

The REGULATOR

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A Summary of The OUR's Consultative Document on Universal Service/Access by: David Geddes & David Sullivan

Jamaica has a population of just fewer than 2.6 million with an average household size of approximately 3.6 persons, equating to just over 722 thousand households. The estimated number of phone lines (fixed and mobile) in use is more than 1.8 million. The OUR estimates that approximately 52 percent of households across the island are being served by fixed lines, however it has no information yet on the number being served by mobile.

This document is intended to promote discussion on some of the relevant issues relating to universal service/access and to gather information so the OUR can offer advice on universal service.

The Telecommunications Act of 2000 encourages the provision of basic voice telephony services across the island where it is technically and economically feasible, promoting access to single line telephone services by persons regardless of residence or work. The Our is of the view that universal service should be technology neutral.

Payphones

The Telecommunications Act stipulates that payphones should be reasonably accessible to customers on an equitable basis.

This document suggests the installation of payphones at schools, post offices, shops and public libraries as well as along main roads. It is further suggested that installation could be based on one payphone for every community or town with at least 25 households or 90 persons, and that payphones should be within a maximum of two kilometers of homes.

Internet Access in Public Institutions

The document looks at the issue of whether computers and internet terminals should be made available to these institutions (schools, public libraries and post offices) via funding from the universal service/access fund and/or government programmes.

Another issue addressed is whether public institutions should be required to pay their monthly Internet bills or whether funding, full or otherwise, should come from the universal service/access fund and/or government programmes.

Universal Service/Access Provider (USP)

The Minister may designate the existing telecommunications carrier as a USP or any other licensee on the recommendation of the OUR. The OUR proposes two approaches to be used in selecting/choosing these licensees :

- 1/ Competitive Bidding and ;
- 2/ Pay or Play ;

The competitive bidding approach would see operators bidding against each other to serve potential customers. The objective would be to award the contract to the company with the lowest bid, that is the one requiring the least amount of subsidy.

Under the pay or play approach an operator can choose to serve an uneconomic customer, area or institution voluntarily. A subsidy might then be made available to the company.

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by: David Geddes & David Sullivan

Funding Universal Service/Access

These are some of the options being looked at to fund universal service/access :

- 1/ General taxation- a levy on society ;
- 2/ Interconnect Charges - the Universal Service Provider is allowed to inflate its interconnect charges and use the extra revenues to finance universal service/access;
- 3/ Cross Subsidies - the incumbent is allowed to inflate the price of one or more service(s) and use the difference to subsidize other services and expand its local network.
- 4/ Universal Service Fund - operators in the industry would contribute to a fund which would be used to cover the net cost of universal service/access.

The document also outlines issues relating to contribution, including which operators should contribute and how much they should contribute.

The possibility of introducing special services to the disabled community including utility bills in Braille and reasonable access to payphones by wheelchair users are also addressed.

The Numbering That Counts By: Curtis N. Robinson

The telecommunications network is a complex unity of diverse systems and fast converging technologies with ever increasing global reach.

And with the virtually seamless integration of its constituent parts and continuous flow of interacting signals, and control processes, the network, provides a communication life-line to practically every sphere of human endeavor.

The carriage of voice and data across the network is supported by various telecommunications numbering systems and schemes that are essential to the proper identification and location of geographic areas, networks, network elements and addresses, for efficient routing and billing.

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The Numbering That Counts

By: Curtis N. Robinson
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The numbering resources employed in the various segments of the network will vary according to technology, services provided, and national telecommunications policies. There are at present, 15 different types of numbering resources to be administered, directly or indirectly, by the regulatory authorities, within the North American Numbering Plan Area (NANPA) which comprises the United States and its territories, Canada, Bermuda and 18 Caribbean nations, including Jamaica. These resources include:

1. International Inbound NPA 456
2. Area Code
3. Central Office Code
4. Carrier Identification Code (CIC)
5. Personal Communication Service code
6. Vertical Service code
7. 800-855 Line Number
8. 555 XXX Line Number
9. 900 Premium Service Code
10. 8XX Toll Free (Called Party Pays)
11. Data Network Identification Code (DNIC)
12. Mobile System Identification Code (SID)
13. International Mobile Station Identifier (IMSI)
14. SS7 Point Code
15. Signaling Area Network Code (SANC)

Not all of the resources listed here are currently employed in Jamaica. Most of course, are subscriber-diallable entities with the remainder being "visible" only to the networks. There are other numbering resources that are not under the control or oversight of national regulatory agencies.

Speaking on the European Union's legal and regulatory environment at a European numbering workshop in Prague, the Czech Republic, John Wilkinson, gave a critical assessment of the importance of numbering in which he stressed that "numbering is a sine qua non of telecommunications". True. Numbering is a key enabler of telecommunications development and has become an important commercial and competitive factor in the telecom industry.

It is important therefore that the assignment, management and use of Numbering resources be done in a transparent, non-discriminatory and efficient manner so as to satisfy current industry needs, promote fair competition, and safeguard supplies to meet future demands.

FAQS

Ask the OUR

Q. What are the Guaranteed Standards ?

A. The utility companies and the OUR have agreed on several issues that relate directly to the quality of customer services provided by the companies. For example the National Water Commission should not send consumers more than two consecutive estimated bills. Another Guaranteed Standard is that the Jamaica Public Service Company should have a representative at the scene of an emergency site within six hours of the matter having been reported to the company.

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OUR'S Role

The Office of Utilities Regulation Act of 1995 established the Office of Utilities Regulation (the Office/OUR) as a body corporate. Under the Act, the OUR is charged with the responsibility of regulating the provision of utility services in the following sectors:

Electricity
Telecommunications
Water
Sewerage
Public transportation by road, rail and ferry.

The second schedule of the Act defines the constitution of the Office as follows:

"The Office shall consist of the Director General and such number of Deputy Directors General as may be appointed pursuant to this schedule".

The OUR receives and reviews applications for licenses and rate increases from the utility providers and investigates possible breaches, taking enforcement action where appropriate.

The OUR investigates complaints against utility companies, after they have been raised with the respective company. This is done at no charge to the consumer.

Objectives

- To ensure that consumers of utility services enjoy an acceptable quality of service at reasonable cost.
- To establish and maintain transparent, consistent and objective rules for the regulation of utility service providers.
- To promote the long-term efficient provision of utility services for national development consistent with Government's policy.
- To provide an avenue of appeal for consumers who have grievances with the utility service providers.
- To work with other related agencies in the promotion of a sustainable environment.
- To act independently and impartially.

If you have received unsatisfactory service from a utility company (electricity, water, telephone), you may be entitled to a compensatory payment from the respective company. Contact the Consumer Affairs Department of the OUR or fill out a complaint form available at post offices islandwide.

Contact

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