

Up in the sky

Satellite broadband is set to become a serious competitor to the wire-based networks, according to Skyware Global. Rupert Cornford reports on the company's future plans

The proliferation of high-speed broadband is an unstoppable train. The demands of consumers have been coupled with government policy to ensure that we become a truly digital nation. Much work is needed to improve the network infrastructure, but there are local examples of projects being undertaken to improve accessibility and speed.

For most this means fixed-line or fibre optic networks, which account for 90 per cent of the global broadband market. But for one new company, headquar-

tered in Accrington, the growth of satellite broadband, which offers connectivity via a satellite in orbit, is set to redraw the map of internet access across the world.

"Satellite broadband was a niche product that would fill in when someone had no other alternative," says David McCourt, chief executive of Skyware Global. "But the new satellites going up are able to provide similar speeds, and the new business models are looking at similar pricing, so I think it will be a direct competitor."

The company was formed in 2009 when US telecoms entrepreneur McCourt combined the forces of his investment firm, Granahan McCourt Capital, and another private investment firm, The Edgewater Funds, to create Satellite Holdings. His aim was to build the world's first "total solutions" provider of antenna systems to the satellite entertainment and broadband markets. In January 2009 Satellite Holdings made its first acquisition with a deal to buy Accrington's Raven Group (including Raven Manufacturing, one of our Growth 100 companies), which manufactures antenna and products for the satellite TV industry. This was followed by the acquisition of business units from ASC Signal Corporation in the US and its operating entity in China in June 2009; and the 100 per cent stock purchase of Germany's Skyware Radio Systems. In October, the whole company was rebranded as Skyware Global to reflect its future ambitions. According to the company, these merged entities have a bigger product range, greater engineering capabilities and manufacturing facilities on three continents. McCourt says: "If you look at the expansion of satellite entertainment and now broadband, we saw there was a need for the most sophisticated and reliable equipment in the industry. There were companies that did pieces of it; there was no-one that wanted to take on all the equipment needed to drive down cost and improve innovation.

The North West connection – Raven Group

- Company was founded 25 years ago
 - Started making satellites in 1990 and was one of the first to get involved with BSkyB's move into direct-to-home TV
 - Started developing opportunities in satellite broadband, mainly in the US, during 2003
 - Opened a factory in Chicago in 2004 and has become one of the three largest providers of satellite broadband in the US
 - Acquired by US investment company Satellite Holdings in 2009 to become part of Skyware Global, which is headquartered in Accrington
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I think we stand alone and are unique in that respect." Skyware Global has earmarked \$4bn of revenue it is chasing in the broadband and entertainment industry. As well as the proliferation of direct-to-home TV products, which has been boosted by relationships with Sky and other global TV providers, the company is also hoping to capitalise on the anticipated rise of satellite broadband, which McCourt believes will explode over the next few years. "There are approximately one million users at the moment," he says, "but we think that over the next ten years that will increase to ten million. If you look backwards, cable is dominant; if you look forwards satellite will never be 100 per cent but it will be a serious player."



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