

Abstract

“Call-Back, VoIP and WiFi: The Story of Alternative Calling Procedures”

For decades, until the 1980s, the international voice telecommunications market was a continent of stability in a shifting world. National “flag” carriers exchanged circuit-switched minutes through the international settlements procedures, with consumers paying premium rates for international direct dialing. Beginning in the 1990s, however, international call-back services, calling cards, refile, international simple resale and other routing, billing and by-pass mechanisms began to undercut this system. The advent of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) or “Internet telephony” in the 2000s generated a full-blown market for Skype, Vonage and other companies that by-pass circuit-switched international calling. Now, a simple application on a smart phone can allow consumers to call anywhere in the world, at a flat rate or for free. The universe of alternative calling procedures has evolved, and so have the impacts upon traditional carriers, consumers and governments. With the ITU now reviewing the ITRs for the first time in decades, it is time for a fresh look at the impacts – good and bad – that alternative calling procedures have on international voice telecommunications, and what governments, operators and the ITU can do to protect networks, boost international calling and avoid regulatory chaos.