

In Sri Lanka, Wireless Fiber does the talking for Dialog Axiata

Sri Lanka has a population of 21.4 million, distributed among 5 million or so households. Back in 2013, home broadband in the island nation was limited to the affluent, with a penetration rate of less than 9 percent. However, 2013 to 2018 saw a rapid upsurge in subscribers, with Dialog's innovative WTTx solution driving 50 percent of all new subscriptions. With 40 percent of total connections through WTTx as of June 2018, Dialog increased the home broadband penetration ratio from 9 percent to 25 percent in just five years, bridging the digital divide for 0.8 million households.

By James Chen, Sun Xun



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– Pradeep de Almeida, Dialog Axiata's CTO



We interviewed Dialog Axiata's CTO Pradeep de Almeida to find out how the operator embarked on the path to success.

WinWin: During the past 13 years, Dialog has evolved from a traditional telecoms operator to one that integrates digital and fixed network services. How has Dialog's strategy evolved since it was founded?

Pradeep de Almeida: Dialog continues to be at the forefront of technology, as per our brand promise "The Future Today". We've been the first to introduce the latest in technology and innovation to Sri Lankans many times, for example, we were the first to launch GSM in 1995, 3G in 2006, and 4G fixed and mobile services in 2012 and 2013. We were also the first to launch eZ Cash, NB-IoT, VoLTE and eSIM technology. Our vision is to provide multi-sensory connectivity to enrich life for Sri Lankan people and enterprises. Therefore, our focus is to invest in verticals to provide mobile,

fixed, TV, video and digital services. We will continue to invest in innovation, while retaining a role of leadership across various technology spheres.

WinWin: Why did you launch home broadband in Sri Lanka in 2013?

Pradeep: Sri Lanka has approximately 5 million households. In 2012, home broadband was considered a luxury that was primarily concentrated in high-density, high-income areas, and connected with copper. Fixed broadband penetration stood at less than 9 percent, due to the high investment and time required for deployment.

WTTx provided an ideal opportunity to capture this market by re-using existing mobile network infrastructure to deploy a fixed broadband network with a much lower investment and faster time to market.

As a result, from 2013 to 2018, Dialog was able to capture a 50 percent share of the

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net additions in home broadband, thereby increasing market share from 9 percent in 2013 to 30 percent in 2018.

WinWin: How can Dialog deliver affordable broadband services to help bridge the digital divide?

Pradeep: High cabling and maintenance costs and lengthy deployment times are some of the key factors that limit widespread adoption of traditional fixed broadband technologies based on copper or fiber, especially in suburban and rural settings. Wireless networks that provide wider coverage are much better suited for this type of environment. Dialog launched a cash and carry model that helps eliminate the need for expensive field teams to provide the service. It’s a plug and play service that allows us to bring down the cost of broadband significantly.

In addition, we’ve launched both prepaid and postpaid services on WTTx, making it even more affordable and accessible and further bridging the digital divide. Compared to the long-term binding packages, prepaid

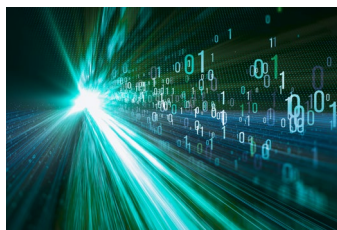
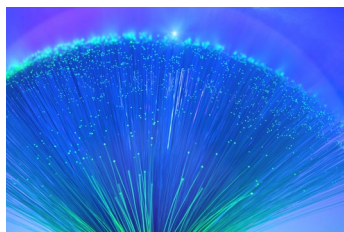
packages allow you to control usage based on affordability.

WinWin: Dialog has achieved great success in delivering the WTTx service. What do you attribute this to?

Pradeep: User experience has played a vital role in WTTx service success as subscribers always want reliable, high-speed Internet. In addition, availability and affordability play key roles in the penetration and adoption of the service.

Moving away from traditional speed-capped packages, Dialog has introduced burstable packages that have enabled users to experience speeds of 100 Mbps and above, while maintaining a guaranteed minimum speed during busy hours. To achieve this, Dialog built its network with advanced technologies, becoming one of the first operators to introduce 4T4R, 8T8R and now Massive MIMO technologies.

WinWin: Dialog is currently at the point of global leadership with Massive MIMO deployment. Why did you consider deploying



this technology?

Pradeep: Massive MIMO plays a pivotal role in our technology strategy, allowing us to achieve greater spectrum efficiency, triple base station capacity, and deliver a fiber-like experience for users. It's enabled us to launch new services, such as video-over-WTTX, and paved the way for the seamless deployment of 5G services in the future. Dialog is planning to expand Massive MIMO deployment across the country, covering up to 60 percent of high-traffic areas with TDD Massive MIMO technology.

WinWin: What are the major points of value provided by WTTx?

Pradeep: There are quite a few:

- Faster deployment and a plug-and-play experience.
- It enables internet, video, voice, and VPN services to address home and enterprise market requirements.
- It gives a fiber-like experience.

WTTx delivers the flexibility to provide speed-

on-demand and affordable prepaid and postpaid services.

And it's future-proof. It enables seamless evolution to 5G and eliminates wasted investment, as base stations can be scaled down or re-deployed if expected targets are not met

WinWin: What advice would you give to other operators thinking of deploying WTTx?

Pradeep: Many operators are waiting for 5G to arrive before they launch wireless home broadband services. Based on Dialog's experience, I would say:

- Stop waiting and start building the Fixed Wireless Access Network today to enable the smooth evolution to 5G.
- Look for potential growth areas and build the network based on demand.
- Learn from your fixed wireless experience as it will be beneficial for 5G FWA service deployment.
- Ensure customer experience remains good and provide customers with the latest technologies and benefits. [um](#)