



High noon in a sunrise sector

Tata Communications and Tata Teleservices, with more than a little help from Tata Consultancy Services, are spearheading the Tata group's telecom sector thrust with an array of exceptional products and services

Once upon a time, not so very long ago, telecommunications meant wires and big, heavy and often ugly telephone instruments that one could use to call a local friend or a local hospital. If the call needed to travel any further than city limits, one had to book a trunk call at the telegraph office and wait for the connection to come through. This was a long process that could, and often did, take hours. In case of an emergency, one had to pay a premium for what was known as a 'lightning' call.

For kids of the 'now' generation, their lives completely dominated by communications technologies that have shrunk distance as nothing else ever has, this may sound like a Grimm's fairy tale. Today's youth, says Anil Sardana, managing director of Tata Teleservices, are so used to the fruits of technological

innovation that they can't imagine a world without super-fast telecommunications. Technology is converging, evolving and opening up new vistas at a breathtaking pace, and smart companies are keeping a sharp eye on new developments and a finger on the consumer's pulse.

"Personalisation and interactivity are two key new dimensions that are revolutionising communications and changing the world," says N Srinath, chief executive officer and managing director, Tata Communications. Equally significant, says S Ramadorai, chief executive officer and managing director, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), is the way technology is bringing communications within the reach of people from every economic strata: "Mass affordability and availability ensure that people from all walks of life can experi-

ence the benefits of communications technology and change the way they live and do business."

Many synergies

India is one of the fastest growing telecom markets in the world, and the Tata group is among the leading players in this sector. In line with its philosophy of investing in businesses that positively impact economic activity and improve the lives of people, the group has invested heavily in telecom. It has three major companies — Tata Communications, Tata Teleservices and TCS — operating in this area, with the thrust of their activities on harnessing technology for the service of society.

Since the telecommunications business is witnessing a powerful convergence of technologies, the Tata group, with expertise in tele-

com and information technology available in-house, has an inherent advantage. While Tata Teleservices and Tata Communications are wholly devoted to providing telecom products and services, TCS, the group's global information technology arm, is building on its proven expertise in providing software solutions to organisations in this sector. Independently and together these three companies are taking the telecom revolution to the next level.

Tech trends

Keeping abreast of the latest technologies is critical if you want to cruise the communications super highway, and Tata Communications is geared to meeting this challenge. On its technology radar currently is WiMax (worldwide interoperability for microwave access). The company was the first to launch broadband services on the WiMax platform for retail customers in India, and is in the process of rolling out one of the largest fixed WiMax networks (wireless broadband but in a limited area) in the world. Setting up a mobile WiMax network is next on the agenda.

On the enterprise side, the WiMax network is already in place in major cities; in October 2008, Tata Communications launched the WiMax-based Work from home (WFH) solution that allows BPO companies to provide scalable and secure remote connectivity to employees working from their homes. This solution creates a win-win situation for both employers and employees: the company saves on real estate and administrative costs and employees on transportation and time. But the bigger advantage, according to Mr Srinath, is the difference WFH makes to the lives of those who earlier could not have a satisfactory working life, such as people with disabilities and women with household responsibilities.

Tata Teleservices, too, is on the ball where cutting-edge technology trends are concerned. It is ready to bid for and roll out the 3G spectrum (third generation wireless technology) as soon as the government opens up the platform. The company has already signed an agreement with NTT DoCoMo, the pioneer of 3G and 4G technologies in the world. Says Mr Sardana, "They are the oldest, biggest and the best. We are completely aligned with the fact that the day we get the spectrum, we will move."

Tata Teleservices, along with its subsidiary, Tata Teleservices (Maharashtra), has made an impact on the market with a slew of innovative products and services, capturing the imagination of consumers and providing unique value on the 2G CDMA platform. Some of its programmes in the field of education, environment and livelihood have helped many who would otherwise have been excluded from the benefits that new technologies bring. Many of these programmes are in rural areas and areas where there is no fixed line. They have changed the lives of farmers, students, fishermen, and the physically challenged, among others.

When so much is possible with 2G, what Tata Teleservices could bring to its customers with 3G technology is only limited by our imagination. The company is also set to launch telecom services on the GSM platform, for which it has recently received a licence from the Indian government.

Citizen matters

Partnering Tata Communications and Tata Teleservices in pushing the communications envelope is TCS. Working on large-scale applications, TCS has combined software with telecommunications to implement projects that bring the manifold benefits of technology to the masses.

Project AP Online, an e-Gover-

nance portal for the government of Andhra Pradesh, has changed the lives of the citizens of the state. All government transactions are now online, efficient, transparent and corruption-free. This has eliminated the long queues and delays that hassled citizens wishing to interact with the government. A similar programme implemented by TCS for the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme addresses 35 lakh households in Andhra Pradesh and touches the lives of those who have mostly remained untouched by technology.

TCS Ignite, a science-to-software programme for science graduates, innovatively uses a digitised platform for long-distance training. Here again, technology transcends geographical barriers, and students in rural and semi-urban areas get the benefits of career guidance so far available only to their city peers. Transforming lives by fusing IT with telecom technologies is a part of TCS's business strategy, says Mr Ramadorai, and a holistic way of combining people, processes and technology with ground realities.

Tata Communications, Tata Teleservices and TCS are leveraging synergies to deliver effective and integrated solutions to enterprise customers, too. As Mr Srinath explains: "Enterprise customers are increasingly looking for a single partner who can offer them both IT and telecom solutions. Our partnership with TCS helps us meet their needs and offer managed services as well."

As the three companies move up the value chain, these synergies will help them grow faster, reach out to a wider market and get ready for the next big leap in technology. ●

(To better understand each company's business imperatives and strategies, read our interviews with the managing directors of Tata Consultancy Services, Tata Communications, and Tata Teleservices on the following pages.)

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