

UnderstandIT

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A publication designed to inform and enable businesses to understand the implications, costs and advantages of using Information and Communications Technology. Distributed through Chambers of Commerce.

COMING SOON – 4G MOBILE NETWORKS

The advance of technology continues to outpace our utilisation of the current wave of services and facilities. We are now probably all users of the mobile 3G (third generation) networks that offer enhanced facilities like multimedia messaging, video calls and other services, accessed by a variety of devices from notebooks to mobile phones.

Theoretically, 3G networks are capable of providing up to 7Mbps (7 million bits per second) speed, but in practice most will probably only achieve 2Mbps. This speed maybe acceptable for downloading email and messaging, but any video-based service is unlikely to be practical. It is also estimated that the traffic volumes for 3G networks will increase 20-fold by 2015, placing great strain on the network infrastructure.

Now the next generation of mobile communication technology is about to hit us – the fourth generation – 4G. This new networking technology will provide considerably faster network speeds of up to a theoretical 100Mbps. This means that the 4G networks will enable users to experience video conferencing, video-streaming, live TV, and video creation facilities.

However, as with all new technology, this will require an upgrade or replacement of user devices, and the mobile network operator's infrastructure on which these services are based. As with conventional computer processing speeds and Internet broadband speeds, the race for ever faster networks and services will inevitably continue to push the technological boundaries.

GOVERNMENT'S DIGITAL STRATEGY UNVEILED

The Government has announced its plans for Digital Britain and the digital economy. There is also the anticipated knock-on effect of the increased employment these plans will bring – estimated at 250,000 jobs by 2020.

It also indicates the important that the government is placing on technology in its efforts to cut government spending by creative use of technology.

The announced plans include:

- A new "MyGov" web portal – providing a single, personalised route to all public government services that are/will be online

- The much heralded fast broadband infrastructure that should reach every home in the country by 2020
- A commitment that all government contracts with a value of over £20,000 will be published online, enabling companies to bid for them
- £30 million funding for the establishment of an Institute of Web Science, with the objectives of studying the economic and social benefits of the web
- The publication online of an inventory of all non-personal data held by the government, enabling businesses, developers and others to "mine" that information

There are some positive comments from industry watchers about the governments' plans - particularly the investment in the Institute for Web Science and its potential social benefits.

However, as you might expect, there are many who are sceptical of the benefits of much of these measures, or have reservations about the government's ability to follow through or potential adverse impact of some of the measures.

The CBI for example is concerned that the plans for the establishing of state-owned "business service companies" to help its shared services projects will perhaps prevent private companies bidding for provision of such services.

As with most government initiatives, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating... and with an election on the horizon, one wonders if these plans will ever see the light of day?

OFFCOM RULES ON REDUCING MOBILE PHONE CHARGES

Ofcom, the industry regulator has announced plans to force mobile phone operators to reduce the cost of calls between competing networks. These so-called termination charges are currently 4.3p per minute. From 2011, this will fall to 0.05p per minute.

They will also rule that porting of numbers from one operator to another must be completed within one working day, rather than the current two days. The PAC code needed by customers to carry out the porting of their number will also need to be sent by SMS to the customer, rather than by mail as is current practice.

