

# AT SEA, LOW-COST BROADBAND TO PHONE HOME

*In addition to navigation, communication and fish finding equipment, marine electronics provider Vikmar offers unique solutions for both domestic and foreign markets—including a revolutionary communication concept for seafarers and an online ship tracking service for landlubbers.*

SOME SAY that with skill, the sheer smallness of the Faroe Islands can be turned into a sizeable competitive advantage on the international level. Take Vikmar, a marine electronics provider based in Tórshavn, with an impressive range of products and services for sea vessels and onshore customers related to the maritime world. Having developed its own special brand of inexpensive at-sea broadband communication as well as a unique online ship tracking information service, Vikmar is looking to expand its growing business to Iceland and other neighboring countries.

“Our market is not confined to the Faroes,” as Jan Egholm, Vikmar partner and general manager noted. “We have seen a strong demand for some of our products in Iceland as well as in Norway and elsewhere. In order to serve those markets, we have decided to work



with local, regional and domestic dealers there instead of setting up our own overseas branches.”

The latest Vikmar service to grab the attention of Faroe fishing vessels is what has been named Viknet Broadband at Sea. This is a whole broadband communication solution for use at sea, boasting everything from IP telephony to digital image transmission, email and Internet access—all at low cost, including international telephone calls, which is nothing but revolutionary. The product was preceded by the likewise satellite based Viknet, a popular Internet content delivery service that provides distant-water fishermen and other seafarers with a daily download of digital news and information including radio and TV, without the need to spend expensive online time.

“You know, the news services of small countries like the Faroes and Iceland don’t broadcast via satellite,” Mr Egholm said. “That limit cuts off sea folk from following events on shore, unless they’re presented with some alternative. That’s why when we came up with Viknet we had a large number of subscribers in no time.

Now with Viknet Broadband at Sea, we’ve found a very effective way to use a satellite connection for high-speed, low-cost Internet and we’ve been able to add services like Voice Over IP, which basically means the guys at sea can talk on the telephone with anyone anywhere in the world at local rates. The vessels get a central telephone system and the crew



Technical manager Trygvi Nysted; managing director Jan Egholm (below).

members get their own wireless IP phone handset.”

To benefit from Viknet or Viknet Broadband at Sea, all a vessel needs to have is a satellite dish and a receiver. “The type of satellite dishes we recommend and supply are equipped with GPS navigation,” Mr Egholm said, “including automatic pointing to keep the satellite signal regardless of the position of the vessel.”

Using the latest technologies for servicing the electronics it supplies, Vikmar has undergone continuous development since the company was founded in 2001. “The world has moved a long way over the past five years, not least in terms of

advances in information and communication technology. Increasingly, our servicing job consists of upgrading and configuring software plus providing technical support; with the connections we have today, more and more is done remotely from our offices. Of course, it’s different when it comes to hardware, or software installations for that matter; then we have to go the customer’s site, which often means on board a ship.”

Mr Egholm also pointed out that as an importer and supplier of marine electronics and equipment, Vikmar places great emphasis on purchasing directly from manufacturers, rather than

through intermediary dealers. “Working closely with our suppliers is one of our core strengths and an integrated element in the service we offer. By cooperating directly with the manufacturers on the one hand and our clients on the other, we’re able to customize solutions for our clients.”

Responding to the absence of another maritime service generally not available to tiny economies like Faroe, Vikmar has developed Live AIS [Automatic Identification System] Web Ship Tracker, a system that employs traditional VHS radio signals converted into digi-

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Own brands:  
Viknet satellite based information service  
Viknet Broadband at Sea internet service  
Live AIS Web Ship Tracker  
(vessel position information service)

tal data to generate real-time display of vessel positions with details on a graphic interface over the Internet. Offering everything from accurate backgrounds for radar display; to graphic display of vessel vectors and names; to easy and secure distribution of AIS data across the world wide web; to secure access in line with the ISPS code for ports, harbor masters, ships and maritime organizations, agencies and authorities—the Live AIS Web Ship Tracker provides multiple vessel details: MMSI number, IMO number, name, call sign, range and bearing, navigational status, rate of turn, course and speed, position and accuracy, ship type and cargo, dimensions, estimated time of arrival, draught and destination.

“Identification of ships is something a government agency usually does,” Mr Egholm added, “except for the smallest countries. Well, since nobody is providing this service neither in the Faroes nor in Iceland, we thought we should look into it.”

The Live AIS Web Ship Tracker has become very popular in the Faroes as a large proportion of the population have family member at sea. And as the system likewise works perfectly in Iceland, Vikmar is working on a plan to market it there.