

## Six Internet companies to log in to Costa Rica market



Telecommunications officials have given authorization for six companies to offer Internet service, voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) and other online options in Costa Rica, logging in a breakthrough in the country's long-sealed telecoms monopoly.

The green-lighted companies are Dodona SRL, Intertel Worldwide S.A., Worldcom de Costa Rica S.A., Call my way NY S.A., Redes Inalámbricas de Costa Rica S.A. and JASEC.

These businesses can now compete with the state-owned Internet providers, the Costa Rican Electricity Institute (ICE) and Radiográfica Costarricense S.A. (RACSA), whose exclusive stronghold expired one year ago when President Oscar Arias signed a law to end the state's 59-year-old monopoly on telecom services (TT Daily News, June 5, 2008). "This is a historic step for the country," Carolina Mora, spokeswoman for the Superintendent of Telecommunications (SUTEL), told The Tico Times. "It's the first time telecommunications companies have been authorized to offer services after decades of a monopoly situation."

SUTEL on Monday included R&H International Telecom Services in its list of approved firms but on Tuesday, Mora said R&H's inclusion was an error. That business remains in a list of 40 companies awaiting approval from SUTEL to begin or expand operations in Costa Rica. The telecom authorities had accidentally omitted JASEC, a company based in Cartago, the old capital east of San José, Mora said.

Of the 40 businesses, 10 are proposing to launch Internet cafés and the remaining would offer Internet or VoIP services to companies and individual customers, Mora said.

At least one of the companies is already up and running. Started in Costa Rica 15 years ago, Worldcom – not related to the defunct U.S. company Worldcom/MCI – has been waiting for the day this country would crack open its Internet market.

With a green light from SUTEL, "Worldcom can immediately provide telecommunications services in this market. Worldcom's telecom network is totally operational across national territory," said Valentin Horvilleur, the company's general director, in a statement e-mailed to The Tico Times.

The opening of the online industry came ahead of the cell phone sector's much-anticipated diversification. Phones and mobiles are still considered the province of ICE. Mora said the phone industry will not likely see new competition in until February 2010.