

Middle East mobile subscriptions surpass 200 million mark

DUBAI, UAE: The number of mobile subscriptions in the Middle East crossed the 200 million mark in 3Q10 to reach 202 million at end-September, according to research by Informa Telecoms & Media. Driven by growth in the less-developed markets like Iran and Iraq, the region's mobile market is still growing strongly, with the number of mobile subscriptions in the region increasing by almost 20% over the year to end-September.



"Although the rate of growth in mobile subscriptions in the Middle East will inevitably slow as the regional market matures, there are still substantial opportunities for subscription-growth in the less-developed markets, as well as in mobile data right across the region," said Matthew Reed, head of mobile research for the Middle East and Africa at Informa Telecoms & Media.

Iran the biggest

Iran is the biggest mobile market in the Middle East in terms of subscriptions, with almost 66 million subscriptions at end-September. Saudi Arabia is the second-biggest mobile market in the Middle East in terms of subscriptions, with almost 43 million mobile subscriptions at end-September. In addition, Saudi Arabia has the most valuable mobile market in the Middle East, with mobile revenues in the country forecast to be US\$11.2 billion (about R78 billion) in 2010.

Iran recorded the biggest growth in the Middle East in terms of mobile subscriptions, with 12.2 million net additions to the Iranian mobile market over the year to end-September. The Palestinian mobile market recorded the fastest growth rate in the Middle East over the year to end-September, with mobile subscription numbers increasing by 56%.

Mobile data revenues in the Middle East will amount to more than US\$10 billion (about R70 billion) by 2015, representing about 23% of all mobile revenues in the region. "Mobile data - including the use of smartphones and mobile broadband services - represents one of the best growth opportunities for the regional industry," comments Reed.

HSPA networks

All of the operators in the six GCC markets have HSPA networks that allow them to offer mobile broadband services. However, only 7.5% of Middle East mobile subscribers are using 3G services at present as a number of major regional markets - such as Iraq and Iran - have yet to launch 3G networks.

Jordan saw the launch of its first 3G network earlier this year, as well as the debut of its first MVNO. Other new opportunities include the new mobile licenses on offer in Syria and Iraq, which have provoked considerable interest.

The number of mobile subscriptions in the Middle East will surpass the 300 million mark in 2014 and will reach 327 million at end-2015, according to forecasts by Informa Telecoms & Media.

Notes

The Middle East is defined here as comprising the following: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, the Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the UAE and Yemen.

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