

Zim telecoms firms fight for survival

By [Dumisani Ndlela](#)

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Zimbabwe's telecommunications battle was normally one for the mobile telecommunications networks, but recently, other players are entering the fray. Technological advances have meant that players can easily provide services that their licences restrict them from offering, albeit through the “technological backdoor”.

Broadlands, a data services firm, sent shockwaves in the market early this year when it announced that it was planning to roll out fixed and mobile voice services that would start in Harare where it had put an extensive optical fibre network.

Regulator, the POTRAZ, immediately stepped in, charging that Broadlands did not have such a licence.

But Broadlands insisted it would use its data services licence for which it had permission to use Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology, also known as broadband telephony, internet telephony or voice over broadband, which could allow its subscribers to make voice calls using broadband internet connection instead of regular or analog phone lines.

Now, other players are trying to harness the technology to breakout from their core business into the voice market.

“We will be announcing our plans for voice services soon through the VoIP platform,” a senior executive with PowerTel Communications, a government-owned telecoms firm with a vast network of fibre optic cables around the country.

PowerTel recently connected to the Global Internet Exchange through the submarine cable systems via terrestrial optical fibre through Botswana under a deal with Botswana Telecommunications Corporation.

Econet Wireless has itself started rolling out its own fibre optic backbone in major metropolitan cities in Zimbabwe and along key highways. This, the company says, will back its 3G service as well as help the network against persistent power failures that disturb its base stations.

TelOne, the fixed line operator that should ideally be reselling bandwidth to local operators, is now trying to break into the mobile phone market through its Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA) wireless connection for which it is offering discounts for calls made on its network.

“In the end, it will be a battle for the voice market and internet, but it's going to be about who has the best product and the cheapest offer,” a marketing executive with one mobile network said.

ABOUT DUMISANI NDLELA

Dumisani Ndlela is a Zimbabwean journalist specialising in business and financial reporting, with experience reporting on commodities, stock and financial markets, advertising, marketing and the media. He has previously reported from a number of regional countries as well as from the UK and Germany on commodities and regional integration. He can be contacted on dndlela@yahoo.co.uk.

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