Make WiMax accessible

Qubee CEO Jerry Mobs shares his experience

NAFID IMRAN AHMED

Qubee, the first WiMax service provider in the country, is in operations for nine months now, and it is already making noise in the market.

Recently Jerry Mobs, the company's chief executive, spoke to The Daily Star and shared his experiences.

According to Jerry, one of the main issues that affect the whole industry is the extremely high price of the International Internet Gateway (IIG) connectivity, which is about two and a half times regional averages, such as Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka.

"If you compare Bangladesh to those nations, you will find that it's very expensive. And that cost is bourne not only by Qubee, but also by others, such as Banglalion, GP and all other ISP's in the market. This is preventing the growth of services in Bangladesh."

"You may be able to get the customer but to connect them to the rest of the world, that's when it gets really expensive and 98 percent of my traffic goes out of the country -- that has to go through the international gateway."

The price for 1Mbps in equivalent South Asian countries is around about $70 -- it is currently Tk 18,000 for the same in Bangladesh, he said.

That is the price all the internet service providers (ISP) pay, not just Qubee, which is the single biggest cost element in retarding their growth, the CEO said.

Jerry mentioned that they brought up the topic with Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) and they responded positively. BTRC knows the issues and will have to look at all the stakeholders, as there are government revenues involved, he added.

"I have a feeling they understand

Qubee CEO Jerry Mobs shows their Dhaka city coverage map on his computer screen

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

the situation and are looking to achieve a sensible way forward that benefits all parties. It has to be a win-win deal. I have faith in the regulator that they will do a good job and everyone will be happy."

Jerry believes the market potential is huge and growing all the time. "Cellular operators have almost 5 million people using the internet on the small screen and there are half a million to three quarters of a million connected at home. We are still looking to cover that market."

"We've gone through our launch phase. Now we cover most main areas of Dhaka. We've got 8,500 subscribers on our network today and we are the fastest growing ISP, in terms of bandwidth -- we know that

talking to Mango TeleServices and BTCL and probably number two or three in terms of single largest bandwidth customer," he informed.

Since inception, Qubee learnt a lot about the market and optimised a lot of the network; and they have about 50 base transceiver stations (BTS) today. By mid June, they plan to increase that number to 120 throughout Dhaka.

"We have a couple of new projects coming up in June-July. There is a lot of work going on, primarily based around mobile devices, allowing people to move around the network and access a WiMax 4G network throughout Dhaka," said Jerry.

On built-in WiMax modem enabled laptops, Jerry said the industry

is working on it at the moment. The main focus now is to provide WiMax to as many potential users as possible, whether on a desktop or laptop, the CEO added.

"Our primary objective in the short term is to cover everybody and give them a chance to use high speed reliable internet services. We want to offer the ability to move around with dongle type devices, which is what our network will be able to support in June. I think around Q3 this year, embedded devices, such as bundled laptops with in-built WiMax devices, should start to happen," he said.

When asked if the company is on target, Jerry said they are a bit behind at the moment. "We are adding about 100 customers a day. Around

about 30 percent of those are referrals from people who've used our services for a month or two."

"I think we delivered in general on our brand promise, which is a good internet experience, a service that never sleeps and speed in happiness."

On existing ISPs with wireless spectrums, he said: "When we invested in Bangladesh, we knew the process was pretty clear and that existing ISPs that already have the rights to use their spectrum, would continue. We don't see that as a big issue."

"If people start to pull their spectrum to create larger groups of spectrum, and if they could offer similar services that creates another competitor with a large chunk of spectrum without benefits to the government by not having to pay a licence fee, to me that is wrong and we would object."

"I don't think that is going to happen. The regulator here has operated within the rules and the rules of the auction are pretty clear."

On rolling out 3G, Jerry said he sees it as a complementary service, and doesn't see his company competing with the cellular operators.

"WiMax is a 4G technology, so having experienced 3G around the world and WiMax, I have seen both sides of the performance. And WiMax is better than 3G."

3G is a great complementary technology, which will help grow the market and internet penetration, he said. But people still need to have much higher bandwidth for their desktops and laptops, and WiMax can deliver that, he added.

"3G is great for small screens but when you plug it in on a desktop and want to play massive multiplayer online games or upload photographs, WiMax is a better technology."

ICT fair on WTISD ends

IT.TELECOM REPORT

A three-day exhibition in observance of World Telecommunications and Information Society Day (WTISD) dropped its curtain at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre on Wednesday.

Jointly organised by Bangladesh Telephone Regulatory Commission and Post and Telecommunication Ministry, the exhibition began on May 17 on the occasion of the day.

The fair did manage to draw visitors' attention quite significantly as enthusiasts of all ages thronged there to get familiar with the state of the art information and communication technology.

The high-tech electronics amateur radio operators' stall at the fair attracted a huge crowd from all age groups.

The Hams, as the amateur radio operators are called, displayed emergency radio communication technology, opportunity of sending messages and photographs through radio signals when internet, mobile and regular phones fail.

Amateur Radio or Ham Radio is a community of people that use radio transmitters and receivers to communicate with other amateur radio operators across the globe.

In times of disaster, when regular communications channels fail, hams can be very useful assisting emergency efforts and working with public service agencies.

Apart from the private organisations and enterprises who deliver IT and telecommunication products and services, some government and semi-government organisatons also took part in the fair.

Visitors took most interests in internet service packages offered by Bangladesh Telecommunication Company Limited (BTCL).

In-charge of the BTCL stall, Mamlukar Rahman, deputy director of the state-run telephone and intenet service provider, said the BTCL provides very cost-consuming internet packages, in which subscribers can get high speed-internet using 'ADSL' modem.

The most interesting product introduced in the fair was 'Vehicle Tracking System' device through which the owners or the drivers of stolen vehicles can easily track down their vehicles. Moreover, owners could start or shut down the engine from outside by using mobile phones with the help of the device. NITS Services Pvt Ltd launched the device in the fair.

Another participating organisation was Bangladesh Association of Call Centre and Outsourcing (Baco). The representative of Baco stall said more than 40 call centres are working presently in Bangladesh and around 2,000 people are working in these centres. The goal of this association is to supersede the annual revenue of the ready-made garments industry in the next two years.

Google beats Microsoft in smartphones, catching Apple

REUTERS, Paris/san Francisco

Google's Android mobile phone system is building momentum, beating Microsoft in the last quarter and challenging Apple as the number of new models with software and compatible applications grow.

Google's Android was the fourth most popular operating system on smartphones sold in the first quarter, research firm Gartner said on Wednesday, putting the company in a good position as handsets look set to surpass computers for browsing the Web.

Android, which was in 10 percent of smartphones sold in the quarter, lags Nokia's Symbian, Research in Motion and Apple.

Gartner said Android was due to beat Apple soon as there were more handset makers using its operating system, and Android phones were already outselling the iPhone in North America.

Gartner's data is considered an industry standard.

DEVELOPER BOOM FOR ANDROID

More and more start-ups are developing applications for Google's Android software,

boosting interest among consumers and posing increasing risk to Apple, venture capitalists told the Reuters Global Technology Summit in San Francisco.

While Apple's app store offers more than 200,000 games, tools and other software to jazz up the iPhone, against just 38,000 for Android, the openness of Google's mobile operating system is helping it gain popularity with developers.

MICROSOFT CHALLENGED

Microsoft, which has been making mobile software for around 10 years, hopes to claw back market share it has lost to rivals with new Windows Phone 7 models, due to reach markets in time for holiday-sales at the end of the year.

Handset makers such as HTC, Samsung and Motorola all make Windows phones but are increasingly turning to Android, which is not only free but attracting a fast-growing developer community.

Adobe fires back at Apple in Flash war

AFP, Washington

Adobe fired back at Apple on Thursday over the refusal by the maker of the iPod, iPhone and iPad to allow the US software giant's widely used Flash video product

to run on the devices.

Adobe placed advertisements on popular technology websites TechCrunch, Wired and Engadget and ran full-page ads in The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, The Washington Post and other newspapers to make its case against Apple.

"We (heart) Apple," said the Adobe ads, which went on to list the things the San Jose, California-based Abode "loves" about the Cupertino, California-based Apple.

"What we don't love is anybody taking away your freedom to choose what you create, how you create it, and what you experience on the web," the Abode ad concluded.

The Web ads linked to the Adobe.com website where the company's co-founders published an open letter defending Flash, commonly used by developers to create online games and Web video, and a page billed as "The Truth About Flash."

"As the founders of Adobe, we believe open markets are in the best interest of developers, content owners, and consumers," Chuck Geschke and John Warnock said.

"We believe that consumers should be able to freely access their favorite content and applications, regardless of what computer they have, what browser they like, or what device suits their needs," they said.

According to Adobe, whose other well-known products include Photoshop and Adobe Reader, which manages PDF files, 75 percent of all video on the Web is viewed using its Flash Player.

Adobe's media blitz comes two weeks after Apple chief executive Steve Jobs published an open letter of his own in which he defended his decision not to allow software developers to use Flash when making applications for the iPhone, iPod Touch or iPad.

"Flash was created during the (personal computer) era for PCs and mice," Jobs said. "But the mobile era is about low power devices, touch interfaces and open Web standards -- all areas where Flash falls short."

Apple devices instead support video built using HTML5, a fledgling software format created by a group of technology firms including Google and Apple.

"Perhaps Adobe should focus more on creating great HTML5 tools for the future, and less on criticizing Apple for leaving the past behind," Jobs said.

"It is not Adobe's goal to help developers write the best iPhone, iPod and iPad apps," Jobs continued. "It is their goal to help developers write cross platform apps."

Geschke and Warnock, the Adobe co-founders, rejected Jobs's criticism and said software that performs on multiple platforms and devices is crucial to the future of the open Web.

'Alan Wake' inspired by Stephen King, David Lynch

AP

Ask most video-game designers about their inspirations and they'll mention other games. But Sam Lake, the lead writer of Microsoft's "Alan Wake," drew more from books especially Stephen King's.

"The setup of the game a best-selling but troubled writer whose dark work of fiction starts to come true, blurring the line of nightmares and reality is a very Stephen King type of a starting point for a story, so King's works were definitely a source of inspiration for us," says Lake, whose script name-checks the horror master right at the start.

But King isn't the only author on Lake's shelf. He also cites Paul Auster's "The Book of Illusions," Bret Easton Ellis' "Lunar Park" and Mark Z. Danielewski's "House of Leaves," all of which tackle questions of reality vs. illusion.

The setting for "Alan Wake" a quirky small town in the Pacific Northwest will remind many players of "Twin Peaks," and Lake welcomes the comparison, praising "the creepy atmosphere and the humor to balance that out" in David Lynch's landmark TV series. Lake says he and the other developers at the Remedy Entertainment studio are also big fans of "Lost": "It's a very good showcase of thriller pacing done right within a TV-series context."

Indeed, "Alan Wake" has the feeling of a TV drama: It's divided into "episodes," each beginning with a "Previously on 'Alan Wake'" recap.

TECH PHOTO

TouchPad

An iPad (R) is seen on display next to a TouchPad, made by Chinese electronics manufacturer Hanvon, which is also known as Hanwang Technology, during an official launch for the Chinese-made product in Beijing May 18.

PHOTO: AFP