

## TO IP OR NOT TO IP...?

**Adax Europe spokesperson:** Robin Kent, Director of European Operations

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There is no doubt that the whole telco world will eventually be IP-networked, but getting to that point requires complete migration from current SS7 infrastructure - a gradual transition which cannot be achieved overnight.

Despite this, some smaller operators are trying to embark on this migration in one giant leap, whilst others only have plans in place to IP-network *part* of their global infrastructure. Neither approach will work in the long term. In effect, they will be just as well served as those who are sitting back, doing nothing and waiting for IP to come to them.

Robin Kent, Director of European Operations at Adax, calls for the smaller operators and MVNOs (Multi Vendor Network Operators) to learn a lesson or two from their large corporate counterparts – or face the consequences.

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### Why migrate at all?

Although VoIP is now a proven technology, and arguably a current hot topic, it is far from the sole benefit to be gained by making the switch from circuit to IP-based networks. In fact, I would argue that the associated cost vs. benefit ratio of VoIP is far too low to drive operators' decisions to undertake a total infrastructure overhaul in its own right.

However, there are emerging revenue opportunities that IP infrastructures allow operators to capitalise on – not least, multimedia services. Furthermore, the massive projected growth in mobile users in Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRICs) will make a seismic shift from SS7 to IP-based infrastructures absolutely necessary. After all, whilst it took 20 years to get 1bn mobile users on board another billion users are expected within the next 3-5 years, all thanks to this BRICs market (Source: 3GSM World Focus 2005).

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### Learning lessons from the big players

SS7 has been the gold standard underpinning the world's telecommunications infrastructure for over 20 years, but it cannot support these new IP opportunities. And there is so much SS7 architecture in the industry that upgrading and rebuilding it overnight would be like building Rome in a day...and we all know that didn't happen!

The large network operators are clearly seeing 'the bigger picture'. They are planning to effectively roll out IP infrastructure to metropolitan, national and international networks piece by piece over time to deliver a network that is as dependable, reliable and responsive as the world has become accustomed. These building blocks are put in place alongside existing legacy SS7 systems so that SS7 and IP can co-exist within the Next Generation Network today and eventually SS7 can be phased out altogether and replaced.

Vitaly, these big players are ensuring consistency of service before, during and after the transition and are future-proofing each and every one of the building blocks to a standard that makes them equally amenable to IP technology at any point in the future. Failure to do this would leave a network that is a collage of technology and standards – which is no use to anyone at the end of the day.

Whilst the larger network operators have started to recognise the IP opportunity, the shift to IP infrastructures really stands to benefit the MVNO community and other smaller operators looking to increase their level of independence, reduce operating costs and increase revenue streams. And they could do worse than follow in the footsteps of their large corporate counterparts.

It is inevitable that one day it will be the IP-way or the highway, and putting in place the right building blocks to get to this stage will ultimately sort the winning operators from the losers.

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