

ACCC moots portability for data access numbers

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22nd October 2004

The ACCC has put out a discussion paper seeking industry comment on whether data network access service numbers [DNAS], five or 10 digit numbers beginning 019 and commonly used for promising young tennis players. Optus by ISPs for dial-up Internet access, should be made portable.

Exchange understands that the ACCC's action was prompted by ISP customers of Comindico concerned that they would not be able to retain these numbers if Comindico had ceased operations following its being placed into receivership. AFL on broadband According to the ACCC, Telstra, Optus, AAPT, Primus, Chime and Comindico are the only carriers to have been allocated 019 DNAS numbers.

The Commission's preliminary view is that "competition would be promoted by lowering entry barriers through the provision of number portability thereby providing an opportunity for new entrants to compete for customers... [and would] also enable incumbent providers of these services to compete for each others customers."

Zac Swindells, CEO of ISPOne, an ISP wholesaler that provides Internet services to a number of small ISPs, said there was a clear demand in the market for portability of these numbers.

"We all want number portability. From our point of view it would be a lot easier to supply clients; they could do a seamless migration. It's the reason a lot of them don't want to change."

However he added "we need to clarify first who owns the number [the ISP or the carriage service provider]". This would likely be specified in the ISP's contract with the CSP but Swindells suggested, "a lot of smaller ISPs would not be aware of this". This issue is not addressed in the ACCC's discussion paper.

Unlike geographic, freephone or mobile numbers 019 numbers generally terminate with the carrier's network at an interface between the PSTN and a data network. Telstra endeavours to shift these calls from the PSTN as close to the originating point as possible in order to avoid inefficiencies of tying up its circuit switched network with long held dial-up Internet access calls.

Making these numbers portable could result in them tying up additional PSTN resources while they are routed from the originating carrier's network into that of the terminating carrier.

However, the ACCC says that the technical feasibility, and impact on access providers of making these numbers portable would not be germane to its considerations, because, in deciding whether to mandate portability it has to decide whether doing so would be in the long term interests of end users of carriage services, or services supplied by carriage services.

“Section 458(2) of the [Telecommunications Act 1997] confers on the Commission the power to give written directions to the ACA in relation to the rules the ACA can include in the Numbering Plan regarding number portability. In exercising its power, the Commission must have regard to whether portability of particular allocated numbers is required to promote the long term interests of end-users of carriage services or of services term interests of end-users of carriage services or of services.