

Africa's Wi-Fi growth is in full force

World Wi-Fi Day is celebrated every year on 20 June, signifying a day where governments, industries and consumers recognise the important role of Wi-Fi in socio-economic development. This special day celebrates the advances of Wi-Fi and how it enables affordable connectivity for the unconnected around the world.



Riaan Graham, sales director for Ruckus Networks

According to Riaan Graham, sales director for Ruckus Networks (now part of CommScope via acquisition) sub-Saharan Africa, “Wi-Fi networks across commercial, government and communities, have continued to grow at a rapid pace across the continent. Both governments and network operators are realising with high-speed backhaul networks, it is a small marginal cost to add Wi-Fi access points at key points in the networks. As a result, Wi-Fi is currently connecting millions of people in Africa and represents one of the most expedient and cost-effective ways to increase both capacity and coverage. And it's growth is in full force.”

Just consider some of the stats:

- There are 9 billion Wi-Fi devices in use and 3 billion devices are shipped every year
- There are more Wi-Fi devices than people (7.6 billion) and cellular subscribers (5.2 billion)
- Wi-Fi accounts for most wireless traffic today. In the US, Wi-Fi carries 67% of mobile device traffic. In Japan, mobile subscribers use Wi-Fi for 83% of their traffic and 75% of connections, and Wi-Fi connections are on average twice as fast as those over cellular (10 Mbps and 5 Mbps, respectively).
- Wi-Fi is well-positioned to benefit from the explosive growth in the Internet of Things (IoT) and it already accounts for a large percentage of current IoT connections.
- The global economic value of Wi-Fi was \$1,96 trillion in 2018, and that is expected to reach \$3.47 billion in 2023.

“Africa's continued growth is driven by the need to not only connect the unconnected but to consolidate demands for access and data,” adds Graham. “What's more, the ubiquity, reliability, performance and cost effectiveness of Wi-Fi has

created a massive footprint that will retain its prominent role as we transition to new networks, such as 5G.”

More spectrum is required

However, for Wi-Fi to continue growing, more spectrum is required. Wi-Fi is not only a cost-effective solution for both urban and rural areas, but it plays a fundamental role in key areas such as making South Africa more accessible for business by improving the ease-of-doing-business in the country, as well as increasing global competitiveness.

“We believe that Wi-Fi technology should be recognised as a core pillar of the National Broadband Strategy to truly realise the unlimited capacity that Wi-Fi provides and open up true connectivity across the country and continent,” continues Graham.

Furthermore, with the transition to Wi-Fi 6 – where most providers are already scaling access points and technology infrastructures to accommodate this shift – this is even more critical. In fact, Wi-Fi will be important to the overall industry and will bring better speeds, lower latency and enhanced support. The flexibility and scalability that Wi-Fi enables results in increased speed and capacity with next-generation applications.

“For Africa to realise the true potential that Wi-Fi technology can bring to the continent, the issues of spectrum needs to be solved so the necessary infrastructure can be accessible for limitless possibilities, encouraging a better quality of life, business growth and investments into the continent,” Graham concludes.

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