THE STATE OF PH TELECOMS SERVICE
Charting the roads to digitization takes more than fancy technology. The Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) recognizes that key telco stakeholders can make or break the goal of using Telecommunications as a tool in building a digital Philippines.

Consumers of the ‘most social nation’ clamor for better Internet services, yet little is known about the grim realities hounding the telco industry. Truth is, the current service gaps go beyond broadband access, and these matters will be brought to light in the ‘no-holds-barred’ dialogue happening at the first Philippine Telecommunications Summit.

Organized by DICT, the summit will address the public outrage over ‘cost, speed and coverage’ of services by identifying underlying issues on telecom infrastructure and building consensus over possible solutions.

Telco major players PLDT-Smart, Globe and PCTO, consumer groups and NTC, as major stakeholders, are invited to the summit to iron out the raised issues.

‘To solve the concerns of our consumers, we too have to solve the concerns of the telcos,’ said DICT Secretary Rodolfo Salalima.

Digitization has two faces in the current state of PH telco—first, as a threat; second, as an opportunity.

PH telcos’ existing positions are now challenged by surge in ICT demand. The Philippines, from having been known as the ‘texting capital of the world’ has now taken the global lead in social media usage with the average Filipino spending 4 hours and 7 minutes per day on social media sites, according to the
Digital Report in 2017 by Hootsuite and We Are Social. This high rate of usage, however, stands in contrast to currently available Internet speeds.

As of Akamai Q3 2016 report, PH has the second slowest fixed line broadband Internet speed in the world (http://www.gov.ph) (http://www.dict.gov.ph/).

In order to speed up the Internet in the country, there is a need to activate more cell sites, according to most telco providers, but the bureaucratic red tape gets in the way of network deployment. The tedious process of securing permits from many local governments, national government agencies, barangays and subdivisions impedes construction, thus affecting the availability of service in certain areas.

NTC Commissioner Gamaliel Cordoba showed in a presentation at the public hearing on Smart Communications’ franchise that an average of 25-30 permits from LGUs are required for the construction of one cell site, processed in a span of eight (8) months. He also emphasized the lack of uniformity in processing fees in different LGUs.

The said barriers also discourage new players’ entry into the telco market, suppressing competition—‘real competition that could provide consumer choice and thus drive significant improvements in cost and quality,’ said the Internet Society-Philippines Chapter Chairman Winthrop Yu in a statement.

Controversial issues surrounding frequency allocation will also be tackled to warn against mobile spectrum hoarding. “Frequencies should be allocated to new players in the telco industry,” DICT Secretary Salalima said.

The Philippine Telecommunications Summit 2017 will set the stage for change toward a digital future through collaboration and consensus among all telco stakeholders. The threats of digitization can become huge economic growth opportunities when addressed in a transparent and ethical way.

“You will experience a speedier internet once we have that summit,” said DICT Secretary Salalima.


Sources:

