

Calling Afghanistan

by Alana Grelyak

To many telecommunications professionals, the challenges presented by the market are limited to brand awareness or government regulation. It's easy to forget that there are very large swaths of the country where economic, geographic, and geopolitical realities render ordinary expansion procedures moot. However, there is seemingly boundless potential for growth in the developing world for those who would be willing to exercise a little creativity and flexibility. One such venue for expansion is Afghanistan.

The possibilities for service providers in Afghanistan are abundant. In a country of roughly 28 million people, only about 2% of the population is actually connected to the Internet. There are many reasons for this, not the least of which was the Taliban's prohibition of Internet service that occurred in 2001 to disallow access to any sort of anti-Islamic materials. With the downfall of the Taliban, the Afghan people now find themselves with new freedoms and new choices. Currently, the Afghan government is attempting to help fill in the gaps in the telecom arena. This leaves a lot of room for startup companies to bring their own products and services to the Afghan people. One company in particular, WaseleTelecom, is setting itself up to capture a major portion of the telecommunications market in Afghanistan by offering up-to-date services, along with promoting Internet self-care services, making WaseleTelecom, in all likelihood, the first Afghan telecom operator to do so.

WaseleTelecom is a start-up service provider, headquartered in Mazari Sharif, Balkh province, that is licensed to provide CDMA 2000 1x communications services. It'll be providing those services to 22 of Afghanistan's northern districts during the first phase of deployment. CDMA will allow WaseleTelecom to provide high speed Internet access at a higher data rate than the widely used GSM wireless technology. As there is very little hard-wired infrastructure in Afghanistan to provide Internet related services, CDMA will allow a large base of the population to access the Internet wirelessly and experience different media at high speeds. Currently, Afghanistan has four GSM-based companies and only one national fixed and CDMA network operator, Afghan Telecom.

How is WaseleTelecom planning to manage such a major endeavor? In this case, they are turning to CBOSS, a transnational corporation active in 36 countries on 5 continents, as the single supplier of the entire IT infrastructure, as well as to

Samsung for their switching hardware. The preliminary testing of the CBOSS products for compatibility with the Samsung hardware has been successfully completed, and within a short period of time due to the flexibility of the CBOSS industrial solution and its open architecture. Being that CBOSS is the sole provider of WaselTelecom's IT infrastructure, a wide range of CBOSS's products are being utilized. For instance, Wasel is planning to become a leader of the mobile Internet segment, offering customer EVDO-based high-speed data services enabled and accounted by the CBOSSip Internet Platform. As for the aforementioned self-care services, the solution from CBOSS includes the Internet customer service CBOSSics and web customer care interface CBOSSwcc. WaselTelecom is utilizing CBOSSsms Short Message Service Center, which is equipped with gateways for SMS conversion to ICQ, email, and voice and to offer a greater convenience to the customers, the functionality of SMS interconnectivity between different network technologies is also available.



When asked what the benefits are of having a single vendor supply the entire IT infrastructure, Anton Bornyakov, Senior Manager of Marketing and PR at CBOSS said, "When using the entire IT structure from a single vendor, a customer is guaranteed the full interoperability of all components and modules, as well as the strong product roadmap in line with the single concept. CBOSS solutions are highly complementary. They are purposely built and tested for interoperability so that our customers experience no incompatibility issues and bear no additional interfacing and integration costs."

While disposable income may not be widely available in most of Afghanistan under present conditions, WaselTelecom has plans to help develop the economy by allowing subscribers to make collect calls or split charges in equal proportions between the called and calling parties, which may increase paid traffic. The notification service CBOSSmissdCall will allow the carrier to boost its traffic by 3-5%, also in the hopes of furthering some economic development.

It seems that WaselTelecom is relying heavily on the functionality of CBOSS's products and IT infrastructure. WaselTelecom CEO Mohammad Gul Kholmi says,

"The modern market is particularly challenging for mobile operators. The convergent solution from CBOSS enables us to deliver exceptional quality of service and guarantees continuous availability of all network elements. It should also be noted that the CBOSS solution is the one that would allow us to offer several completely new services to our subscribers."

And, being that there are already several telecom competitors in Afghanistan, and most likely more on the way, WaselTelcom's ability to offer these new services may very well help them stand out among the crowd to capture the market share that they so desire.

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