

Confusion over similar call identity numbers

 By [Timothy Kasonde](#)

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Confusion looms in Botswana's mobile industry following an allocation of similar dialing numbers to different mobile phone service providers.

Botswana Telecommunications Authority (BTA) may find its decision conflicting with customer interest after it allocated Orange Botswana and Mascom Wireless dialing numbers that all start with seventy-four (74).

According to reports, Mascom started using these numbers last year while Orange Botswana is expected to start using them from the 1st of June 2007.

An Orange subscriber Florence Nanguba, who is also an airtime vendor said she finds it difficult to differentiate which number belongs to Mascom and which one is Orange. "These numbers should be in such a way that it is easy to differentiate which one is Mascom and Orange when you receive a call. Calling Mascom and Orange numbers may not be the same in monetary value. Customers have been used to clear distinction that the Mascom number starts with 71 and that of Orange starts with 72. It may result in problems of identification," she said.

Meanwhile, Aaron Nyelesi, the public relations manager at BTA said they allocated Orange Botswana about 200,000 additional numbers ranging from 7430 0000 to 7449 999. "Mascom has been allocated numbers ranging from 7410 0000 to 7429 999. That is the difference."

He said although the initial number allocation was such that Mascom was assigned the 71, and Orange the 72, it was never the intention of BTA to differentiate mobile service providers through number allocation. "It should be understood that numbers are a finite resource and that they should be used prudently. Previously each of the mobile operators was allocated 1 million numbers in the 71 and 72 range. Such allocation can no longer be sustained in a competitive market where the demand for resources such as numbers increases. Future allocations will be made in much smaller blocks, say 200,000 or less," he said.

Nyelesi added that BTA envisages the introduction of number portability in the future and as such it would be proper to allocate numbers without branding them to a particular network.

"This will ensure that as customers switch between networks, they do not necessarily have to change their numbers. The number should be identified more with the customer than the network operator," he explained.

Asked on the procedure of allocating numbers, Nyelesi said BTA's decision is informed by the operators' submissions

(application for numbers), which will include among others a demonstration of optimal usage of the current allocated batch of numbers.

"Licensed operators require resources such as numbers to be able to provide a host of services to consumers of telecoms services. The BTA makes its decision based on the existing national numbering plan, which indicates allocations of numbers for the various service areas," he said.

He also pointed out that such an allocation would urge the network operators to compete on the basis of service that they provide and not numbers. "It is incumbent upon network operators to distinguish themselves from competitors through various creative means and not necessarily through numbers allocated to them. Numbers are a national resource whose administration is the responsibility of the BTA and therefore they should not be used for branding and competition purposes," he stated.

Odirile Motlhale, Mascom's public relations officer said he had no problem with Orange numbers starting with 74. "Our numbers start from 7410 0000 to 7429 999 and theirs are different from ours. I see no problem or confusion that may result from this," he said.

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