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ComReg issues consultation paper on Numbering for VoIP Services

The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) today published a consultation paper in relation to Numbering for Voice over Internet Protocol services in Ireland.

The cost of telephone calls is widely expected to fall dramatically in price over the years ahead, as the convergence of traditional telephone systems with the new Internet Protocol (IP) technologies gathers pace. Already very cheap long-distance calls can be made using certain providers, though not necessarily always with the same high quality expected from the regular telephone companies. Nevertheless, it is generally acknowledged that IP telephony – known as VoIP – is here to stay and will move from niche services to becoming a core offering over the coming years.

An important issue that can influence the growth of these services is the availability of telephone numbers for their users, allowing them to be called by the majority of telephone subscribers, who are still based on the traditional telephone network (PSTN). Only a very few countries have yet made regular telephone numbers available for VoIP subscribers but now ComReg is opening a consultation with the aim of exploring under what conditions this might be done in Ireland.

ComReg has opened this consultation in response to requests from interested VoIP providers. It is clear that a positive outcome could help to accelerate the growth of VoIP services, greatly enhance competition here, and also contribute to Ireland's drive to be at the forefront of information age technologies.

The consultation has implications for all telephone companies and service providers, for the new VoIP service providers and, potentially for all consumers. In that respect it is worth noting that certain VoIP services could drive down the costs of telephony.

One possible outcome of the consultation would be the immediate opening of a completely new range of telephone numbers for VoIP and related services, which would facilitate new-style operators and avoid the risk of exhausting existing numbers ranges.

ComReg considers that the emergence of VoIP towards mainstream use may be one of the more significant occurrences in recent telecoms history. It has the potential to totally transform the economics of telecommunications services. ComReg believes that within this scenario, Irish companies should be at the forefront, so as to gain maximum advantage from the changes now underway – and opening this consultation is an important step towards that end.

The full consultation paper ComReg 04/72 – Consultation on Numbering for VoIP services is available on the ComReg website www.comreg.ie

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Editor's Notes

1. Japan, Austria, Norway and the UK are known to have designated numbers for VoIP purposes, sometimes under restrictive conditions, while Germany is currently undertaking a consultation on this issue.
2. In the VoIP world, it is possible that demand for telephone numbers could arise from multiple subscribers per line or per household, which would have a serious impact on existing numbering resources.