

Connecting LATAM In The Ways That Matter Most

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In the rush to bring next-generation services to consumers whose lives are built around the premise of constant connectivity, overlooking those who have no connection at all unfortunately happens.

As LATAM residents helplessly wait for a cost-benefit analysis to determine that it is worthwhile for some form of broadband infrastructure to arrive at their village, the gap between those villagers and the connected world grows. These residents stand to gain the most from connectivity, and SATCOM has a unique role to play in reaching them.

Even those of us who grew up pre-Internet tend to take for granted the benefits our sophisticated connectivity bestows upon us. A good idea that is created in one corner of the world spreads everywhere at blinding speeds—worthy ideas, from household tips to business plans to geopolitical strategy, find a receptive audience.

Free speech finds an outlet. Markets for goods transcend boundaries. Access to skills and jobs become widespread. All the advantages that the connected world enjoys propels us to success. However, at the same time, they sharpen the distinctions between those who have and those who do not have equal access to broadband-based services.

Leveling the playing field so all may participate is what SATCOM does best. This article discusses several fundamental ways in which SATCOM is helping the unconnected join the conversation and it focuses in on real human-interest stories in LATAM.

Government

In northern Peru, a retired navy vessel streams down the Napo River—the mission: provide medical, educational and banking services to more than





Disaster Relief

SATCOM is often pointed out as the most reliable connectivity delivery method. When disaster strikes, this reliability does save lives. Only SATCOM offers a guaranteed connection when terrestrial networks are compromised.

When earthquakes, tsunamis and other natural disasters wreak havoc around the world, terrestrial communications infrastructure is prone to collapse. SATCOM offers an immediate solution for the continuance of communications. From auto-pointing antennas that fit in a backpack to stations that support an entire network, SATCOM is key to rescue efforts and to restoring coverage and normalcy.

A large supermarket chain in Texas and Mexico leveraged SATCOM to bring its special brand of relief to hurricane-stricken communities. A convoy of VSAT-mounted trucks served as mobile supermarkets, ATMs, drugstores, Wi-Fi hotspots and power sources for charging cellphones—they became the centers of life and commerce for the disaster afflicted residents. Another SATCOM service was providing a feed for news teams to broadcast footage of the disaster, which, beyond its news value, serves as an important means of soliciting rescue assistance.

Healthcare

One of the greatest challenges in rural healthcare is attempting to diagnose and treat complex issues with insufficient resources. With SATCOM, local medical services can connect to central hospitals and receive the support they need, allowing them to provide quality care remotely, whether monitoring a patient's signs and symptoms, evaluating lab data, or consulting with specialists.

Another way to achieve the same quality care is to transport doctors to rural areas and allow them to work as they would in an urban hospital setting, with access to all the diagnostic information they need to succeed. From hospital ships to mobile emergency triage points, SATCOM provides the instantaneous connectivity that helps patients get well.

A decade ago, Hurricane Wilma, the most intense Atlantic storm ever recorded, struck Mexico. In response, the Mexican Ministry of Health established mobile field hospitals equipped with VSAT technology to provide reliable broadband, voice and data services during times of epidemics or disasters. These self-contained field hospitals are designed to handle different types of disasters and to operate independently for extended periods of time. They include a communication room equipped with the VSAT and all related communication equipment.

This technology provides VoIP phones for telephony services, video conferencing when doctors need the help of medical specialists, and high-speed Internet access. The link is invaluable in enabling high-speed data transfer, such as laboratory results, server synchronization, ordering supplies and other data applications.

In The Field, Making It Happen

Behind the scenes, making all of these solutions possible is a SATCOM expert with more than 25 years of experience in the delivery of connectivity solutions. Gilat Satellite Networks provides equipment, installation, project management and training, and interfaces with government and local authorities. To learn more about how Gilat continues to innovate with advanced technological solutions to meet diverse needs, please access www.gilat.com.

7,000 people living in 30 isolated communities. In spite of the remote location, the ship is equipped with broadband, thanks to a VSAT, which provides the connection. The ship's offerings include banking and ATMs, medical and dental treatment as well as government services, including Ministry of the Interior offices.

Villagers with no hope of reaching facilities that could provide these services suddenly find themselves enjoying the benefits of modern communications. The government gains from this initiative as well; beyond registering citizens, they are able to meet this rural constituency face-to-face and better understand their needs. In the past few years, services of this type, delivered in trucks or ships, have grown increasingly common.

Another way SATCOM helps rural areas thrive is the installation of voting stations. A network of VSATs enables polling in any location, no matter how remote. In Venezuela, sites were established in remote locations with a fingerprint-based identification system; 5.5 million votes were smoothly handled.

An additional benefit occurred post-election; rather than shutter the satellite network when elections ended, the government initiated a project to use the VSATs as Wi-Fi points for Internet connectivity. The VSATs were redeployed to provide permanent broadband to remote villages. Access to these broadband services, so fundamental in the Western world, makes a tremendous impact on the villagers' quality of life. The sites were so remote and the roads so impassable that creative implementation was required. The VSAT equipment ended up being delivered by helicopters, small riverboats, and even via donkeys.

Education

When a VSAT is set up in a rural school, it represents an event far weightier than merely being a piece of equipment that transmits and receives a signal. When exposed to the wider world for the first time, the minds of students open; they recalculate the limits of what they thought possible. Exposure to a broad swath of ideas and cultures helps foster tolerance and a sense of belonging to the outside world.

Teachers reap the benefits of connectivity as well. They gain exposure to the latest education materials and methodology, enhancing their skills and broadening their students' horizons. IPTV, videoconferencing, and Internet searching all become part of the educational toolbox.

When thousands of rural schools and hundreds of thousands of classrooms are connected, the cumulative impact is millions of students learning more effectively than ever before. Bridging the digital divide is a prime benefit of SATCOM as has been successfully implemented in many LATAM countries such as: Mexico, Peru, Brazil, Colombia and Uruguay.