

COMMUNICATIONS & TECHNOLOGY

Interconnection clearing houses will reduce tariff - Nnamani

TELECOM services providers in the country have been urged to embrace the licensed interconnection clearing houses in the drive to reduce the cost of telephone services.

President, Medallion Communications Limited, Ikechukwu Nnamani, who made this call in a recent correspondent with the *BUSINESS TIMES*, said that the operators incur a high transmission cost in moving calls from one switching center to another, which could be eliminated by the interconnection operators.

According to Nnamani, for some operators all their interconnect traffic has to get to Lagos first before it is ex-

Stories by
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changed with other operators. The unfortunate thing in most of the cases is that the subscriber for which the call is meant is actually in the same city that the call was originated, but because of the absence of interconnection points in the state capitals, the calls are first routed out of the state to be exchanged and then it starts a return journey to the same city to be terminated. He added that this leads to higher cost of the call, high potential for call drop, and overall inefficiency of the entire system.

The President revealed that while the interconnect ex-

change operators ready to solve the problem by deploying different interconnection platform in the major cities, there is still reluctance from the GSM operators to patronise the service. PTOs and CDMA operators have embraced the project.

He however explained that the reluctance is as a result of the raging war on interconnect termination rates. The GSM operators are not happy with the current NGN11.52k being paid to them on interconnection charges. They want a minimum of NGN16.50k or better still NGN18.00. The current approach is to shut off their networks from other operators

who are not willing to pay the above rate to them. Access is being limited to a few EIs or in some cases few voice lines to other operators. Until this issues of interconnect rate is resolved to the satisfaction of the GSM operators, the situation is likely to remain the same. This is currently affecting the establishment of interconnection to the Interconnect Operators by the GSM operators.

Nnamani posited that the solution to resolving the current interconnect logjam is first for the NCC to issue the long awaited resolution on the new interconnect rates noting that the sooner a new rate is adopted by the industry the better for every stakeholder.

While it is likely the rates would go up based on the position of the GSM operators, it is also important the Regulator look at the issue of parity in interconnection charges, he said. He stated that the current NGN6.00 difference in termination rate between the PTO and GSM operators is a source of continued acrimony amongst the operators.

Once the above issue is addressed and all operators are willing to open up their networks for interconnection, then there must be concerted efforts to encourage the establishment of several interconnect points by the Interconnect Operators so that as much as possible, calls are localized within a given geographical region, the president averred.



• Chairman, Virtual Africa Solutions (VAS) Limited, Akin Ajayi, (left) Deputy Director (Telecom Department) Ministry of Communications, Sabo Ahmed and Managing Director, VAS Limited Andre Gyenfie at the corporate launch of VAS in Lagos last week. Photo: Kola Akinro

VAS opens shop, launches prepaid calling card

VIRTUAL Africa Solutions Limited, a value added services provider, last week in Lagos commissioned its office complex, even as it launched the first of its bouquet of services, the prepaid international calling card.

The company's Managing Director, Andre Gyenfie said in his speech that the launch of VAS is an answer to the dynamic communication needs of Nigerians as it plans to harmonise the airtime distribution and value added ser-

vices activities of all networks to optimum benefits of the telecom consumer.

According to Gyenfie, VAS will use its technologically advanced platforms to deliver a high quality and unique services to the Nigerian market. VAS offerings for the Nigerian market will initially be focused around virtual airtime along with large-scale SMS based competitions.

In addition, VAS will offer international prepaid calling cards, prepaid internet services along with handset kits,

SIM kits and value added services packages, he remarked.

VAS chairman, Akin Ajayi revealed that the firm is a joint venture with Intercontinental Bank using the small and medium enterprise fund and so has the support of the bank's management to ensure it survives, and grows to fulfill the aspiration the stakeholders.

The Minister of Communications, Cornelius Adebayo, urged the company and other private operators to avail themselves of the opportunities provided by the government to make the sub-sector

vibrant and a key player in the global market.

Director, telecom, in the Ministry who represented that Minister, Sabo Ahmed said that the opening up of the sub-sector to both local and international competition through such policy orientation as privatisation and other incentive regime is intended to enhance efficiency and quality service.

VAS has Lifetree and N-Soft as technology solutions partners.

THE intervention of the Consumer Affairs Bureau of the Nigerian Communications Commission has ensured that an MTN subscriber, Isaac Dike, who is a genuine winner of the star prize in MTN's recent Yello Season Promo, was last week presented with the new Kia Optima car he won.

Dike's mother, Martha Ugi, had earlier lodged a complaint with the Commission's Consumer Affairs Bureau alleging that the star prize won by her son during the 7th Draw of the MTN Yello Season Promo was not given to him. She disclosed that the star prize of a new Kia

NCC intervenes in MTN promo

Optima car was instead given to a certain Chinye Onyema who MTN claimed had the same winning number as Dike's. Ugi, having made several visits to MTN offices on behalf of her son in order to get the company to honour its commitment without success, eventually brought the matter before the Commission.

The Commission promptly instituted an inquiry into the matter which established that the complainant was the owner of the winning number 08065434997. The complainant

also produced a newspaper report with his number as the winning number and another newspaper report of the presentation of the star prize to someone else in Port Harcourt.

The Commission subsequently came to the conclusion that the error of handing over the star prize to someone else other than the genuine winner was made by MTN and therefore directed MTN to give the complainant the star prize he rightly won.

Obliging the Commission's directive, MTN's General Man-

ager, Northern Region, Mike Ikpoki, presented Dike with a new Kia Optima car on behalf of the company at its Abuja office in the presence of a delegation of the Commission led by the Executive Commissioner, Licensing and Consumer Affairs, Bahir Gwandu.

On receiving the car, Dike thanked the Commission for its intervention to ensure that the star prize was presented to him. Telecom analysts have called for caution in giving out of prizes for promotions.

BRIEFLY

Mobile Signature holds seminar for cybercafes

MOBILE SIGNATURE, Nigerian's leading domain name registration company, has concluded plans to host a seminar to enlighten cybercafe owners on how to leverage on their existing infrastructure to create additional streams on incomes for their businesses.

The seminar billed for Friday, February 24, at the Fate Foundation hall, Water House, Ijora is expected to show cybercafe owners how to maximise their assets.

According to the company's Chief technology officer, Tayo Olatimilhin, Mobile Signature seeks to partner with cafe owners to deliver other services such as retailing bulk SMS, domain name registration and web hosting to their existing customers, whilst offering technical support and consumer service.

He stated that the firm has designed an SMS enterprise solution that gives cafe owners capability to own an SMS gateway that can send up to 500,000 SMS's at once for as low as N7.50 per SMS, giving profit margins of up to 45 per cent on each SMS sent.

Nokia expands the scope of mobility

NOKIA, world leader in mobile communications, last week at the 3GSM World Congress in Barcelona, Spain unveiled three new devices; introduced its first UMA network solution; launched additional frequency variants for the Nokia Flexi WCDMA Base Station; and announced a new cooperation agreement on DVB-H interoperability.

The innovative mobile phone company unveiled the Nokia 6131 and Nokia 6070 mid-range GSM camera phones, as well as the Nokia 6136 Unlicensed Mobile Access (UMA) device. The Nokia 6131 comes in a folding design and offers a 1.3 megapixel camera, while the Nokia 6070 comes in a classical form and offers basic camera phone capabilities at an affordable price point.

The Nokia 6136 UMA device, which can switch seamlessly between GSM and wide local area networks (WLAN), offers users more reliable connectivity in homes or office with poor cellular coverage. Nokia also launched a UMA network solution that enables operators to deliver cellular and data services to subscribers over WLAN access networks, thereby increasing mobile service availability. With both UMA network equipment and a UMA capable handset, Nokia is able to provide a complete end-to-end UMA offering.

APC at ICT for government

GLOBAL, end-to-end solution provider for real-time infrastructure, American Power Conversion (APC), was at the fourth ICT for Government event, which took place at the Accra International Conference Centre recently.

The objective of ICT for Government as a process is to build capacity within the various arms of government, including central, regional and district levels, to harness ICT for the socio-economic development and improvement of the delivery of public services through eGovernment.

APC's Barred Jonker, Systems Engineer and HPP Account Manager for English-speaking Africa, spoke on how organisations can build a data centre faster, cheaper and with a higher level of overall availability and resiliency by looking at the Network Critical Physical Infrastructure (NCPI), incorporating power, cooling, racks and physical structure, security and fire protection, cabling and data centre management.

Today, increasing numbers of companies are centring their strategic initiatives around the concepts of standardisation and consolidation and nowhere is this more applicable than in the data centre. The traditional approach to data centre architecture forces enterprises to build out to full projected capacity from day one.

The outcome is a long deployment schedule and millions of dollars spent on an under-utilised infrastructure. As a result, it is rarely, if ever, adaptable enough to keep up with today's changing IT needs.

By taking power protection to the next level, companies are changing the way data centres are deployed.

Says Carl Kleynhans, country general manager, Africa at APC: "By right-sizing the data centre architecture, companies would only incur the infrastructure costs actually required at a given time. To achieve the theoretically available cost savings, the ideal data centre architecture would only have the power and cooling infrastructure needed at the moment; it would only take the space that it needed at the moment and it would only incur service costs on capital infrastructure capacity that was actually being used. It would be perfectly scalable."

Microsoft launches system builders club

AS a step to further recognise and support its local partners, Microsoft Nigeria has launched a System Builders Club (SBC) in Nigeria.

The club would afford members the advantage of being exposed to online and hands-on technical and sales training facilities and receive latest information on product development.

Microsoft System Builders Partner Account Manager for Nigeria and Ghana, who addressed the audience at the launch in Lagos last week, said members would also become part of a worldwide network of Microsoft partner organisations. By joining also, members gain access to key resources.

Uducci disclosed that Microsoft conceived the club as a way to help strengthen local brands in the market and give them a competitive base with other global brands.

System Builders are primarily small, local businesses with local customers. The club is a relationship management scheme that aims at establishing a firm bond with the breadth channel, driven by a continuous, rolling reward mechanic. It enables members receive training and resources that help them differentiate their businesses, create new sales and growth opportunities, and strengthen their customer relationships.