

SA's spectrum woes continue, but there is a solution - Ispa

According to the Internet Service Providers' Association of SA (Ispa), South African consumers are anticipating a post-Covid future with a much lower cost to communicate thanks to mobile network operators getting access to the spectrum that powers our data-driven lives.



Photo by Maxwell Ingham on Unsplash

Ispa said in a statement that the country's mobile network operators have always explained that South Africa's historically high voice and data rates as the direct result of not having enough high-demand spectrum, which cannot be accessed due to political and regulatory stumbling blocks.

"The current pandemic has demonstrated that remote access to high-speed data boosts the real-world quality of life and underscores the gap between the connectivity-haves and connectivity-have-nots. If the assignment of high-demand spectrum had not been stalled for all these years, we could already have achieved the twin goals of protecting lives and generating revenue for the state which have now taken on added importance," said Ispa.

With daily talk of the arrival and distribution of coronavirus vaccines, as well as the likelihood that we could be approaching herd immunity, South Africans are beginning to wonder about the specifics of our shared post-Covid future. Having witnessed first-hand the edge the connected have over the disconnected - even when our very survival is being threatened -

many of us now view more affordable access to communications as being non-negotiable in the near term.



Mediation approach to ISP disputes proves successful

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For this reason, all South Africans should be concerned that litigation is threatening to delay - once again - a more accessible and affordable communications future. Telkom, eTV, MTN and Vodacom have all taken issue with ICASA's Invitation to Apply (ITA) and approached the courts for relief.

Ispa understands that this is a critical commercial inflection point for the operators and that this is driving the litigation, but there is a point at which narrow commercial interests should give way to the greater good

Ispa, therefore, supports calls for mediation and other initiatives designed to bring these disputes to a swift conclusion.

Many of Ispa's members are keen to compete in selling mobile data, bringing innovation and lower prices as they have done for fixed data.

The incumbent operators are on record as stating that limited access to scarce spectrum is the reason they cannot provide resale opportunities to ISPs. "ISPs and South African businesses and consumers look forward to the day when that reason drops into oblivion thanks to the successful assignment of high demand spectrum in the first half of 2021," concluded Ispa.

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