

Globe Wireless launches iFusion

Globe Wireless has introduced an integrated communications package including a FleetBroadband terminal, onboard security and routing management, and integrated GSM – which will allow seafarers to make calls from their own mobile phones for \$0.55 per minute

Globe Wireless has launched a new maritime satellite communications system called Globe iFusion, incorporating a FleetBroadband 250, a communications management gateway, and onboard GSM equipment.

Specifically designed for IP satellite services, Globe iFusion aims to integrate shipboard satellite communications, shore-side administrative control, GSM voice and data, firewalls, and crew communications into a single system.

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 USD\$12,000.

The new system comprises two main components, the Globe i250 and the Globe iPortal. The Globe i250 includes a Globe Wireless-branded Inmarsat FleetBroadband 250, based on AddValue technology, and an onboard router gateway.

The system is configured to allow users to make voice calls using a GSM handset or normal fixed-line telephone, send or receive e-mail and fax, browse the internet, and upload or download files. It also allows users to access Globe Wireless' commercial applications.

The Globe iPortal is the shore-side portion of the system, which allows land-based offices to control the communications services onboard.

This includes the administration of user profiles, browsing capabilities, firewall settings, satellite gateways and least cost routing.

"We have entered a new phase in maritime communications," said Frank Coles, president and CEO of Globe Wireless.

"This solution fuses service, applications and support into a single platform.

The solution includes a dual firewall, highly-optimised IP connections, and multiple least-cost route gateways."

Development

The evolution of this system goes back approximately four years, following Globe Wireless' acquisition of Seawave. This deal included a piece of Sewave technology called the Integrator, which was the forerunner to the new shipboard gateway.

"It had an Iridium terminal inside, and for IP and Inmarsat services it used MPDS. It also had a GSM unit in there, but that was purely for data communications out of the terminal," Mr Coles explained.

"Then, earlier this year, we bought a company called Zynetix, which provided us with a GSM platform, and made us a GSM operator with our own SIM card. And, of course, we also became a FleetBroadband distribution partner."

"We then went and talked to a company called AddValue in Singapore, a manufacturer of FleetBroadband antennas. With their help and with our engineers we put together this product."

Globe's aim was to try and integrate a number of the various solutions available through these different products into a single package, that could provide shipping companies with one platform covering most of its communications needs.

"There are airtime resellers out there, companies that provide shipboard GSM, companies that provide satellite equipment, a whole raft of e-mail providers," said Mr Coles.

"If you need a network router or IP optimisation, you need to go somewhere else, buy a box and put that on board, and then go somewhere else for the installations and putting in the VPNs. You could

go and do it, but you'd be dealing with a spaghetti of different companies."

"What we've done is taken the 'spaghetti' out of it, and put it all in one place. To put all of those boxes together today is going to cost you somewhere in the region of \$20,000. And depending on the routing you put on board, or the IP acceleration or other things, those numbers could be considerably higher."

Mr Coles believes that the \$12,000 price point that Globe is marketing the product at will encourage the industry to look very seriously at the offering.

"We think this is a very small price to pay for the market, when you consider the accidents waiting to happen, when you consider what's in there," he said.

"The power to control any of the terminals on the ship, control your business communications, your crew communications, your voice and your data traffic."

The fact that the package comes already integrated also helps in smoothing the installation process, which can be managed from the shore offices once a connection is established.

"It's as simple as taking the box onboard, connecting the antenna, and when it talks to the shore it will be configured and ready to go. And that also means when it breaks you can do the same thing with the next box," said Mr Coles.

"You also have the ability to add up to 10 other IP connections. There are three ports on the box, but with a switch you can add up to 10."

"Not that a ship is ever going to have 10 comms connections, but you could have one port for Wi-Fi connection, in another a second FleetBroadband terminal, and in another VSAT – Ka-band, Ku-band or C-band. I joked with the Inmarsat guys that we're already Ka-band ready for their next generation."

GSM

From a crew perspective, one of the most exciting aspects of this system could be the possibility to access a range of cheap communications options from their own mobile phones.

To access the onboard GSM only a Globe Wireless SIM card and an unlocked cell phone handset are required. The seafarer inserts the SIM into the phone and the Globe i250 system will create a prepaid account for the crewmember.

Once this is done that 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 \$0.55 per minute, to landline numbers anywhere in the world. Calls to mobile phones will be higher, and will vary depending on where the call is terminated.

"We believe voice remains very important to the market, we still see very high usage amongst our crew," said Mr Coles.

"The crew can use their cell phone

onboard as the means of communicating with shore. It provides a prepaid and post-paid platform for voice and for data, in one place, and from the same billing plan the shipping company buys from us."

"It allows you to route the call over the inbuilt i250 (FleetBroadband antenna), or any other satellite terminal connected to the box – VSAT, Iridium, or even another FleetBroadband."

SIMs are available from the ship's Captain, and come with \$2.50 initial credit. They can be recharged using a prepaid reload code, sent to the Captain by Globe.

The crew member purchases the code and inputs it into the phone to top-up. Crews can also check their balance on their phone, which sends a message to the network on the ship and retrieves the information.

"All of the crew accounts will be based on the SIM card. The crew buy a prepaid SIM card, insert it in their cell phone, switch on the phone, follow some instructions, and they are up and running on voice, on SMS, and on e-mail," said Mr Coles.

"By the end of the year they'll be up and running on internet browsing too, all from the one SIM card and one account. They don't have to browse on the phone, they can browse on a computer with the same account, but the SIM card is what activates the account and puts them on the network."

This same account will also work on any other ship that is running the Globe iFusion system onboard, meaning that the seafarer can keep the same SIM card in their phone and access their store of credit as they move from ship to ship.

SMS over the system will be charged at approximately \$0.25, while e-mail will be charged at \$5.50 per megabyte – which Globe says would allow small text-based e-mails to be sent for "just pennies".

However, despite this low data cost Globe is convinced that voice calling will be the most popular service available to the crews.

"Blue Ocean Wireless, who really started the market in GSM, always said that they had 87 per cent SMS traffic – but that's because the voice rates were too high," said Mr Coles.

"We have it exactly the other way round, we have about 87 per cent voice and very little SMS. Because we have \$0.55 per minute the crews much rather talking, they're not all teenagers going crazy on SMS. They'd rather make a phone call, especially at a cost effective rate."

All phone numbers available on the Globe SIM cards are currently US based, though Globe is looking at extending this to numbers in other countries. However, Mr Coles notes that most calls are ship to shore over the system, so the number of the phone on the ship is not important in that case.

"Because of the way telcos rip everybody off on calling a ship, you're better off sending an SMS to the ship saying 'call me'," he said.



The iFusion package includes an FB antenna, communications gateway, and GSM hardware for \$12,000