

Makeover for Zim mobile networks

Zimbabwe's mobile networks have undergone a makeover. With over a decade of operations, the three mobile phone networks had become known by their access codes; Telecel Zimbabwe was 023, NetOne was 011, and Econet Wireless was 091.

By [Dumisani Ndlela](#) 11 Oct 2010

091 had become as big a "brand number" as the Econet Wireless brand itself, and those among Zimbabwe's brand-conscious were normally happy to be reached through a number whose network was seen as progressive and "inspired to change your world".

Telecel, from 023 to 073

Telecel Zimbabwe, whose start-up history saw its offshore partners courting a noisy lobby of small-scale miners, the indigenous business women (IBWO) and the war veterans, then champions of a chaotic land reform programme that triggered an unprecedented economic crisis, hit a perception storm from the beginning.

So when it changed from its 023 access number to 073, it became a good escape from a perception setback that had mired the network for too long: 023, as subscribers perceived, was a network for the unsophisticated and backward, and therefore one to avoid.

Telecel therefore struggled for space, and was for too long the smallest network with just 250 000 subscribers.

It has started recovering after the change to 073, and is decorating its campaigns with a dominant yellow colour that is making people think South Africa's MTN has come to Zimbabwe.

Today, Telecel's subscriber base has grown to 1.2 million, and with a bit of shrewdness, it has begun hunting from its competitor's territory.

Econet, from 091 to 077

Econet, the biggest network by subscribers at four million, launched its new access number on 2 October 2010, changing its prefix number from the popular 091 to 077.

While some of Econet's customers may have remained loyal to the network because they did not want to change numbers, Telecel immediately launched an ambush on Econet.

"Now that you are changing your number anyway....why not move over to the fastest growing network and enjoy mega benefits!" charged Telecel in its newspaper advertisements.

Econet hit back launching a first in the domestic telecommunications market: The Ecolife Package. Underwritten by First Mutual Life Assurance Company, the package offers free life cover to subscribers. To qualify for the life cover, an Econet subscriber recharges with a minimum of US\$3 every month, and thereafter every dollar goes towards increasing the subscriber's free life cover.

NetOne, from 011 to 071

NetOne, whose "One World" campaign was anchored around its 011 code, has changed to 071. Although the 011 brand had a good market acceptance, it became more associated with government bureaucracy, and its inefficiency. NetOne, which is wholly government-owned, has not grown since dollarisation last year and is now the smallest network with about 500,000 subscribers.

But the new prefix codes have blurred that numbering distinction which separated the three networks; all three essentially now bear the 07 prefix, with the difference being the third digit.

But subscribers have had a nightmare trying to adjust to the new codes: a call from the cellular number will almost always invoke the question: Have you changed your number? Or is this your new number?

"I now have to change all the numbers saved in my phone," said a mobile phone user, dejectedly. A cumbersome task, especially if one has to deal with a bloated contacts list.

ABOUT DUMISANI NDLELA

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