

Cheaper mobile data set to unleash mobile innovation

 By [Devon Meerholz](#)

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The close of last year contained some especially good news for the South African mobile consumer. Usually, the annual holiday break is a time for some really unfortunate news to be announced in the hope it will be scarcely noticed. This time, however, it was really good news that, oddly enough, barely entered the national consciousness.



Devon Meerholz, Chief Creative and Operations Officer at IMmobile SA

The country's ICT industry regulator, ICASA (The Independent Communications Authority of SA), finally took the bull by the horns and published a formal notice of its intention to conduct an inquiry into competition in the provision of mobile broadband services. Well, when you say it like that, no wonder no-one noticed! Let's simplify things a little.

Essentially, the regulator believes there has been a failure in the normal market forces that would usually ensure mobile data prices are fair and reasonable. ICASA's upcoming investigation cuts to the heart of the cost to communicate in South Africa and it's, therefore, a process that everyone should get excited about.

ICASA has previously investigated mobile call termination rates and the result was massive reductions in wholesale rates charged between operators with a knock-on effect on pricing to consumers for voice communications. Now ICASA is investigating similar measures for mobile data. Are you starting to get excited now? Think of what this could mean for the local mobile user's consumption of data-heavy mobile content and applications.



ICASA investigates mobile data competition

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The Internet Service Providers' Association (ISPA), for its part, says "this is perhaps the most important regulatory process that ICASA has ever undertaken, and it should have the support of all South Africans. Everybody who cares about or feels

the cost to communicate should take an interest in this process and participate where they can.”

Basic supply and demand economics indicate that reduced cost means increased consumption and increased consumption means more incentive for South Africa’s mobile content and applications developers to come up with some really outstanding work. Content and applications are the core of every mobile industry so increased investment there means a much-needed boost in challenging times for the wider cellular industry.

After all, what is a smartphone without the juice that enables it to be smart? Data is to mobile what petrol is to motoring and we can’t move the mobile industry forward, with the associated benefits to the local economy, without much more affordable mobile data.



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As the plethora of awards annually bestowed on Africa’s mobile content and applications industry clearly demonstrate, our continent excels at mobile innovation. From prepaid cellular to mobile payments, it happened here first. Constrained by unusually high mobile data prices, our creativity has nonetheless produced mobile goods. Imagine the level of innovation when mobile data is set free - possibly in 2020, by the regulator’s estimates.

There is so much upside to ICASA’s market enquiry it really is a shame the announcement was missed by so many of us. Let’s change that and all start thinking about how we can positively contribute to the planned national debate on South Africa’s mobile data prices.

ABOUT DEVON MEERHOLZ

Devon Meerholz is Chief Creative Officer at IMmobile, a global software and solutions group with a presence in over 60 countries worldwide. Devon’s unique approach to creativity is put to good use at IMmobile’s Johannesburg office. Here he works with a multidisciplinary team to develop SA-specific mobile initiatives from bank statements to cross-platform personalised marketing videos that enable the company’s clients to speak to current and potential customers in more visual, appealing and creative ways.

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