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TRA to 'censor' internet in free zones next year

UAE

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Internet access will be censored in Dubai's Internet and Media cities from early next year, the director general of the Telecom Regulatory Authority (TRA) has announced.

These zones, together with certain Emaar developments such as The Greens, are currently provided with internet services through Tecom, which has a stake in new telecom operator du.

Unlike etisalat, this company does not use a proxy server that can prohibit access to undesirable sites such as those featuring pornography.

However, as part of the process to allow du to provide internet services beyond these zones, the TRA will introduce a uniform proxy server across the UAE.

TRA Director General Mohamed Al Ghanim said: "There will be a unified policy for both etisalat and du.

"We will be taking a lighter approach regarding censorship," said Al Ghanim, adding that the new proxy was likely to be introduced in early 2007.

Du is preparing to launch the UAE's second mobile phone service and Al Ghanim said the two providers would be allowed to compete on



■ (From left) Essa Al Haddad, marketing officer of etisalat, Mohammed Al Ghanim, Director General of the TRA and Osman Sultan, CEO of du

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price, but that the TRA would not permit a price war.

"We are working to make sure competition is being done in a transparent manner. We will not allow any company to enter into an anti-competitive practice against another company," Al Ghanim said.

However, du Chief Executive Osman Sultan said his company will instead focus on providing a variety of pack-

ages for different market segments, such as teenagers and housewives.

Al Ghanim said it was inevitable Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone calls will be introduced, but warned the situation was complicated as etisalat derives the majority of its income from international calls.

"We will have to look at it when the market is liberalised.

There are a lot of companies trying to provide VoIP illegally and we are stopping them," he said.

Al Ghanim added VoIP will first be permitted for national calls through du and etisalat, before the service is extended to allow international phoning and for other providers to enter the market.

Todd McGregor of Forrester Research said the UAE was

being hampered by a lack of broadband penetration, in part caused by high prices.

A one megabyte broadband connection costs Dh249 per month – about three times the price in Europe.

"Broadband is becoming a utility rather than a discretionary service. The high expense is excluding lower socio-economic groups," McGregor said.



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