

TECHNOLOGY

AIS gives superblock bandwidth a leg up

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Advanced Info Service (AIS) is implementing new upgrades to its “superblock” bandwidth structure, aiming to reinvigorate the country’s largest mobile operator as it faced stagnant subscriber growth the past few years because of a saturated mobile market.

The company claims the new superblock will help boost service speeds by 30%, while accommodating up to 52 million customers.

In August, AIS secured an additional 5x2 megahertz of bandwidth on the 1800MHz range in an auction, bringing its total to 20MHz on one band and making upgrades to the superblock possible.

“AIS has the most spectrum bandwidth with a total of 60x2MHz of download and upload, the highest for the first time since it joined 28 years ago. We also have the highest capacity for a block of spectrum,” said Prathana Leelapanang, chief of consumer business officer for AIS.

As of June, AIS had about 40 million subscribers, followed by True Move with 27 million and Total Access Communication (DTAC) 22 million.

AIS has 60x2MHz of total bandwidth, True Move 55x2 and DTAC 50x2.

As Thailand’s mobile subscriber penetration reached 130% — where subscribers exceed the actual population — Mr Prathana acknowledged mobile operators will continue to face subscriber growth decline.



AIS chief executive Somchai Lertsutiwong shows the operating licence for the 1800MHz spectrum awarded yesterday by NBTC.

“In this saturated market, we must offset slowing subscriber growth by continuing to develop new ways to capture increasing value, both by broadening our business models and by investing in new network technologies and services,” he said.

“We need to move beyond subscriber growth — developing more innovative services to encourage individual users and business operators to benefit from the economic opportunities that mobile connectivity brings.”

Average monthly revenue per AIS post-paid user is 600 baht, while total average revenue per AIS user is over 300 baht per month.

With revenue slowing for traditional mobile services, Mr Prathana said AIS is turning towards new markets such as machine-to-machine, mobile transactions

and other services on mobile devices.

AIS is emphasising research-based product planning and market segmentation. The company has defined different target markets and uses a variety of popular influencers to drive brand engagement with customers.

AIS has three major customer groups: mass market (20 million); teens (4-5 million); and urban consumers (12-16 million).

He said AIS still projects an image of lacking leadership when compared with its smaller rival True Move, which is the brand consumers think of first when asked about telecom companies, despite having less subscribers.

AIS expects its fixed-line broadband subscribers to reach 800,000 by year-end, up from its current tally of 640,000, said Mr Prathana.