The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) recently passed a proposal to allow internet telephony in India. By doing so, the regulator has removed a key roadblock for companies like Kirusa, a pioneer in this space. Headquartered in New Jersey, Kirusa has been enabling internet telephony across several global markets in conjunction with telecom operators. TRAI's green signal to internet telephony has resulted in several carriers showing interest in the company's hybrid over-the-top solution that supports GSM-VoIP (voice over internet protocol) call conversion. In an interview with tele.net, Dr Inderpal Singh Mumick, founder/chief executive officer, Kirusa, talks about the company's solutions, and its strategy for the Indian market...

What are your current focus areas?

Over the past few years, we have introduced several new technologies to make interconnection possible between GSM and VoIP. InstaVoice ReachMe is one such technology that makes it possible to receive PSTN (public switched telephone network) calls made to a normal mobile number through a data connection. The service allows people to make or receive calls when on roaming or out of coverage but within data/Wi-Fi connectivity. It also allows people who may be living abroad to have a virtual number. (A virtual number allows you to buy the US/UK/France/Canada numbers sitting out of any country. As long as a user is connected to data, all incoming calls to these numbers can be received on the app.) Besides, it brings great value addition against exorbitant roaming rates. The solution allows virtualisation of numbers, in-app calls and SMS over the cloud. Frequent travellers across the world have been availing of this seamless interface for a SIM-free voice experience.

We are extremely excited about the launch of this service in India, particularly, with the recent opening up of VoIP calling for regular mobile numbers by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT). App to app calling, as in the case of WhatsApp, has been allowed for a while; but DoT's recent ruling allows interoperation between mobile numbers and VoIP. We have already launched this service for the US and the UK markets and are now working with operators in emerging markets including India, Africa and the Southeast Asia.

At the company level, we are currently handling close to three billion calls on a monthly basis. Further, our services are being utilised by over 100 million unique monthly active users. Of these users, over 90 per cent currently come from Africa.

What has been the response from the Indian operators' side to such a solution?

DoT's approval has infused clarity and there has been an increased activity in this space. The country, since the launch of Reliance Jio Infocomm Limited (RJIL), has become one of the largest data markets in the world, if not the top data market. People are using more than 20 GB of data per month. At the same time, India is notoriously famous for the lack of service quality on voice networks; there are many instances of call drops and low network coverage areas.

Now, when a voice call goes over data, the amount of spectrum that gets utilised is very low. Voice calling on data requires only about 240 kilobytes per minute of bandwidth, but delivers significantly good quality voice call vis-a-vis a regular voice call. Efficient utilisation of spectrum also leads to lower costs for operators.

What are the key challenges that VoIP-based apps face in India?

Convincing people to switch to a new app is a big challenge. They are already using apps like WhatsApp and will only move to a new app if the latter offers something more or different. Another challenge is to bring around operators to collaborate with us, which also takes significant time.

How do you think 5G will impact the content segment?

If we look at the impact that 4G has had on the content segment, it helps in gaining visibility into how 5G will change the content story. 4G allows users to watch high definition (HD) videos on mobile phones. In fact, as per estimates, HD videos now account for about 50 per cent of all traffic on networks. In the past two years, all key operators – RJIL, Bharti Airtel, Vodafone India and Idea Cellular – have introduced video applications. This, in turn, has propelled growth for companies like Netflix. Music streaming has also gone up dramatically. 5G will up this game further by offering five times higher data bandwidths and extremely low latencies. Looking at the content space, the two areas where 5G will make an impact are augmented and virtual reality. In addition, there are futuristic use cases of 5G which appeared almost impossible 10 years ago, such as autonomous or self-driving cars.

What is your outlook for the voice market? What are the other focus areas for Kirusa going forward?

The voice market as measured in terms of revenues is declining. However, the minutes of usage/calling continue to increase.

We are now also focusing on enterprise communications. That market has been limited to SMS-based communication between businesses and customers for a very long time. This space is ripe for a change with rich communication services coming in as a new machine technology.

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