

3G technology is already making its way in Cuba (+Photos)

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Its introduction is perceived in the quality of services and although the Internet does not reach mobiles yet, ETECSA is working to achieve so in the shortest time possible.

The Telecommunications Company S.A. of Cuba (ETECSA) is working to implement Internet access from mobile phones as soon as possible.

Thus informed Tania Velázquez Rodríguez, Central Director of ETECSA's Commercial and Marketing Direction, in a recent TV program Round Table (Mesa Redonda) to update on the programs the company is developing in mobile and fixed telephony, Internet access, as well as projections for the next months.

As regards the latter, the executive specified that this year ETECSA would continue to ensure the connectivity of local entities as a major support for the country's development, implement over 200 new public surfing areas, deploy 38,000 capacities for Nauta-Home service with similar scenarios to the experiment carried out in Old Havana.

"Our company –she remarked– works with all the opinions and perceptions from different sectors of society, and insofar as possible and with the resources we own, we work to meet their expectations".

3G technology at hand

At present, 2G and 3G technologies coexist in Cuba, which allows to share voice and data traffic today, thus leading a better perception of the quality of service, stated Engineer Hilda María Arias Pérez, Central Director of ETECSA's Mobile Services Division.

Arias Pérez detailed that since March this year the company began to provide prepaid clients with 3G technology, starting from Matanzas and extended to the rest of the territories. This service kicked off in Havana in late April.

She explained that in the last three years the number of mobile lines has doubled and that today they total 4,220,000. So far this year, over 320,000 new clients have been added.

The executive added that such growth requires in parallel a strong investment process to support it, hence radio base stations (RBS) have doubled in three years too.

Consequently, she said, Cuba has two networks now: one 2G, which has a territorial coverage of 75 percent, but covers 85 percent of the population, and also one 3G that has been implemented in the first four months of the running year.

By this time, in 2016, 3G technology was deployed in Havana's northern coast, part of the airport, the major tourist poles and capital cities.

For example, 213 new sites have been created in Havana this year.

The engineer said that today there are 846 2G sites and 343 3G ones and that although the latter cover 13 percent of the national territory, they cover 47 percent of the population, since they're located in the most densely populated places.

From the implementation of the said possibility, which allows faster access to data, hence consulting Nauta mail service has improved, "we have noticed a 3 percent growth in data traffic and almost 20 percent in voice traffic, which means there's a better quality", the executive exemplified.

She cleared up that the client's perception in 3G network depends on the number people close to the radio base stations, what they're demanding, as well as the mobile equipment they're using. In 3G network, she pointed out, the mobile equipment is seen as part of the network.

Regarding the type of equipment Cubans should use to connect to the 3G network, she said it should be one that works on the 900 MHz frequency. All equipments with data access on sale by ETECSA have that requirement.

While referring to the promotions and offers of her entity, the executive highlighted: "we know that the main dissatisfaction –and it is ours as a company too– is the topic of tariffs and prices", but pointed to the need of a fair balance between the tariff and traffic the network can support, which depends on the investments made by the company that are subject to the financial

resources available.

However, she recalled that all plans have lowered their tariff. In the case of Nauta Package (Bolsa Nauta), for example, it reduced it by 70 percent. She also drew attention on the over 318,000 activated packages, and the importance that this and other services are self-configured, since the client does not need to go to the commercial office to do so, which was one of the complaints.

"We must combine those offers that allow to recover investments faster with the other ones that are for the benefit of the whole people, because what we do benefits the rest of the services, which are for everyone in the end", she said.

Connectivity grows

Adolfo Iglesias Reyes, Central Director of the Fixed Services Division, underlined that bringing the Internet closer to an increasingly larger number of people falls within the investment plans of the company and today there are already across the country 634 rooms for wired connection, with 2,102 seats for surfing.

As part of the development plans, so far this year 20 of these rooms have been added, with 79 seats. The executive highlighted that 10 of them were opened in hospitals and 4 in post offices.

Regarding Wi-Fi surfing spots, he announced that, unlike the information offered at the previous Round Table, now all municipalities of the country have at least one of these public places, as a result of the 70 created in the first four months of this year.

He added that there are 616 of spaces of this type altogether, counting the network with third parties, as well as that his company is in a full process of modernization, improvement and expansion of all this system.

Linked to surfing in rooms and public places, he recalled that last March 30 the company lowered the fees of the permanent accounts of domestic access to 0.10 CUC per hour or its equivalent 2.50 CUP, as well as the minimum recharge price to 0.10 CUC, also valid for international access accounts.

As for the sales of permanent accounts and recharges, the executive stressed there are 19.8 million now.

He also stressed the connectivity of the educational, cultural and public health institutions, as well as the banking network, and such government entities as industry, agriculture, food, commerce, tourism, etc, which have been benefited by these efforts and investments.

The company reports more than 30,000 links of this type and of them this year it grew by 2,000, some with major bandwidths.

Making investments visible

At the beginning of the TV program, the Central Director of ETECSA's Commercial and Marketing Division, Tania Velázquez, had mentioned the complexity of the investments systems linked to telecommunications as main axis to understand the problems to develop the aforementioned activity on the island.

In particular, she drew attention over the fast technology obsolescence and the strong investment processes that are needed to undertake, mainly imposed by the world's strongest tech providers, since they force through violent and quick processes to replace and modernize our networks, and infrastructure to be in sync with the services the population expects and that convey big financial amounts: millions.

She stressed that in our case, an important percentage of the technology is imported and its purchase must be financed with incomes from the exportable services provided by ETECSA.

"The funds that we have from our services abroad are the ones that allow us to finance our contractual commitments, not only to develop the investment process, but also to cover the expenses we need to maintain infrastructure and pay international service providers", the executive added.

Regarding the Internet, Tania said that for this issue the business model is different from voice model, where two operators exchange traffic and share costs and added that in the case of the Internet, the operator providing the service should pay for it completely, thus having a significant impact on hard currency expenditure.

Moreover, she specified that the service provided is paid in full, to support not only the needs of our clients, but also anyone who is abroad and needs to browse a service or content that is in Cuba.

"We have capacity to support that demand, but, evidently, that conveys a major impact on the financial models we have to support", she highlighted.

"We set priority to the services generating incomes from abroad, but we have also progressed in creating capacities and services destined to the domestic market, to people who do not have the possibility to access the services with payments from abroad. And since December, we've

seen more dynamism in the promotion of our offers and options, as well as in the implementation of new platforms introduced in our infrastructure”, Velázquez Rodríguez concluded.

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