

## ALP launches ICT revamp with E Australia strategy

Opposition ICT spokesperson Kate Lundy yesterday launched a broad ALP IT and telecoms policy with the centrepiece, E-Australia, featuring a \$69.3 million, four-year program designed to *"manage public information and provide online services as well as target specific challenges and opportunities, starting in January 2005"*.

Launching the policy in Brisbane, Lundy said that at the heart of the policy is the opposition's belief that *"ICT is a foundation of nation-building in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Labor will create a new emphasis and a new administration for ICT industry-related policy and programs."* This, she said, would be achieved within a more enterprise-oriented Industry Department, where ICT would *"take its proper place at the heart of industry policy"* in a new ICT section.

Lundy said the aim of E-Australia would be to close the digital divide and prioritise making the Internet available to everyone. *"E-Australia will address many of the important social aspects of IT, including using the Internet to enhance democratic participation, providing government services online, supporting small business adoption of IT and e-commerce and helping people use the Internet safely."*

E-Australia has been divided into the following sections: Australia Online, Citizenship Online, Government IT and Online, Small Business Online and Safety Online, effectively re-aligning the current government's IT&T departmental regime. Government IT and Online (GITO) will replace the Howard Government's Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO). Labor also said it would finally appoint a Government CIO.

Lundy ushered in further funding for manufacturing, university and TAFE places, though it is yet to announce its R&D policies. *"Turning good ideas into successful businesses requires smart investment, entrepreneurial skills, clever technologists and a range of professional services."*

Communications minister Senator Helen Coonan slammed the policy as showing *"clear disregard for the Australian IT industry"*. She warned of Labor's *"desire to re-unionise the workforce"*, claiming that it would *"wind back industrial relations and reduce workplace flexibility for ICT start-ups"*.

Alan Hartstein

## Optus boss slams current state of broadband competition

**Optus** has taken a vocal stance against the lack of pro-competitive policies for broadband in current government strategy. Speaking in Brisbane yesterday, newly installed Optus chief executive Paul O'Sullivan urged the federal government to implement a pro-active strategy to *"unleash the competitive potential of broadband"*.

*"The government should adopt 'outcomes based regulation' - specifically designed to achieve the outcome of much higher broadband take up and, in turn, a much more open and competitive market structure in the local loop,"* he said. O'Sullivan called on whichever party was elected to adopt a three-pronged approach to ramping up broadband adoption. These include: halting **Telstra's** gaming in wholesale broadband and restore resale margins, protecting companies building their own broadband networks and setting rules to ensure Telstra plays fair in facilitating competitive rollout and making investments in competitive broadband infrastructure viable and attractive.

O'Sullivan said that broadband could bring massive benefits to Australia, including high-speed access for consumers, enabling e-commerce for businesses of all sizes and delivering economic and social benefits through applications such as telemedicine and e-government.

He warned that those benefits would only be realised if there were vigorous broadband competition. *"Optus is determined to bring competition to broadband - and head off efforts by the incumbent to dominate the market in the same way that it dominated the local loop,"* he said.

Natalie Apostolou

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## Optus signs up for Gilat satellite upgrade

Israeli satellite equipment vendor **Gilat Satellite Networks** has signed up **Optus** as its first customer for a revamped SkyEdge product range. Gilat's SkyEdge family, which offers a series of different VSAT products that can all operate via a single hub, was released earlier this year and has been in trials with a number of operators.

Gilat spokesman Barry Spielman told *Communications Day* that the deal with Optus was significant not just because it was the first for the new product line-up, but because Optus was *"an important customer who continuously upgrades and expands its networks"*. Gilat did not disclose any financial details of the contracts. Optus already operates two-way satellite services throughout Australia and New Zealand based predominantly on Gilat's 360 and 360E systems, which will now be expanded to SkyEdge. The deployment and upgrade of the network is expected to be completed in Q4 of 2004.

*"We are pleased to continue our relationship with Gilat and are confident that this upgrade will enable us to improve the quality and range of services we supply to our customers,"* Optus Wholesale & Satellite MD Warren Hardy said. Spielman said SkyEdge products were also currently in trials in the US and Peru, and he expected further contract announcements soon.

As well as offering the ability to use different terminals from a single hub, the SkyEdge system also marks Gilat's support for an increasingly popular two-way satellite standard known as digital video broadcast - return channel system (DVB-RCS). Previously the vendor had only offered its proprietary two-way standard. Former Gilat CEO Oron Most had earlier said that while DVB-RCS is still in its infancy, it was important to customers. *"Our move to DVB-RCS and open standards is a strategic decision and a reflection of what the customers want. We accept it and want to lead it,"* he said, adding that the company was now part of the committee finalising the standard.

Geoff Long

## Broadband Phone launches residential and SME VoIP service

Sydney based VoIP specialist **Broadband Phone** has launched its residential and SME service following a seven-year development cycle. The VoIP service requiring ADSL or cable modem connectivity also utilises **Unwired Australia's** network allowing existing customers to enable their wireless broadband service with voice capabilities.

Broadband Phone is an Unwired reseller but does not have a collaborative relationship with Unwired for VoIP services. An Unwired spokesperson yesterday confirmed it was on track to launch its own VoIP service of PSTN quality in the first half of 2005. Unwired is currently testing its in-house VoIP solution and will conduct a pilot later in the year.

The Broadband Phone service includes discounted local, STD, IDD and fixed to mobile call rates, a fully portable number and free calls within the Broadband Phone network. Broadband Phone director Miranda Wong said the solution aimed to combat the rising costs of fixed line rental and is pitched at SMEs making regular STD or IDD calls and subscribers looking to increase the value of a broadband connection.

The Play and Plug Broadband Phone will retail for \$249 with standard call plans at \$15.95 per month. These include 50 free local calls and unlimited and untimed calls between Broadband Phone subscribers. Additional local calls are 15 cents per call untimed, STD calls are 10 cents per minute, calls to Australian mobiles are 30 cents per minute and IDD call rates start from 5 cents per minute.

Natalie Apostolou

## ACCC releases third Telstra record keeping draft

The third draft for **Telstra's** record keeping rules under the accounting separation regime has been released by the **Australian Competition and Consumer Commission**. The rule relates to imputation testing, used to assist in detecting an anti-competitive price squeeze, on retail services using Telstra's core wholesale services. A price squeeze could occur where Telstra reduces the margin between retail and wholesale prices to a level that inhibits competition.

The draft rule updates a decision issued by the ACCC last year, ACCC Commissioner Ed Willett said. At that time, the ACCC foreshadowed the issuing of a revised rule that would require Telstra to report on the retail ADSL service. *"The purpose of this is to determine whether those providers using the unconditioned local loop service, which is a wholesale service used to gain direct access to Telstra's copper network, would be able to viably provide broadband services."* He added that this is separate from the ACCC's investigation into wholesale ADSL pricing, which is currently subject to a Competition Notice. *"That investigation relates to the retail pricing of the service for competitors who resell Telstra's ADSL wholesale service."* The ACCC is seeking comments from interested parties on the draft rule by Wednesday 22 September.

Natalie Apostolou

## Telecom NZ forced to delay launch of UBS

Telecom New Zealand Wholesale is unable to implement its unbundled bitstream service, or UBS, as planned, by its launch date of September 29. Strategy and planning manager Martin Butler says it will provide a version based on its Layer 3 JetStream Surf service as an interim solution, for the between five weeks and three months it might take to sort out. *"We don't think it is insurmountable but we had a choice of delaying the launch of UBS or launching with an interim solution."*

Butler says the issue with the Layer 2 Tunneling Protocol L2TP service manifested itself in the testing part of the project. This is the first time Telecom NZ has ever attempted a service such as this, he says. Practically, at Layer 3, Telecom NZ is managing the IP addresses and has control of authentication and authorisation. At Layer 2, the service provider has control of those.

According to Butler, if an ISP wants to provide a *"throttle on cap"* they will be inconvenienced. *"This is made significantly easier by having control of IP addressing. We are obviously apologetic for that inconvenience."* ihug announced such a service yesterday called blink, with a flat-rate price and a speed throttle coming in once data caps of either 2GB or 20GB per month are reached. ihug general manager networks David Diprose says he doesn't see why throttling would be an issue since JetStream Starter can be throttled.

*"We'll need to see Telecom NZ's proposal and analyse it in full detail,"* he said. Diprose says ihug is disappointed in the delays but if Telecom NZ can provide an interim solution then ihug is committed to getting on with selling it. Ihug had been involved in UBS trials with Telecom NZ but had been wondering why the trials hadn't really been progressing, he says. It has 10,000 customers it wants to convert from JetStream to UBS from October.

Butler says there shouldn't be issues for customers or ihug from a pricing perspective but Telecom NZ will need to analyse what ihug is planning before it could comment definitively. He says Wholesale is doing its best to ensure its partners can keep their promises to customers. An ironic upshot is that the glitch could mean a faster switch to Telecom NZ's UBS services for other ISPs who were waiting in a queue behind trialtees ihug and **Orcon**. Existing customers of those other ISPs will be able to be migrated to the interim service earlier than they would have been able to get a UBS service.

Richard Wood

## BRIEFLY

- The **Australian Communications Authority** has completed 1717 of its scheduled smartnumber auctions, with 143 auction still open. The highest recorded auction price was paid by **Managed Performance**, which purchased the 1300 8294 (TAXI) number for just over \$1 million. Details of bidding and buyers can be found on the smartnumber Web site.
- **Nokia** has announced plans to adapt a Symbian OS-based BlackBerry Connect solution on its Series 80-based mobile devices, like the Nokia 9500 Communicator. Due for release in Australia in Q4 2004, it will be able to connect to BlackBerry services from Research In Motion including support for BlackBerry Enterprise Server and Internet Service, enabling push-based e-mail and calendar access.
- **Infonet** announced the availability of a new Internet-based MPLS IP VPN service targeted at multinational customers. The new product, which compliments Infonet's existing Infonet's IP VPN Secure and IP VPN Off-net products, will provide customers with better security than do-it-yourself IP VPN Internet services.

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