



Islander June 2012 Technology Update

Extend your communications and support capabilities with these interesting new products.

We have been introduced to several innovative high tech items this month. Out of these, I have selected a couple which are about to be launched into the market, both of which can provide tremendous benefits to yachts and to the land-based service industry that keeps them all afloat.

True Connect – GSM, 3G and UMTS signal booster

We are currently testing a unique GSM and 3G signal booster called True Connect. It really is unique, as it performs like no others we have used before.

True Connect enables you to extend your GSM and 3G signal up to 40km offshore and into quiet and secluded anchorages where previously there would have been no signal.

We asked the designers why it is unique and they told us it is because their product outperforms any other products. This unit has no less than 6 specific noise filters (in and out for each modem) and an individual gain control for every frequency. Also, the unit has been tested and optimised for life at sea. In fact, it is specifically designed and is fully compliant for use at sea, and cannot be used ashore. The designers are working on a similar booster that will be approved for use ashore.

Covering all 3 European frequencies (a US model is also available) it picks up the faintest signal from a GSM tower up to 40km off shore, amplifies and filters out the noise, and retransmits the signal aboard the vessel. Guests and crew can therefore use their mobile phone and 3G device as if on land.

We have been aware of the product since its conception. The designers have tested it on various vessels at sea during the development phase, and were very pleased to receive positive feedback from those vessels that they were regularly getting excellent reception 40km offshore with a 10m high antenna. The higher the antenna is mounted, the better the range will be.

This should prove particularly useful in the Med where GSM, 3G and UMTS coverage is extensive, and yachts mostly cruise around the coastlines. It will enable extended use by every one of their own cell phones. Captains should no longer get the request to “anchor in the next bay” to get a signal.

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This is a great solution for any size or type of yacht that cruises in areas with GSM, 3G and UMTS coverage.

The unit is easy to install and consists of a complete kit of all the required equipment: external antenna, main booster unit, internal antenna, power injector and all necessary cabling and mounting brackets. Accessories are also available to distribute the signal around the yacht to engineering spaces such as the engine room where engineers were previously unable to use their cell phones.

A 4G version of the True Connect is in development.

Imagine having a serious problem on board such as the internet connection fails or, even worse, a guest has a heart attack...

Then imagine how much easier it would be for someone to help you if they could see what you are doing by looking through your eyes and be able to talk to you and the patient at the same time?

A few weeks ago we conducted an evaluation presentation of a new product designed and manufactured by Modern Security Solutions to user requirements validated for medical use by Dr David Irons of Ocean Medical International, and by ourselves for Remote Technical use.

It is a communication device for anyone needing to communicate with another from a remote location, live, and for any reason. We have called it eYES & eARS powered by AFIANT.

Put simply, it place shifts the **EYES** and **EARS** of the wearer to anyone else, anywhere in the world via a web browser.

The unique feature of this new product is that it not only communicates using voice but also uses live vision. The product consists of a headset with a camera with a small backpack.

Your imagination can run riot as to what it can be used for. Between us and our evaluation guests, we came up with a plethora of ideas:

- Medical support, help and intervention.
- Remote service to equipment on board.
- To enable immediate warranty service post refit or launch wherever the yacht is after it has left the yard.
- Showing & discussing with an owner the progress of a refit.
- A brief initial view & discussion of a boat for sale.
- Sending live video and commentary from a yacht race.
- How to insert a card in a decoder!

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- Selection of different fabric options.

Basically, it enables more complex procedures to be handled remotely and in turn will increase the comfort factor for an owner to use their yacht in more remote locations. Due to the vision it enables faster help and diagnosis – in an emergency it could be a potential life saver.

You may think this could be done using a smart phone or one of the many cameras you can buy on the internet for mounting on your helmet whilst cycling. Between us we have tried them all and none work successfully.

The design goal was to provide a flexible, portable, hands free, rugged, waterproof and rapidly deployable solution for global remote audio and video transmission. It has been designed and built to a number of military specifications and is thus extremely reliable and easy to use.

One of the most impressive features is the video compression. This is what make this device unique and allows it to be used with all the yacht's communication connections including, VSAT, Inmarsat Fleet Broadband, 3G and wi-fi at a very reasonable cost. It connects via a wi-fi access point or alternatively via 3G with its own on-board 3G SIM card.

As can be seen in the photos eYES & eARS powered by AFIANT primarily consists of a custom waterproof headset with a mike, bullet camera and a small waterproof backpack. There are various additional options such as a range of cameras including night vision.

Our evaluation presentation was a success. We had invited a cross section of professionals from the industry including captains, project managers, both independent and attached to yards, yacht builder representatives, yacht managers and brokers. The overall feedback we got was very clear, "every yacht should have one, particularly if their cruising itinerary takes them offshore". Another comment from the project managers was "it would save us a lot of money by clearly identifying if warranty call-outs were necessary".

In my opinion, this month's two new products complement each other superbly.

Cobham, owners of Sea Tel, acquires Thrane & Thrane

The big corporate news this month has been the acquisition by Cobham of Thrane & Thrane.

On 3rd May, British defence equipment manufacturer Cobham, owners of Sea Tel inc, finally secured a recommended £275 million

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takeover of Danish satellite telecommunications group Thrane & Thrane.

It's going to be interesting to watch and see how Sea Tel and Thrane & Thrane, whose main brand in our business is Sailor, work together. A few months ago, Sea Tel launched their own Fleet Broadband terminal in direct competition with the industry standard Sailor Fleet Broadband terminals and Thrane & Thrane launched their own VSAT antenna.

Cobham has been stalking Thrane for the best part of a year and launched a £270 million bid in March, which it withdrew, and then re-launched last month at the same price after Thrane's chief executive resigned. Over recent months Cobham has built up a 25.6% stake in the business.

They won the agreement of the founder and 22.7%-shareholder Lars Thrane by tweaking up their offer by 15 Kroner (£1.64) to 435 Kroner per share.

And finally littleBits

If you, or your kids, are interested in learning more about electronics and how things work take a look at the web site for littleBits, www.littlebits.cc.

It is an open source library of electronic modules that snap together with tiny magnets for prototyping and play.

As the web site states, "we spend more than 7.5 hours with technological devices every day, but most us don't know how they work, or how to make our own. For all the interactivity of these devices, we are bound to passive consumption. At littleBits, we believe we need to create scientific thinkers and problem-solvers, and interventions need to occur early. The time is ripe to create the pipe cleaner and the popsicle stick of the 21st century. littleBits consists of tiny circuit-boards with simple, unique functions engineered to snap together with magnets. No soldering, no wiring, no programming, just snap and play."

They are spot on. With regard to technology we are mostly consumers rather than inventors. Look what Lego did for house building and grand designs. Maybe littleBits could stimulate a new Steve Jobs!

Roger Horner of e3 Systems

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