NBN SKY MUSTER UNMETERED DATA LAUNCHED

NBN CO LAUNCHES SKY MUSTER PLUS 'UNMETERED DATA' SERVICE

NBN Co has launched its Sky Muster Plus wholesale service, which allows homes and small businesses in the satellite footprint to access unmetered data for online activities.

NBN Co, the company building Australia's broadband access network, says three wholesale plans with different metered data allowances will be available to participating retail service providers based on a wholesale speed tier of 25/5 Mbps, and Sky Muster Plus customers will from time-to-time experience wholesale speed bursts above 25/5Mbps, subject to available network capacity.

According to NBN Co, insights from a Sky Muster Plus trial, which ran from 7 June until 8 August, revealed four out of five existing Sky Muster customers reported an improvement in their online experience during the trial, with many reporting the unmetered data was "particularly helpful when it came to managing their overall data usage".

NBN Co says the ability to stream entertainment with the confidence it will not affect day-to-day activities such as internet banking and email was an important factor for residential customers, and people who use the internet for business or work, whether regularly or from time-to-time, made up two-thirds of the survey sample, and were particularly satisfied with Sky Muster Plus compared to their previous service.

And NBN Co notes that activities including select web browsing, email, and PC and smartphone operating system updates do not count towards the plan's monthly data allowance.

Meanwhile, all other online activities such as video and audio streaming remain "subject to monthly peak and off-peak metered data allowances, with wholesale speeds being slowed if data limits are exceeded".

First announced in November 2018, Sky Muster Plus was developed in consultation with NBN Co's industry partners and existing Sky Muster customers, and designed to help meet the broadband needs of regional and remote Australians.

Research released by NBN Co last year forecast the availability of the NBN broadband access network will drive an additional $5.3 billion in gross domestic product (GDP) and help create up to 20,000 additional jobs in regional Australia by 2021.

NBN Co says the research also showed that people living in regional connected areas are 40% more likely than people living in regional non-NBN connected areas to use the internet to "keep in touch with loved ones".

And by comparison, people living in metropolitan NBN-connected areas are 30% more likely to use their home broadband to socialise compared to people living in metropolitan non-NBN connected areas.

"The NBN access network was designed to help lift the digital capability of Australia, and to champion social and economic progress through connectivity. Our Sky Muster satellite services are a critical part of that, and I'm delighted to officially announce the launch of our new Sky Muster Plus product," said NBN Co CEO Stephen Rue.

"I'm proud to see the team at NBN Co working together with our key stakeholders and industry partners to continue to ambitiously explore new ways to provide essential broadband services to rural and remote Australians.

"Early insights show that around one third of the total data used in July was unmetered. This not only frees up more data for metered activities such as video streaming or accessing cloud storage but will also provide comfort to customers who can continue to access essential internet services such as online banking any time. We know this is particularly important for small businesses, which are critical to local communities."

According to NBN Co customers and stakeholder groups who made the switch from Sky Muster to Sky Muster Plus plans during the trial have welcomed the product.

NBN Co cites this comment from Sky Muster Plus user, Isolated Children's Parents' Association, Queensland Vice President, Louise Martin: "It is so great to see that Sky Muster Plus delivered on its promise. We often have five teenagers at home over the holidays which means we use more data than usual".

"It's comforting to know I can continue running our business without any interruptions, even if we use up our metered data."

Peter Dinham

IPSTAR OFFERS 'UNMETERED' DATA TO REGIONAL INTERNET USERS

Australian-operated, Thai-owned regional satellite ISP IPSTAR Broadband is offering unmetered and non-speed-restricted data to users in regional Australia - via Skymuster satellite - for essential services including emails, general browsing and social media.

IPSTAR says its offer will also be available for PC and smart phone software updates to rural and regional areas.

IPSTAR Broadband managing director, Shannon Fisher, said the new service was another example of the company's "commitment to ensuring rural and regional Australians were better able to stay connected, educate their families and grow their businesses".

"Customers have told us their monthly data allowance is sometimes used up by their children, grandchildren or even them streaming videos and gaming, leaving them unable to complete tasks crucial to running a business, like sending and receiving emails to and from customers and suppliers," Fisher said.

"Sky Muster Plus will remove the monthly download cap for essential services, allowing rural regional businesses – many of which operate from home – to rest easy knowing their operations won't be disrupted by too many streamed episodes of Stranger Things or battles on Fortnite."

IPSTAR says the Sky Muster Plus package maintains on the top plan a monthly cap of up to 150 GB peak and 150GB off peak for streaming.

However, there will be no data limit for regular web activities like accessing emails or Internet banking.

Under the activities such as gaming and video streaming will contribute to users' overall monthly streaming data limit and, once the streaming cap is reached, will be speed-shaped down.

However, the unmetered essential services can continue to function at the same speed of up to 25Mbps.

Fisher said IPSTAR Broadband was "improving connectivity across rural Australia, ensuring customers received the best possible internet service".

"Whether it is health, education, Indigenous equality, live sports, or streaming entertainment, when it comes to internet connectivity regional Australians are being left behind," he said.

"IPSTAR Broadband is committed to making life better for those in the bush."

IPSTAR says community advocacy group, Better Internet for Regional Rural & Remote Australia, has been instrumental in helping the Federal Government and NBN to develop Sky Muster Plus.

Co-Founder Kristy Sparrow says Sky Muster Plus will make a significant difference to those who have been "battling limited data allowances, especially for the 42% of Sky Muster users who have no other internet option".

"We appreciate that NBN and the Minister for Regional Services have listened to regional advocacy groups and understood that data allowances on Sky Muster have restricted essential services for regional users and we thank them for listening to our concerns" she said.

Peter Dinham

HUAWEI WARNING TO US, GOOGLE WITH LAUNCH OF HARMONYOS

Huawei Technologies would prefer to keep using Android but with the launch of HarmonyOS, its open source cross platform operating system, the Chinese telecoms giant has signalled that it is not prepared to take US sanctions against the company lying down.

That is the message delivered by Richard Yu, CEO of Huawei consumer division to a packed Huawei Developer Conference 2019 in Dongguan on Friday.

"If we cannot use Android in the future we can immediately switch to HarmonyOS," Yu told the audience at the conference.

Known in China as Hongmeng, HarmonyOS is not only open source - a point reportedly enthusiastically received by the audience - but has been developed to be cross platform to include PCs, tablets, IoT edge devices.

Since being placed on the US "Entity List", defined as "a significant risk of being or becoming involved, in activities contrary to the national security or foreign policy interests of the United States", in May this year, Huawei has been faced with the prospect of being banned from using US technology.

That includes Google's Android, Microsoft Windows, Qualcomm and Intel chips among other US software and hardware.

Huawei, the largest telco and second largest smartphone company in the world, has said that this has forced the company to become more self reliant on its own technology.

This is especially critical for Huawei as the ban comes on the eve of the burgeoning 5G smartphone market evolution.

However, developing a new operating system for smartphones is one thing but building a ubiquitous ecosystem of apps to support it is quite another.

For smartphone users, the Android and Apple app stores are considered to be an indispensable part of their respective operating system environments.

For example, it is hard to imagine buying a smartphone without Google Maps (or an equivalent) and the myriad of messaging and social media apps being available.

In China, where about half of Huawei's smartphones are sold, the company already has a well established local app store but at present there is nothing outside the Android ecosystem available for Huawei phones in the wider world.

At the developers conference, Richard Yu said that making HarmonyOS open source would help to make the development of the necessary ecosystem faster. With a massive existing installed base of hundreds of millions globally, it would be hard to imagine app developers passing up the opportunity to port their apps over to HarmonyOS.

In addition, Huawei has stressed that HarmonyOS will be more than just a smartphone operating system and is built to encompass a range of device platforms.

"The Harmony OS is built to work across different devices synchronously and support Tablets, Smartphones, PC, TVs, Wearables and more," the company told website **Huaweicentral.com**.

Claiming to have an operating system suitable for the entire gamut of user devices is an ambitious vision but with a substantial user base in its own country, as well as the rest of the world, it would be far from wise to be dismissive of this.

At the same conference, Huawei has announced that its subsidiary smartphone brand HONOR launched HONOR Vision, what the company says is "the world's first smart screen equipped with HarmonyOS".

Stan Beer

ACMA ISSUES COMPLIANCE SEPT DEADLINE REMINDER TO TELCOS

Telecommunications service providers have just until the start of September to provide information on their compliance with the revised Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code (TCP Code) to the telecommunications regulator regulator, ACMA.

Service providers must lodge compliance information with Communications Compliance - the independent compliance monitoring body - by 2 September.

The TCP Code was recently revised and came into effect from 1 August, with the revised code strengthened in a number of areas.

Strengthened areas include provider's selling practices, financial hardship processes and credit assessments.

As part of the ACMA's 2019-20 Compliance Priorities, the ACMA has said it will be ensuring providers meet their TCP Code obligations around these areas in particular.

Chapter 10 of the revised TCP Code requires telecommunications services providers to lodge an annual statement—or compliance attestation—verifying compliance with the Code.

And the ACMA has warned that failure to lodge compliance details by the due date may result in formal investigation and compliance action.

Peter Dinham

PROPOSED CHANGES TO MOBILE ROAMING REGULATION EXPECTED

Proposed changes to the regulation of international mobile roaming (IMR) services will come into effect in the Australian telecoms sector in January next year under draft changes put forward by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA).

The ACMA says in a statement that it anticipates making the determination on roaming services in October this year, with commencement of the regulation on 1 January 2020.

The ACMA is now seeking industry and public comment on the proposed changes to the IMR regulations, including an ACMA draft service provider determination that is proposed to replace an existing industry standard.

The proposed changes reflect the outcomes of the ACMA's 2018 review of the standard – with the Authority stressing that the proposed schedule would give telecoms providers a minimum two-month transition period to prepare for full compliance with the determination.

The ACMA lists seven key proposed changes as:

- Enabling a broader range of devices to benefit from IMR protections (for example, tablets).

- Ensuring providers offer additional non-SMS communication options to customers (for receiving IMR-related notifications).

- Giving providers increased flexibility on the wording of IMR message content.

- Where a customer has been sent an IMR message that contains charging information applicable to multiple countries, the provider won't have to resend the same information when the customer travels to another country covered by that same message within 14 days.

- Ensuring IMR customers are made aware earlier of the charges that will apply once they have used up any included value in their mobile plan.

- Changing the definition of 'consumer' to now include a business that has or will have an annual spend with a provider of no greater than $40,000. Replacing the term 'nominal fee' with a specific amount equal to $1.00.

The ACMA proposed changes - to facilitate the administrative change from an industry standard to a determination – have been approved for consultation by Department of Communications and the Arts and approved and the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts.

Peter Dinham