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Google-backed O3b Networks to bring Internet to developing nations

by Stevie Smith - Sep 10 2008, 10:55



HSBC, and John Malone look to bring high-speed Internet to developing nations. Image: madnzany/Flickr.

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Search engine specialist Google Inc. has announced it is joining forces with cable TV giant John Malone and the HSBC in an ambitious project designed to bring cheaper, high-speed Internet [access](#) to some three billion people in places such as Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

The project, O3b [Networks](#), has been named as such in light of the ‘other 3bn’ people of the planet’s six billion-strong population who are currently without the kind of online access most of us take for granted each day.

The O3b Networks will consist of a minimum of 16 satellites that will be positioned in orbit to provide widespread coverage to those areas where high-speed online services have traditionally labelled as commercial non-starters.

The joint partners are today expected to confirm an order with French aerospace manufacturer Thales Alenia for the 16 aforementioned low-Earth satellites as the O3b Networks project shifts forward in what is believed to be a \$750 million USD venture.

Current funding from the three main partners, and also media advisory specialist Allen & Company, stands at around \$65 million USD, with Google, HSBC and John Malone committing an initial \$20 million USD each while Allen & Company has injected a further \$5 million USD into the cumulative pot.

[The Financial Times](#) reports that HSBC has outlined it will lead the effort to secure more financing over the next two years, with some 70 percent of the project’s total funding expected to emanate from the debt markets.

O3b Networks’ founder Greg Wyler has intimated that the project’s collection of satellites should be orbiting and operational by the close of 2010, while the International Telecommunication Union has been lined up to supply the necessary wireless spectrum.

Google product manager Larry Alder has commented that the O3b Networks project could potentially reduce the cost of bandwidth in emerging markets by as much as 95 percent and should provide a significant coverage boost for areas that would be otherwise overlook

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