

# WAPA Predictions for 2015

In December, the news is full of reviews and analysis of the year gone by, while predictions are notoriously difficult, WAPA has focused on the trends impacting the wireless industry and predicts the following for 2015.



## ICASA will allocate and assign more spectrum

WAPA has long been advocating for more spectrum to be allocated and assigned, as has much of the rest of the wireless industry. ICASA's Strategic Plan for 2015-2019 explicitly recognises the role of spectrum in facilitating universal access to broadband services at fair retail prices by 2020. This Plan sets out roadmaps, deliverables, and targets for both International Mobile Telephony (IMT) spectrum, and progress towards opportunistic spectrum management inclusive of such technologies as 'white spaces' or 'TVWS' and cognitive radios.

The assignment of more spectrum is fundamentally important to the growth of faster, cheaper broadband and achieving the objectives of South Africa Connect. ICASA must balance these objectives with ensuring that its policies do not cause interference with existing systems in use, or any unintended consequences. In any event, this has long been in the works and in 2015 we will begin to see some of the fruits of this labour.

WAPA also welcomes the draft amendment to the spectrum licence fees as they pertain to the mmWave spectrum, and it is encouraging to see this outcome after the co-operation between ICASA and WAPA at the Future Wireless Technologies Forum. WAPA predicts that the first mmWave spectrum assignments will be made for commercial network deployment before the end of 2015.

## More nationwide wireless brands will emerge

WAPA members will continue to provide the only option for fixed broadband services in many rural areas because of the high cost of rolling out fixed-line technologies outside of cities and other densely populated areas.

Some incumbents and larger WISPs will launch or extend existing bids to build strong consumer wireless brands to capitalise on fixed wireless' ability to deliver broadband in areas that are not economically feasible for fibre or other alternatives. WAPA expects that while some may compete head-on with smaller providers, many of these operators will partner with the local WISPs, many of whom are WAPA members, through some form of reseller or local support arrangement.

## Neutral host/open access will become more prevalent

Open access as a theme is appearing more and more commonly in policies emerging from the Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services, and is a central feature of South Africa Connect. It is also being embraced by certain elements of the telecommunications industry, starting on the fibre side, and WAPA expects we will begin to see the beginnings of a move towards open access in wireless and Wi-Fi as well in 2015.

Industry has yet to reach complete consensus as to what exactly it means for a wireless network to be provisioned for open access, but the concept describes an arrangement whereby multiple service providers share the same basic network infrastructure and compete in other ways such as pricing plans, customer service, and value-added services.



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## Value-added services will hit mainstream

Last year, WAPA predicted that value-added services such as video-on-demand and location-triggered loyalty solutions over Wi-Fi would hit the market in 2014. Larger operators continue to look for ways to deliver new revenue in a world where over-the-top (OTT) solutions such as Whatsapp, which plans to launch free calling in early 2015, challenge traditional revenue streams. MTN launched a streaming video service called FrontRow at the end of December 2014, and MWEB announced that DStv users will retain free access to the MWEB Wi-Fi network (which will shortly become a paid service), and will hopefully make use of streaming video while on the go.

WAPA expects more and more operators to begin to dabble with these sorts of services, in a battle to differentiate for residential consumers. In the Wi-Fi space, larger providers may decide to focus on monetising the network through advertising or location-based services, and smaller providers will differentiate on value-adds from the venue.

## Privacy and security will become top of mind

This may not be so much a prediction as a wish, but with everything from major U.S. retailers having their credit card data and customer databases pillaged to the infamous Sony Pictures hack to the Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act that will begin to affect South African businesses in 2015, there is no better time to design and build systems that have security and consumer privacy as core tenets rather than afterthoughts.

This is especially relevant to public Internet access points such as Wi-Fi hotspots, where a combination of poor security, multiple devices, and consumers on the go could lead to some unfortunate consequences.

Here's hoping, anyway!

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