

The Path to Digitisation

By Rahul Nehra, Honorary National Secretary, SCTE India

SCTE India sums up digital and cable developments in India over 2016.



As the year ends, the digital world of India has unfolded at a pace which has surprised many. 2016 is set to be remembered as a year when the world of multimedia, multiscreen and quadruple play embraced users from the cities to the villages.

This shift has a few key contributors such as Reliance Jio; APSFL; Amazon; Zee; Hotstar; Airtel; Google; Facebook; Vodafone; MIB and MOC.



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Launches and mergers

Let's start with the biggest and boldest shift, the Reliance Jio wake up! This big announcement is bound to have ramifications for the entire telecom sector - Reliance Jio has kicked off a digital revolution. Chairman, Mukesh Ambani, commercially launched the group's telecom venture, Jio, on **1 September 2016** offering voice free of charge for life, even while roaming, besides offering data at around a fifth of industry rates. As per the company's welcome offer, the data will be free of charge for all subscribers until the end of this year.

Hailing mobile internet as the future, Ambani said there are no doubts that it is a life-changing, world-changing technology for this century. He also added that technology is a huge opportunity and those who took risks would reap rewards. So, "Jio is not really a telecom company. It is a tech company," he told The Times of India.

Confident of a bright future, Ambani said that Jio would enable India to be among the top 10 countries in broadband and internet access within the next few years and is aiming to acquire 100 million customers in the shortest possible time.

Meanwhile, a merger changed the global numbers game in the DTH world with the merger of Dish TV and Videocon D2H as a single DTH company. Ending months of speculation, India's largest Direct-To-Home (DTH) player Dish TV and NASDAQ-listed Videocon d2h (Vd2h) have decided to merge operations to form



Above: SCTE India's booth at Convergence India 2015

one of the largest Pay TV operators in the world with 27.6 million net subscribers. The Board of Directors of the two companies approved a scheme for amalgamation. Dish TV shareholders will own 55.4%, while the remaining 44.6% shares will be owned by Vd2h shareholders in the new entity, Dish TV Videocon Limited.

Current Dish TV CMD, Jawahar Goel, will head the new company as chairman and managing director, while Vd2h will nominate two directors - one of whom will be vice chairman and the other a deputy managing director of the company.



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OTT in focus

OTT mania seems to be taking over India as mobile proliferation and bandwidth on three airwaves headed north. With 400 million plus smartphones and a national seventy per cent coverage projection of the country by 2017/18, OTT is set to grow to a hundred players at 45-50 per cent annual growth.

A couple of recent reports on the media and entertainment industry highlight OTT's bright future in the country. According to Deloitte Technology, Media and Telecommunications Predictions 2016 report, "Over-The-Top is likely to bring new dynamics in digital media". A few reasons why OTT will gain market share in coming years are the three Cs—convenience, content and control. "4G will bring the complete transformation of the current television viewing experience and mark a shift in control from the broadcaster to the consumer," said the Deloitte report.

The use of smaller screens on personal devices will fuel 'personal escapism' or watching content individually, with 45% of all content consumed expected to be on the small screen by 2020, as claimed by another report from consultants, EY. So in five years, we may see a different world of media and entertainment with OTT proving to be the technology of the future.

All the major operators, content houses and broadcasters have thrown their hat in the OTT ring. Star; Zee; Viacom; Sun; Balaji; Airtel; Vodafone; ETV and Eros have all set in motion a definite OTT strategy for a piece of the pie.

India's digitisation programme

The Indian government and the court seem to have finally put markers down on the ever-shifting deadlines of Digitisation Phase III. The deadline for implementing Digital Addressable System (DAS) in the phase III cities had expired on **31 December 2015**, which was challenged on the grounds on non-availability of set-top boxes and others by multiple local cable operators in different state high courts.

In the recent order, as reported on **7 November 2016**, Justice Sanjeev Sachdeva of the Delhi High Court's single bench has over-ruled orders passed by various other High Courts re the stay granted for extension of digitisation. The court also directed the petitioners to run a scroll on their networks about digitisation and switch off analogue signals within three weeks i.e. by **24 November 2016**.

"It's a welcome move that the law is taking its own course and this would be in favour of broadcasters as well as viewers. Broadcasters would be able to increase revenues, while viewers will get the power of choice," said Kaushik Moitra, partner at the boutique telecom and media law firm, TMT Law Practice.

VD Wadhwa, CEO of SITI Networks, said, "This is a very important judgement as the Delhi High Court has dismissed the nine cases, thus paving the path for digitisation. Not just in DAS Phase III areas, this order will also clear the passage for timely implementation of DAS Phase IV of digitisation."

The Andhra Pradesh government has successfully set a global standard of delivering triple play to the villages across Andhra Pradesh in record time, paving the way for rural India to savour the fruits of the emerging digital divide and also bridge the digital divide.

Another interesting development was the view of all stakeholders that digital growth would also mean that the industry would need to protect itself against digital video piracy and we saw global specialists, such as Friends MTS, engaging across the eco-system and building best practises for harnessing the revenues that the fragile digital world would generate.

All this illustrates that India's growth story is on track, in motion and irreversible.

The SCTE India governing council, which met in September, acknowledged this and set in motion a fast-track process to meet the skills challenges that will unfold from this digital growth story.

I can safely now say that 2017 will be an 'anywhere – everywhere' world for the consumer for entertainment, information and education.



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