Andean Tower Partners readying DAS and small cell projects

By Phil Anderson - Thursday, January 4, 2018


Source:Digital Bridge

South American passive infrastructure and connectivity provider Andean Tower Partners expects to deploy more than 300 small cells in Peru this year, as well as 100-200 units in Colombia and around 100 in Chile, executives told BNamericas.

Additionally, ATP is developing nine Distributed Antenna System (DAS) projects in the region, which will become operational during 2018, including one that is already live, according to Marc Ganzi (pictured), CEO of ATP parent company Digital Bridge. The largest of the DAS projects is a contract with Lima International Airport.

Sister company Mexico Tower Partners (MTP) operates 15 indoor DAS networks and two outdoor small cell networks, Ganzi added.

The small cell projects in Colombia and Chile include deployments of the ePole solution, which resembles a lamp-post but contains a low-power, low-coverage radio for filling in spaces that are poorly covered by traditional base stations, particularly in areas of strong demand. ATP has deployed 14 such poles in Bogotá so far.

This product – available due to Digtial Bridge's recent acquisition of Colombian firm Axcellnet – is particularly ideal for Chile, where strict tower placement rules limit the prospects for installing traditional base stations, Ganzi pointed out.

Unfortunately for MTP, the rules are relatively lax in Mexico and operators or infrastructure providers can often install towers with little attention to permits, according to Ganzi. As a result, there is not much demand for the ePole solution in Mexico. However, Ganzi believes international best practices for tower zoning will eventually come into play in this market.

STRATEGIC ASSETS

In February 2017, Colombian power distribution firm ISA acquired a 48% stake in ATP for US$80mn. As a result of the deal, ATP has access to fiber infrastructure operated by ISA's connectivity unit Internexa, amounting to some 35,000km in Colombia, Peru and Chile.

The agreement also includes a leasing agreement for 32,000 sites that can be used for macro base stations and small cells, all served by fiber, whereas less than 10% of the 2,150 sites owned directly by ATP are served by fiber today, according to ATP chief executive Daniel Seiner.

In many cases, Ganzi believes it will be in the interest of ATP or Internexa to build lateral fiber extensions from the Internexa backbone to carriers' new sites, or as a means of upgrading connectivity to existing sites, many of which are served by microwave backhaul today.

In the US, Digital Bridge controls a datacenter unit called Vantage. Ganzi and Seiner agree that ATP would be well-positioned for such a venture in Latin America, especially as operators talk more and more of moving to software-defined networks and cloud Radio Access Networks (cRAN), which will require hubs that bring together RAN, interconnection and nodes belonging to content providers like Amazon, Apple, Google and Netflix.

"Those hubs will need power, cooling, security and connectivity, very much like a datacenter environment. It's not core to ATP's business today, but it's something we do think about," Ganzi concluded.