

BSNL in talks with virtual firms to retail voice and data services

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Muntazir Abbas | ETTelecom | Aug 16, 2016, 07.33 AM IST

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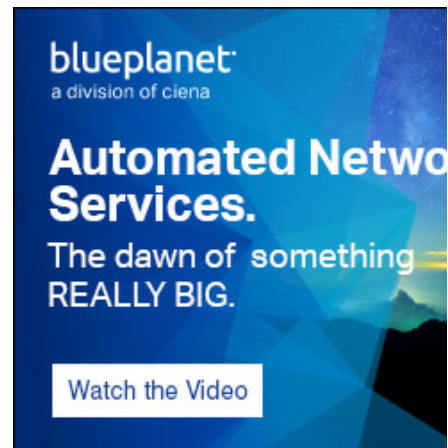


NEW DELHI: State-run Bharat Sanchar Nigam (BSNL) is in talks with six to seven companies, including tablet maker Datawind and payments firm Oxigen, for mobile virtual network operator (MVNO) deals with an eye on boosting

revenue.

"We are formulating a uniform VNO framework that will allow transparent access on a non-exclusive basis, so that any company can come and engage with us, and obtain voice minutes and data in bulk to resell it to their customers," BSNL chairman Anupam Shrivastava told ET.

Both, DataWind and Oxigen had approached BSNL to resell its network-based voice and data services, BSNL is likely to take a



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An MVNO provides telecom services without owning either spectrum or network infrastructure. It relies on the network of its partner telecom company to provide services to customers under its brand name. It does so by buying bulk talktime and bandwidth from an operator, and selling it to users.

In March this year, the telecom department (DoT) notified MVNO guidelines after almost eight years of discussions, which could offer consumers more choices for voice and data services and allows telcos additional options to monetise unused airwaves.

BSNL, according to Shrivastava, is very enthusiastic about the new MVNO policy, which he feels will help the loss-making telco focus more aggressively on core mobile networks, thereby leaving sales, marketing and customer service functions for retail partners.

The top executive admitted a drawback in marketing and customer care operations of the state-driven company but believes that by tying up with virtual service operators, its engineers could focus on core technical competence of creating robust networks and ultra-modern technologies.

BSNL has a widespread 2G and 3G mobile network across India's 20 service areas, excluding Delhi and Mumbai metropolitans, where another state-run telco, Mahanagar Telephone Nigam (MTNL), operates services.

The telco is already in advanced talks with MVNE (Enabler) and MVNA (Aggregator) companies—Plintron Global Technologies and XIUS—to deploy network hardware and infrastructure services, which is a prerequisite for an MVNO service.

Plintron and XIUS have worldwide expertise in putting hardware components, according to Shrivastava, and this will allow any virtual firm to plug in to offer services without having to worry about capital expenditure.

Though the global MVNO market is slated to top the \$73-billion mark by 2020, it largely remains a western trend, with

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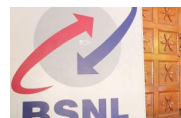
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Germany, the US and the UK home to maximum number of MVNOs, according to an internal study by Xius. According to industry experts, MVNOs are most prevalent in mature telecom markets where penetration (based on connections) has surpassed 100%.

Wireless teledensity in India is over 81%, but skewed hugely in favour of urban areas, which have over 147% penetration, as per regulator data at May end.

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