

SAT-7: Broadcasting the Gospel into Closed Countries in the Middle East

Satellite programs broadcast into homes seek to reach viewers who want to explore Christianity

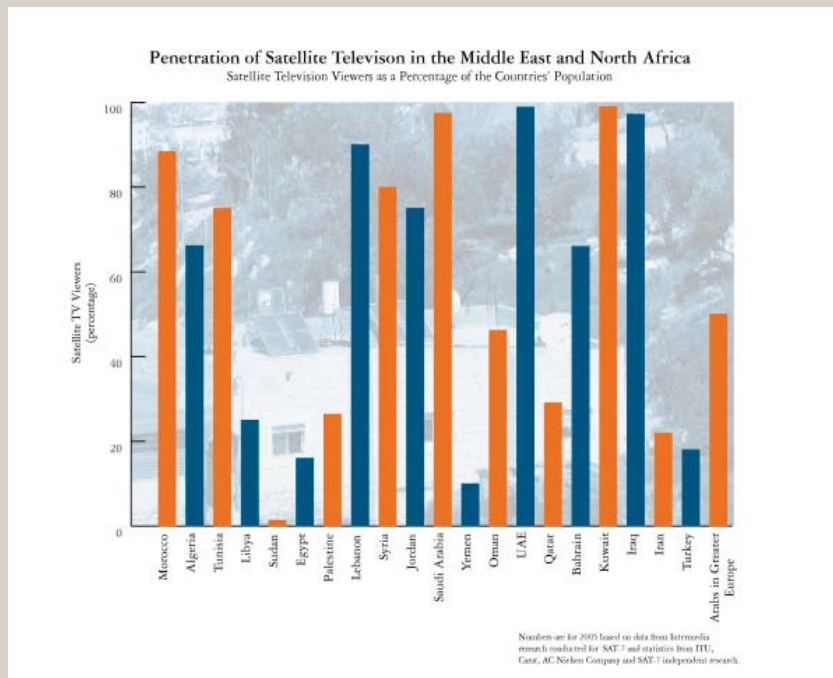


CONTEXT

- More than 225 million television viewers have access to satellite TV in the Middle East, which is half of the region's total population. The area also has a rich oral culture and most people are oral learners.
- Few professing Christians live in the 22 countries making up the Middle East and North Africa. Only Lebanon and Egypt have a Christian population of more than 10 percent.
- Illiteracy in the Middle East and North African world is higher than the international average and the average in developing countries. These countries are home to more than 83 million illiterate adults, the majority of whom are women. In 13 out of 22 Middle East and North African countries, women have a lower literacy rate than men – sometimes 10 percent to 20 percent lower than men.
- In the Middle East and North Africa women, on average, constitute about 49 percent of the population and young people, birth to age 24, constitute 51 percent of the population.

NEED

Based on 2005 U.N. Population Division statistics, there are more than 475 million people in the Middle East and North Africa. Most people there have never heard the gospel. While great strides have been made in improving literacy, low literacy rates remain significant. Storytelling can be an effective way to engage with people from oral cultures and those with low literacy skills. All types of media programs can be used to address viewers' concerns and needs.



With more than half of the Middle East age 24 or younger, youth are visual and technologically savvy, and gravitate toward the use of Internet, cell phones and television.

While most people are not Christians, the Middle East has a long history of Christianity and was home to the patriarchs, prophets and early disciples of Jesus. Today, there is a minority Christian community in the Middle East. This minority group, at work in an environment increasingly hostile to it, needs teaching, discipleship and encouragement. The gospel must break through political, social and religious barriers. Those with less voice in this society and its future leaders - women and the youth - must

be exposed to the teachings and values of Christianity.

SOLUTION

For 14 years, SAT-7 – a satellite television network headquartered in Cyprus with studios in Cyprus, Lebanon and Egypt – has aired children's programs, dramas, talk shows and documentaries that promote Christian values and teach viewers about Scripture. It uses television to reach the whole family and the whole person. It seeks to show viewers that Christianity is a way of life and part of the Middle East and North African culture. SAT-7 also offers social development programs, such as those that teach people to start a small business, learn to read and care for children. SAT-7 also broadcasts programs created by and for women.

Using satellite technology, SAT-7 has breached the barriers that once prevented sharing the gospel. Over the years, it has received thousands of letters, calls and e-mails requesting Bibles, prayer and counseling. SAT-7 started as a two-hour test program and now offers three channels, each reaching a particular segment of the Middle East. In 2007, it had an audience reach of more than 200 million people and an estimated regular weekly audience of 3 million to 5 million, according to a survey conducted by Washington, D.C.- based InterMedia.

SAT-7 VISION AND MISSION

VISION

To see a growing Church in the Middle East and North Africa, confident in Christian faith and witness, serving the community and contributing to the good of society and culture.

MISSION

To provide the churches and Christians of the Middle East and North Africa an opportunity to witness to Jesus Christ through inspirational, informative and educational television services.

LEADERSHIP PROFILE

Terence Ascott, chief executive officer, founded SAT-7 International in 1995. Before that, he co-founded and served as international director of Middle East Media, a print and TV agency. Ascott co-founded Middle East Media in 1975. During his 16 years with Middle East Media, Ascott also helped found the Arabic Broadcasting Convention, chaired the Cooperative Strategy Group, and produced “The Real Story,” a six-part video series to help Christians understand the Arab world. He is a member of the Arabic Media Convention, the World Association for Christian Communication, and the British Coptic Association. He has been a consultant to Far East Broadcasting Associates Radio and Living Bibles International and is on the advisory board of the International Christian Media Commission. He has a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering from Middlesex University, England.

Rita Elmounayer, executive director of SAT-7 ARABIC and SAT-7 KIDS, was born in Lebanon and has worked in Christian media since 1992. With a heart for children and people in need, she studied and taught communications for deaf and mute

children at the Father Andrew Institute in Beirut. In 1992, Elmounayer joined FEBA radio where she wrote programs for youth and helped with follow-up. She joined SAT-7 in 1996 where she manages two SAT-7 channels that broadcast in Arabic – the original Arabic channel and the newer SAT-7 KIDS channel. Elmounayer earned her master’s degree in communication from the University of Wales.

Sara Afshari, executive director of SAT-7 PARS, is an Iranian Christian. She received a bachelor’s degree in theology at Bristol University in United Kingdom, a bachelor’s degree in Persian literature and a master’s degree in communications from the University of Wales. In 2002, Afshari moved to Cyprus to serve as a liaison between SAT-7 and the newly formed ministry, Iranian Christian Broadcasting (ICB). She directed the creation of a series of basic- to advanced-training programs on the SAT-7 PARS channel called Seminary of the Air, utilizing the talents of Farsi-speaking professors at several seminaries. She advocates making programming culturally contextual. She manages a staff of 12 employees and several freelance producers living in Iran and around the world. She lives and works in Cyprus.

GOVERNANCE



SAT-7 is governed by an international board of directors, the majority of whom must live in the Middle East and North Africa. The board owns the ministry and sets policies and goals. SAT-7 has ministry offices and studios located in Egypt, Lebanon and Cyprus, and fund-raising offices in the United States, Europe, the United Kingdom and Canada. SAT-7 has more than 100 local staff working in its offices in the Middle East.

INTERNATIONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Board chairman, the Rev. Dr. Habib Badr, senior pastor, National Evangelical Church of Beirut, Lebanon

Board vice chairman, the Rev. Dr. Safwat El Baiady, president of the Protestant Churches in Egypt and general secretary of the Synod of the Nile

Secretary, Dr. Nadia Halim Suliman, professor of Sociology at the National Centre for Social and Criminological Research, Egypt

Treasurer, Roy Kemp, representing SAT-7 Trust United Kingdom

Bishop Marcos, Coptic Orthodox Bishop for the Diocese of Shoubra El Kheima in Cairo, Egypt

Elijah Bassily, representing the Coptic Orthodox Church

Monsignor Roland Aboujaoude, Patriarchal Auxiliary and Protosyncellus of the Maronite Church in Lebanon

Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan, president of the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran

Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, Palestine

Dr. Guirguis Ibrahim Saleh, general secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches, Egypt

Archbishop Sebouh Sarkissian, Armenian Archbishop of Tehran, Iran

Brother Ziya, writer and theologian, Turkey

Mar Dr. Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, Metropolitan of Aleppo, Syrian Orthodox Church, Syria

The Rev. Ashton T. Stewart, chair of SAT-7 PARS and director of Persian Ministries for World Witness

Dr. Roy Rissanen, elected representative of SAT-7 Partners and Middle East regional representative for the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission

Bernth-Ake Ottoson, chair, SAT-7 Europe board, deputy mission director of Inter Act, Sweden

Peter Schulze, chair, SAT-7 USA board

SAMPLE OF SAT-7 PROGRAMS

SAT-7 ARABIC offers various Arab-language Christian programs such as documentaries, movies, educational children’s programs, teaching and live interactive programs. The channel caters to all ages, but has specific blocks of programming for children, youth and women. Women and youth are among their top viewers. Programs feature successful Christian women. Discussions center on issues such as spousal abuse, drug use among children, tools to improve marriages, Bible study and practical skills to improve women’s lives. Its youth-oriented programs include “One Hour Youth” and “TV Magazine.” These programs feature different segments, such as youth finding answers to their frustrations and fears through their relationship with Christ. “From Me to You,” a TV program launched in January 2009, attracts Arabic-speaking youth through music. A popular Lebanese worship band, “Strongholds,” features youth developing godly friendships and praying together. Other TV programs include dramas, interviews, testimonies, reports and reviews on secular films from a Christian perspective.

SAT-7 KIDS broadcasts in Arabic and seeks to help train children to follow the Lord. It is the only Christian channel broadcasting in the Middle East that focuses on children and youth. It airs original dramas, talk shows, educational material, cartoons, musical programs and other shows that capture the attention of young viewers. Bible storytelling is popular, as indicated by viewer feedback on “Bedtime Stories with Rita.” Rita, the main character, reads a story from the Bible surrounded by big pillows and stuffed animals in a child’s bedroom. She ties the theme of the stories to biblical principles. “Alwan” or “Colors,” is a new show for small children that is growing in popularity. Children learn basic words, concepts and Bible lessons through songs. “Colors” begins with a blank coloring book on screen (made of only black lines). Colors are then added, and soon smiling, dancing children appear. The show does not have any physical sets, but instead uses green screen technology so each new “location” appears as a drawing filled with colorful animated cartoons. Every episode includes three songs and a story.

SAT-7 PARS broadcasts in Farsi (also known as Persian) to Iran and the wider Persian world, including Afghanistan and Tajikistan. This channel reaches viewers who seek to know about Christianity and those who need encouragement in their Christian faith. The channel airs blocks of original programming for children, youth and women - as well as teaching programs for a general audience. Among its popular programs are “Iranian Children’s Bouquet.” This is a cluster of programs that includes Bible stories, Iranian crafts, letters from Iranian children to God and others. “Jadeye Javanan - The Path of Youth” is a program targeted at young people under 25 years of age, the largest demographic in Iran. It is the story of Joseph, whose father, an Iranian pastor, was murdered because of his faith. His family fled to the United States, but Joseph retained a passion to bring the Good News of Jesus to his people. Young people follow the challenges and joys of Joseph’s life and find hope in Christ and gain tools they need to mature in their faith.

SAT-7 FINANCIALS*

This project adheres to some or all of this sector’s established best practices

	2006	%	2007	%	2008	%
INCOME						
Restricted income	6,754,207	74	6,847,584	56	6,726,197	52
Donations	1,854,149	20	5,010,153	40	5,806,232	44
Partnership fees	273,257	3	305,083	2	346,838	3
Other income	231,847	3	257,601	2	190,274	1
TOTAL	9,113,460		12,420,421		13,069,541	
EXPENDITURES						
Salaries	3,190,014	30	2,508,445	22	2,842,693	22
Administration	587,730	6	897,368	8	1,098,246	8
Production and broadcasting	4,534,316	43	6,563,039	58	7,679,835	59
Net restricted expenses	1,305,859	12	453,205	4		
Depreciation	456,007	4	384,052	3	373,733	3
Other					219,453	2
Fundraising	531,212	5	622,351	5	789,667	6
TOTAL	10,605,138		11,428,460		13,003,627	
SURPLUS / (DEFICIT)**	(1,491,678)		991,961		65,914	

NOTES: *Income and expenses reported in U.S. dollars

INCOME: Donations come from the Middle East, United States, United Kingdom, Europe and Canada. Of these, approximately 54 percent of donations comes from the U.S. Some of the major classes of restricted income are staffing, women’s programming, the children’s channel and mission support. Donations include gifts in kind such as the use of a studio, administrative support and programs from partners. The organization significantly increased its donations from the U.S. in 2007 and 2008, due primarily to a large matching gift.

EXPENDITURES: Many expenses are fixed costs that are not easily reduced when income decreases. Salaries have remained consistent over the years in view. There was a significant increase in net restricted expenses in 2006 due to new channels added, but expense came down in subsequent years. Administrative expenses include information technology, travel and rent. While the organization reported a loss in 2006, it had sufficient equity to absorb it.

BEST PRACTICES

- Present broadcasts that are culturally appropriate and in the local language
- Present contemporary messages that will make the program more effective in the lives of viewers
- Address the contextual needs of the population from a biblical perspective
- Encourage openness, dialogue, friendship and one-to-one interaction between the ministry and the majority population
- Partner with various ministries

ANALYSIS

Risk  Low High Low:1, Low/Medium:2, Medium:3, Medium/High:4, High:5 

CONCEPT: 1

The use of educational programs, talk shows, dramas and variety programs is a strategic and non-threatening way to introduce Christianity to viewers in the privacy of their homes. SAT-7 programs can reach millions of people in the Middle East and North Africa. It gives viewers a way to interact through text, phone, e-mail and the Internet.

PROGRAM DESIGN & EXPERIENCE: 3

SAT-7 has the working knowledge and experience to offer these programs. Most of its programs are backed by audience research. Also, SAT-7 has contact each year with thousands of viewers using a contracted call center and an in-house staff. From time to time, SAT-7 also contracts an independent research firm to provide viewer statistics and feedback. However, statistics are not gathered per TV program but as a total viewership for a particular SAT-7 channel.

LEADERSHIP: 2

Current staff is highly qualified to create and run the SAT-7 operation. It has a stable leadership team. As SAT-7 programming grows, however, it will need more staff to handle program implementation and management.

FINANCIAL CONTROL: 1

SAT-7's financial statements are externally audited and it has an independent board. Project budgets are reasonable and most fall around 2 percent of the total operating expenses. All projects have board endorsement.

SUSTAINABILITY: 3

SAT-7 programming relies mainly on financial gifts from individuals, churches, foundations, nongovernmental organizations and other entities, many located overseas. Continuous funding from these sources is necessary to maintain and expand SAT-7 operations. It has some strong local financial support from Christian viewers and supporters in Egypt and Lebanon, but not enough to sustain operations.

EXTERNAL: 3

SAT-7 is broadcasting into the Middle East where not everyone will embrace its message and persecution of Christians have taken place. To mitigate risks, SAT-7 has been careful in its ministry approach to present the truth of the gospel in a manner that is respectful of the culture and society where it operates.

SAT-7 AT A GLANCE

- Founded in 1995, first broadcast in May 1996
- 80% of SAT-7 programs are produced by Christians in the Middle East
- Operates three channels, which include four hours daily of programs in Turkish
- A reach of more than 200 million potential viewers in the Middle East and North Africa, including Afghanistan, Iran and parts of Europe
- 10 million to 11 million viewers tune in at least once a year, as of 2007
- Annually receives tens of thousands of letters, phone calls, text messages and e-mails from viewers; Web site records reflect more than 2 million hits a month
- Most popular programming are its child-oriented shows
- SAT-7 broadcasts from the Eutelsat Hotbird satellite platform. Its three channels can be viewed across North Africa to the Red Sea and Gulf States, north covering Europe and Turkey, and east to Iran and Afghanistan. SAT-7's three channels can also be viewed on the Web through streaming services.



Global Scripture Impact serves the American Bible Society and the greater American Christian philanthropic market by providing independent research and evaluation of Scripture ministry projects around the world, and supplying this information to interested supporters.

Global Scripture Impact
1550 Liberty Ridge Drive
Suite 330
Wayne, PA 19087
484.654.3490
www.gsimpact.org

