

## Avanti's Quest to Connect Unconnected Africa

Kyle Whitehill, CEO of Avanti Communications and TechAfrica News discussed the future of connectivity in Africa and Avanti's footprint in the satellite industry.



INTERVIEW BY:

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**I am happy to be catching up with you Kyle. Can you tell us more about Avanti's footprint and activities in Africa?**

Africa is the heart of the Avanti business, most of our capacity and customers are in Africa.

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CEO

finally today, people are talking about "we are now connecting" the people who get mobile connectivity for the first time. I think the energy has changed from three years ago.

What is amazing about the industry today, is the fact that we have Elon Musk, we have OneWeb, we have Apple, and we have lots and lots of new people talking about new types of technology, but all with this one aim in mind - connecting the people of Africa.

**The satellite market is quite dynamic, and we have seen a lot of changes in the past years. How is Avanti adjusting to the ever-changing needs of the clients?**

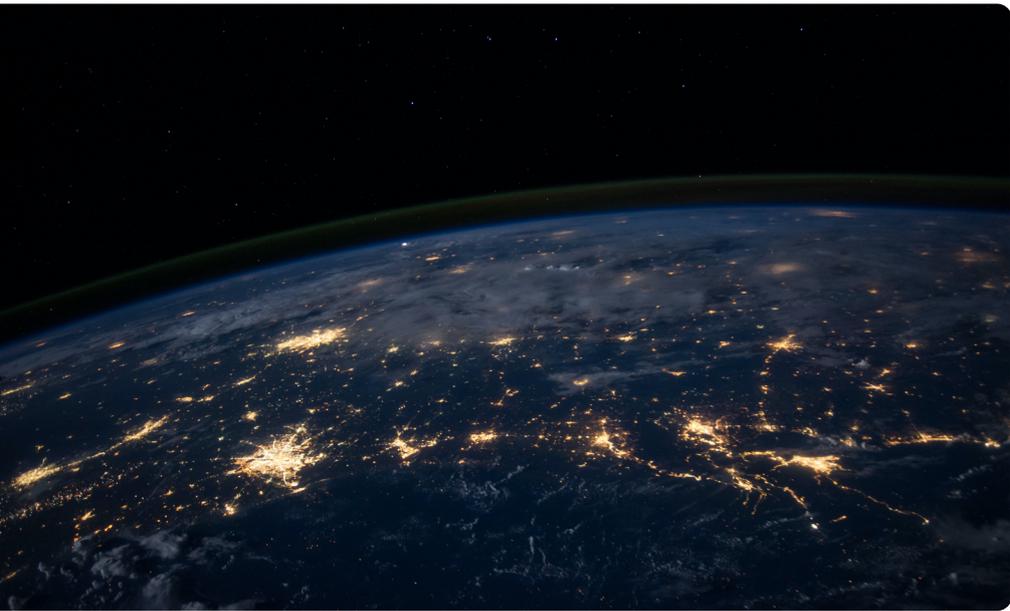
I have almost 20 years in the mobile industry, most of it with Vodafone. My view from the start has always been, that customers want a service, and it shouldn't really matter which

network delivers that service, because ultimately, we use our phones to make phone calls or to use an app, and we need this service now.

This dynamic industry has forced us to face up to the fact that what the customer needs is what we need to deliver, and to not be so fixated by "it has to be my network". I don't believe in that anymore. I believe very passionately now that my role in the industry is to try and help to connect people and to try and do that, whether it's my network or someone else's network.

**We know that you are expanding to West African countries thanks to your new satellite gateway in Senegal. Can you tell us more about this project?**

The HYLAS 4 was designed to be able to cover Sub-Saharan Africa, and we built two gateways, one in Johannesburg and one in Lagos,



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I want to go to my customers and say, look, don't think about Avanti as HYLAS 4. Think about Avanti as someone who can deliver you GEO, MEO, and LEO capacity. Whatever the right solution for you is, then this is what we will bring you.

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CEO

which is primarily serving central and southern Africa. We always had the plan to build a gateway in Senegal because that allowed us to enter new countries, in which we don't have any capabilities right now. Last year we signed agreements with three countries, and we should be in service in the first quarter of 2023, giving proper internet access to Senegal, Gambia, Ivory Coast, and six or seven new countries that we don't physically have the capability in now.

high cost of deploying into very rural communities. This business case didn't work and each year we'd come back to the office and think "I don't know how to connect this next set of population." We didn't have an answer, but we never thought about satellites at that point because at that point, satellite was always considered to be expensive, and it wasn't really what mobile operators were interested in. So, of course, the irony is now I'm a satellite guy. Four years ago, the only people

who are going to connect the unconnected were the mobile operators for two reasons. It's in the interest of the mobile operator to deploy more networks to generate more revenue. And secondly, governments, through the regulators are saying you need to start connecting these rural communities as well. This has forced mobile operators to look at it in a very different way. So now, instead of it being a traditional 40, 50, 100 meters tower with full electronics on there, which

**Do you see satellite connectivity as the way to connect the unconnected population in rural and semi-rural areas in Africa?**

I'm 100% convinced about that. Let me explain, I was the CEO of Vodafone in Ghana for three years. Every year we were presenting our network rollout plan to the Vodafone group and every year the plan was becoming less and less affordable, because of the



you would have in urban areas, you've got very exciting new developments with very low-cost towers, which can cost less than \$12,000, which are perfect for rural communities. It had to be a low-cost model. In my view, it's the mobile operators who are going to get to the rural populations.

### What does the future hold for Avanti?

Primarily we are going to focus on not being precious about our own network. Along with this, we want to focus on two things.

Firstly, we must be good with our customers - which means being commercially good and also good when it comes to delivering our service.

Secondly, we've just announced two or three deals where we're representing other satellite operators' capacity in areas where we are strong, like Africa. So, we've done a deal with Eutelsat, and we've done a deal with TURKSAT. We have another one on the go. I want to go to my

customers and say, look, don't think about Avanti as HYLAS 4. Think about Avanti as someone who can deliver you GEO, MEO, and LEO capacity. Whatever the right solution for you is, then this is what we will bring you, without worrying about what that technology is.

We really want to be bigger, doing what we do well in Africa, but I want to be able to deliver more and more networks into more and more rural communities. Essentially, when think about connecting people, we think about it in our terms, which is all beyond Facebook and Twitter. Whereas in rural Africa, of course, they have very different needs, everything's got to be about how can you help develop rural Africa - food, medicine, and education. These are the things at the heart of economic development in Africa.



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