

Boxing clever over satcoms

Seafarers should benefit from a new 'one-stop shop' integrated maritime communications system that was launched in London last month...



Globe Wireless runs a 24/7 support desk for users of its systems

'Built for mariners by mariners' is the sales pitch behind a new maritime communications system launched last month by the US-based company Globe Wireless.

The firm claims its new Globe iFusion system should deliver major benefits to seafarers — opening up a range of new options for keeping in touch while at sea, with instant access to voice calling, SMS and e-mail via mobile phones.

Specifically designed for IP satellite services, Globe iFusion incorporates Inmarsat's FleetBroadband 250 and aims to provide a 'one-stop shop' that fully integrates all shipboard satellite communications with shore-side administrative control, GSM voice and data, firewalls, and crew communications in a single system.

Company president Frank Coles — a former Merchant Navy shipmaster — says the integrated system will avoid the 'spaghetti junction' that ships usually require to provide such a range of services.

'This is an industry first and represents a new phase in maritime communications,' he told the Telegraph. 'What we have is a single box that takes care of all the ship's business and crew communica-



The Globe i250 voice and data communications router incorporates a FleetBroadband 250 terminal and is designed to fit into a 19-inch rack

tions, and fuses service, applications and support into a single platform.'

The Globe i250 allows the user to make voice calls

using a GSM handset or a normal fixed-line telephone, and to send and receive emails and faxes, browse the internet, and upload or download files.

A shore-based portal takes care of the configuration and maintenance of the system, allowing companies to administer user profiles, browsing capabilities, firewall settings, spending limits and least cost network routing.

To access the onboard GSM, seafarers will need to use a Globe Wireless SIM card and an unlocked mobile phone. Once a prepaid account is set up, the crew member will have instant access to voice calling, SMS and e-mail via their mobile phone.

Voice calls will be charged at a flat rate of 55 cents per minute, anywhere in the world, and the system enables mobile phones to be used to make free calls to others onboard.

SMS will cost around 25 cents, while e-mail will be charged at \$5.50 per megabyte.

Globe Wireless — which already provides services for more than 550 companies operating some 10,000 ships — says the system will give seafarers much more privacy when they make calls home. It displays call costs and the amount remaining on

the account, as well as allowing 'virtual' reloads. The account can also follow seafarers from ship to ship within a company fleet.

Mr Coles said Globe iFusion is the result of three years of planning and its launch follows successful three-week trials onboard two US container ships, the Washington Express and the Charleston Express.

Described as a 'plug and play' system, Globe iFusion can be easily installed onboard and is suitable for ships of all sizes. Globe will provide hardware, installation, airtime, applications and maintenance as part of the package, as required. The company says that it will be offering the complete integrated onboard setup for a price of US\$12,000 — which, it claims, is some \$8,000 less than the cost of providing all the elements of the package separately.

'The fact that it is all in one box makes it easier to install and maintain,' Mr Coles added. 'The user experience is more akin to what you would have on an iPhone, and in most cases will be better than you would normally get on a mobile. We believe it adds up to a major step forward in maritime communications.'