



New entrants to Irish broadband market will drive down prices, says ComReg



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


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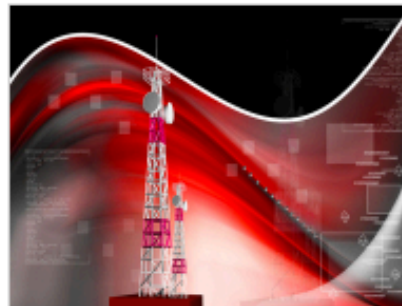
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Ireland should capitalise on white spaces opportunity following analogue TV switch-off

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Following the switch-off of Ireland's analogue TV signal in recent weeks, tech industry giants like Microsoft and academics are urging the country to take advantage of a huge economic opportunity in the form of white spaces which could be used to double the range of broadband in rural and urban areas.



Ireland should capitalise on white spaces opportunity following analogue TV switch-off

White spaces technologies use wireless signals that can travel large distances and easily through walls, making it suitable for a wide variety of consumer applications, including doubling the range of Wi-Fi, as well as M2M (machine-to-machine).

The technology works by searching for unused areas of the airwaves or gaps called white spaces that exist in bands that were traditionally reserved for TV broadcasts.

Ireland, because of its low population density and neutral military stance, has an abundance of radio spectrum. And last month's **switch-off of the analogue TV spectrum** is a stepping stone that should not be ignored.




In September, the CTVR telecoms research centre at Trinity College Dublin brought together ComReg, the Department of Communications and various businesses to hear from companies that had taken part in TV white space trials in other countries. SFI-backed research by the CTVR is underpinning a concerted effort by Prof Linda Doyle from the CTVR at Trinity College and her colleague at CTVR Tim Forde to ensure Ireland is a leader rather than the usual laggard in an important new area.

An organisation called **White Spaces Ireland** has been established by Doyle and Forde and involves companies interested in encouraging Ireland to move faster on this front which includes Microsoft, Imagine, e-Net, HEAnet, Spectrum Bridge, Neul and Taoglas.




Doyle said other countries are powering ahead on this front, including the UK, which last year became the **first European country to introduce white space technology**. Finland, which plans to ensure every citizen can access 100Mbps broadband by 2015, has already conducted test trials on white spaces.



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In recent years, the Irish telecoms regulator ComReg had been quite vocal on the opportunity for Ireland to be a test bed for future wireless technologies and created test licences for organisations that wanted to R&D new technologies.

Last year, ComReg warned that radio spectrum – which is worth €3.6bn to the Irish economy and employs 26,000 people – faces the risk of congestion as consumer demand for rich media and broadband increases. It said that re-farming of additional spectrum, as well as further investment in wireless backhaul and microwave radio links, is required.

However, Doyle warned that everyone involved, from the companies to the regulators and Government, need to avoid falling into a trap of complacency.

She said it also needs to be borne in mind that if smart metering for water and electricity is to become a reality in Ireland – considering Ireland's deficiencies in terms of broadband – white spaces could be the answer.

White spaces, she argued, could also be used to create urban Wi-Fi super hotspots.

Time to join the dots on white spaces

The main problem is getting all the constituents to move faster, from the regulator to the mobile operators and other organisations that could potentially benefit.

"There are many challenges. Technology is out there but some development is needed to get the volumes – but this is also an opportunity. Business model opportunities are not clear but we need to explore to find the answers.

"And we so need to take this kind of risk in Ireland. There will also be the need for policies and legislation if real commercial opportunities emerge from this," she said.

Doyle said faster facilitation of trial licences could help and by targeting Irish issues, as well as general issues, global opportunities could emerge.

A challenge is getting the telecoms industry to focus on the longer term.

"TV white space is a stepping stone to what is becoming a trend – spectrum sharing.

"It is inevitable that spectrum sharing will be a part of the future if we are to ensure that there is enough spectrum to support the data demands of the future," Doyle urged.

Wireless spectrum image via Shutterstock

John Kennedy

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