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Optus' new mobile caps: good news and bad

Optus has revamped its capped mobile plans, introduced unlimited standard national SMS and MMS on its \$59 and \$79 capped plans and additional Optus-to-Optus included call value and at the same time increasing the charging increment from 30 seconds to one minute.

The plans are available on 12 or 24 month contracts. The new \$59 and \$79 plans include \$330 worth of standard calls and text to any GSM mobile and fixed lines within Australia. If this 'Optus2AnyOne' value is used up, customers can then access the additional 'Optus2Optus' value which provides \$350 worth of standard calls and text to any Optus GSM (ie non-satellite) mobile and selected Optus fixed lines within Australia on the \$59 plan and \$640 on the \$79 plan. The \$19 and \$29 plan come with \$50 and \$330 worth of any-to-any calls but no Optus-to-Optus value and no free SMS or MMS

The new plans replace the previous plans which offered similar values of standard calls and text to any GSM mobile and fixed lines within Australia but without the unlimited SMS and MMS. Previously unlimited SMS (but not MMS) was available only on the \$79 cap plan

However it's not all good news: the charging increments on all cap plans have been changed from 37c per 30 second (\$79 cap) and 40c per 30 seconds (\$29, \$49 and \$59 caps) and 47c (\$19 cap) to the equivalent rate per minute. Coupled with the 35 cent flag fall, this means that the minimum cost of a call on any plan will be in excess of \$1

Consumer customers also get free five minute calls to Optus GSM mobiles on the same account within Australia, 24/7 and small business customers signing up for 'yes' Business \$49, \$59 and \$79 Cap Plans get unlimited voicemail and a choice of Smart Fleet – free standard calls, SMS and MMS within Australia to other GSM mobiles on their business account 24/7 - or Business Time – free five minute calls to three

nominated Optus GSM mobiles or standard fixed line numbers within Australia.

On Sunday 17 May 2009, Optus will launch a national press, online, radio and outdoor advertising campaign featuring the new 'yes' \$59 Cap plan.

• Vodafone introduces new business caps

Vodafone has introduced a new range of business capped plans at \$69, \$79 or \$99 per month on a 24-month contract offering a bundle of 'minutes' of talk-time with no voicemail charges. They also include text and picture messages, unlimited BlackBerry email and Internet, a monthly data allowance plus a choice of smartphones.

The plans offer, respectively 250, 300 and 600 minutes of standard calls and 300, 400 and 700 Vodafone-to-Vodafone minutes and 200, 300 and 400 SMS or MMS messages.

Unlike the Optus plans Vodafone's are charged by the second. That information at least was prominent on its website but the equally important rate per second, if it is was there, was well hidden. Nor was it clear if there was a flagfall charge.

Telstra launches custom UI on Windows & Sony Ericsson phones

Telstra has introduced the custom-developed mobile phone user interface announced in February (ExD 19 Feb) and branded it 'TelstraOne Experience'.

It is designed to give customers one-click access via customised icons to their most frequently used applications and services. TelstraOne Experience will initially be available on two mobile handsets, the Motorola Motosurf A3100 and the Sony Ericsson W705. Further releases will follow in coming months.

Ross Fielding, executive director, Telstra Product Management, said that TelstraOne Experience was unique in that going forward it would be able to be customised to suit traditional form factor handsets or touch screens and could be deployed across multiple

platforms, presently Windows Mobile and Sony Ericsson's proprietary OS with the ability to roll it out to other platforms in future.

The February announcement spoke only of the Windows Mobile version and said this was being developed by Victorian software company, Pointui. Telstra has now named another Australian software company, SurfKitchen, as the developer, in conjunction with Sony Ericsson, of the Sony Ericsson version.

The Sony Ericsson W705 has a RRP of \$619 and will be available on a \$40 plan over 24 months from Telstra Shops and dealers from 19 May. It has the added advantage of being 'blue tick' rated for use in marginal coverage areas.

The Motorola A3100 is fully HSDPA enabled touch screen device with a device peak downlink speed rating of 7.2Mbps with typical customer download speeds of 550 kbps to 3 Mbps. It has a RRP of \$829 and will be available on a \$60 plan over 24 months from 11 May.

Yankee Group returns to Australia, again

Boston Massachusetts-based telecoms and IT market research and consultancy firm, Yankee Group, has appointed Melbourne-based AsiaFootPrint as its exclusive partner for Australia and New Zealand.

The move is the latest chapter in a 30 year saga of Yankee's on-off relationship with Australia. Yankee Group claims it is uniquely suited to help businesses navigate the transformation of Australia's telecommunications landscape that will be wrought by the National Broadband Network.

"With Australia and New Zealand emerging as growth sectors in connectivity, it is natural for us to expand our presence there," said Emily Green, president and CEO of Yankee Group. "AsiaFootPrint's ability to establish relationships in the region allows us to ramp up quickly to meet demand."

AsiaFootPrint provides a range of services aimed at helping companies enter markets in the Asia Pacific region. According to its web site "our mantra is to assist our clients [to]: rapidly grow their business; open-up and enter new markets; minimise risk and cost; ensure local compliance is met; provide a scalable business model."

Yankee had direct representation in Australia from the early 1980s to late 1997 when the office, which employed a dozen people, was closed. The firm's research was sold from 1998 to 1999 through a local

communications consultancy, Conserve. Yankee then opened a new subsidiary with one of Conserve's principals, Rob Padgett, as its managing director, but that too closed in late 2002.

Yankee has also had numerous owners. Howard Anderson founded the business in 1970, sold it to US based information service company, Primark in 1996. After trying unsuccessfully to take the firm public, Primark sold it to Reuters in May 2000 for \$US72.5 million. Reuters in turn sold Yankee to Monitor Clipper Partners (part of the Decision Matrix Group) and a group of private investors in May 2004. In late 2005 it was sold again, to an investment group led by private equity firm Alta Communications and Emily Green who is currently its president and CEO.

Yankee appears to have no direct presence in Asia Pacific. Its web site says only that: " Our research approach to Asia-Pacific relies upon on-ground Yankee Group analysts and established local research partners."

Voice biometrics: they can tell who you are and much, much more

The identification of somebody from their voice is now a reliable and increasingly widely used means of authentication by call centres, but, according to the CEO of voice technology specialist, Salmat VeCommerce, the same technology is capable of detecting if a person is stressed, suffering from 'cognitive overload' or is telling the truth.

Salmat VeCommerce CEO, Paul McGee said such technologies were still under development, but close to commercialisation. He suggested they could find ready application in call centres. "If you phone up to make an insurance claim, the system could decide whether to process your claim routinely or pass it to an agent for special handling."

VeCommerce has had a voice biometrics installation at Australian Health Management for several years, and one at The New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, but despite saying on a number of occasions in the past year that an implementation would be announced by a major Australian financial institution, that has yet to happen.

However McGee, addressing a press lunch this week, said: "A major Australian insurance company will go live with voice biometrics in the next few weeks and a major Australian bank will also go live in the next few weeks."

There is a strong likelihood that this will be National Australia Bank. In March VeCommerce announced that it had supplied a voice recognition system for NAB to streamline the routing of incoming

customer enquiries as part of its new customer service initiative (ExD 06 Mar). The press release announcing the NAB implementation arrived with the line "As part of the continued development of its customer service strategy NAB launched its new speech recognition and voice biometrics system in October." However it was quickly retracted by VeCommerce's PR agency which said "Have just been informed by NAB that the company has not launched a voice biometrics system."

According to McGee major financial institutions in the US are "in lockstep to deploy voice biometrics...It is almost a natural first entry point," and the company in the past has said that, once one major Australian bank deploys the technology, others will quickly follow.

Consumer ready for voice biometrics

To promote the technology VeCommerce commissioned a survey from Callcentres.net into the general public's view on traditional means of authentication - passwords, PINs and predefined questions. About 200 people were interviewed in each of Australia and New Zealand.

According to VeCommerce, "the survey found that 67 percent of Australians are concerned about fraud and identity theft...An alarming 37 percent of the survey respondents had either experienced identity fraud or theft themselves or had a friend or family member who had fallen victim to these crimes."

VeCommerce said 45 percent of respondents favoured voice biometrics for identity verification, followed by PIN (21 percent), password (18 percent) and person details or personal history questions (16 percent).

Sixty seven percent of respondents were reported believing that their security details were at risk. They are right to be fearful. Mark Goudie - managing principal of the investigative response team APAC at Verizon Business Security Solutions - told *ExchangeDaily* last month that, in 2008, Verizon Business had witnessed an explosion of attacks targeting PIN data (ExD 17 Apr) and he said: "Every PIN breach we investigated was the result of a breach of the back end systems...and investigators found that PIN fraud typically leads to cash being withdrawn directly from the consumer's account."

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New ITU-T study group to look at ICT and climate change

The ITU has established a new study group to deal with environment and climate change. The move follows the Telecommunication Standardisation Advisory Group (TSAG) agreeing - at the conclusion of its three day meeting on 30 April - on how work on ICTs and environment including climate change and recycling would be distributed in ITU-T.

Study Group 5 was chosen as the lead study group and will be renamed the Study Group on Environment and Climate Change to reflect its new mandate. The group remains the lead study group for protection against electromagnetic effects.

Specifically SG 5 will work on documents related to:

- Study of methodologies for calculating the amount of greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions from ICTs, and the amount of reduction in the GHG emissions in other sectors as a result of using ICTs;
- Creation of a framework for energy efficiency in the ICT field, taking account of WTSA Resolution 73;
- Study of methodologies for power feeding that effectively reduce power consumption and resource usage;
- Study of methodologies that reduce environmental effects for ICT facilities and equipment such as recycling.

Study Group 5 will next meet 25-29 May in Geneva and is likely to establish a new working party to address these issues. The ITU says that, "In addition a Joint Coordination Activity (JCA) will ensure that the work across ITU-T's study groups is focused on delivering climate change focused standards in a timely and efficient way. Essentially the group will aim to see that standards are developed in the most appropriate way and that no duplication of effort occurs. It will also provide a single point of contact for ICT and climate change activities in ITU-T and seek collaboration from external bodies working in the field."

IT being left off the agenda for solving global problems

First it was Cisco complaining that the G20 was ignoring IT in its efforts to reform the global banking system. Now Ericsson says IT is being left off the agenda for the global climate negotiations in Copenhagen later this year.

Releasing Ericsson's annual Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability Report, president and CEO Carl-Henric Svanberg, said: "We would like to

see ICT and telecom on the agenda for the global climate negotiations in Copenhagen later this year...During 2008, our technology has been used around the globe to reduce energy consumption and the corresponding CO2 emissions, demonstrating our firm belief that telecommunications is both an essential part of the equation in solving global climate change and critical to the development of more carbon-lean societies."

According to its web site the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen conference, to be held in December will be the culmination of "a crucial year in the international effort to address climate change" and a gathering at

which the nations of the world will agree "to shape an ambitious and effective international response to climate change."

It seems rather surprising if, as Ericsson claims, IT&T does not loom large in this agenda. Equally surprising was the claim made by Cisco, in a white paper last month (ExD 20 Apr) that: "throughout several hundred pages of publicly available reports produced to support the G20 Summit - from the EU, FSA, UN, US Treasury and G20 working groups - there is not a single mention of the role technology could play in supporting the new [global financial] system."

BRIEFS

Avaya Communications Manager to ship with Prognosis included

Integrated Research (ASX: IRI) – developer of the Prognosis IP telephony performance monitoring system – has struck a global distribution agreement with Avaya under which it will provide Prognosis products to Avaya customers worldwide. From 4 May 2009, every Avaya Communications Manager customer will receive a free license for Prognosis VoIP Monitor.

MyNetFone adds new features to Virtual PBX

VoIP service provider MyNetFone (ASX: MNF) has added a number of new features to its Virtual PBX product: automated attendant, tenant billing and receptionist console. With Automated Attendant users can upload their own IVR message directing callers to the appropriate groups within the company (eg: dial to 1 for Sales, dial 2 for Accounts, etc). Tenant billing allows users to have separate billing for various functional groups with an organisation, or a hotel/motel to bill guests for usage of in-room phones. Also, the Snom and Linksys/Cisco IP handsets which MyNetFone supplies for user with the service can be tailored to meet individual user's operational requirements, including displaying their logo.

Haliplex signs distributor to tackle Eastern Europe market

Australian telecommunications manufacturer, Haliplex, has signed a joint development and distribution agreement with TTC Marconi a company headquartered in Prague in the Czech Republic. Haliplex CEO, Richard Cookes, said: "Under terms of the agreement, Haliplex and TTC Marconi have collaborated to enable Haliplex's STM-4 blade technology to be incorporated into various solutions of the TTC Marconi portfolio." Haliplex and TTC Marconi are also in discussions regarding Haliplex's recently announced SONET/SDH Data Pump (SDP).

TTC Marconi is a designer, system integrator and supplier of telecommunications and information technology equipment and services to telecommunications operators, large enterprises and government agencies primarily in Central and Eastern Europe. The company was founded in 1993 as a joint venture of the Czech telecommunication equipment provider TTC Telekomunikace Ltd. and Marconi SpA. It has been an associated partner of Ericsson since Ericson bought Marconi in 2006.

GlobalConnect to resell Verint workforce optimisation products

GlobalConnect Australia, a provider of contact centre integration services, has signed a reseller agreement with Verint Witness Actionable Solutions, a provider of workforce optimisation products for contact centres and for remote office, branch and back-office environments. GlobalConnect Australia will resell Verint's Impact 360 Workforce optimisation software and services suite in Australia – including unified, analytics-driven workforce optimisation products for quality monitoring and call recording, workforce management, speech and data analytics, customer feedback surveys, performance management, eLearning and coaching.