

Ruckus Wireless showcases smart Wi-Fi at AfricaCom

The prevalence of Wi-Fi in Africa and around the world is increasing, with more and more mobile operators looking to deploy it as part of their overall networks, according to Ruckus Wireless. As the role for Wi-Fi in mobile networks becomes clearer, and carrier-grade Wi-Fi solutions such as Ruckus Smart Wi-Fi become more readily available, the monetisation options are becoming clearer as well.



Michael Fletcher, Sales Director of Ruckus Wireless sub-Saharan Africa.

"The vast majority of the world is still waiting for broadband service. In the well-populated parts of developed countries, existing fixed phone infrastructure has made broadband relatively easy to offer, and availability is now very high," said Michael Fletcher, sales director of Ruckus Wireless sub-Saharan Africa.

"Everywhere else, though, especially across regions in Africa, the high costs of current options, such as deploying new fixed infrastructure or large-scale macro-cellular wireless models like WiMAX, are big barriers to further broadband subscriber growth, yet the demand for Wi-Fi is there, and that's where we come in."

According to the Broadband Commission's "State of Broadband 2013" report, mobile broadband is the fastest growing technology in human history. Mobile broadband subscriptions, which allow users to access the Web via smartphones, tablets and Wi-Fi-connected laptops, are growing at a rate of 30% per year. In fact, by the end of 2013 there will be more than three times as many mobile broadband connections as there are conventional fixed broadband subscriptions, with 2.1 billion mobile broadband subscriptions worldwide, which is equivalent to one-third of the total global stock of mobile cellular subscriptions.

Africa has some catching up to do

"Looking at these figures, Africa has some catching up to do in terms of access - despite being big consumers and drivers of mobile," continued Fletcher. South Africa ranked at number 62 out of 170 countries on mobile broadband penetration (26%), while Ghana is the best ranked country in Africa at 49 (33%), followed by Zimbabwe, Namibia and Egypt.

"We believe we have solved this problem. Our field-proven Smart Wi-Fi approach to wireless broadband access opens vast new segments of customers to broadband operators. We can dramatically reduce the capital costs of broadband infrastructure, which in combination with build-as-you grow business models can deliver attractively short break-even timelines, even in very low average revenue per user (ARPU) markets."

Wi-Fi is playing an increasingly important role as operators try to manage traffic and customer demand, while improving customer satisfaction and reducing churn. With the arrival of Hotspot 2.0, a standard developed by the Wi-Fi Alliance (WFA) and fully supported by Ruckus Wireless, this could have a big impact on IT managers, enabling them to monetise their public access Wi-Fi networks by entering into roaming arrangements with mobile operators - providing even further incentives across industries.

Automatic future

"In time, consumers won't know or care what access they're using, cellular or Wi-Fi, because it will all be automatic. They will get a bill at the end of every month that covers all access," continued Fletcher. However, in order for this to happen, the organisations that run these Wi-Fi networks need to enter into agreements with the mobile network operators (MNOs). "Currently, monetisation options are largely limited, but with extensive data analytics, for example, that can enhance location-based services and offer additional revenue-generating opportunities for marketing, advertising and loyalty programmes, this opportunity for MNOs is increasingly opening up, and is set to change the way not only consumers think of Wi-Fi, but the way IT managers and operators see it as well.

"The potential that Wi-Fi has to change and open up the telecommunications landscape in Africa, as with the rest of the world, cannot be denied. Wi-Fi is becoming more and more pervasive and the sooner Africa realises the flexibility and overall cost-effectiveness Wi-Fi has, backed by a more concrete business model, the sooner we can more effectively leverage and expand Wi-Fi to meet the demand for broadband access in Africa," concluded Fletcher.

Michael Fletcher will be presenting on this topic today, 14 November at 12.20pm during AfricaCom, which takes place at the Cape Town International Convention Centre.

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