

News

Telecommunications

THE Australian Communications Authority (ACA) has fixed November 16, 2000 as the implementation date for local rate and freephone number portability, and confirmed its intention that they will be implemented via a number pool.

An independent body, Industry Number Management Services (INMS), has been established by industry to allocate numbers (in units of one) and administer a centralised reference database holding details of all allocated local rate and freephone numbers, including those transferred between carriage service providers. The ACA decision should assist INMS to secure finance and contract a vendor to finalise industry specifications. This will free industry participants to commence detailed work on the necessary changes to their networks and operational and IT systems.

CABLE & Wireless Optus (C&W Optus) has initiated arbitration proceedings with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) regarding local number portability call routing after months of negotiations with Telstra.

C&W Optus says that the arbitration will centre on Telstra's refusal to route calls made to C&W Optus local call customers to the Optus exchange closest to the customer. Optus claims that calls routed to any of its exchanges cost millions of dollars a year in increased routing and provisioning costs.

The ACCC ruling on LNP requires carriers to upgrade their networks to allow customers to keep their existing telephone numbers when switching carriers. In other words, Telstra is obliged to provide the equivalent level of service to ported and non-ported numbers for carriers offering comparable local call services.

THE Australian Communications Industry Forum (ACIF) has released two codes for public comment. The Draft Local Number Portability Industry Code and the Draft Pre-selection - Single Basket/Multi Service Deliverer Industry Code (including fixed-to-mobile pre-selection) are intended to play a significant role in enhancing the contestability of the telecommunications marketplace.

The LNP Industry Code requires inter-carrier processes of greater complexity than the current bilateral Telstra-Cable & Wireless Optus arrangements, particularly where a number is ported more than once and three carriers are involved. The review of the Pre-selection Industry Code to accommodate fixed-to-mobile pre-selection is also a prerequisite to the implementation of a regulatory (ACA) determination that fixed-to-mobile calls should be included in the existing basket of pre-selectable services.

The public comment period will close on June 8, 1999. Copies of the drafts are available on the ACIF website, www.acif.org.au.

Spectrum management

RIGHTS to the last two blocks of channels for trunked land mobile services in the 800MHz bands in Melbourne have been sold at auction. Motorola Australia bid \$47,000 for the two lots on offer. Each lot consisted of five channels.

In a separate auction, Hutchison Telephone won the last lot from the Australian Communications Authority's 800MHz/1.8GHz bands spectrum licence auction series, bidding the reserve price of \$20,000 for a lot covering Central Australia.

Broadcasting

THE Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) has registered codes of practice for pay television - subscription - broadcasting services.

The codes have been developed by the Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association (ASTRA) on behalf of the industry sector. They set out the obligations for subscription television broadcasting services in relation to issues such as the classification of program material, the presentation of news and current affairs programs, the placement of advertising and the handling of public complaints. The codes also provide a framework for the handling of consumer service issues such as confidentiality of consumer information and disputes about fault repair and billing.

The ASTRA codes will be subject to a review in 12 months' time.

Music

THE Australian radio industry has acted to specify a standard for new Australian music on commercial radio.

The revised Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters code of practice includes, for the first time, a minimum percentage requirement for "new" (within 12 months of release) Australian music on commercial radio. It requires Category "A" stations to play a minimum 25 per cent "new" Australian music of their 25 per cent Australian content quota, Category "B" 25 per cent of their minimum 20 per cent Australian content, and Category "C" 15 per cent of their minimum 15 per cent Australian content.

Information technology

THE proportion of employing businesses in Australia using personal computers (PCs) increased from 49 per cent in

June 1994 to 64 per cent in June 1998, according to a publication released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Business Use of Information Technology, Australia provides summary details on the use of information technology and telecommunications (IT&T) by employing businesses in Australia as at the end of June 1998. The key findings include:

- only 20 per cent of businesses had either local or wide area computer networks;
- 30 per cent of businesses had access to the Internet - 29 per cent utilised email facilities and 26 per cent web browser facilities;
- there were three PCs for every 10 persons employed but there were eight for every 10 authorised PC users;
- IT&T employees providing inhouse or external services accounted for less than three per cent of total employment in businesses. On average, every IT&T employee supported 27 PC users.

The publication also found that the industries with the highest usage of PCs were mining (80 per cent of businesses), property and business services (79 per cent) and wholesale trade (76 per cent). The industries with the lowest usage of PCs were personal and other services (44 per cent) and accommodation, cafes and restaurants (47 per cent).

Nearly all businesses employing 100 or more persons used PCs (99.8 per cent) whereas just over half of the business employing up to four persons used PCs (55 per cent). Larger businesses were more likely to have Internet access and email and/or web browser access - 90 per cent of those employing 100 or more persons compared to 26 per cent of those businesses employing up to four persons.