

TECHNOLOGY

Thaicom targets tourists with launch of Spot Gen 4

KOMSAN TORTERMSASANA

SET-listed satellite operator Thaicom plans to launch Spot Gen 4 as the country's first tracking service via a low Earth orbit (LEO) satellite in the fourth quarter of this year, targeting the tourism and maritime industries in Thailand and the region.

The move follows a commercial partnership signed last year between Thaicom and Globalstar relating to the narrow-band LEO satellite business. Globalstar is a global LEO satellite operator and a leading provider of satellite Internet of Things (IoT) solutions and mobile satellite services.

Thaicom chief executive Patompob Suwansiri said the launch of Spot Gen 4 will be piloted in Phuket, where the company has registered demand for thousands of devices related to businesses involving tracking solutions.

The Spot Gen 4 device uses a satellite-based tracking system to safeguard tourists and can help promote local marine tourism, he said. The device can be attached to a life jacket.

The long-term partnership agreement between Thaicom and Globalstar comprises two categories.

First, Globalstar hires Thaicom to develop, equip and operate ground station facilities in Thailand at Thaicom's Teleport Center, located in Pathum Thani province, for Globalstar's LEO satellite constellation.

The infrastructure and services at the ground station enable the deployment of commercial LEO satellite services by Globalstar in the region.

Second, Thaicom is an exclusive partner for the distribution of Globalstar's LEO satellites in Thailand.

Mr Patompob said the construction of the infrastructure and a ground station is finished, while some equipment has been imported and installed, allowing



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the company to start the services.

The partnership deal aims to cash in on Thaicom's local ground facilities and regional service deployment, focusing on sectors of personnel safety and management solutions for the country's tourism and maritime industries, he said.

The deal with Globalstar forms part of Thaicom's business development roadmap as the LEO satellite business is one prong of its diversification and can complement its satellite services portfolio, said Mr Patompob.

Thaicom was awarded a landing licence related to foreign satellites by the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC).

He said the company already demonstrated the IoT products that will be serviced through Globalstar's LEO satellites.

The size of the Spot Gen 4 device is smaller than the palm of a person's hand, while assets or humans can be monitored remotely via the satel-

lite network.

Thaicom priced the device at 6,000 baht per unit, excluding a monthly fee users must pay to Thaicom.

Mr Patompob said it is too early to estimate a revenue stream for the Spot Gen 4 service in the country. Solutions and services offered via LEO satellites represent the early development of Thaicom's LEO business, he said.

LEO satellites operate between 500 kilometres and 2,000km above the Earth's surface, compared with the 36,000km height of geostationary satellites, the traditional type of communication satellites.

The advantage of the lower orbit is lower latency, benefiting those with access to high-speed internet services via 5G technology, IoT devices, machine-to-machine technology, as well as drone technology and applications in areas that require high levels of accuracy, such as remote surgery.

LEO satellites can be broadband or narrow-band satellites.



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PATOMPOB SUWANSIRI
Chief executive, Thaicom