



Sparkle: Driving Execution and Innovation

Mario di Mauro was appointed Chief Executive Officer of Sparkle in March 2019.

Telecom Review recently visited Mario to get his views on the connectivity marketplace. We have provided his insights below:

TR: Sparkle is among the top ten global operators in the world. Can you please tell us your near-term plans for Sparkle and the Sparkle network?

"Our industry is mature and that is a fact we have to deal with. How? We need to be bold, courageous and smart to tackle and exploit all market

opportunities and our company's strengths. IoT, 5G, Cloud, Secure connectivity, Premium Content are changing the IP paradigm: from a best effort to a secure, quality-based and trustable connectivity. We are working to restructure the core business evolving Sparkle into a "Secure

connectivity and wholesale digital solution provider”.

“Sparkle’s history and track record have been based upon three crucial assets: customers, infrastructure and our passionate people; and the future will also rely on these three assets. The whole Company is conscious of that and in the last nine months is running after simple, plain and clear priorities: repositioning the core business by igniting Customer Experience, develop sustainable digital smart infrastructures and capillary new PoPs, develop people engagement creating and spreading a culture of Execution and Innovation.

We’re investing in new infrastructures such as cables, fibers and PoP expansion to offer a fast, reliable and competitive connectivity. We will be selective in terms of geography and partners to co-invest with in building state-of-the-art cables, landing hubs and PoPs.

In addition, we are creating new platforms to “dress” this connectivity in the way the market is looking for: secure, virtual, adaptable, dynamic. Also, in this case partner selection will be the name of the game to be effective in terms of time to market and success rate.

People will be THE asset we’re strongly committed to take care of. I am personally and directly devoted to increase my organization engagement at all levels. The whole management will be focused on people: inject new strategic and crucial capabilities, insource know-how, reallocate resources from declining traditional to growing business via digital reskilling and retraining, will be core activities in the next two to three years. Further, we will continue to devote strong efforts to the Robotic Process Automation sector.

Activities and projects developed in the recent months rewarded my team and myself with significant results in terms of commercial achievements, new customer acquisitions, and partnership agreements. We believe we are in the right condition to sustain a smart and safe growth path for Sparkle in the next couple of years.”

TR: Can you please tell us about Sparkle’s Tier-1 IP transit network, Seabone?

“Seabone is a worldwide Tier-1 Internet backbone providing ISPs, content providers and accelerators with top performing access to the Global Internet. With its vast presence throughout Europe, Latin America and the United States, its unique presence in Africa, the Middle East and Mediterranean Basin, and its continuous expansion in Asia Pacific, Seabone is one of the Top 10 global IP backbones providing state-of-the-art performance, robustness, and reliability. Its extensive worldwide presence means Seabone puts Internet access right at Customers fingertips. The innovative concept and architecture of its meshed network provides a congestion-free environment, ensuring fail-proof service to customers. Fault tolerance and redundancy are fully addressed by a network that circles the globe reaching across Europe to Asia, from Asia through the US and from the US back to Europe. Seabone provides customers with a comprehensive Service Level Agreement that guarantees availability, packet delivery and latency. In addition, DoS/DDoS attacks are managed with customized solutions as Self DDoS Mitigation & Cleaning, a more sophisticated option for smart customers to self-protect their networks, and BGP Flowspec, a new mitigation technique to rate-limit or drop the attack at the edge of the backbone. Furthermore, Seabone offers the opportunity to bundle multiple different services over the same access port providing customers with efficient and scalable solutions.”

TR: Sparkle is a network hub for data traffic moving between Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Can you please tell us about the traffic growth through the Sparkle Sicily hub?

“Sparkle leverages its natural dominance of the South Mediterranean Area, having partial or total ownership of ten out of 18 cables landing and/or passing through Sicily.

The South Mediterranean area, in turn, is a geographic gateway for all IP International traffic to Europe. In fact, with tens and tens of Terabits,

Asia, Middle East and Africa represent together almost 20% of overall international internet bandwidth in Europe. This traffic is increasing more than 30% on a year over year basis. We can assume to keep the same trend as the market does.”

TR: Sparkle interconnects with IP exchanges such as De-CIX. How has this increased your network growth?

“Main IP Exchanges offer interconnections on the most advanced Layer 2 switching platforms in the industry. Sparkle has always been a member of the most valuable and diverse IP exchanges worldwide like DE-CIX, LINX, AMS-IX, giving the chance to the Customers to interconnect each with other and exchange traffic and so playing a crucial role within the Internet ecosystem. In particular with DE-CIX, Sparkle has established in the years a strong and solid partnership extending its interconnections with them – in addition to Frankfurt – also in growing DE-CIX hubs like Istanbul and Palermo, strategic for the Med Basin and the MEA region. Another significant benefit for Customers is also to benefit from DE-CIX “GlobePEER Remote” to peer remotely with hundreds of networks at other DE-CIX locations. Moreover, Sparkle has recently joined new and strategic IXPs both in Europe and Latin America interconnecting to France-IX, SpeedIX, NetIX, PIT Chile, Cabase Buenos Aires. All the above mentioned IXPs interconnections gave a relevant contribution to Sparkle network growth in terms of Customers’ satisfaction and specific needs. For the future, we’re planning to move forward this way.”

TR: Sparkle has a large presence in South America and is expanding with new PoPs such as the recent one in Columbia. How do you view your growth in South America?

“The South American backbone is fully integrated into the Sparkle global network, supporting a complete range of services across USA, Europe, Middle East, Africa and Asia.

Sparkle’s IP Transit service Seabone is ranked #1 in Latin America thanks to its fully protected backbone and the best QoS in the market. Key customers in the

Region have selected Sparkle as their unique provider for many years. In the last two years Sparkle has been further expanding its presence in the Latin American market boosting its offer in Brazil, Argentina and Chile to support the demand of OTTs and Content operators and further increasing its market share in growing market such as Bolivia, Peru and Colombia, where Sparkle is pursuing a continuous growth plan in South America, both on the Pacific and Atlantic side. In 2019 New PoPs have been launched in Cartagena and Bogotá in Colombia, confirming Sparkle's positioning as one of the main providers in South Americas. Sparkle's presence in Chile has been reinforced adding Huechuraba to the existing two PoPs in Santiago. In Brazil the Sao Paulo city ring has been strengthened with additional PoPs and in the upcoming weeks new presences in Salvador de Bahia and Porto Alegre in Brazil are planned.



Sparkle's fibers on Seabras-1 support the fast-growing demand for advanced connectivity between North and South America, as well as cater to the needs of customers in Latin America to connect to the rest of the world.

Seabras-1 is the first submarine cable system directly connecting Sao Paulo to New York, designed to reduce latency and increase reliability with respect to all other existing systems in the Atlantic.

We will continue to invest in South America in the short-medium term, reinforcing our presence also in the Pacific side as well as in countries such as Argentina and Brazil where Sparkle has a historical footprint.

Latin America is witnessing a surge of high capacity deals and with this significant investment in the region Sparkle is fully able to cater to the boosting connectivity demand, typically coming from OTTs and Content Providers, and to satisfy the lower latency needs."

TR: Sparkle owns 3 of the 6 pairs in the Seabras cable connecting Brazil to North America. How has this helped your growth in the Americas region?

"With the 3-fiber pair investment, Sparkle confirms its strong commitment to keep a key role in the US-Latam corridor, granting the highest diversification through different routes. Through Seabras-1, Sparkle provides easy onward connectivity to the rest of the world, serving relevant routes such as Europe-Latin America and USA-Argentina. A compelling choice for carriers, ISPs, content and application providers, as well as for any other player that values a direct, low latency route between Brazil and the United States and a global reach. Having a significant participation in one of the newest and most effective systems in Latam, strengthens dramatically our position in the region, for several reasons. Our capacity offer is one of the most resilient on the Atlantic route. Also, the Seabone IP offer is more robust and top performing than ever. But we've been able to grow also on the Pacific route, adding a fourth diversified route between South and North America. This promotes Sparkle as the most reliable and complete platform all around the continent."

TR: Can you please tell us about your growth plans for 2020?

"2020 will be a year of actual

implementation and execution of our Relaunch Plan focused on Sparkle's repositioning in the core connectivity business. First of all, we intend to accelerate our presence in our traditional markets such as Americas, Mediterranean Basin, Middle East and Europe developing PoP footprint. In 2019 we already built a fourfold number of new PoPs than we had in the past and we will continue to be fast in doing it, along with a concept of digital, multiservice, intelligent PoPs.

In addition, we will continue to work on the digitalization and automation of internal processes and of our networks. At the same time, we are mainly working on restructuring and rationalizing traditional old services such as Voice, in order to recover resources and focalize them on growing businesses.

Sparkle's relaunch plan requires strong engagement and commitment at any company level together with a major turnaround in terms of skill reshuffle.

2019 has been a great and smart year for our company. The relaunch plan is a major challenge for all of us but here at Sparkle, we never give up!" **TR**