

GUIDELINES

ON

NUMBERING HARMONISATION

FOR

SADC

COUNTRIES

TELECOMMUNICATIONS REGULATORS ASSOCIATION
OF SOUTHERN AFRICA
(TRASA)

2003

Background

These guidelines result from a consultancy study carried out for TRASA during 2002 on the topic of numbering plan harmonisation, and a related workshop held in November 2002 attended by TRASA members and sector stakeholders. Please refer to the background papers produced by the consultancy study for more information on the terms and concepts used.

1. Introduction

All member countries of TRASA are developing their national numbering plans in the face of pressures similar to those experienced elsewhere in the world - the pressures of growth, new services, liberalisation and the need to maintain a user-friendly interface.

TRASA recognises the benefits both for individual countries and for the region as a whole of developing national numbering plans in a co-ordinated and harmonised way. However, numbering changes entail costs to the industry and to the public, and therefore change must be well-considered and not undertaken lightly.

Certain actions are therefore planned at a regional level in support of co-ordinated numbering plan development. In addition, all members will observe the guidelines below, which are based on international good practice.

The intention is to achieve long-term harmonisation by adopting these design guidelines when national numbering plans require revision in any case. It is not proposed that numbering changes should be made simply to achieve harmonisation.

2. Actions

Set up NOG and NSO

A1 A subgroup of the TRASA Numbering and Standards Committee (NSC) will be set up, to be known as the TRASA Numbering Operational Group (NOG). This group will focus the region's numbering expertise. It will meet more frequently than the full committee and will be responsible for the implementation of actions which have been agreed in principle by the full committee.

A2 Day-to-day support will be provided to the NOG by a Numbering Support Office (NSO) consisting of at least half the time of an appropriately skilled individual. ICASA has offered this support in the first instance.

A3 The NSO will operate under the supervision of the NOG, which in turn is a subcommittee of TRASA's Numbering and Standards Committee (NSC).

A4 The NOG will investigate avenues for collecting information from stakeholders on a regional basis, including establishing a regional stakeholder advisory group to serve this function.

Initial tasks for the NOG and NSO

A5 Under the NOG's guidance, the NSO will lead further in-depth investigation of numbering space which is free or easily freeable in all member countries, with a view to identifying number ranges (whether in national destination code space or in short code space) which can be used in a harmonised or common way across the region.

A6 Similarly, under the NOG's guidance the NSO will lead in identifying subranges of freephone and premium rate numbering space to be set aside in all countries for central allocation. This will enable, for example, single freephone numbers to be publicised throughout the region for public service or commercial use.

A7 Based on the findings of the investigations A4 and A5, NOG will recommend to NSC numbering ranges to be used in a harmonised or common way throughout the region.

A8 NOG will agree on, and recommend to NSC, standard number layouts for use in closed plans of each length, eg xxx xxxx for 7-digit plans.

Continuing duties for the NOG and NSO

A9 The NSO will provide a central point enabling all interested SADC countries (and if possible also other African countries) to be aware of each other's numbering plans and proposed changes. TRASA's relaunched website will be a valuable tool for this purpose.

A10 The NSO will collect ideas for services which it could be advantageous to number in a harmonised or common way across the region, using the numbering resources identified for harmonised or common use. Periodically, using NSO's collected ideas, NOG will recommend to NSC what services should be numbered in harmonised or common ways.

A11 Subject to the NOG's approval, the NSO will manage allocations from identified and agreed common numbering space. For example, indirect access carriers wishing to offer service using a single carrier selection code in more than one country of the region will apply to this office for a suitable code.

Topics requiring further study

A12 The NSC finds that further study is required of appropriate policies for countries of the region in the following areas, and that it would be economical to initiate study at the regional level:

- carrier selection policy
- number portability policy
- policy on charging or not charging for numbers

It therefore instructs the TRASA secretariat to seek resources for defining and launching such studies. Because carrier selection is essential for long-distance indirect competition, their order of urgency is as shown above.

3. Guidelines for national numbering plan design

Basic design principles

D1 Numbering plans will conform with all relevant ITU recommendations. In particular, the international prefix will be 00; the trunk prefix (if there is one) will be 0; and the digit 0 will not be used as a leading digit of national significant numbers.

D2 The importance of user recognition of meaning in the number, and especially recognition of tariff differences, will be paramount in all numbering decisions. This implies:

- easily understandable correspondence between numbering areas and charging areas.
- easy recognition of expensive calls (such as long-distance trunk rate or mobile) and ability to bar these selectively, preferably on the first significant digit.
- clear identification (through recognisable codes) of new services charged at higher rates.

D3 Within a country, national significant number lengths will move towards uniformity.

D4 Each national significant number length will move towards one of two regional standards: 7 digits or 9 digits.

D5 Any codes signifying a geographic area will be shared among all operators who wish to provide service within the area.

D6 Each country with an open numbering plan will preserve the option of moving to a closed plan, and will periodically review whether to make this move.

Choice of codes and numbering ranges

D7 Geographic numbering will be focused on lower initial digits and non-geographic numbering on higher initial digits.

D8 Countries with closed numbering plans which are not using the first digit 0 will reserve this digit for possible future regional applications.

D9 The 1xx range will be reserved for short codes. Any regionally harmonised codes which are identified by NOG will be implemented at the first convenient opportunity, subject to NSC agreement.

D10 Carrier selection will be implemented using the prefix approach (that is, by dialling a carrier selection code before the number as normally dialled, complete with trunk or international prefix where appropriate). The codes for this purpose will be drawn from a designated 1x range, which may differ from the range identified for common allocation.

D11 The short code 112 will be reserved for integrated emergency services call-out (fire/police/ambulance), and all operators will provide this service on this code as soon as feasible in each country. Where an integrated service cannot yet be provided, at least a helpful announcement will be provided giving alternative numbers to call in an emergency.

D12 The short code 911 will also be reserved for emergency call-out applications.

D13 The code 800 will be used for freephone services and 90x (where x may indicate a tariff level or service type) for premium rate services.

D14 Other new services will be numbered in co-ordination with the rest of the region (using facilities provided by TRASA's NSO, see A9). This implies both:

- informing the NSO when the numbering of a new service is first under consideration, and

- consulting the NSO to find out others' practice before deciding on the numbering of a new service, and

- informing the NSO of the final decision on numbering a new service.

4. Guidelines for good regulatory practice

Basic principles

R1 The numbering plan is a national resource which will be managed in the long-term best interests of the country as a whole.

R2 Numbering plan management and administration will be carried out in a non-discriminatory way by a competitively neutral body, normally the national regulator or a body acting on its behalf.

R3 The numbering plan and the rules relating to its use will be published and accessible to the industry and end-users. The rules will clarify the rights and responsibilities of number block holders and end-users of numbers.

R4 There will be open public consultation on all significant decisions about the numbering plan.

R5 A numbering advisory group or similar body may be set up, including representatives of industry, users and other interested parties, to discuss numbering issues and provide views and expertise to the regulator.

Routine numbering plan management

R6 Basic principles of good husbandry will be observed in numbering administration. For example, the size of number blocks allocated will be related to reasonable demand forecasts, and blockholders will be required to demonstrate exhaustion of existing blocks before being allocated more.

R7 The public will be educated in the meaning of telephone numbers (eg costs of calls to different codes) and in writing numbers correctly (eg using agreed standard number layouts, abbreviating the international prefix as +).

Major numbering plan changes

R8 The planning horizon for numbering plan changes will be measured in decades. Numbering change in any given range more than once a decade will be avoided.

R9 Before deciding on a major numbering plan change, options will be considered and stakeholders' views taken into account.

R10 When implementing numbering changes, every effort will be made to minimise difficulties and inconvenience for users. This will mean, for example:

- publicising the change well in advance
- providing helpful changed number announcements on old numbers

Number portability

R11 The regulatory framework will be prepared to ensure that, when it is in the national interest to introduce number portability, the regulator has the necessary powers to require number portability and direct how its costs are to be covered.

R12 Network operators will be encouraged to make advance preparations in their networks so as to minimise the eventual cost of introducing number portability.