the market as part of the European Commission's four-year Maritime Navigation and Information Services research project, now nearing completion.

As part of the E-Maritime initiative, MarNIS was aimed at harmonising maritime telecommunication and navigation under EU Framework Programme Six and, as the only non-European firm involved, OMC had to set up a European subsidiary for the purpose.

A key component is a new portable

pilotage unit, in which the underwater clearance software has been incorporated.

This week an official live demonstration will take place of the portable unit on a ship in the port of Lisbon, where it is already operational. The firm said DUKC is in 19 ports worldwide — 11 in Australia, three in New Zealand and five in Europe.

"There was no doubt that, with our growing workload in Europe, we needed to establish a permanent base," managing director Peter O'Brien said.

The new office at Howbery, headquarters of hydraulics research institute HR Wallingford, will be headed by Anglo-New Zealand pilotage expert Captain Jonathon Pearce, supported initially by an engineer who is currently in Bremerhaven.

"I see a huge potential in Europe for DUKC," Capt Pearce said. "More and more ports authorities and pilotage services are being held accountable for their actions."

"It could be argued that static rules may be coming to the end of their usefulness, as they have dramatically failed at some ports."

He said the technology is now available to accurately assess the under keel clearance of a vessel, thereby substantially reducing the risk of a grounding.

"I can see it becoming more difficult for a port to defend itself in the event of a grounding under static rules as DUKC technology become more prevalent."

Cicek chief voices fears for small yards

TURKISH shipbuilder Cicek Shipyard launched a new 25,000 dwt bulk carrier design during last month's SMM exhibition, but with a warning that some of the smaller shipyards in the country are likely to face hard times as the credit crunch hits the region, writes Craig Eason.

Cicek vice-president Berke Cicek said it has developed the vessel design to meet demand for new handysize tonnage based on the common structural rule notations by class societies and with the new coating performance standards.

"We have also concentrated on designing a vessel that is economical to operate. We expect our vessel to operate with a crew

of 22 and to maintain a service speed of 13 knots on just 21.5 tonnes a day," he said.

While being one of the more established yards in Turkey, with a healthy orderbook, Mr Cicek warned that with the tightening of the financial markets a large number of the Tuzla Bay yards may close down or be acquired by some of the larger shipbuilders.

In the cramped bay region, where there are reported to be up to 40 independent shipyards he believes there will be some big changes within the next two years.

"The banks in Turkey are going to stop giving money and there will be some big changes in the region," he warned.

In addition to feeling the financial pinch, the Turkish yards have suffered a series of fatal accidents this year.

They are also being hit by rises in steel prices, with supplies coming mainly from Ukraine.

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Newbuildings									
Vessels Launched									
Builder	Yard	Name	Launched	Launch Date	Type	GT	DWT	Flag	Owners
Austal	340	Riyhad	Fremantle	B 01 Oct 2008	pr	6133	555	AUS	Arab S.M.
Austal USA	616	—	Mobile	30 Sep 2008	pr	9000	882	USA	Hawaii S.
Barkmeijer	316	Flinterrebecca	Stroobos	26 Sep 2008	ggc	2999	4504	NLD	Flinter G.
China S.B.	877	YM Upward	Kaohsiung	B 01 Oct 2008	ucc	90000	100100	LBR	Yang Ming
China S.B.	884	Ocean Bird	Keelung	B 08 Sep 2008	ucc	15700	21700	HKG	Sanko S.
Dae Sun	473	Sichem Hawk	Busan	B 02 Oct 2008	tch	17500	25000	MLT	Eitzen C.
Daewoo	3501	Discoverer Clear	Okpo	B 03 Oct 2008	yds	63190	55000	MHL	Transocean I.
Damen S.G.	511553	Waterstraat	Gdynia	B 01 Sep 2008	xig	285	—	ANT	Far E.
Fujian Southeast	H885	Saag Lyra	Fuzhou	B 01 Sep 2008	xah	1678	1360	SGP	Jaya S.
Gdanska - Gdynia	123	Fugro Synergy	Gdansk	03 Oct 2008	rre	5200	4400	BHS	Fugro
Guangzhou	05130015	Torm Lene	Guangzhou	B 02 Oct 2008	tpd	31000	51800	DIS	Torm
Hantong	010	Mandarin Fortune	China	B 01 Sep 2008	bbu	32957	57000	SGP	Da Sin
Hyundai H.	1838	Al Hilal	Ulsan	B 01 Sep 2008	ucc	76000	79030	QAT	UASC
Hyundai M.D.	2127	CPO Norway	Ulsan	B 01 Sep 2008	tco	23270	36700	GBR	Offen
Hyundai M.D.	2128	CPO Russia	Ulsan	B 01 Sep 2008	tco	23353	36700	GBR	Offen
Imabari (Imabari)	673	Hanjin Nhava Sheva	Imabari	B 01 Sep 2008	ucc	17515	21840	PAN	Imabari (Imabari)
Imabari (Imabari)	680	Sat Nunki	Imabari	B 03 Oct 2008	bbu	17070	28080	SGP	Imabari (Imabari)
Imabari (Marugame)	1479	Lowlands Queen	Marugame	B 30 Sep 2008	bbu	39750	76500	PAN	Santoku
Jiangnan	2370	De Xin Hai	Shanghai	B 28 Sep 2008	bbu	41726	76000	CHN	Qingdao O.
Koyo Dockyard	2237	APL Florida	Mihara	B 10 Sep 2008	ucc	72000	72300	PAN	Neptune S.S.P.
Kumamoto Dock	448	Charlotte	Yatsushiro	B 30 Sep 2008	tco	5635	8500	SGP	Searights M.
NMC A.	799	—	Alblasserdam	B 01 Sep 2008	oyt	499	534	CAN	Jacht
New Times Ningbo Dongfang	0307318	Starling	Jingjiang	B 01 Sep 2008	tpd	42010	73400	LBR	Seaarland
Pirou	C285	V.B.Adroit	Concarneau	B 01 Sep 2008	xig	350	—	FRA	Boluda G.
Polnocna	B844/08	Cindy Tide	Gdansk	B 29 Sep 2008	xah	2200	2020	VUT	Tidewater
STX	1241	ACX Pearl	Jinhae	B 01 Sep 2008	ucc	29093	39000	PAN	Anglo E.S.
STX	1251	Matrah	Jinhae	B 03 Oct 2008	tco	30200	47400	PAN	Emirates
STX	5207	M.Y.Adriatic	Busan	B 01 Oct 2008	lpg	7500	12697	PAN	Benelux O.
Sainty S.J.	06STIG026	Shun Tian 8	Jiangdu	B 01 Sep 2008	ggc	4500	5650	CYP	Buss
Sanoyas	1262	Crystal Pioneer	Mizushima	B 04 Oct 2008	bwc	49200	61700	CYM	Meiji
Shanghai Chengxi	4229	Yin Ning	Jiangyin	B 01 Sep 2008	bbu	32474	53300	CHN	China S.I.S.M.
Shanghai Waigaoqiao	1063	Omaha	Shanghai	B 02 Sep 2008	bbu	86851	177000	MLT	Cardiff
Shanghai Waigaoqiao	1090	Bai An Hai	Shanghai	B 01 Sep 2008	bbu	90685	177000	CHN	COSCO B.
Shimanami	Z.516	Clipper Iyo	Hakata	B 20 Sep 2008	bbu	16960	28350	PAN	Hakuyo K.C.L.
Xiamen	XSI405B	Thirsk	Xiamen	b 29 Sep 2008	ucc	26688	34500	GBR	Zodiac M.A.

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