

## Iraq leaps ahead with DVB-H to serve war-ravaged market starved of TV

The launch of Iraq's first commercial DVB-H network means that the country has overtaken highly affluent countries, such as Qatar and the UAE, which were widely tipped as the most likely to debut commercial broadcast-mobile-TV services in the Middle East. The service, run independently of the cellcos, could find a market among the many Iraqis with limited access to standard broadcast TV.

Iraq-based Mobision has gotten the jump on Middle Eastern cellcos and other broadcasters in mobile TV, by launching the region's first large-scale commercial DVB-H network, in its war-torn home market.

The UAE's regulator is still mulling over submissions from mobile-TV-licensee hopefuls and is expected to make a decision later this month. And Qatar's regulator is remaining silent about any potential deployment.

The Iraqi DVB-H rollout is also remarkable for other reasons, both commercial and sociopolitical. For instance, the country's mobile operators – Asiacell, Korek and Zain – are playing hardly any role in the service.

Jad Atallah, vice president of technical affairs at Mobision, explains that the company, which he describes as a "sister company" of Iraqi satellite broadcaster Alsumaria TV, had approached Iraq's mobile operators to cooperate on billing for the DVB-H service. But negotiations collapsed because the cellcos were demanding a 50% cut of revenue for merely collecting payment for the service, Atallah says. This prompted Mobision to develop its "own independent business model," he adds.

Even though Iraqis are used to watching television on TV sets at home, large swaths of the country have access to electricity for only up to three hours a day, according to Atallah. This means that many Iraqis are usually unable to watch TV, making mobile TV "a need, not a want" in the country, he says. Using a battery-powered device to watch TV – which can be charged during the scant hours when there is electricity – offers a neat way around the problem of nonfunctioning TV sets. Mobision is therefore banking on achieving high penetration of its DVB-H service, since those eager to watch TV are faced with little alternative.

### Lebanese money

The DVB-H-network rollout has been financed primarily by Lebanese investors, who have collectively poured about US\$30 million into the project, with Alsumaria TV acting as a local partner. Part of the advantage of teaming up with Alsumaria TV is that the broadcaster already has a billing relationship with large numbers of the Iraqi population, and charging extra for a service that viewers could potentially use for longer periods of time appears to be a sound proposition.

Atallah also states that although broadcast mobile TV services have traditionally been viewed as a "luxury" service elsewhere in the world, Mobision intends to market the service as a mass-market play. It is initially offering three tariffs: US\$15 a month, US\$40 every three months and US\$120 a year. Other pricing and package variations might be offered as the service matures.

A drawback is that Mobision won't be subsidizing the retail price of the handsets needed to pick up the DVB-H signals. The only DVB-H-compatible handset in Iraq is the Samsung P-960, which is available via local Samsung distribution partner Jibal. Atallah reports that 10,000 units have been shipped already. He nevertheless says he expects Mobision to have 60,000 subscriptions within a month of launch.

Mobision is planning to launch a budget, DVB-H-compatible handset line manufactured by an undisclosed Chinese vendor in April. We are currently developing a new DVB-H phone, tailored specifically for our needs," Atallah told local press at the recent CABSAT conference hosted in Dubai. "This phone will be very affordable and have dual-SIM-card capabilities. There is currently no other dual-SIM-card phone available in this region."

The Mobision-branded mobile TV service, comprising 20 channels, was commercially launched March 10, offering English- and Arabic-language content from broadcaster

Alsumaria TV.

The DVB-H network is initially set to be available only in certain regions, but the company aims to cover Iraq fully in the next two years. Atallah says Mobision's network will have 40% coverage in Iraq's capital city, Baghdad, in the initial phase. The middle and south of the country – which contains major population centers, such as Basra and Diwanieh – will have 30-40% coverage, he says. In the Kurdish northern region of the country, the network will cover 70% of the population at launch, he adds.

Mobision bought the network equipment from vendor Enensys, and the conditional-access system was provided by France's Nagravision, a subsidiary of the Kudelski Group. Alsumaria TV's engineers are set to manage the network. Nagravision is also providing Mobision with microSD cards, which users must buy to activate the service.

Any user with the right DVB-H handset can subscribe to the Mobision service by buying the microSD card, for about US\$35. The Mobision account is activated by calling an interactive-voice-response (IVR) portal and receiving an activation SMS in response.

Nicholas Chevalier, head of product marketing for mobile TV at Nagravision, says providing the IVR and SMS elements of the activation process is the only role that the country's cellcos play in the mobile TV service.

Chevalier says the deployment of microSD cards makes the Mobision service accessible on a variety of devices, even "unconnected devices," such as portable media players and navigation devices. Such flexibility helps Mobision's mass-market ambitions. "The idea is to access TV content anywhere and not to have it as a niche product," he says.

The microSD cards enable Mobision subscribers to record programs via the service's personal-video-recording capabilities, Chevalier says. The cards use the Open Security Framework as a means of securing the content.

OSF is a legacy standard stemming from the DVB standard in the mainstream broadcasting industry. It enables Mobision subscribers to record content on the card and move it from one mobile device to another, while protecting content from piracy (see fig.).

#### Open Mobile Alliance conditional-access standards for mobile TV

	Supported by	Location of CAS technology	Usage case
Open Security Framework	Broadcasters, handset manufacturers, mobile operators, SIM-card suppliers	SIM/microSD card	Enables mobile TV services to be viewed on various devices
BCAST Smartcard Profile	Broadcasters, handset manufacturers*, mobile operators, SIM-card suppliers	SIM card	Enables mobile TV services to be viewed on handsets
BCAST DRM Profile	Various parties in the mobile TV industry, but mainly favored by Nokia	Handset	Can be used only on Nokia DRM handsets
*Except Nokia			
<i>Source: Nagravision</i>			

By teaming up with Nagravision and choosing the OSF standard, Mobision has denied its customers the opportunity to use Nokia's DVB-H handsets. The Finnish device manufacturer uses the Open Mobile Alliance DRM standard, which means that the conditional-access system is based in the handset, rather than a service-operator-supplied card.

Mobision has signaled an intention to roll out similar services elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa, though it has not announced where it is looking to launch next.

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