

***Anil Tandan, Chief Technology Officer, Idea Cellular highlights Idea's experience and initiatives in the infrastructure sharing space. Excerpts...***

**What has been your experience in the passive infrastructure sharing space?**

Recognising the need to save capex, we were one of the initial players to start sharing at a bilateral level, first with Vodafone and then with Bharti Airtel. By and large, despite the reluctance of the business, it went off very well, and we were able to achieve a fair amount of sharing. Post the emergence of the tower industry towards the end 2006, we were again one of the first companies to support that model. These companies were initially not so well established in their operations and maintenance, but over time they have developed expertise in that area. Also, with consolidation, these companies have now been able to achieve economies of scale. However, the issue of energy charge continues to be a matter of concern. Overall, our experience in this space has been very satisfactory.

**What are your initiatives in the active infrastructure sharing space? What are the key bottlenecks in its uptake?**

In active infrastructure sharing, we cannot share spectrum. Only antennas, base transceiver stations, feeders, cables and the backhaul can be shared. If two operators are rolling out their networks together, there is a better probability for active infrastructure sharing as both the companies can source equipment from the same vendor. This is because compatibility of equipment is a key issue. For instance, Idea and Vodafone Essar have implemented both active (limited to transmission) and passive infrastructure sharing on a large scale in the Bihar circle, as both companies were rolling out their networks at the same time. This is, so far, the only deal of its kind in the country and has been very successful. In my opinion, there are more technical issues and not so much of a cost benefit in active sharing in the case of operators with already established networks. The other offshoot of active sharing is intra-circle roaming. A number of operators are currently working on this and we are also in the process of ironing out the details for intra-circle roaming in our new circles.

**What are the back-up power solutions that your organisation is experimenting with?**

When the towers were under our control, we experimented with alternative power solutions such as biofuels and windmills to power base stations. We used biofuels in collaboration with Ericsson and separately installed a small windmill to run a repeater site in Maharashtra. With Idea Cellular hiving off most of the towers to Indus, our focus on this area has reduced slightly. This is because our impact is minimal, since we own a limited number of towers. In this field, we are now hoping to pick up from the learnings of the tower companies. We are also focusing on this area as part of the Indus Tower Company.

**What is the future outlook for the Indian tower industry? Is there likely to be an oversupply situation with so many companies rolling out towers?**

We never expected all the operators to roll out independent networks. Rural rollouts are going to be limited, and sharing, either through intra-circle roaming or some other form will need to be implemented. The tower companies may not feel the need to build any more towers. The challenge for these companies will be to increase the tenancy, as profitability depends on a good tenancy ratio (of two) on the existing sites. In rural areas, most of the existing towers are with Indus because of the highest level of rural deployment by Bharti Airtel, Vodafone Essar and Idea Cellular. The challenge for the tower companies will be to raise the tenancy ratios on their towers in these regions, unless they need to roll out more towers in case of demand.

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