

Orange Morocco

Winning with wireless

Bordering the North Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean, Morocco is home to a robust telecommunications ecosystem, with a mobile penetration rate of 131 percent and one of the lowest broadband Internet prices in the region. Orange Morocco CEO Yves Gauthier explains how the French telco is making some serious plays in the nation's mobile broadband (MBB) market by focusing on innovation to realize its strategic connectivity targets of speed, expansion, and empowerment.

By Gary Maidment



Quick off the blocks

Headquartered in Casablanca, Orange Morocco was founded in 1999 after the acquisition of Meditel. Fast forward 20 years and the Orange subsidiary has established a strong presence in the nation of 35.6 million, boasting more than 15.3 million subscribers. In the first half of 2018, it won the national Speed Test Award for the fastest mobile network after hitting 19.12 Mbps. And that's just what the market wants. "What customers expect today is speed and bandwidth," says Gauthier. Nevertheless, he recognizes that while speed is the metric in this case, the true value lies in what it enables the network to provide Orange Morocco's customers, "It's the customer who recognizes that we offer the best network in terms of bandwidth and data. The award is just a way to make people aware of what you've done."

Fixed on wireless

Meeting customers' burgeoning data needs is central to Orange Morocco's strategy. But with little room to expand in the fixed market, the operator has focused on innovating solutions that, in Gauthier's words, "deploy data to the home very quickly." Fast service rollout in a data-hungry market is essential, he says, "But deploying fiber takes time. So while we know we need to deploy fiber, we sought a wireless solution to bring Internet to the homes of our customers."

Orange Morocco deployed a wireless WTTx solution that combines the Huawei CPE B612 with its Dar Box, a bold move given that for many operators, wireless solutions are uncharted territory.



WTTx generally suits SMEs and homes in rural areas, urban pockets that aren't well covered by FTTH, and emerging markets that lack the fixed infrastructure to deliver broadband using fiber, copper, or hybrid schemes.

WTTx uses wireless technologies such as 4G LTE to connect base stations to fixed wireless terminals, which provide backhaul capabilities for customer premises equipment (CPE). In any scenario, its major selling point is the ability to connect the disproportionately expensive last-mile at a far cheaper rollout cost than FTTH, but with the same functionality, "It offers Internet, it offers voice, and for us it's more competitive than ADSL," says Gauthier.

While he doesn't necessarily see WTTx as replacing fixed technologies, the strong competitive nature of the joint solution is a major draw. "It's a way to develop fixed customers very quickly with a good technology," he says. In terms of its current success, Gauthier is clear on the importance of collaboration, "I think the success of the Dar Box is due to the collaboration between us and Huawei. We count Huawei as one of our main providers – we're mainly using their network and CPE, so I believe we have to keep our strong cooperation to keep this leadership." Looking to the future, he says that, "We will migrate our customers to fiber or 5G."

Ubiquitous connectivity isn't always about the bottom line

Back to the present, Orange Morocco is committed to expanding 4G coverage to rural areas under the government-led program, Universal Services. Mobile penetration may be high in Morocco, but there's still much work to do to ready its ICT infrastructure for ubiquitous connectivity, 5G rollout, the wider adoption of artificial intelligence, and the thriving digital economy that these milestones will enable.

In Huawei's Global Connectivity Index (GCI) 2018, Morocco ranks 65th out of 79 countries in terms of ICT maturity. That said, GCI 2018 recognizes that the African nation has been making solid progress in rolling out wireless technology, with 60 percent of the nation currently covered by 4G.

However, as is the case the world over, rural areas tend to be left behind when it comes to coverage – a fact that the government recognizes with its Universal Services program, especially in the context of achieving the national digital plan, Maroc 2020. According to Gauthier. “The Universal Services fund is designed to finance the development of mobile infrastructure in rural areas, which isn't traditionally profitable for operators.” Indeed, low ARPU from a sparse population coupled with a lack of existing infrastructure, power supply, and transmission networks do not make for good business. Deploying base stations in remote areas can mean an ROI of up to 10 years due to high installation CAPEX (up to

US\$100,000) plus OPEX of around US\$9,000 per year.

Empowerment is essential for development

In tandem with its commitment to connecting remote areas, Orange Morocco's strategy includes empowering women through digital technology. While great strides have been made in national literacy, for example, illiteracy in Morocco tends to be more widespread among girls and women. And in remote rural areas located far from schools, female illiteracy can be as high as 90 percent. “With the Orange Digital House Foundation, we're bringing digital technologies to rural areas, teaching women to use tablets and, where needed, to read and write,” says Gauthier. “If you want to have a better future and be part of the digital economy, these skills are essential.” They're also key building blocks for a strong national economy: according to an OECD report in 2016, gender disparity costs the global economy an estimated US\$12 trillion per year.

In its analysis of Morocco, the Huawei GCI 2018 recommends that, “Morocco should continue to expand its digital infrastructure and online content. They need to expand citizens' access to broadband with an emphasis on sharing knowledge and supporting local service providers to develop IT markets.” Alongside partners like Orange Morocco and Huawei, the government's commitment to achieving ubiquitous connectivity and connecting the unconnected in rural areas are steps in the right direction. [www](#)