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Intelsat HTS platform attracts record-breaking data contracts

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The Intelsat 29e satellite, launched by Luxembourg-based Intelsat yesterday, has led to some of the largest data commitments for new business in the history of the company, an Intelsat executive told BNamericas.

IS 29e is the first of Intelsat's Epic class of High Throughput Satellites (HTS), which, according to the firm's Latin America & Caribbean vice president Carmen Gonzalez-Sanfeliu, are a perfect fit for the current economic environment.

This is because the platform delivers more throughput to the user but at the same time is backwards compatible with customers' existing hardware, as well as incorporating open architecture, which allows them to choose the network hardware that best suits their applications, Gonzalez-Sanfeliu explained.

Intelsat estimates that its Epic satellites will provide three to five times more capacity per satellite than its traditional fleet, and throughput in the range of 25-60Gbps, which is roughly 10 times more than the traditional fleet's performance.

The firm is kicking off the Epic program in the Americas because more than half the region has fixed and wireless broadband penetration below 20%, while Cisco's Visual Networking Index (VNI) predicts that mobile data traffic in Latin America will grow at 59% CAGR during 2014-19.

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Furthermore, satellite consultancy Euroconsult predicts total satellite capacity requirements will grow at 10% CAGR to reach to 98GHz in 2024, Gonzalez-Sanfeliu added.

The Intelsat 29e satellite will enter commercial service by mid-2016, and will be followed by the Intelsat 33e unit, scheduled for launch in 2H16 to cover Africa, Asia and Europe.

These first two satellites cover the majority of the world's business travel routes, she added, referring to the potential for providing in-air connectivity to passenger planes.

There will be two more Epic class launches in 2017 and three more units are in construction with a view to having a full fleet of seven units in 2020, at a cost of some US\$2bn.

IS 29e was built for US\$400mn-450mn, whereas traditional satellites cost about US\$350mn, but Intelsat expects costs to come down for construction of future Epic satellites, the executive said.

The Epic fleet operates in the Ku- and C-bands, making it interoperable with Intelsat's existing fleet of 50 satellites, and is designed to serve primarily the broadband and telecom carrier markets, Intelsat having boosted its broadcasting services fleet in Latin America with the launch of the IS34 satellite in August 2015.

Latin American customers already confirmed for Intelsat 29e include Venezuelan state operator Cantv, BT Venezuela, Ecuadorian state operator CNT, Telefónica del Perú, Colombian rural services provider Anditel, and Colombian VSAT services provider Axesat.

Committed broadcasters include Amazonia Cabo, Cadena Ecuatoriana de Television, Canal 10 CETV, Fox Latin America Channels do Brasil, Igreja Mundial do Poder de Deus and Radio e Televisao Banderantes.

Several governments have shown interest in the Epic platform for their universal access programs, but cannot commit until the satellite enters service, Gonzalez-Sanfeliu added.

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