

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN JULIUS GENACHOWSKI
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C.
APRIL 18, 2013

Re: Promoting Innovation and Competition by Facilitating Direct Access to Numbers

Today we seek to ease access to phone numbers for innovative online companies and new competitors, lowering the costs of competition and removing barriers to innovation.

Today's notice continues our ongoing agency-wide effort to modernize our rules for today's broadband marketplace, while promoting competition, protecting consumers and ensuring public safety.

We developed the country's first National Broadband Plan, providing a strategic roadmap for the transition to all-IP networks.

As recommended in the plan, we've approved landmark reforms of USF, and overhauled intercarrier compensation. We've sped the transition to next-generation 911. And we recently launched an agency-wide Technology Transitions Task Force to provide recommendations to modernize the Commission's policies.

Building on this work, this item proposes to reduce barriers to innovation and competition for innovative online providers of voice services.

Today these providers generally have to obtain telephone numbers through intermediate providers, raising costs and creating potential gatekeepers to the deployment of new services.

Removing these barriers has the potential to deliver real benefits to consumers.

It could help improved call quality thanks to fewer hand-offs for calls, and promote deployment of HD voice services. And it could fuel development of other innovative new products.

Already developers have used VoIP technology to develop new security features like automated phone calls or text messages when an online user attempts to change sensitive data in a mobile app.

Innovative VoIP technology is also being used to rapidly deploy call centers, for example for political campaigns, and to integrate automatic voice and text features into web sites.

We can only guess what's next.

As we strive to unleash these innovations and consumer benefits, we have to make sure that calls continue to complete reliably, that we don't create new opportunities for providers to game the intercarrier compensation system, and that we safeguard against number exhaust.

Today's notice asks critical questions on all these issues.

These questions are also why we're proceeding with a narrowly-tailored trial, to test technical issues that have been previously raised in the record.

This trial will provide a small pool of numbers to test giving VoIP providers direct access.

We have safeguards in place if problems arise, and a robust reporting and public comment process.

Some have argued that a technical trial is premature. I disagree.

This access to numbers proceeding has been going on since 2005, with many of the same comments and replies traded between parties time and again.

But the record we've received to date too often has simply been filled by hypothetical concerns answered with hypothetical solutions.

It's time for some data. The trial we adopt today is consistent with the data-driven approach we've adopted agency-wide, it will help us protect consumers, and I'm glad we're moving it forward.

Thank you to the entire Wireline Bureau team for their excellent work on this item, and to the Technology Transitions Task-Force as well for their assistance.