

## VoIP information helps consumers

The term voice over internet protocol (VoIP) refers to various technologies that allow voice telephone calls to be made over broadband internet connections. VoIP technology encodes voice communications for transmission into a digital format, called data packets, which are decoded back into voice at the receiving end.

The potential cost advantages

of these types of services have led to their increasing popularity, which in turn has led to a growing need for consumer information. ACMA has published a VoIP page on its website to provide information, including a checklist of questions for potential customers.

The page explains the characteristics, special features,

potential advantages and limitations of VoIP services, types of services available and equipment needed. It also provides information about what to check with the service provider before signing up, such as charges, complaints mechanisms and service quality.

The page outlines some important issues consumers should consider, including whether the service can provide access for emergency calls, what will happen if the power supply is cut off and security provisions—protection for your

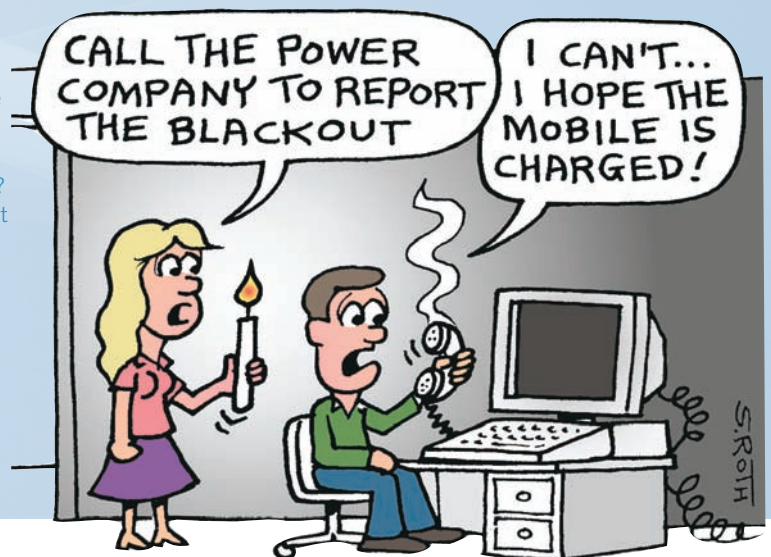
information, your computer and your money.

There are useful links to the websites of other organisations, including SCAMwatch ([www.scamwatch.gov.au](http://www.scamwatch.gov.au)), the website set up by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to help consumers avoid becoming victims of scams.

The VoIP information page is on the ACMA website at [www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au) (go to Internet > VoIP > ACMA VoIP Homepage).

### CUSTOMER CHECKLIST - VOIP SERVICES

- Does the service enable you to call other users not using the same VoIP service—for example, can you make calls to mobile numbers, normal home lines, international numbers, 13 numbers, 1800 numbers and other VoIP services?
- Can you receive calls on your VoIP service and are you assigned a phone number that other people can call?
- What are the call costs for people wanting to call your VoIP service?
- Do you need to purchase software or extra equipment such as an analogue phone adaptor to use the VoIP service?
- What is required to set up or install the service?
- Is a high level of computer literacy required to set-up or install the service?
- Is there a helpline/adequate customer service/adequate online help and is it readily available and useful?
- Is there a test number that can be called at any time, particularly at set-up/installation time, to check if the service is working properly?
- Are there any arrangements for access to emergency calls and what are they?
- What is the quality of the service like?
- What will the company do if the service is unavailable?
- If the VoIP provider is based overseas, is the pricing of its services potentially subject to currency fluctuations?



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activities include radio and TV broadcasting and production, training and working with social groups on diversionary programs. CAAMA has its own music label and is producing a children's TV series for Channel 9 and Disney with Indigenous actors and crew, which is about to start shooting.

Over the past three years, ACMA and the former ACA have undertaken a series of visits to remote communities throughout Australia to meet with community leaders and representatives of local government associations, land councils and Indigenous media organisations. These direct consultations have enabled ACMA to gain valuable

insights into people's experiences of telecommunications service quality, availability and needs in remote Indigenous communities. The site visits complement data that ACMA collects from Telstra on the performance and take-up of standard telephone services and payphones in communities.

Direct consultations have also equipped ACMA with an understanding of the growing role of Indigenous media organisations in promoting and facilitating access to telecommunications services in communities.

During the recent visit, ACMA was advised that the performance of many

phones in the region had improved following network upgrades carried out under the extended zones agreement, but that issues with the reliability and sound quality of phones were still experienced in some Ngaanyatjarra communities. Community representatives also described credit management issues relating to the post-paid billing system and expressed interest in pre-paid mobile or home phone solutions for people living in communities.

The dedicated monitoring program for telecommunications in remote Indigenous communities was implemented in response to recommendation 5.3 of the Regional

Telecommunications Inquiry in its 2002 report, Connecting Regional Australia.

The insights gained from these visits will inform ACMA's monitoring of Indigenous telecommunications issues, which will be reported on in the Communications Review for 2005–06.

More information about ACMA's monitoring of telecommunications in remote Indigenous communities is on the ACMA website at [www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au) (go to Consumer > Information Portals > Telecoms > Regional Telecomms Inquiry).