



We must bridge the digital divide

Mark Twomey gets the lowdown on the Azotel / hosting365 wireless-in-a-box broadband package



FRUSTRATION with the roll out of a quality and reliable broadband service has become a common complaint in the regions outside Dublin from residential users right up to SMEs, but all that is set to change with a solution that enables wireless internet service providers (WISPs) to deliver viable, profitable and class-leading broadband services.

The Azotel wireless-in-a-box solution, which is available to entrepreneurs, community groups and existing ISPs, will cater for groups from 30 users up to several thousand. Furthermore, the service requires a minimal investment of only €5,000 so that wireless internet service providers who invest in the wireless-in-a-box (WIB) solution could see a return on investment and enter profitability within nine months.

Azotel will be offered to new and existing operators under the option of managed service or unit franchisee by Internet infrastructure company hosting365. Encompassing transit, monitoring, support, billing, hardware, training, consultancy, marketing packs, financing and backhaul, it is a complete turnkey offering to set up a proven broadband business.

Under the terms of the initiative, Motorola brings a comprehensive range of world-class wireless broadband technology, the Motorola Canopy solution, offering simplicity and quality at volume pricing. Equally attractive deals are included by Bank of Ireland for financing and eNet on backhaul for Azotel operators. It is the

combination of technology and companies that make the proposition so compelling.

As John O'Hare of Azotel explains: "Basically what we are doing is offering a business solution in a box to group broadband operators by making it commercially viable for them to do it. Our belief is that it has to be profitable for it work effectively.

"What we have done is addressed all the gaps in terms of what an operator needs to do through our partners. Hosting365 are the actual sales channel for the Azotel franchise and the ISP model, and the existing operators out there that don't want to go down the franchise route."

The operators will get all the applications and services and support that hosting365 offer: "In terms of the radio access network, we have integrated the Azotel technology with Motorola to provide a seamless integration; the fibre network is provided by eNet from the metropolitan area network that the government have provided to 27 towns and cities throughout the country; in effect they are supplying the oil that is then fed out to the end users, so they are bringing the connectivity," said O'Hare.

"In a nutshell, the Azotel box is connected to the MAN fibre through which it controls the flow of information. This is in turn connected to the nae — the Motorola canopy. This is a radio device. It's the same type at the access point end, the centre of distribution, and the subscriber end. It

sends and receives all the data. The latency is very low on this, at five milliseconds, which is crucial for VOIP."

Since the launch of the service in July, Azotel and hosting365 have had significant interest from all across the country, far greater than they expected, according to O'Hare: "Since it was first reported in the media through

Azotel and hosting365, we have had great interest from owners of business parks who have had no connectivity as it is an ideal add-on to their business to provide this to their tenants. There is great potential with this and this could only have been made possible with the partners."

Paul Lynch, sales director of hosting365, believes that the Azotel solution will offer individual entrepreneurs — existing and potential Internet Service Providers — a unique opportunity to become involved in broadband roll-out: "There is a real issue in the marketplace today as far as wireless ISPs are concerned, in terms of DSL broadband delivery both in the metro level, in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick, and on a regional level by the existing DSL broadband providers. The idea here is to bring together the component parts to offer the tools to a start-up ISP so they can deliver a quality valuable service into a client base, grow value in their company and hold that client base," he says. "To date, eircom have been slow to roll out a wire-

less service; they would say that they have 80% DSL coverage, but I would think that the figure is closer to 65%.”

He says that slow internet access, which has been discussed initially on forums on the internet by small user communities, has become a major political issue.

“The whole fundamental commercial offering of Ireland Inc. is concerned about foreign investment coming into Ireland. Multinational companies are entering areas around the east coast where they know they are going to get access to services and they are avoiding the regions because they

know that the regions cannot support them, so the digital divide has become a problem which can only be rectified by offering realistically priced and high quality regional broadband,” says Lynch. The investment required by a regional wireless ISP to offer a top-end service is huge — they will need software to manage CRM, software for support and monitoring, software for radio access, bandwidth shaping, and much more. Then, if they gain an extra 100 customers they need to be able to offer a wide range of services from video-on-demand to web hosting and these are services that are being sought both in the SOHO and residential markets. Hence many of the operators that have invested into this area with GBS (Group Broadband Scheme) funding from the government are suffering from the same problems.

“If you can build multiple small networks on a regional basis using the same radio access network and the same backend system, suddenly you could have a user group of eight to 10,000 on the back of very low investment. We are looking at the local operators who understand the local market: they know where the high sites are, they know where their client base is and they know where to go.”

Lynch says that the government have also been very proactive with this and they are happy to work in tandem with private companies and the local authorities and have set up the GBS grant scheme. They have awarded 119 licences and they have €25 million to roll-out regional broadband, yet only €4m has been drawn down.

“Hosting365 will give you a wireless internet access in a box for €5,000; this includes the web client which sits at the edge of your network which backs into our hosting centre 24/7,

encompassing transit, monitoring, support, billing, hardware, training, consultancy, marketing packs, financing and backhaul. So suddenly you have the whole backend to a wireless ISP that you could never have as an individual entrepreneur who is looking to set this up,” says Lynch. “The beauty of this system is that the radio technology deployed with this system is cutting edge: it’s low latency, which means that a full spectrum broadband offering is available up to and including VOIP, which you can forget about on dial-up connections.

“An Azotel customer as I see it is an entrepreneur and somebody with limited experience in wireless equipment; that person is potentially a Sky TV installer or somebody working with SME selling routers or somebody who has a connection or who has an ‘in’ into the local community. He will know how many customers he will be able to sign up in the local community and we will give him all the tools he needs to run a successful wireless ISP. We call it WISP in a box; the client sits out there and it aggregates all of his business for him.

Ian Bayly, Director, Motorola Canopy said: “Motorola’s Canopy solution was first deployed in Ireland in Cork in 2004 and is now installed in 130 countries by 3,200 WISPs. The Canopy system is a proven wireless broadband solution and the ideal technology for developing, enhancing and extending wireless broadband networks and services into rural and urban areas.

“The key characteristics of the Canopy system — carrier-grade toughness, exceptional performance, security, low latency for VoIP, ease-of-use and cost effectiveness — make it the perfect fit within the Azotel solution.”

Canopy solutions are part of Motorola’s MOTOwi4 portfolio of innovative wireless broadband solutions and services that creates, complements and completes IP networks. Delivering IP coverage to virtually all spaces, the MOTOwi4 portfolio includes Fixed Wireless Broadband, Mesh, Broadband over Powerline and WiMAX solutions for private and public networks.

■ www.hosting365.com
■ www.azotel.com



AT YOUR FINGERTIPS: John O'Hare, CEO of Azotel, which provides solutions for broadband service provision.