

## **Is your FTTH connectivity service provider short-changing you?**

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27 February 2017

Fibre to the Home (FTTH) is sweeping the nation, and many people are caught up in the excitement of the possibilities it offers. The prospect of high speed, stable connectivity is being well-received and has many consumers facing the challenge of selecting a service provider from many of them out there.

There are several factors to consider and questions to ask to choose a service provider who offers the best value for money from the multitude of service providers clamouring for business, claiming best provider status and extending enticing value adds. One consideration that many consumers overlook is whether or not the service provider offers voice on top of their data offering.

While service providers tout the many benefits of high speed data and Internet access, consumers are usually unaware that these services often exclude voice. And while voice may seem like an unnecessary addition in the age of mobile phones, the value it can add in terms of cost savings and proof of quality could ensure consumers don't get short changed by a second-rate service provider.

Landlines or ADSL VoIP services are often sacrificed for FTTH connectivity, as many consumers revert to using their mobile phones instead. Mobile call charges remain high in comparison with land line calls or Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) calls, making it an expensive option. As there is no separate line needed to have voice added to a FTTH connection, it should be an easy – and free – add on for service providers to offer. This will take away the expense of either a dedicated voice line, such as a landline, or of relying entirely on mobile for voice.

Yet, many service providers are not including voice on their service offering, for good reason. Voice is difficult to offer unless a service provider's network is impeccable. It requires a network that is stable and well supported in order to be effective. On top of this, service providers require interconnection with all major operators which can be expensive and prevent entry into the voice market.

In fact, voice is so reliant on stable and expansive networks that it can be seen as a measure of network quality when it is offered: a service provider who offers voice should have a network of sufficient quality to enable the provision and support of quality voice services. Usually, a voice provider is bound to have a superior data offering.

If a consumer manages to narrow their service provider choices down to those who include voice as a service, there are a few, simple considerations which will help identify the best value for money. Firstly, voice offerings should not demand that consumers spend a fortune on new handsets, particularly if they already have a handset from a previous ADSL or landline offering. The service provider should be able to offer voice using existing handsets.

Even more cost effective and efficient would be a voice offering that uses the user's mobile handset to offer voice over Wi-Fi, leveraging the Wi-Fi router attached to the FTTH connection. This is also known as Wi-Fi calling and allows consumers to make use of a single device to make and receive calls, without exorbitant mobile charges. The added bonus with this type of voice service is that consumers are not limited to their own Wi-Fi network. They can make use of any Wi-Fi network, anywhere.

The second consideration would be the level of support offered on voice. Consumers need to ensure that their voice service is afforded priority over their data service so that call quality is maintained. Consumers should check the references and capabilities of the service provider to ensure that they are able to offer a quality and reliable voice service over their network.

Finally, consumers should select a service provider who offers easy number portability. It is an unnecessary nuisance for consumers to have to change their contact numbers, requiring them to memorise a new number as well as notify all of their contacts. Any creditable service provider should be able to offer easy and quick number portability with their service offering.

There are hordes of service providers out there, all vying for business and angling to offer the best deals to FTTH subscribers. However, if voice is not on the menu as a value add on top of a data offering, consumers may end up wasting money on additional voice services. Adding unnecessary costs to one's data service and winding up short changed in the process.