

Vodacom pledges to extend LTE to all its customers

Vodacom said yesterday, 25 March 2013, it would extend its long-term evolution (LTE) network - also known as 4G - to its prepaid market five months after launching the service commercially to its contract customers.

"LTE represents the next evolution in mobile with connection speeds many times higher than 3G, translating into faster downloads and stutter free video," said the mobile phone operator.

It was investing more than R6bn per year in SA, adding extensively to the network of 3G base stations and as building LTE coverage. Vodacom launched its LTE network last October, targeting the contract market.

"But with increased LTE coverage and a much wider range of devices now available, LTE services have now also been made available to prepaid and top up customers," Vodacom CEO Shameel Joosub said.

Vodacom had 600 live LTE sites covering Johannesburg, Cape Town, Pretoria and Durban. An additional 400 were planned by the end of the year.

"This is the culmination of a massive investment in high-speed fibre transmission and an overhaul of our radio network countrywide," Mr Joosub said.

"It is the reason our network has the widest high speed coverage in SA and why we're the clear choice for the best data experience," he said.

Vodacom rival MTN launched LTE commercially late last year mainly targeting contract customers. "MTN intends to offer LTE prepaid users. We will make the relevant announcements to media in due course," MTN said.

Telkom-owned 8ta said recently it would commercially launch LTE in a month or so.

8ta is testing the network and when it launches, it expects to have 1,000 base stations in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Pretoria and Durban.

GSMA, a global industry body representing mobile network providers, stated in its Mobile Economy Report 2013 that LTE/4G networks would account for one in five mobile broadband subscriptions by 2017. Last year, LTE accounted for one in 25 mobile broadband subscriptions.

Vodacom said customers who had a Vodacom-supported LTE capable device would be automatically provisioned for the service within 24 hours of it being registered on the network.

In certain instances, the settings might need to be changed directly on the device.

In its report on technology trends for 2013, Deloitte said the roll out of LTE, although only at selected places, was "an exciting time, especially for mobile broadband subscribers in SA who have been craving high-speed internet, which is now reaching similar speeds to what is available in the developed world".

It said LTE would become a reality in SA in the "very near future when the frequency band becomes completely available".

Deloitte expected access to high-speed broadband to still be limited to a few urban areas.

Source: *Business Day*

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