

SA needs at least 5 million Wi-Fi hotspots



While private, NGO's and government sectors continue to deploy Wi-Fi throughout the country, more consultations and collaborations are needed if the country's broadband 2020 vision is to be realized, says Wi-Fi Forum SA Chairperson, Andile Ngcaba. Speaking to *Digital Focus* on the sidelines of the Forum's inaugural conference held last month, Ngcaba said a lot still needs to be done if these connectivity objectives are to be realized.

He added that the Forum was born out of the realization that critical issues regarding connectivity needed to be solved. "We realized that there were a number of issues that needed to be solved in order to provide affordable and available broadband in the country. These include: ensuring that the quality of connectivity is addressed; and that we are members of the global Wi-Fi community so that we can address issues such as international Wi-Fi roaming."

Ngcaba says the Forum encourages anyone who has an interest in Wi-Fi deployment to join as a member. "As you know, in the modern age it is critical that we have access to broadband connectivity and services. In rural areas and smaller communities, we hope to be working as an industry with retailers, service providers and community organisations to enable them to deploy and run Wi-Fi services."

South Africa has the potential and the expertise to ensure the delivery of quality services using Wi-Fi as an access medium, thereby ensuring that we form part of the the global broadband community. However, Ngcaba says this can only be achieved if affordable connectivity is available across the country instead of in a few select areas. Though South Africa has seen a number of deployments of Wi-Fi services across the country, these are mostly in urban areas as telcos struggle to meet the needs of rural areas in terms of quality and affordability. Ngcaba notes that one of the priorities



for the Forum will be to mobilise industry to provide coverage in underserved areas. "There is increasing usage of Wi-Fi in South Africa but it is not broad enough; we need to connect taxi ranks, train stations, townships, rural areas, stadiums and public spaces to provide them with the ability to get connected," he added.

As the Tshwane Wi-Fi project continues to be a success with increasing usage and more rollouts in townships, Ngcaba says the rest of the country can learn vital lessons on how crucial connectivity has become in the lives of ordinary citizens. "That is a great project, and it is pleasing to see that other municipalities like Mangaung in the Free State and Johannesburg are undertaking or planning similar projects; it bodes well for the country's vision of broadband for all," he adds. Ngcaba noted that the Forum's vision of achieving widespread coverage with at least 5 million hotspots with the capability to deliver 100Mbps per second is a realistic goal, indicating that the City of Johannesburg has set itself a target to create 1000 hotspots in the underserved areas of Johannesburg by 2016.

For Ngcaba it is also encouraging that national government has come on board as a key stakeholder in developing best practices. "The Department of Telecommunication and Postal Services understand that Wi-Fi is critical to the success of the SA Connect vision. The Forum understands that we have to engage with and bring these key stakeholders on board; we aim to co-ordinate with the regulator, ICASA, and other interested stakeholders to ensure

“

I urge the Wi-Fi Forum of South Africa to work towards ensuring that Wi-Fi, as a delivery medium for broadband, supports job creation and economic development by contributing to the growth of SMME's

”



the broadband rollouts are a success and happen as smooth as possible," he said, adding "it is a well-known fact that economic benefits for a connected country are significant, so South Africa cannot be left out when the rest of the world is making connectivity a priority."

During his opening speech at the inaugural conference of the Forum, the Minister at the Department

of Telecommunications and Postal Services, Dr Siyabonga Cwele, outlined the importance of connectivity. "I urge the Wi-Fi Forum of South Africa to work towards ensuring that Wi-Fi, as a delivery medium for broadband, supports job creation and economic development by contributing to the growth of Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME's) which operate within the ICT environment," said the Minister.

Ngcaba added that the effective delivery of a broadband future is dependent on two critical components - fibre backhaul and Wi-Fi access networks. "This future is, however, dependent on the industry working together to ensure quality, standards and affordability are delivered in order to provide confidence to end-users in the delivery of services," he said.

Another important area of focus for the Forum is in the area of developing a common currency for Wi-Fi, in order to enable consumers to utilise Wi-Fi bundles across all providers' networks. Ngcaba indicated that the Forum aims to get Wi-Fi providers to work together on effective price and quality measures, noting that "critical to the success of this approach is in ensuring that standards are designed and applied collaboratively throughout the country."

Established in November 2013, the Forum's inaugural conference also highlighted significant new technology developments in the Wi-Fi sector and discussed the development of an effective self-regulatory framework for South Africa.

ZERO DISTANCE: THE NEW PROXIMITY TO THE CUSTOMERS

Every entity expects that, regardless of whether they have turned on their lights, what has happened (the development of) a number of "disruptive" technologies - Cloud Computing, Big Data, Social Media and Mobile Computing, when they appear in combination, they have the potential to transform our world (public spaces, and in doing so, these technologies also transform business, their employees and their customers) - including our own. The Minister, Enkhosini Mphahlele.

www.digitalfocus.co.za/2014/02/04/zero-distance-the-new-proximity-to-the-customers/

T - Systems -

