

Changing the way people across Asia view entertainment

SINGAPORE – A new joint-venture startup that will offer a regional over-the-top (OTT) video service has its sights set on bringing a whole new dimension to the way content is consumed across Asia.

Named HOOQ, the OTT service is offered by Singapore telco and pay-TV service provider Singtel, Sony Pictures Television and Warner Bros Entertainment, and will deliver both Hollywood blockbusters and TV series, as well as popular local movie programmes.

One of the main reasons for the launch of HOOQ, is the inherent market potential for over-the-top (OTT) video in Asia, Peter Bithos, CEO of HOOQ, told *APB*.

"Today, across developing markets, there is limited access to quality entertainment, streamed directly to the screen of one's choice. It's either illegal, comes at a high cost or is difficult to get. We aim to fix that [with HOOQ]."

"In addition, there is good market potential. According to research, market potential for OTT video in India, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines is expected to be more than US\$1 billion by 2018.

"OTT also provides a much richer experience for consumers, and is the de facto model for content consumption for millennials, who make up a disproportionately



HOOQ is a regional OTT service offered in Asia.

large fraction of the population in our key target markets."

And the Philippines was HOOQ's first port of call, as it was launched in late February, in partnership with Globe Telecom. By the first quarter of this year, HOOQ is expected to be rolled out across the Singtel Group's Asian footprint.

As to how HOOQ differs from Singtel TV Go, another OTT service offered by Singtel, Bithos explained: "The content offering on HOOQ complements that on Singtel TV Go, which provides catch-up for linear channels customers have signed up for on the Singtel TV service. HOOQ, on the other hand, does not carry linear channels, and has a wide range of movies and TV series."

In the long term, 4K Ultra HD (UHD) could also be a possibility, Bithos revealed: "4K UHD is on the radar, as are a number of other exciting categories/add-ons from a content perspective."

Broadcasters should speak up and ask their regulators for more frequencies

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should tell their regulators and governments why they need the frequencies, and to make that requirement known during the meeting in Geneva this November during WRC-15. [Broadcasters] need to preserve their frequencies, otherwise there is no future for them."

Lindsay Cornell, principal systems architect at BBC-UK, agreed. The best people to deliver the message to regulators and governments are the broadcasters in each and every country as spectrum is managed on a national basis.

He explained: "The WRC sets the framework, but it's the countries themselves that in the end make those decisions and it's the representatives of those countries

that go to the ITU conference. Broadcasters should talk to their regulators and government about the spectrum that they use, why and what they use it for, as well as the audience benefits and the value that that it brings."

Keeping in mind that broadcasters are serving the public and regional broadcasters in the Asia-Pacific are serving over three million audiences, this allocation of spectrum makes it very important and crucial for the future broadcasting, emphasised Dr Javad Mottaghi, secretary-general of ABU.

Dr Mottaghi told *APB*: "I do believe that regulators should understand the role of broadcasters in serving audiences, providing them with information and infotainment. And public broadcasting is the only

IP-based systems need further development

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during the ABU Digital Symposium held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, last month.

She said: "As this trial involved new technologies such as 4K UHD as well as IP, engineers needed to possess a unique skillset in both technological elements.

"So even for our R&D department, where we have a lot of specialised engineers, it was still challenging (to find technically sound engineers in 4K and IP), and if we were to move to a larger scale of events in the future, we really need to build on our skillsets."

Dr Zheng also lamented the lack of standardisation for both 4K UHD and IP which makes systems integration a "big challenge" because a single vendor solution cannot be relied upon.

She continued: "Furthermore, the lack of mature products in the market also meant that trial engineers had to produce the codes themselves, which eventually left little time for system integration tests. This is not scalable, and we have to wait for the rest of the industry to play catch-up."

Concurring with Dr Zheng, Fintan McKiernan, CEO of Ideal Systems, believes that the current availability of broadcast equipment for an all-IP workflow is not "comprehensive enough" to replicate what presently takes place in a baseband broadcast system. He added: "I think we have to see a lot more development and innovation from manufacturers in order to be able to replicate today's baseband workflow in an IP-based workflow."

However, Dr Zheng was quick to point out that IP-based workflows

and infrastructures aid broadcasters in achieving remote production; utilise consumer infrastructure such as broadband to send content back without deploying satellite trucks; and enable centralised support, monitoring and better use of resources.

"IP can deliver savings and enable multiple-platform outputs that no other technologies can achieve," she concluded.

IP-based workflows are an inevitability, suggested Simon Fell, director of technology and innovation at the European Broadcasting Union (EBU).

Fell told *APB*: "IP workflows give you the flexibility to deploy your content on many different platforms, and it gives you the ability to be flexible in growth terms, so that you can scale your facility later on. We need to have the end-to-end IP solution so that we can have flexible capability in production."



The BBC-UK's Dr Zheng Yuan-Xing: "IP can deliver savings and enable multiple-platform outputs that no other technologies can achieve."

As for the BBC, the success of the Glasgow trial has the British public broadcaster eyeing 4K UHD as a key consideration in the development of its next-generation IP broadcast system, Dr Zheng revealed.

"I think we need to consider HDR (High Dynamic Range) as well as 4K UHD as a whole package in offering the next generation of high-quality UHD viewing experience. Due to its high bitrate, the transitional broadcast infrastructure will find it very challenging to cope — therefore IP offers a good alternative solution."

She concluded: "Yes, IP is definitely the way we are going and we are actively working with the industry to further develop its applications for broadcast systems."

The benefits IP-based broadcast systems can deliver

According to the BBC, IP-based broadcast systems can deliver a range of benefits to both the broadcast industry and audiences. These include:

- **More flexible ways of working:** This is true particularly for live events, as broadcasters can effectively move their entire production facilities to a central location, sending only the critical staff needed to capture complex, live outside broadcasts.

- **Increasing output:** With central production facilities, broadcasters can increase on-the-ground operations using a fraction of the manpower currently required to scale up large multi-camera productions, such as major sporting events and music festivals

- **New forms of content:** IP technologies allow more production data and metadata to be sent alongside video and audio feeds. New forms of content could take advantage of this information to provide richer, more interactive and more personal ways of telling stories to audiences.



The ABU Digital Broadcasting Symposium 2015 highlighted the importance of spectrum to broadcasters as WRC-15 takes place this November.

platform that can reach across the nation to billions of audiences and talk to them constantly."

The ability to reach audiences with free-to-air (FTA) TV is at stake, cautioned Simon Fell, director of technology and innovation at the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), warning of the risk of transitioning to "pay-TV operations or some sort of pay-mechanism" should the spectrum for FTA terrestrial digital TV go unprotected.

Broadcasters need more spectrum, was the blunt assessment of Kanit Sunthavirul, assistant to

chairman of National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), Thailand, seeing that countries in South-east Asia are still in digital adolescence.

"Our region is different from Europe. In Thailand, we are still at the beginning of our transition from analogue to digital. We still need some time for the transition, and that means we need more spectrum, because we need to simulcast analogue and digital services together," Sunthavirul appealed.

With each individual country taking its own approach due to the

different market requirements and conditions, Dr Ahmad Zaki, group general manager of engineering television networks at Media Prima, proposed a way forward for Malaysia.

Speaking in one of the conference sessions at the ABU Digital Broadcasting Symposium, Dr Zaki underlined: "After an extensive amount of research, I am not able to find a National Spectrum Policy for Malaysia. Should this be the case, I urge the relevant Malaysian authorities to implement one, just like Singapore, the UK and the US."