

Zimbabwe to test 3G

Trials of Zimbabwe's 3G network are due to commence next month says Econet Wireless.

Harare – Econet will for the first time in Zimbabwe begin full commercial trials of its 3G network next month when it makes available the service to some select customers on a trial basis. Announcing the new developments, company CEO Douglas Mboweni said the trials will allow Econet to fine tune the services before it is offered to its customers.

3G or "Third Generation" is a new cellular technology to replace the current 2G or second generation used by most cell phone networks around the world. 3G is much more advanced than 2G, and comes with features such as video telephony, and high speed internet. It even allows customers to watch short video clips on their cell phones. Currently only South African mobile telephone operators MTN and Vodacom have full commercial 3G networks in Africa.

Mboweni said work on the construction of the 3G network has reached an advanced stage, and it should be ready by June and that up to 2 000 customers will be selected to use the service on a trial basis. "This will allow the company to put in place all the systems for wide scale launch. The company also plans to launch services gradually. We are not going to put on all the services it can offer at once. We will probably not offer video phones until the end of the year, but we will certainly do high speed Internet access," he said.

Apart from the superior services available, 3G also allows the operator to put in more network capacity to eliminate congestion.

Evolving technology

Mboweni explained that 3G is not a new network but an evolution of the technology currently in use. "Our current technology has been around for about 15 years, and it is gradually being made obsolete. Operators around the world are now beginning to emigrate to this new technology which we call 3G that will be followed by another system which has been dubbed 4G," he said.

He said Econet expects that top business executives, and professionals will be the main users for the new service. To be able to use the service a person will have to buy a special 3G phone which are already available on the market.

Because of the cost of the roll out and the shortage of foreign currency, Econet will gradually introduce 3G across the country, but will initially target the major cities. "This is what is happening in the rest of the world, but when you get out of coverage you can still make normal phone calls. It is not possible to roam from the normal service to 3G," he said.

Mboweni said the introduction of 3G will make Zimbabwean business more competitive. "Our business people, professionals and senior government officials need to have the most advanced communication tools if they are to be competitive and efficient."