

# Gateway to a new world



N SRINATH

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**T**ata Communications chief executive officer and managing director, N Srinath, shares his vision of the company and talks about its innovative services in an interview with *Shubha Madhukar*.

## **How is communication technology benefiting businesses and lives at a macro level?**

The growth and spread of communications has had a positive impact on both enterprise and retail customers. Networking as a whole is increasing and the ability of individuals to get information on a product, to use a service or to interact seamlessly with others, practically without geographic limitations, is greater than ever before.

On the enterprise side, businesses can now have direct access to their end customers and, therefore, their understanding of customer requirements improves. Their ability to profile customer behaviour and to segment markets better increases several times thanks to this. Increasing the level of interaction with customers and partners is another great advantage brought about by the advancement in communications technologies.

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## **Could you tell about the Tata Communications services that are impacting the lives of people?**

There are two that are already available and a third is at a nascent stage. The first is Telepresence, which is based on a new, high-definition video conferencing

technology. Telepresence provides a near real-life environment as compared with the much more limited experience of conventional video conferencing. It's like being across the table from someone. The cameras are so positioned that if you are talking to me, I can know from your eyes that you are looking at me. Multiple locations can be connected simultaneously and you can have a large conference-room kind of experience.

The advantages are huge, and I speak from personal experience. I have managed to cut down my travel in the past one year by 50-60 per cent; we have done recruitment interviews and board meetings using Telepresence. Savings on travel apart, the real benefits, I believe, are the freedom and flexibility you get in running your business. When you increase the number of locations that are simultaneously connected, the benefits begin to multiply. Overall, this is a hugely environment and employee friendly.

We have Telepresence suites in Mumbai and Chennai in India, New Jersey and Virginia in the United States, Montreal in Canada and in Singapore. Setting up a room has a one-time cost of Rs1-1.5 crore per room; though this is useful for all businesses, it may not be affordable for all of them. To increase accessibility we have set up public rooms in multiple locations in India, the UK and the US where you pay by the hour (less than Rs20,000 per room). These are run in partnership with Taj Hotels and the Confederation of Indian Industries, and people can use them on a pay-per-use basis. We plan to expand the network to about 100 rooms this year.

The second standout service we have is the 'Work from home' (WFH)

solution. The service empowers BPOs to allow their employees to tele-work via a secure network. Here again, apart from savings in real estate and transportation costs, I believe the bigger benefit is the difference we bring to people's lives. Not only can we enable a more employee-friendly environment, WFH also opens up employment opportunities to those who otherwise would not have considered a conventional nine-to-five job.

The third service is broadband. While everyone talks of broadband today, I believe its true value — beyond just high-speed internet access — has yet to be seen. In terms of applications and services, broadband has the ability to transform our lives in many ways. It has the ability to change the way one gets educated, the way one is entertained, the way one gets medical treatment...

Broadband can change the way enterprises conduct business and the way people conduct their everyday lives. The technology is there and a compatible business model is evolving. However, in India we are still in the early stages of broadband penetration; it will be a few years before we can experience the full power of the service.

#### Do you have an innovation cell working on new ideas and projects?

Most of our innovation work is embedded in our different business units. The product teams within each business focus on their customer segments and work on bringing out various new products and services, some completely new and some that are variants of what we already have.

To illustrate, our folks are currently working on several new managed services that are additions to our existing portfolio of offerings. We are working on how Telepresence, an enterprise solution, can be used by individuals to, for example, meet friends and family members, or even for marriage matchmaking. This can be an interesting market in India and our team is figuring out the business model for it. This is not a technology innovation; it is a service innovation. A lot of our innovation revolves around what more services can be provided with



## Standout initiatives

**Telepresence:** A powerful communication collaboration service to facilitate life-like, high-definition conferencing facilities, it provides a feeling of sitting across the table for a meeting. Telepresence brings huge benefits: savings on time, money and travel while also being environment and employee friendly (reduced travel hours).

The technology ensures there is no time lag and meetings can be held simultaneously from four different locations. Telepresence-managed services include a concierge service to manage reservations, scheduling, customer support, network monitoring, reporting and billing. As of now there are eight Telepresence public rooms in seven locations across the world, one each in Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai, Gurgaon, London, Boston, and two in Bangalore.

**Work from home (WFH) solution:** A wonder solution for the BPO industry, WFH extends the secured office VPN to employees' homes, providing them a secure way to access all the enterprise applications they need to work from home. The solution is enabled by WiMax technology and has a comprehensive coverage within major cities. All data and VoIP applications are backed by round-the-clock support and troubleshooting, and stringent service guarantees. WFH brings benefits for both the employee and the employer by reducing travel time, enhancing work-life balance, increasing access to talent pools, and lowering real estate and administrative costs.

available technologies and capabilities.

#### Is there any technology development happening outside India?

A lot of our service concept and product development is done outside India. This is because, in many cases, the technology we work on is already in use in the US or Europe. So having somebody who is proximate to that market helps us with the ideation and service creation. Several of our core technology people are in places like Singapore, London, Montreal and New Jersey. What we are trying to do is to supplement that by creating additional capabilities in places like India.

We have tried to optimise our global delivery model. The ideation and serv-

ice creation is close to the customer; the delivery, to some extent initially, is local but over time we would like to get most of it back to India.

#### Could you explain the synergy between Tata Communications and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS)?

The TCS-Tata Communications model is quite complementary. World over, enterprise clients are now increasingly combining networking and IT applications, and they prefer to work through a single partner. On a global scale, TCS leads the application effort and we work with them on infrastructure, data centres, connectivity, etc across all major markets in the US, Europe, Asia and, of course, India. ●