

Tata-led Neotel launches consumer range in South Africa

The Tata-led consortium Neotel Friday made available a range of telecommunication products and services that gives consumers here a choice for the first time after decades of dependence on former state-owned fixed line provider Telkom.

Neotel was granted a licence as the Second National Operator (SNO) by the South African authorities several years ago and their services have eagerly been awaited, especially with the expectation of decreased costs.

The range of consumer products that have become available under the brand NeoConnect includes high-speed Internet access. The high cost of broadband in South Africa has been cited by both business and government here as an obstacle to development and growth.

But Neotel maintains that they are not offering 'broadband' yet, but rather 'high-speed Internet access'. The company said it would launch what it calls 'true broadband' through a fibre optic cable rollout in the months ahead.

'For years South African consumers have been calling for services that meet their requirements and we believe that we are now making that a reality,' said Ajay Pandey, managing director and CEO of Neotel.

'The NeoConnect service has been custom-designed for Neotel in order to address consumers' latent and expressed needs. Regular testing and focus group discussions have allowed Neotel to continuously refine the service to what it is today - giving consumers in South Africa everything they need and more,' he added.

The availability of 2.5GB data capacity at an entry level is a significant shift in the telecom market in South Africa, since consumers thus far have been used to smaller data capacities.

According to Pandey, there were two critical areas that Neotel wanted to address when entering the market - the low data caps that were currently prevalent and convenience in obtaining and using the services.

'Obtaining the product is simple and easy and data caps that were formerly perceived as high-end bundles are similar to those which Neotel is introducing as its mid-range offering,' said Pandey.

Although Neotel services are initially being rolled out only to the business hub of Pretoria and Greater Johannesburg, Pandey said their network was being expanded rapidly and would be available in Cape Town and Durban as well soon.

'The NeoConnect offering we are introducing to the market brings the best of mobile and fixed communications together in a product that allows for high-speed internet, carrier-grade voice calls and SMS through one product,' said Mukul Sharma, executive head of Neotel's consumer business unit.

'We have incorporated global best practices into the design of this product, ensuring that while it remains relevant to the market, it is based on a first-in-world device - a unique solution that

addresses the key pain points South African users have been highlighting for years,' he said.

The NeoConnect product is built on CDMA technology - a telecommunications technology which is growing rapidly in popularity across the African continent.

'We believe that this is going to change the way in which consumers communicate significantly - we have listened to what the consumers wanted and provided them that and more,' Sharma said.

'This is only the beginning though ... we know that the South African consumer wants true broadband and that is precisely where we are heading,' he added.

Neotel is South Africa's first converged communications network, connecting the major centres in South Africa to each other and to the world, directly linking the country into Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd's (VSNL) global Tier 1 network.

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