

CAMEROON'S TELECOMMUNICATION INDUSTRY AND ITS CHANGING AND COMPETITIVE NATURE.

Telecommunications in Cameroon today is still controlled by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications with a Minister-of-State at the helm of affairs. Unlike in other countries, Posts and Telecommunications are fused together though this fusion remains only for historical purposes.

Telecommunications in Cameroon is handled by CAMTEL. It is worthy of note that though Telecommunications produces services of economic value it is presently a monopoly with the State of Cameroon owning 100% of the shares. Following the recent privatisation moves, the State of Cameroon has offered 51% of its shares for sale to potential investors in the Telecommunications domain.

CAMTEL takes care of charges for calls, telephone connections and installations, modification after installation, subscription dues, ancillary charges for telephone services and special links.

Under the head of charges for calls, CAMTEL takes care of local calls without limitation on length, calls requested from a public telephone booth, and special calls with notice. A surcharge equal to one third of the charge per unit for the call in question is collected in addition to the charge for the call.

CAMTEL is also responsible for telephone connections and installations. In this regard they ensure that installation charges are paid. The charges to be paid no longer depend on the particular zone where the installation is to take place. Telephone charges within the country are no longer a function of distance. The only difference in charges depends on the use of the telephone line; whether for business purposes (phone booth) or for home use.

CAMTEL also takes care of modifications after installation. Under this head, CAMTEL handles transfers after installation within the same zone, third to second or first zone and second to first zone. CAMTEL also handles removal of installations and change of names.

Furthermore, CAMTEL is involved in the installation of telephones and extensions. They install main telephones (ordinary main telephone and deluxe main telephone) and telephone extension (ordinary telephone extension and deluxe telephone extension). They also take charge of the installation of switchboards, manual switch panel and connection cords. Various fees are charged for the different items but where the equipment is

supplied by the subscriber the installation charges are reduced by one-half.

CAMTEL also takes care of ancillary charges for telephone services, the issuing of receipts for charges on a telephone call from a public phone booth, charges for the transmission of a registered reminder on the non-payment of bills, unlawful modification of installation, etc.

CAMTEL has also absorbed the functions of the former International Telecommunications Corporation of Cameroon (INTELCAM) which was set up and organised by Decree N° 82-539 of 28 October 1982. INTELCAM was placed under the supervisory authority of the Minister in charge of Posts and Telecommunications and classified under the first category of public establishments.

The purpose of the International Telecommunications system was to:

- Study, establish, maintain and operate all sub-marine, radio frequency, Terrestrial and Spatial telecommunications systems, etc.
- Install infrastructure and equipment needed for the international telecommunications of the United Republic of Cameroon;
- Install, maintain and operate all the international telecommunications systems authorized by the Government for the routing of the international traffic of Cameroon;
- Participate in all international telecommunications systems by Satellite, Submarine, Coaxial repeater cable or any other means;
- Negotiate and conclude agreements with all bodies with a view to fostering the development of the international telecommunications of Cameroon;
- Acquire, obtain and use all concessions, rights and privileges for the landing, laying and operation of sub marine cables, and the installation of radio and earth stations for space communications and all other telecommunications systems;
- And, in general, to carry out all commercial, industrial, personal and real property, and financial operations that may directly or indirectly relate to the above objectives.

CAMTEL has a monopoly of operations over all submarine, terrestrial and spatial radio waves, telecommunications systems, international transit centres required for the routing of international telephone, telex and telegraphic traffic and for the transmission of data, facsimiles, sound and television pictures.

The Telegraph Service also falls under telecommunications in Cameroon. Here we have the ordinary telegrams for the internal system. Charges are per word. Then we also have the international system and the charge per word is variable depending on the country of destination.

The charge collected for official telegrams is the same as those for ordinary telegrams. However, official urgent telegrams are not subject to a double charge. Ordinarily, all urgent telegrams are double the charge of an ordinary telegram of the same length.

As concerns the telex service, we have the installation of lines and connections. A deposit is paid. Thereafter, there is an initial installation charge, which depends on the zone or the distance from the telephone exchange.

The fax is another telecommunications electronic system in Cameroon. The charges depend on the length of the message and the distance from the exchange.

There are several private radio stations in Cameroon now. The State Radio (CRTV) has one Provincial Radio Station in each Province of the country, and a National Station for the whole country. Some animation radio studios have come up in recent years in the two major cities of Cameroon (Douala and Yaounde). The appendix to Law N° 67-20 of 12 June 1967 authorising the formation of private radio stations has been repealed.

The television falls under the Ministry of Communication but is directly linked to CAMTEL. The State Television is the CRTV, while there are a few private Television Stations now operating in Cameroon.

The criteria for classifying technical and operational telecommunication centres are as follows:

- Capacity of the equipment installed (circuits, lines);
- Number of equipment in service, subscribers, etc;
- Number of directions served;
- Number of working positions;
- Number of the types of equipment;
- Number of relay stations;
- Number of terminal stations;
- Function of transmitting handled;
- Real distance separating the most distant points from the nearest supply centre;
- Annual volume of out going traffic;
- Daily duration of service and
- Annual income.

The present privatisation of State-owned corporations envisages the privatisation of the billing and commercial services of telecommunications in the first place.

As concerns the areas which the state can give tenders or permit private entities to operate, we have private electric wires or radio. This is mostly used by timber companies to control the logging process in the forest. Here, they are only allocated a frequency within which they can call. However, they are limited as to the distance to which they can call.

The mobile phone is now operational in Cameroon and the two main exploiting companies are MTN Cameroon and Orange Cameroon. CAMTEL has also recently introduced a new service called CT Phone. This is a modernised version of the fixed phone which enables users to move around with. This innovation has also seen the birth of the cordless fixed phone.

In March 1997 Cameroon got hooked to the INTERNET. The INTERNET authorities went round the administrative confines and got in partnership with the government. There are however some category of private persons who have been given the authority to do installations with equipment like fax, telephone, etc. so long as they remain within the scope of their authority. The use of the Internet has experienced a dramatic turn in Cameroon. Many schools are now hooked to the Internet and the services have moved from dial-up to wireless. Apart from CAMTEL, there are many other Internet Service Providers (ISP) whose services range from the dial-up through the wireless and other newly-introduced Internet services.

The telecommunications industry in Cameroon has witnessed a tremendous growth within the last five years and with the present competition and liberalisation of the industry, Cameroon is sure to record a major breakthrough in this sector in the years ahead.