

Introducing Telkom's real competition – ECN takes aim at the incumbent

John Holdsworth, ECN CEO

There is a new player in the telecommunications space, and it is rapidly emerging as the number one fixed-line alternative to Telkom. ECN operates in the converged voice and data arena and is the first value added network services (VANS) provider to interconnect bilaterally to all four major operators and one of the first VANS to connect to Sentech's international gateway for inbound and outbound calls.

According to CEO John Holdsworth, ECN is already ranked in the top three terminators of fixed line voice minutes in the market – the company expects to do some 10 million minutes per month by the end of the 2nd quarter– and the company can offer the corporate market a full range of converged voice and data services without any Telkom infrastructure being present.

"ECN is not a simple least cost routing (LCR) provider. We believe that the key to enhancing our customer's business is much more than just a cheap phone call. Our solutions are designed to deliver the highest performance and the greatest flexibility, while still offering savings in the region of 30-40%. As soon as customers are connected to our network they immediately see significant improvements in their call quality and substantial reductions in their monthly telephone bill," he says.

According to Chief Commercial Officer Andy Openshaw, ECN has a strong focus on the high-end corporate market. We are a trusted and highly regarded supplier and provide critical communications to some of the largest organisations in South Africa including AON, Clover, Discovery, Exxaro, JD Group, MNET, Scaw Metals and many others.

"We have also signed up a large proportion of the contact centre market, and one needs to remember that this market segment is particularly interested in quality of service (QoS), so if you can provide them with the kind of QoS they demand, you know you are doing something right."

Holdsworth says that under the terms of the Electronic Com-

munications Act, ECN already has already been awarded an Individual ECS licence, but that it has applied for, and hopes to soon receive, the ECNS licence which would mean it can self provide its network where necessary, making it a genuine competitor to Telkom and Neotel.

"We already have points of presence (POPs) in Pretoria, Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg and will add POPs in Port Elizabeth and Bloemfontein soon, which means we will have a footprint in all the key metropolitan areas of the country."

ECN's CTO, Brynn Andrew, points out that first and foremost, ECN is a telephone company.

"We connect people via whatever medium suits the task at hand, whether it is via microwave, copper, fibre or even WiMAX. It is this level of flexibility for the end user along with the fact that we do it more efficiently and effectively than the competition that has seen us grow our business so quickly," he says.

"Corporate South Africa is increasingly seeing ECN as the second network operator and we want to tackle the incumbents on their own turf. If you understand how this business works – and we do – then you can be a relatively focused player and still take on the established brands."

Holdsworth says that although ECN may not be a large multinational with a global footprint, its major advantage is its efficient operations and motivated workforce who are passionate about what they do and the services they provide our customers.

"You don't have to wear a suit to be serious, and really the only thing we're serious about is ensuring we deliver the best possible service to our customers. We are the dark horse of the market, but unlike many other competitors who have made dramatic announcements and then been unable to deliver on their promises, we have delivered first and only now begun to talk about it, because that is the way we do business."

"Although we may not be part of the cheap and cheerful LCR brigade, we still want to save our customers money, but we want to do so while providing carrier grade reliability and industry leading customer service, backed up by innovative product and service sets developed using 21st century next generation technology. Or to phrase it another way: ECN is big enough to matter, but small enough to care," he concludes.

