

STARCOMMS: STEADY CLIMB TO THE SUMMIT

Starcomms Plc, which pioneered the Mobile Broadband Data Access Service (EVDO) in Nigeria, attained over 1.5 million lines on its subscription base at the end of July, confirming its position as Nigeria's 4th largest telecommunications operator, and keeping within sight of the GSM behemoths.

Speaking at the listing of the company's shares on the Nigerian Stock Exchange on July 14, Starcomms Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Maher Qubain, said the granting of a unified license to the company by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) in 2006 was a major driver of its growth through optimal utilization of its various provisions, which, among others, are the operation of fixed wireless, fax, data, mobile telephony, long distance, national, international mobile and high speed internet services.

Subsequently, the network launched its mobile code numbers - 07028 – in early February 2007, quickly reaching its maximum capacity and propelling such surge in demand that required activation of another series 07029.

The new number range (07029), like the first, operates on the CDMA 2000 (Code Division Multiple Access) platform, and enables subscribers enjoy the roaming mobility that mobile communications offers.

Some of its main features are superior voice clarity, flexibility and mobility, enabling subscribers to use their phones in different parts of the country, besides eliminating the challenge of inter-connectivity between GSM and CDMA technologies.

Despite the challenges of responding and satisfying the huge demand, Qubain emphasized that quality customer service delivery, unparalleled product and service innovations, robust technology, competitive pricing and aggressive marketing will remain the company's defining features.

"Given our rapid transformation into a leading telecommunications player, we have a duty to maintain capacity and capability by continuously retooling our systems, processes, technology and manpower with the overall objective of meeting and surpassing customers' expectations," he said.

It was therefore not surprising that the leading 'triple-play' (mobile, fixed wireless voice and wireless broadband) operator on Saturday, August 16, 2008 won the Best Telecom Product and Best Unified Licence Operator of the year 2008.

Organizers of the Nigerian Telecom Awards said the awards were in recognition of the company's phenomenal contribution to the growth of the sector, having earlier listed its shares on the Nigerian Stock Exchange. The company's newest

IT product, iZap, a super high-speed broadband internet service won the Best Telecom Product.

During the 2007 edition of the awards held in August last year, Starcomms also clinched a double: the Telecom Company of the Year and Cross-Over Network of the Year

Two months earlier, the United States-based CDMA Development Group (CDG) had commended Starcomms on the successful deployment of West Africa's first CDMA2000(r) 1xEV-DO Revision A (Rev. A) network in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. CDMA2000 is the most widely deployed 3G technology with 227 operators in 97 countries, including 77 CDMA2000 1xEV-DO systems, serving more than 350 million subscribers.

With over 130 members, the CDMA Development Group is a trade association formed to foster the worldwide development, implementation and use of CDMA2000 technologies. The primary activities of the CDG include development of CDMA2000 features and services, public relations, education and seminars, regulatory affairs and international support. Currently, there are more than 500 individuals working within various CDG subcommittees on CDMA2000-related matters.

In July of the same year, the company won a double as IT Company of the Year (Internet Service Provider) and the Communication Company of the Year (Wireless Operator), at the Niger Delta Advancement Awards (NDAA), which the organizers, Bonux Communication, said was in recognition of its excellent performance both within and outside the Niger Delta. This, they said, has bridged the communication gap in the difficult terrain of the area.

Less than a decade ago, Starcomms which commenced operations in 1999, was just another PTO seeking to find a foothold in Nigeria's largely underdeveloped communications industry that became later dominated by the GSM behemoths.

With subscriber base of less than 2,000 and only a few base stations in Lagos in 2002, Starcomms moved to over 60,000 by the close of 2003. It also forayed into the northern part of the country in the same year by launching in Kano and Borno. The figure reached almost 200,000 by mid 2005, and surged to 1.6 million today while numerous initiatives have been set in motion in the quest to hit the two million by the end of this year.

Most of the network's growth, according to enquiries, occurred in the past four years, propelled by the adoption of technology and business models backed by management savvy, aggressive marketing of products and services, competitive tariffs, robust technology and consistent innovations.

“We want to continue to reinvent and bring innovative services because we believe that we have a moral obligation to bring about fundamental change to the way Nigerians live, talk and use communication generally. That is what our brand values - acquisition strategies, distribution and others.”

The recent launches in Abeokuta, Ijebu Ode and Shagamu means that the network is now effectively available in 14 major Nigerian cities namely Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, Maiduguri, Port Harcourt, Onitsha, Aba, Asaba, Kaduna, Benin and Zaria while preparations are in progress to put more cities on air this year with a total of 31 cities targeted to be on air.

Over the years, the company has invested millions in new technologies and innovations towards improving the quality of its products and service with the ultimate aim of building a solid network for voice and data to cater for all categories of subscribers.

The deployment of the world-class CDMA technology in 2002 exponentially established Starcomms as Nigeria's largest CDMA network. As the African leader in the commercialization of CDMA, Starcomms has continued to demonstrate its expertise in maximizing the performance of new technologies across its infrastructure equipment and subscriber products in order to meet customer expectations.

Starcomms' EVDO Mobile Broadband, launched February last year, is the mobile wide area wireless service commercially available today with download speeds of 300-600kbps, with peak carrier capacity of 2.4Mbps.

Based on advanced Third Generation CDMA wireless technology, EVDO, which has been acknowledged to be a revolution in technology advancement, has true mobile broadband access to the Internet, intranet, and e-mail. Among other capabilities, the 3G technology, aptly described as next generation mobile services technology, can deliver improved system capacity and spectrum efficiency over the 2G systems.

The company has continuously partnered with major telecommunication and service providers around the world, including Sony Ericsson, Huawei, Nokia, LG, Motorola and Zenith Bank, as part of the quest to deploy the latest telecommunications equipment for present and future communication needs.

Part of the company's phenomenal growth was propelled by the recent deployment of the CDMA 2000 1X EV-DO technology, the first of its kind in West Africa, and presently being deployed in the United States of America, which gives wireless access to the Internet at the speed of 400-800kbps

Starcomms in 2006 introduced a new concept called 'The call of Freedom', which affords the network's numerous subscribers the flexibility to enjoy numerous

services such as per second billing, SMS, Content, VAS, High Speed Internet, and Fun Box, among others.

Since the offering was introduced, Starcomms had given subscribers a variety from the array of innovative products at highly affordable rates, with a bouquet of mobile phones, desktops and Internet module. The management of Starcomms then promised to extend 'The call of Freedom' to other states in the country, as it continues to expand its network to other major towns and cities across the country.

Last year, Starcomms opened additional Service Centres known as Starcomms Shops in some areas in Lagos, namely Ikotun-Egbe and Apapa, which brings to nine (9) the number of such centres opened in Lagos area alone. These centres are full service centres which provide total communication solutions for data and fixed and wireless customers.

Starcomms has continued to empower Nigerians through the provision of efficient telecommunication services and job creation. For instance, all its CDMA base stations are built as well as maintained by local contractors.

At the heart of the firm's value system are its people, who are driven by the expectations of a five-letter word – PRIDE – which translates to Perfection, Respect, Innovation, Dedication and Excellence.

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