

Number portability: you have to wait a bit longer

Tom Manners MyBroadband | 24 March, 2010

ICASA delays individual number portability process due to technical problems

The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) has officially given notice to postpone the implementation of Geographic Number Portability for individual customers.

The Geographic Number Portability process began in May 2009 and is implemented in phases. The first phase dealt with blocks of one thousand and ten thousand numbers, and kicked in in mid-2009.

The decision to postpone porting numbers for individual users was made after consulting with local operators (Telkom and Neotel) regarding their readiness for the second phase.

Neotel has endorsed ICASA's postponement, adding that it came about "following a request by Neotel and Telkom for time to allow them time to iron out minor technical problems not anticipated at the time of the original scheduling of the phased roll-out of GNP"

"We were early advocates of GNP because it is one of the most important aspects of deregulation of the South African telecommunications landscape," commented [Angus Hay](#), Executive Head of Technology at Neotel.

"It gives subscribers true freedom of choice as to their fixed line service provider. They can keep their fixed line number which, for most people, is an integral part of either their home or business lives, while being able to shop around for better rates and services from carriers. GNP gives control of the telecommunications market to consumers"

"In doing that, it forces service providers to be competitive not simply on price but on the type and range of services they provide. Only the most agile and customer-focused of service providers will survive."

Catalyst for telecoms shake up

According to [Vox Telecom](#) CEO Tony van Marken when this is achieved the South Africans telecoms industry should undergo significant change.

"The reality is that the first phase of Geographic Number Portability has had no real impact. Most business do not have consecutive 1 000 number blocks. Although single number portability enables individual residential customers to now have a choice, the real opportunity is in the corporate sector where companies have hundreds of fixed line numbers and are paying exorbitant fees to Telkom,"

Van Marken also urged ICASA to stick to its deadline for the second phase of Geographic Number Portability.

“A lot of consumers and businesses are exasperated by bad service and high prices and they will finally have real choice in which carrier they want to use. They will be able to take advantage of cheaper prices and in these economic times, that’s crucial. We are also calling on ICASA to ensure that there is no further delay with GNP and that Telkom is ready in accordance with ICASA’s own time table.”

Vox has also revealed that it believes geographic number porting will have a significant take-up compared to “the muted response to mobile number porting”.

“The cellular players offer similar fees and services to their rivals, making it barely worth switching networks. But the cost and quality of landline services varies significantly between rival players, so customers have much to gain by switching networks” concludes the company.

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