

Key Building Blocks for an Internet of Innovation

By VON Europe

As Europe welcomes a new Parliament, envisages a new Treaty and prepares for a new Commission, the i2010 strategy adopted for 2005-2009 is under review. For VON, the next plan should set the priorities and vision Europe has for the ICT sector for the next ten years, hence our “i2020” proposal.

VON Europe believes that the following elements need to be put in place to ensure that the i2020 vision for the future is one that builds on Innovation and delivers tangible benefits to consumers, businesses and the economy as a whole:

i2020 IS ABOUT CREATING A GENERATION OF INFORMED USERS RATHER THAN STICKING TO OLD MODELS.



Voice over Internet protocol, referred to as “VoIP,” services have truly revolutionised the way people and businesses communicate: talking to each other is cheaper if not free, families can see each other through video-conferencing even when separated by thousands of kilometers, games become more interactive and Web 2.0 social networks switch from the virtual arena to real life. Many of these VoIP services use software in combination with a user’s Internet access to enable a wide variety of innovative new ways to communicate. **This innovation has been rendered possible by a light touch regulatory approach** that considered that VoIP services were not to be treated as traditional telephony and should therefore not be burdened by regulatory requirements - put in place to address public concerns that were only relevant decades ago, for older, different technologies - such as emergency access, localization of callers, etc. as long as users were clearly made aware that access to 112 was not offered.



But instead of focusing on raising awareness, **some policy-makers prefer to burden these innovative VoIP services with traditional telephony obligations** for which they are often not technically suited. By creating blanket obligations, there is a **danger** that consumers will depend on these new innovative services for emergency calling when their reliability cannot be guaranteed because they depend on an underlying network that is normally not managed or controlled by the Internet voice provider.

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- ▶ Old telephony regulation should be reserved for those VoIP services offering a close replacement to traditional retail telephone services and where there is a risk of consumer confusion.
- ▶ The Commission should focus on ensuring VoIP users are informed when communicating over the Internet of any limitations such as lack of emergency calling and should not burden innovative services and applications with obsolete obligations!

i2020 IS ABOUT RETHINKING NUMBERS IN AN ALL-IP WORLD, NOT CREATING CLUSTERS BY REGION OR DEGREE OF MOBILITY.



Phone numbers, IP addresses, mobile Vs fixed, geographic Vs non-geographic... **most national numbering plans, devised more than 30 years ago, are unlikely to be adequate to cope with new trends and developments.** Location information of geographic numbers is a legacy from the Plain Old Telephony Services, when habits were not what they are today. In recent years, people have become more flexible, ready and wanting to move and travel at any time. Mobile phones are slowly overtaking fixed phones and calling your plumber happens more often than not on his mobile phone, whilst a call given to a specific number could be forwarded to anywhere.



Numbers, including geographic numbers, should be eligible to be allocated to service providers and be used by end users outside of the traditional telephone zones or other boundaries, including on a trans-national basis within the EU. VON Europe supports the view that geographical numbers are most suitable to open up VoIP services to the mass consumers as consumers are highly familiar with those types of numbers and end user tariffs are the most transparent (or at least not less transparent than other types of numbers).

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- ▶ The approach to numbering should not be one of obligations v.s. rewards, whereby a VoIP provider can only get access to numbers if it fits into a label and abides by a series of constraints. Nor should it be one that is unable to encompass and embrace the imminent changes brought by convergence of all networks and the switch to an all-IP environment. **A well designed and forward looking numbering plan will accommodate growth in the market, bring consumer benefits and promote competition.**
- ▶ Policy makers should focus on ensuring the fullest possible retail price transparency and removing the link between geographic numbers and location, rather than creating additional obligations on usage of certain numbers. **Let users choose their number(s), keep it wherever they are and use it on the device(s) or services of their choice!**

i2020 IS ABOUT INCREASING AND PROMOTING CHOICE



Ensuring that consumers and businesses can continue to use the Internet to access lawful VoIP applications and services and devices is essential to promote choice, innovation and competition. VON Europe believes a crucial challenge of the i2020 vision will be to continue to facilitate innovation by companies who are developing new services, including VoIP, delivered via the Internet.

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- ▶ Policy makers should ensure that consumers and businesses can continue to use the Internet applications, services and devices of their choice. Policymakers should resist any attempts to block the unfettered access to VoIP (or similar technologies) and more generally all legal Internet services and applications, stemming from regulatory, commercial and competitive barriers that put undue restrictions on the use of Internet enabled communications including the underlying technology and prevents it from being utilised to its full potential.
- ▶ A dialogue between all interested stakeholders should be initiated by the European institutions to ensure that European consumers benefit from a meaningful choice of innovative services and applications.

We thank you in advance for taking consideration of these views. Feel free to contact Caroline De Cock, Executive Director VON Europe, by phone (+ 32 (0)474 840515) or email (cdc@voneurope.eu) should you need further information.

ABOUT VON Europe: VON Europe consists of leading VoIP companies, on the cutting edge of developing and delivering voice innovations over Internet. The coalition, which includes iBasis, Intel, Google, Microsoft, Rebtel, Skype and Voxbone, works to advance regulatory policies that enable Europeans to take advantage of the full promise and potential of VoIP. The Coalition believes that with the right public policies, Internet based voice advances can make talking more affordable, businesses more productive, jobs more plentiful, the Internet more valuable, and Europeans more safe and secure.

More information on VON Europe can be found at www.voneurope.eu

