

Unified Licensing regime in India

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Technological developments have rendered traditional approach of service specific licensing redundant. Today it has become harder and harder to distinguish between voice carrying networks, data networks, video/picture carrying networks. The same services, including voice, video and data, can now be provided on a variety of different networks and the lines between them are blurring. Similarly the same network platform could not only deliver a variety of services which traditionally required separate licenses (viz. SMS/ Push to Talk services offered by mobile operator, broadband services offered by cable operators, ISP's offering telephony services, mobile operators and ISPs offering streaming TV) but also entirely new value added applications. This trend is likely to continue and moreover is difficult to anticipate. The rapid technological change necessitates a licensing framework that can efficiently deal with such evolutions. This is especially important given the key objectives of regulatory and licensing policy to achieve network growth, provide the wide variety of highest quality services at the lowest possible prices while encouraging free growth of new applications and services. This is inexorably leading to a converged licensing regime. A converged licensing regime shall provide flexibility to the service providers to offer any or all services, using technology of his/her choice with flexibility also in terms of area of operation, greater participation of all types of entrepreneurs (big or small). With these objectives in mind TRAI has recommended Unified licensing to the Government in October 2003. The Government of India has agreed in November, 2003 to implement a Unified Licensing Regime under a two phase implementation scheme. The first phase, implemented from November, 2003 onwards has put in place a Unified Access Licensing (covering both fixed and mobile services) in India. Telecom Regulator (TRAI) has also provided the Government with its recommendations on Unified Licensing for all telecom services on January 13, 2005. The recommendations also proposes reduction in licensing burdens for the operators in order to facilitate growth, introduction of niche operators in telecom facility wise less developed areas, introduction of Internet telephony, etc.

This presentation will mainly cover a brief history of telecom licensing regime in India, the reasons of introducing the concept of Unified Licensing Regime, the migration process to Unified Access License, the current status of Licensing Regime in India and the salient features of proposed Unified Licensing recommendations for all telecom services.
