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Welcome

Welcome to the Case Communications October 2010 Newsletter.

Fibre: BT told to give rivals access to superfast broadband network

As part of new measures designed to encourage investment and competition in superfast broadband Ofcom has told BT it must offer rival ISPs access to any fibre lines it lays and let them use its underground ducts and telegraph poles for their own fibre.



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Scrapped ICT projects revealed

The number of cancelled ICT projects in government is becoming increasingly clear, following a series of parliamentary questions from Scottish National Party MP Pete Wishart.

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Broadband 'improves' school results

"Schools which make use of broadband connectivity are found to have improved academic results and increased learner motivation compared to those which do not make use of this technology."

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Nokia: Mobile phones not PCs will connect the next billion people to the internet

Nokia is putting its money on the next big trend in the mobile phone market. It's not smartphones, says the company, but mobile phones for the emerging market that will drive the next handset revolution.

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Google sent out its Street View camera cars with wi-fi scanning equipment that picked up private emails and passwords being sent over the connections.

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ISPs would put iPlayer in the slow lane

Senior executives from BT and TalkTalk have said they would be happy to give priority to selected apps at the expense of their rivals.

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Fixed broadband: worldwide forecast 2010-2015

Forecast shows that the total number of fixed broadband connections worldwide will pass

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500 million by the end of 2010.

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October 2010

Fibre: BT told to give rivals access to superfast broadband network

New measures designed to encourage investment and competition in superfast broadband (defined by the telecoms regulator as greater than 24Mbps – the speed at which copper-based broadband technology is capped) has led to BT being told by regulator Ofcom it must offer rival ISPs access to any fibre lines it lays and let them use its underground ducts and telegraph poles for their own fibre.



The telecoms regulator proposed the measures earlier this year, and today confirmed virtual unbundling and duct access as the core of its regulatory framework for superfast broadband.

Under the plans announced today, from mid-January 2011, BT will have to share information with other communications providers about its ducts and poles, detailing factors such as quality of the infrastructure and available capacity, with a view to launching access by early June.

"BT has got to make its own judgement about how far they roll out [fibre broadband] and where... [duct and pole access] allows other people to make that choice as well. If BT chooses not to roll out somewhere, then other companies are able to say 'can we make a business from that?'," Ofcom CEO Ed Richards told an event in London today.

Earlier this year, cable broadband ISP Virgin Media began a trial of fibre over telegraph poles in the Berkshire village of Woolhampton, offering residents a 50Mbps broadband service via overhead fibre.

Ofcom is also enabling ISPs to gain access to BT's ducts and poles so they can lay their own fibre more cheaply than digging up roads – the usual route for fibre-laying. The regulator believes this will help bring superfast coverage to areas where BT chooses not to lay fibre – providing "other avenues for CPs [communications providers] to provide their own network and enter the market if they wish".

Ofcom backs Vula

TalkTalk, the UK's second-largest ISP, today announced plans for a commercial superfast broadband service by buying fibre access from BT, making it the first large ISP to do so.

Under Ofcom's framework, access to BT's fibre lines will be regulated via a wholesale access product called virtual loop unbundling, or Vula, which BT will be obliged to make available to other ISPs so they can provide superfast broadband services to their own customers.

BT currently offers wholesale fibre access via a product called GEA (generic Ethernet access). According to Ofcom, GEA is "pretty close" to the characteristics it's looking for in Vula, adding that GEA will be...

"BT earlier in the year announced what they called Generic Ethernet Access which is their version of Vula," McIntosh said. "It was a very early stage of development at that point and they with industry have been looking at how this should be developed."

Ofcom's aim is to ensure ISPs using BT's superfast network gain adequate control over any services they offer. "[Vula] is intended to provide companies like TalkTalk and others who are competing in this market with the sort of control over the services they provide that they have currently in the LLU [local loop unbundling] environment," said Stuart McIntosh, competition partner at Ofcom.

"We think the GEA product which BT is providing... is pretty close to the sort of characteristics that we're looking for in



a virtually unbundled wholesale local access product.

"There are some things that probably still have to be developed – and we need also to recognise that these things do not stand still. This product will get out into the market and it will evolve."

According to McIntosh, Vula specifies a number of provisions the regulator believes are important for ISPs to ensure they have adequate control and flexibility over their services – such as ensuring ISPs buying Vula get dedicated capacity that is not shared with others, and that there is no contention on the lines.

Over the longer term, the regulator also believes a form of unbundling for fibre will emerge as a viable option – via a technology such as wavelength sharing, once the UK's fibre footprint proportion shifts in favour of fibre to the home (FTTH), rather than the current focus on fibre to the cabinet (FTTC) for most exchanges. BT's "current thinking" is for up to 25 per cent of its rollout footprint to be FTTH, said Ofcom, with the lion's share being FTTC.

The regulator noted that proportion may well vary – depending on consumer take-up of superfast broadband services, with high demand for fibre perhaps fuelling more FTTH rollouts.

"We don't have a lot of fibre in the local access network [at present] and the way it's been deployed – which is using the PON [passive optical network] – you can't physically unbundle that," said McIntosh. "However as we begin to see fibre to the premises roll out it's quite possible that you may be able to have wave division such that it would be quite possible then physically to separate light waves within the fibre which you make available to others."

"The standards are not there to allow that today but it's perfectly possible that we migrate towards that in the longer term," he added. "We will look at it again in three, four years' time."

"Strategically you can see that's where, over time, one wants to get to," added Richards.

Fibre pricing

Ofcom said it is not regulating the price BT can charge ISPs for access to its fibre network, saying it expects the current generation of broadband prices to help "constrain and discipline" superfast broadband prices.

"We have... maintained the ability for BT to have flexibility in terms of how they price these products and services," said McIntosh.

"We're under no illusions as to the fact there are risks associated with these investments and in light of that and, given that the market is in a relatively immature stage in terms of the deployment and take-up of these higher speed propositions, we thought it appropriate to stand back from being very interventionist and regulating the prices and let the market decide."

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NEWSLETTER

October 2010

Scrapped ICT projects revealed

The number of cancelled ICT projects in government is becoming increasingly clear, following a series of parliamentary questions from Scottish National Party MP Pete Wishart.

The Ministry of Defence is one department to have responded to Wishart, confirming the cancellation of the Land Information Architecture Office project. Defence procurement minister Peter Luff also said that the MoD is still in the process of carrying out an ICT project review.

The Department of Health has also cancelled major IT work, most notably the multi-billion pound NHS National Programme for IT.

The department also said it had ended a £1.1bn deal with Fujitsu in 2008.

In addition the Ministry of Justice admitted to spending £4.3m on the National Enforcement Tracker System before scrapping it.

The parliamentary written answers have also listed a number of smaller project cancellations.

In 2007 the Rural Payments Agency scrapped an £870,000 broadband deal.

And the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said it ended a £140,000 back office ICT project.

The government's deputy chief information officer Bill McCluggage told Publicservice.co.uk that departments have been asked which of their ICT projects are no longer required under the coalition government.

He said the Cabinet Office has asked departments to make recommendations on these projects in terms of "closing, rescoping or continuing".



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NEWSLETTER

October 2010

Broadband 'improves' school results

Minister Nick Gibb has admitted, Schools with broadband connectivity have improved academic results, despite an earlier statement that the government is to cut technology funding for schools.

Asked in a parliamentary question what assessment the government has made of the contribution of ICT and broadband to supporting educational activities, Gibb said that broadband can improve results and motivation in the learning environment.

He said: "Schools which make use of broadband connectivity are found to have improved academic results and increased learner motivation compared to those which do not make use of this technology."

But he emphasised that technology alone does not guarantee educational success. Gibb said: "Evidence shows that technology has a positive impact on learning and broader outcomes when it is used as part of good teaching practice."



But the government has indicated it is to reduce funding for ICT in schools.

In September, Gibb told the House of Commons that the government's Harnessing Technology grant would be reduced by £100m in the current financial year.

The grant was set up for schools to "harness technology" like computers and the internet.

£50m of this reduction has been used to provide capital for "Free Schools", Gibb said.

Christine Blower, general secretary of the National Union of Teachers told Publicservice.co.uk: "It is wrong to divert scarce resources from existing projects to fund the untried and untested Free Schools programme."

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October 2010

Nokia: Mobile phones not PCs will connect the next billion people to the internet

Nokia is putting its money on the next big trend in the mobile phone market. It's not smartphones, says the company, but mobile phones for the emerging market that will drive the next handset revolution.

"More people will join the information age using a mobile phone than a PC," revealed Mary McDowell, Nokia's executive vice president for Mobile Phones during her keynote at Nokia World on September 15.



"With approximately 80 percent of the world's population in reach of a cell tower, it is the mobile phone that will offer the first PC-like experience for many of the next billion people who will come online."

Nokia might not be far off with its goals "to connect the 'next billion' people to the Internet;" a September 14 report by The Boston Consulting Group suggests that "emerging-market cities represent the single largest commercial growth opportunity globally."

The company used Noka World as a forum to showcase its latest touch and type phone, the Nokia C3 – a device it hopes will stand out in the emerging market thanks to its smartphone-like features and relative affordability.

"New kinds of services and powerful software typically associated with smartphones are becoming more important in the traditional mobile phone space," insisted McDowell.

"We are rolling-out targeted services to meet consumer demand for connectivity, access to information and affordability."

Like Nokia's first touch and type device, the C3 combines a touch screen with the "more familiar" numeric keypad.

The C3 also offers 3G and WLAN connectivity, a 5 megapixel camera with flash, a music player, FM radio, support for up to 32GB of memory, email, and access to applications in the Ovi store.

The C3 is due to make it onto the market by Q4 of 2010 and will be priced at around €145.

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October 2010

Google camera cars collect more than street views

Google sent out its Street View camera cars with wi-fi scanning equipment earlier this year, inadvertently, it says, picking up data, including private emails and passwords, being sent over the connections.

In May, Google said the data was so fragmented it could not be pieced together, but has now admitted that examinations of the collected data by "external regulators" has shown that is not the case.

It is clear from those inspections that while most of the data is fragmentary, in some instances entire emails and URLs were captured, as well as passwords.

In a post on the Google blog, Alan Eustace, senior vice president of engineering and research, wrote: "It's clear from those inspections that while most of the data is fragmentary, in some instances entire emails and URLs were captured, as well as passwords."

"We want to delete this data as soon as possible, and I would like to apologise again for the fact that we collected it in the first place," he said, adding, "We are mortified

by what happened, but confident that these changes to our processes and structure will significantly improve our internal privacy and security practices for the benefit of all our users."

Regulation

While several governments have taken action over the privacy intrusion, the UK data watchdog, the UK Information Commissioner's Office, merely called for the collected data to be deleted.

Its investigation consisted of viewing a few samples of the data at Google's London office, and the watchdog concluded at the time that the bits collected were not "meaningful".

Google's admission - forced by other regulators - means the ICO now must reconsider its own findings. "Whilst the information we saw at the time did not include meaningful personal details that could be linked to an identifiable person, we have continued to liaise with, and await the findings of, the investigations carried out by our international counterparts," the watchdog said in a statement.

"Now that these findings are starting to emerge, we understand that Google has accepted that in some instances entire URLs and emails have been captured," it said.

The ICO hasn't yet spoken to Google, and is waiting to get more data from the web giant and other regulators before considering action. "We will be making enquires to see whether this information relates to the data inadvertently captured in the UK, before deciding on the necessary course of action, including a consideration of the need to use our enforcement powers."

The ICO is able to fine organisations up to £500,000, but has yet to impose such a punishment.

A Bill of Rights

Concerns about the abuse of privacy raised by this and other similar cases are currently under discussion by cross-party backbenchers in the House of Commons, which they hope will lead to the creation of a Committee of Enquiry that would consist of experts charged with drawing up a Bill of Rights.

Rob Halfon, Conservative MP for Harlow says, "We need a Bill of Rights which would address the issues - if an individual has been infringed against they should be able to prosecute the offending company and the company should be fined."

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October 2010

ISPs would put iPlayer in the slow lane

The UK's two biggest ISPs have openly admitted that they would give priority to certain internet apps or services if companies paid them to do so.

At a Westminster eForum on net neutrality, senior executives from BT and TalkTalk said they would be happy to put selected apps into the fast lane, at the expense of their rivals.

Asked specifically if TalkTalk would afford more bandwidth to YouTube than the BBC's iPlayer if Google was prepared to pay, the company's executive director of strategy and regulation, Andrew Heaney, argued that it would be "perfectly normal business practice to discriminate between them".

"We would do a deal and look at YouTube and look at the BBC, and decide," he added.

When asked the same question, BT's director of group industry policy, Simon Milner, replied: "We absolutely could see a situation when content or app providers may want to pay BT for quality of service above best efforts," although he added BT had never received such an approach.

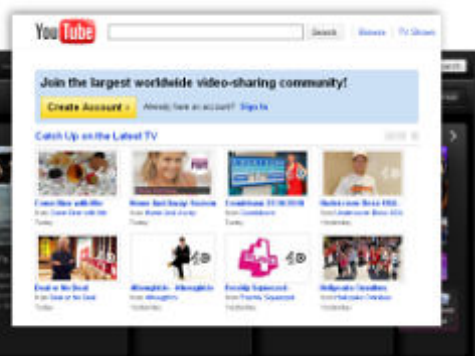
The ISPs' stance was tacitly backed by regulator Ofcom, which has just completed a consultation on net neutrality. "We see real economic benefit for a two-sided market to emerge, especially for markets such as IPTV," said Alex Blowers, international director of Ofcom, although he went on to insist that ISPs must be transparent with customers about such arrangements.

No such thing as neutrality

TalkTalk's Heaney argued that the entire concept of net neutrality had long since evaporated, with varying degrees of traffic management now commonplace among all the leading ISPs. "It's a myth we have net neutrality today - we don't," he said. "There are huge levels of discrimination over traffic type. We prioritise voice traffic over our network. We shape peer-to-peer traffic and deprioritise it during the busy hour.

"If we have a blocking policy customers don't like they vote with their feet, they move," he added.

And the TalkTalk executive urged regulator Ofcom and the EU to refrain from regulating net neutrality. "We don't have a problem, so we shouldn't be considering regulation," Heaney stated. "This is just another business model. It's a legitimate and normal business practice."



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Fixed broadband: worldwide forecast 2010-2015

It is forecast that the total number of fixed broadband connections worldwide will pass 500 million by the end of 2010, and will continue to grow to 720 million by the end of 2015. Fixed broadband's share of total broadband connections will, however, continue to erode. It will account for just 62% of broadband connections worldwide by the end of 2015, down from 87% at the end of 2009.

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