

No throughway for VoIP in Zimbabwe

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The Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (Potraz) has failed to come up with regulations to govern Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), raising fears this could be a deliberate attempt to protect state-owned telephone operator, TelOne, whose fortunes have crumbled since the advent of the mobile networks 10 years ago.

Potraz was supposed to have put in place the regulatory framework governing VoIP operations in the country in October last year, but has not yet done so.

The delay in coming up with the regulatory framework, said by angry internet service providers to be deliberate, has meant that the Internet Access Provider Class A licences remain unissued.

Some Internet Service Providers have been waiting for well over five years for regulatory authority to allow them to start offering VoIP services to clients.

Currently, there are three licenced Internet Access Providers – Telecontract, Ecoweb, owned by mobile network provider Econet Wireless, and ComeOne, owned by fixed telephone network operator, TelOne.

BizCommunity has been informed that the government's telecommunications regulatory agency was worried that new communication tools could hurt state owned telephone services by allowing people to make cheap international calls using VoIP, therefore reducing TelOne's revenue.

With an increasing phobia for unregulated communication among its citizens, the government is unwilling to allow the usage of VoIP for now, although telecommunication sector players say some institutions are already using it and that the country was presently receiving voice and data traffic from South Africa's VoIP infrastructure.

One source, who declined to be named for fear of retribution, indicated that instead of the government, which recently passed a law legalising the spying of private telephone calls and email messages, formulating new laws that would allow use of VoIP in the country and then spend millions of dollars buying spying software to eavesdrop on VoIP communication, it had decided rather to delay opening up the VoIP market to players.

"Installing firewalls to prevent international calls through VoIP would be costly," the source indicated.

VoIP has been subject to intense debate and government suspicion across the globe, with certain countries, like the United Arab Emirates, making it illegal to use any form of VoIP.

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