

Diversifying connectivity - key in 2018



By [Riaan Maree](#)

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One can absolutely not deny the role of fibre in South Africa's economy from both a business and consumer perspective - aiding in bridging South Africa's digital divide and increasing access to high-speed connectivity.



Riaan Maree, co-founder and chief technical officer at VRUlink

Consequences of this are far reaching beyond mere cost saving on what used to be a very expensive data pool but also aiding faster and more productive work streams in the business environment.

Furthermore, the advent of fibre has enabled job creation and has given South Africans the platform to compete with global digital trends.

While fibre is still in its infancy, needing a shift in mindset to truly reap the full rewards, it has certainly come a long way in changing the connectivity landscape in South Africa. However, as landgrab by fibre operators continues to take centre stage, we have to ask ourselves – where to from here?



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This year will be yet another year of constant change, innovation and movement in the connectivity market – does it all centre around fibre, however? Not so much. Let's take a look.

Tapping into the untapped

We have already seen a move by businesses towards tapping into the rural market – or those markets that are not

necessarily seen as fibre-viable - with Vumatel recently announcing its expansion into Alexandra in Johannesburg and, if all goes well, into Diepsloot and other low-income areas thereafter - with the aim of reaching [10 million residents](#) within the next two years.

This is just the start. If we consider that the country's population is approximately 55.91 million people and internet population is around [22 million people](#) (almost 40% of the population are internet enabled), then we can be sure that there is a massive opportunity for connectivity in South Africa – driving down cost for these internet users.

However, household internet penetration is at [a mere 10%](#) and therefore, similarly, the untapped household market offers a very strong opportunity for fixed connectivity and fibre is set to still be a hot topic in the coming year.

“ It is the pricing model that will be the challenge and/or the opportunity for providers over the coming year/s. ”

Optimising connectivity in non-fibre-viable areas

So, what happens to those consumers who are in the outlying areas, not fibre-viable at this stage? Are they left behind in the rush for connectivity? Will they be the 'poor-cousin' last in line to receive good connectivity? Or are we going to see a shift in this space in the year to come?



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We have 13 years to go before government's South Africa Connect project aims to be completed – with a goal of providing internet to the homes of all citizens by 2030. 13 years! That's a long time to wait for a good connectivity and lowered data fees and, if we consider that only [7% of areas](#) in South Africa are said to be able to afford good service when it comes to connectivity, then there is no doubt that a focus into 2018 should on making sure that the rest have access to affordable, service-orientated internet access.

Wireless broadband's very important role

While fibre is all that, at the moment, wireless broadband has a very important role to play in South Africa's connectivity mix. Therefore, as citizens wait on government's rollout of internet connectivity, we need to ensure that there are sufficient options in place for outlying consumers, giving them sound access to high speed, affordable internet.

“ I believe that we will see a continued uptake and perhaps even, a stronger drive in certain regions, towards wireless broadband – plugging the connectivity gap and ensuring that South Africans have good quality access and service delivery. ”

While having matured substantially over the past 10 years, South Africa's connectivity market is still in its infancy with many lessons to be learnt and innovations yet to be realised, however, we are confident that change is upon us, opportunity precedes us and we have another year ahead filled with opportunity to diversify the connectivity mix and ensure a solid solution for all South African's – fibre or not.

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