

Telecom Hotline

March 03, 2009

GUIDELINES FOR ENSURING BETTER QUALITY OF INTERNET/BROADBAND SERVICES

Over the past few years, India has witnessed a sea change in its telecom regime and the authorities have kept abreast with global trends by formulating policies which are not only liberal but which also adequately protect the interests of the end customer.

In 2006, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India ("TRAI") introduced regulations on "Quality of service of Broadband Service" which stipulated benchmarks and parameters for bandwidth exploitation and network connectivity ("2006 Regulations"). One of the main purposes of the 2006 Regulations was "to protect the interests of consumers of broadband service and enhance consumer satisfaction".

There has been a tremendous growth in the subscription of internet/broadband services and alongwith this growth there have been numerous complaints from subscribers regarding the shortfall in broadband connectivity / speed. Most of these complaints allege that the available broadband speed is lower than the subscribed speed and the 2006 Regulations failed to confront this issue. TRAI via its consultancy paper dated January 15, 2009 on "Bandwidth required for ISPs for better connectivity and improved quality of service" invited comments from stakeholders for setting up standards to resolve issues on broadband connectivity / speed / congestion.

In furtherance of the same, TRAI on March 2, 2009 issued guidelines **FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS PROVIDING INTERNET/BROADBAND SERVICES FOR ENSURING BETTER QUALITY OF SERVICE ("Guidelines")**.

Salient features of the Guidelines are as follows –

1. All service providers providing Internet/broadband services so as to ensure transparency and awareness shall provide adequate information to subscribers regarding Internet/broadband services being offered and marketed by them.
2. All the service providers shall provide information regarding Contention Ratios in their tariff plans submitted to TRAI, manual of practice, call centers and on their websites.
Contention Ratios – The Guidelines define contention ratio "as the number of users competing for the same bandwidth". It can also be defined as the number of subscribers sharing the same bandwidth capacity. Thus the quality of Internet access / speed will be better, if the Contention Ratio is lower.
3. The service providers providing Internet/broadband services shall on a quarterly basis publish Contention Ratio for different Internet/broadband services on their website.
4. All service providers providing Internet/broadband services, shall ensure availability of minimum bandwidth on their network according to the Contention Ratio as suggested below -

Services	Max. Contention Ratio for Home users	Max. Contention Ratio for Business users
<i>Dial up</i>	1:70	-----
<i>Broadband</i>	1:50	1:30
<i>High Bandwidth Services</i>	1:1 to 1:4 (to be defined by Service providers in customer package)	
<i>Leased Line</i>	-----	1:1 to 1:4

CONCLUSION

These Guidelines further the spirit of transparency along with subscriber satisfaction as the subscriber will not only have the ability to examine and choose the most viable option but shall also have an assurance for adequate broadband speed. Even though broadband speed and connectivity are not solely dependant on Contention Ratios, these Guidelines will ensure that service providers do not accommodate excess number of subscribers on the desired bandwidth.

- Huzefa Tavawalla & Vivek Kathpalia

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