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Consumers fight Telkom

BY DAVE GLAZIER

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[15 August 2006] - A small group of disgruntled Telkom customers are starting an advocacy movement to highlight the lack of alternatives in the telecoms market.

The campaign aims to take out a full-page advert in a national newspaper detailing the commonly-alleged high costs and poor service of the fixed-line monopoly, says Tectonic writer and Flow Communications employee Richard Frank, who leads the project.

"I think there are a lot of businesses sharing our view that there is no viable alternative [for simple fixed-line voice and data services]," Frank says.

He says the idea for the campaign is based on the successful Firefox campaign, where the open source organisation bought a double-page spread in the New York Times to highlight that there was an open source alternative to Internet Explorer.

In the same way that the open source community donated money to that project, he is hoping local businesses will each donate R200 (or more) to fund the campaign.

Frank will seek "legal expertise" before continuing, and is happy to work with other people with more experience in consumer advocacy.

Newspaper ads

MyADSL founder Rudolph Muller describes Frank's plan as a "great idea", but believes about 500 people will need to be involved in order to raise sufficient cash.



MyADSL founder Rudolph Muller.

"Telkom is sensitive to media exposure," he adds, pointing to an advert recently taken out in Beeld, where Dr CH Stuart desperately requested the name of a senior staff member after making 31 fruitless calls to the help-desk.

"By 8am on the morning of the paper's publication, the man was contacted, and by 11am his problems were attended to," says Muller.

Yesterday, an executive at one of SA's larger Internet service providers described Telkom's profit margins from the SAT3 cable as "criminal".

Those interested in the project can contact Frank at richard@tectonic.co.za.

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