

Verizon Responds to Complaints Regarding Network Access

A Verizon spokesman said the complaints from competitive carriers (CLECs) regarding a recent Public Utility Commission (PUC) order governing access to local networks “was utter nonsense.”

“The CLECs have had ample notice – nearly four months – that these changes in ...law were imminent,” said Harry J. Mitchell, a Verizon spokesman. “Unfortunately for them, they continue to cling to a business model...that regulators have found does not provide true telecom competition.”

On March 23, the PUC followed federal regulators and the courts, and ruled that Verizon and other incumbent carriers (ILECs) were no longer required to lease portions of their networks to their competitors. “The order reflects the FCC's finding that the lack of unbundled local circuit switching does not impair competition for small business and residential customers,” Mitchell said.

Requiring ILECs to lease their networks to competitors grew out of the 1996 federal law that de-regulated the telecommunications industry as a way of fostering competition in the local markets. Since then, dramatic advances in technology alone have led to competition in the industry. Other landline providers, cable companies, internet telephony providers, wireless companies and other alternative technologies like instant messaging and e-mail offer a variety of competitive choices.

Chairman of the PUC Wendell F. Holland noted in the order: “That given the General Assembly's signal to narrow available UNEs (portions of the network), the FCC's successive orders narrowing available UNEs as in the public interest nationally, our own expectation that the requirements would be reduced after 2003, and the availability of alternative offerings such as Verizon's Enhanced Corporate Awards program, we no longer believe that it is in the public interest for Pennsylvania to require Verizon to continue to make available a Pennsylvania-specific UNE-P offering for either residential or business customers.”

Moreover, the CLECs have options for retaining customers and winning new ones besides leasing the networks at a discount. They can resell Verizon's services at a discount of up to 25 percent; enter into commercial agreements with Verizon under the company's Wholesale Advantage program (as many companies have already done); and they can build their own networks.

Powerline Broadband Project Moves Along

PPL's two-year old pilot project to offer broadband over the powerlines has shown promise, but the Allentown-based power generator plans to move deliberately in gaining additional residential and commercial customers, according to a memo from its corporate headquarters. The memo also noted that for the most part customer reaction to the service has been positive.

Trading under PPL Broadband, the service is now available in the Lehigh Valley – in Bethlehem and Emmaus and Whitehall, Upper Macungie and Hanover Townships. The company uses Amperion and Main.net to deliver the broadband service to the customers.

PPL Broadband does plan to expand in the commercial market but noted that it has “issues to work out with technology providers to demonstrate the capacity for a large-scale commercial deployment.” Additionally, the company is working to maintain and improve the network for existing customers.

Internet Raising Unwanted Issues in the Workplace

Attorneys are bracing for the newest twist in employment law: Handling Internet bloggers who write about their workplace, or use blogs while at work.

About 11 U.S. employees were fired last year for blog-related activities - almost double the previous year's total, according to the director of the Committee to Protect Bloggers, an Oregon-based group that monitors legal actions affecting bloggers around the world.

The term blog is an abbreviation for Web log: a personalized online digest where a user can share Internet links, news stories, opinions and diary entries with a potential audience of millions.

As blogging grows in popularity, employers have noticed that self-published materials could contain confidential company information, defame the corporate image or offend co-workers with easily accessible entries. While blog-related incidents multiply, more companies are turning to employment law to write new policies and protect themselves.

A study released by the Pew Internet and American Life Project in January revealed that more than 8 million Americans have published blogs, and that the number of blog readers had grown by 58 percent, to 32 million, during 2004.

Many employee bloggers believe that blog comments are both anonymous and protected within the Internet. "It's not a whole lot different from things people usually say around the water cooler, but now there is an audience of millions," said Kurt Opsahl, a staff attorney at Electronic Frontier Foundation, a nonprofit group that defends the legal rights of new technology users, from bloggers to software designers.

The foundation recently protested when California Superior Court Judge James Kleinberg ruled that bloggers don't have the same confidentiality protections as journalists - rejecting a "protective order" motion made in the lawsuit, *Apple Computer Inc. v. Does*.

In that lawsuit, Apple Computer Inc. had subpoenaed three bloggers to reveal the identities of anonymous sources that allegedly gave the bloggers confidential information. The foundation appealed the decision to the California Court of Appeal on March 22 in O'Grady v. Apple Computer Inc.

Many employee bloggers believe they are protected by the First Amendment, but Opsahl explained that most states have "at will" employment laws where "employees can be fired at any time, for any reason, even an arbitrary reason."

Verizon Online Offers Twice the Speed of Its Basic Consumer DSL Service For the Same Low Price

Verizon has announced it is now offering consumer DSL service with twice the speed of its current basic plan at no additional charge.

Qualified Verizon Online consumers can now pay just \$29.95 a month for unlimited high-speed DSL Internet access with a maximum connection speed of up to 3 Mbps (megabits per second) downstream and 768 Kbps (kilobits per second) upstream when purchased in an annual service plan or as part of a package of calling services from Verizon. Month-to-month service is also available for \$37.95 a month. Previously, only service with a maximum connection speed of up to 1.5 Mbps downstream and 384 Kbps upstream was available for this price.

Current subscribers to the 3.0 Mbps/768 Kbps plans will automatically be switched to the new rate effective with the start of their first bill cycle after March 20.

New DSL customers signing up for an annual service plan also receive, at no additional charge, a free home gateway – a combination DSL modem and broadband router – that lets them share their DSL connection among multiple computers in their homes.

Verizon Online DSL customers receive the benefits of MSN Premium at no additional charge as part of their service – a \$99 annual value that includes online safety and security features such as pop-up guard, firewall, virus protection, advanced spam filters and parental controls.

Verizon Online offers customers a superior online experience with features like round-the-clock live technical support, nine e-mail boxes, 10 MB (megabytes) of personal Web space with exclusive Site Builder tool, access to the world of online music from Rhapsody and games from Wild Tangent and RealArcade and other multimedia content and services.