

Broadband uptake in the country has been very slow so far. However, with the government now increasing its focus on the segment, operators have started investing in broadband wireless access technologies such as Wi-Fi and Wi-Max.

Wi-Fi, in fact, has already carved a niche for itself in the industry and has emerged as a viable option for providing connectivity within a small area, or hotspot. More importantly, this technology has been effective in providing broadband access in remote regions.

This presents a major opportunity for companies like O-Zone, which has based its business case on tapping the potential offered by Wi-Fi deployments.

### **Background**

O-Zone's establishment was inspired by the success of popular European wireless broadband operator, The Cloud. Founded in 2003, The Cloud has made a name for itself by providing Wi-Fi connectivity at thousands of indoor and outdoor locations. It has done well in Amsterdam, Stuttgart and London, and in countries like Sweden, Denmark and Norway.

Looking to replicate the company's success in India, Sanjeev Sarin established O-Zone in 2007. The company is backed by US-based Access Industries.

O-Zone's business plan has been to develop a wireless broadband network, which is a hybrid of owned, overlaid and roaming networks. This network is meant to provide an integrated and seamless mobile broadband experience for the retail, commercial, leisure, hospitality, transportation and residential segments.

The company's service portfolio includes offerings for enterprise customers as well as service providers. For example, O-Zone's Guest solution for enterprise customers segregates the

internet access device, which offers a secure system that separates a company's employees (permanent users) from its guests (temporary users) without the IT department's intervention. Through this system, a third party can use the network like a mobile cyber café.

For telecom service providers, O-Zone is building and operating a Wi-Fi network, using which the telecom operator can connect with and resell bandwidth to its existing customers.

### **Recent initiatives**

This year has been a busy one for the company. It has received several contracts from telecom vendors, construction majors, content providers and operators.

In April 2011, O-Zone signed an agreement with Alcatel-Lucent to jointly develop Wi-Fi hotspots across the country. As per the agreement, Alcatel-Lucent will provide technology support to O-Zone, which will enable users to seamlessly migrate from their existing mobile networks to Wi-Fi whenever they are within the Wi-Fi hotspots developed by O-Zone. The network will have intelligent features to identify the subscribers' usage pattern on the network and provide preferred content without requiring users to browse or search on the internet.

The company has also initiated discussions with Vodafone Essar and Idea Cellular to provide internet connectivity at Wi-Fi-networked public places.

In December 2010, O-Zone signed an eight-year contract with the Ansal Group to provide Wi-Fi services at various Ansal Plaza malls in north India. The company has set up kiosks at these malls for selling Wi-Fi vouchers.

It has also tied up with entertainment major T-Series and with the Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf chain of coffee shops to provide Wi-Fi services at its outlets.

### **The road ahead**

In the long term, O-Zone plans to diversify its client and product portfolios. It is counting on major players in the transportation, education and medical service sectors to increase its clientele and intends to offer services such as VOIP, security, advertising and marketing, management systems and gaming.

In April 2011, the company announced its plans to launch an initial public offering worth Rs 8 billion in the next 12 months.

O-Zone also intends to increase its reach over the next few years and set up 50,000 Wi-Fi sites by 2013-14.

Net, net, the company is geared up to capitalise on the business opportunities presented by the growth in Wi-Fi penetration in the coming years.

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