

Neutral hosting economics 'absolutely stack up': OneWifi

The economics of the neutral hosting model “absolutely stack up,” according to OneWifi & Infrastructure managing director Mevan Jayatilleke.

OneWifi was announced in February as the first infrastructure provider to receive funding for sites as part of the NSW government’s Active Sharing Partnership. So far two mobile sites have been announced — in Brewarrina and Wilcannia — with Pivotel the first service provider striking a deal to deliver services with the planned OneWifi towers.

Jayatilleke told CommsDay that the company is currently in “negotiations and discussions with a number of MNOs” to employ its RAN-as-a-service offering. “That is not just for these two sites; it is for any site across Australia,” he said.

“Needless say, we think that New South Wales government is an exemplar of what the market should be doing,” Jayatilleke said.

“I think they have really gone out on a limb to basically look at a model that is fair and equitable for all stakeholders and industry participants. And we think that model will over time be adopted by other state governments.” “We see early signs that the other states are very interested,” he added.

He said that some details of the deal with the NSW government are confidential but the agreement encompassed a mix of capex and opex support.

Jayatilleke said that in terms of agreements with MNOs, the neutral host model could support “numerous commercial constructs”.

“So one is pay as you grow, one is fixed fee, one is revenue share, one is profit share.” He said that “the models that have been adopted to-date have been similar to passive tower sharing — a flat fee.”

“It makes things easier from their accounting and procurement perspective,” OneWifi commercial and strategy director Gary Tsang told CommsDay.

“So pay as you grow of course is super attractive, but there’s a lot of things to work out to make that work” because of the variable costs, with telco executives keen on “predictable numbers when it comes to putting together any operating plan.”

“We understood that principle, having worked with telcos for most of our careers,” he said, which was part of the impetus for the flat fee approach, but Tsang said there are “certainly other models out there that will work in the future.”

He said that the NSW approach was based around the concept of a minimum viable product, which had been agreed on by participants in the initial active sharing workshops facilitated by the state government. The MVP will support voice and data, but typically only on a single band, Jayatilleke said.

Jayatilleke said that there were elements supportive of the neutral host approach in the guidelines for Round 7 of the federal government’s Mobile Black Spot Program. In general the federal guidelines have moved much more towards embracing multi-carrier solutions and active sharing, Tsang said.

“In the latest round, the formula they’re calculating [with is] highly favourable for a



multi-carrier solution, and there's a lot of finer details on the active sharing aspects of it as well."

Tsang and Jayatilleke originally met at analyst firm Telsyte. Jayatilleke subsequently held a senior role at Optus and later Telstra. After Telsyte, Tsang took a telco-focused role at Boston Consulting Group.

OneWifi was formed to address the "gap in the market" that was neutral hosting, Tsang said. "And that was 10 years ago! We were way too early for our time, so in order to stay relevant and survive we started off doing a lot of work in public wi-fi — hence the OneWifi brand."

He said the company has done a lot of work delivering public wi-fi for shopping centres, local government and retail and hospitality venues. That business still continues along with a smart cities line of business.

"We're doing a lot of work still in the smart city space because we understand the property developer, the local government's lens on how they want technology to be implemented, including 5G connectivity in a harmonised manner," Tsang said. "So we work on things like smart poles, fibre, EV chargers, sensors." However, he said that today the company is focussing strongly on 5G.

Rohan Pearce

Global fragmentation could stifle terahertz spectrum era, Nokia warns

The Australian Communications and Media Authority could potentially play a role in helping prevent global regulatory fragmentation of terahertz spectrum, Nokia has suggested.

The company noted recent research has presented opportunities to overcome the limitations of terahertz band spectrum, opening the possibility of services "that were unimaginable even a few years ago."

However, Nokia warned of possible regulatory fragmentation between different jurisdictions, which it said could stifle the potential of services using spectrum in the 100GHz+ range.

"There are many use cases that are either not realizable or cannot deliver the required user experience in today's networks, including 5G, through the lower parts of the radio spectrum currently in use," the company told ACMA in response to the regulator's draft Five Year Spectrum Outlook.

Some of those use cases will be delivered by 6G, Nokia said.

"Global harmonization of Terahertz spectrum to encourage allocation of similar frequency bands globally will pave the way for collaboration among different countries to bring this fledgling technology to maturity," Nokia said. It said that the Australian regulator should "consider its role given Australia's strong position in spectrum management."

A majority of early adopters of technologies taking advantage of terahertz spectrum are likely to be "vertical industries and large enterprises who often have a global presence." That gives impetus to the need for international consensus on the band.

"Nokia considers essential access to the THz spectrum should be done in a timely