

Mobile subscriptions in Africa will reach one billion before 2016

The number of mobile subscriptions in Africa will cross the 750 million mark during the fourth quarter of 2012 and reach one billion before the end of 2015, according to forecasts by Informa Telecoms & Media.



Africa has the highest rate of growth in mobile subscriptions among major world regions, with the number of mobile subscriptions in Africa forecasted to grow by 17.5% over the year to end 2012, a higher rate than in any other major world region and above the world average of 10.75% over the same period.

Africa has the world's second-biggest mobile market region by subscription count, behind Asia-Pacific but ahead of Latin America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, North America and the Middle East. Africa's mobile subscription count overtook that of both Western Europe and Latin America during 2011.

Robust growth

"Africa's mobile market continues to grow robustly, driven by competition among mobile operators, the availability of new data services and strong economic growth on the continent," said Matthew Reed, principal analyst for Africa and the Middle East at Informa Telecoms & Media. "Substantial opportunities for further growth remain, because the rate of mobile penetration in Africa is the lowest among major world regions and fixed networks are under-developed or absent across much of the continent."

The number of mobile subscriptions in Africa will reach 761 million at end 2012 and will rise to 1.13 billion at end 2017, according to Informa forecasts. Nigeria, which crossed the 100 million mobile subscriptions threshold in the second quarter of 2012, will continue to be Africa's biggest mobile market and is forecasted to have 168.99 million subscriptions at end 2017, followed by Egypt with 129.4 million subscriptions.

Lowest penetration rate

The rate of mobile penetration in Africa at end September was 67.55%, which was the lowest rate among major world regions and some way below the world average of 91%. The take-up of mobile data services is growing strongly in Africa, as a result of the roll-out of 3G networks, the increasing affordability of data-enabled devices and huge improvements in international connectivity following the deployment of new submarine cables connecting the continent to the rest of the world.

Remarkably, operators in five African countries (Angola, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa and Tanzania) have launched LTE services in recent months, ahead of some ostensibly more-developed European markets. However, LTE subscription numbers in Africa are very low at present, at an estimated 5,000, and take-up of LTE services is likely to be limited to niche markets of more-affluent business and consumer customers for the coming few years.

Informa's analysts will be speaking on a range of hot topics in Africa's telecoms market at the AfricaCom conference. For more information, go to <http://www.informatandm.com/section/africa-com/>.

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