



OFFICE OF UTILITIES REGULATION

Regulating Utilities for the Benefit of All

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OUR ACTIONS QUALITY OF SERVICE ISSUES AFFECTING TELECOMS CUSTOMERS

(KINGSTON, Jamaica; 2019 November 08): The Office of Utilities Regulation (OUR) has instructed both major telecommunications service providers, Digicel and FLOW to immediately provide their customers with service interruption notifications and updates on service restoration times. This comes against the background of persistent quality of service issues such as data and voice service interruption. These include dropped calls, calls not being initiated and delays in contacting customer service with sometimes inadequate redress.

The leadership of the OUR met with Executives from both service providers last week to discuss the service quality issues and made it clear to both providers that it had serious concerns about the current service levels and what appears to be a lack of diligence in their resolution.

Digicel explained that the service issues being experienced by its customers resulted from the implementation of its modernization programme which began two years ago. Digicel reported that it is upgrading its infrastructure to transition to a more up-to-date telecommunications technology and ultimately to provide improved service quality. The company asserted that it was the modernization works that have resulted in service disruption to customers. After this is completed, the Company said, customers should experience little to no significant disruption in service and should also see improvements in the quality of service.

FLOW informed the OUR that it has made substantial technology/capacity upgrades to its network in order to provide its customers with improved service quality. The company asserted that the significant increase in data traffic due to these upgrades, resulted in “a signaling storm” on the network which subsequently caused service disruption. They also indicated that steps have been taken to increase the signaling capacity and implement additional network redundancies. Flow claimed that the incidents of service disruption were isolated and not related to a general failure of their telecommunications infrastructure. The company also noted that a significant portion of service disruption was due to vandalism of its network and some of the ongoing road works. The FLOW representatives gave the assurance that the causes of the recent service disruptions in October were identified and have since been resolved.

The OUR’s Director General Ansord Hewitt said that the OUR expected network upgrades to be carried out with minimum dislocation to customers and where unavoidable, customers should be kept updated and given specific notifications. /More...

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Both companies admitted that the steep and rapid rise in the demand and use of data, which requires constant adjustments had hampered their service delivery. They also conceded that they have not been sharp and clear in their customer communication and education. Both have committed to providing their customers and the OUR with service interruption notifications and updates on service restoration through their various communications channels. They have also advised of their intention to provide more information to customers particularly about how to optimise their devices to get the best from service bundles.

Notwithstanding the providers' proffered explanation and assurances, the OUR has taken note that subsequent to the meeting, some of the network issues have continued unabated with complaints such as customers' inability to complete calls, the need for multiple dialling to make connections, loss of internet services and dropped calls. The OUR is therefore continuing to explore the options that are available to incentivise providers to deal expeditiously with the issues that are causing great hardship and frustration to consumers.

This includes continuing to monitor the quality of service being provided through the scrutiny of required reports, as well as frequent meetings where both telecommunications companies will be asked to provide weekly updates on their progress in correcting or mitigating the issues as well as on any initiatives that will have significant customer impact.

The OUR is also urging customers that where their service contracts provide for rebates in the event of prolonged service disruption, they should insist on receiving them. Any refusal to honour such obligations should be reported to the OUR.

Mr. Hewitt noted that the OUR is also taking steps to ensure that it is able to independently verify Key Performance Indicators of service quality. He noted that the OUR is aware that service disruptions are continuing to date and pointed out that the organization will use its resources to ensure that the source of the issues are identified and fixed in as short a time as possible so as to mitigate the harm being done to consumers and businesses.

He emphasized that the OUR will continue to push for powers to quickly impose and enforce sanctions for customer service breaches in any future enactment or amendment of Information and Communication Technology legislation.

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