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Ten years of GSM in Australia

In April 1993 when Australia's Telstra launched its GSM network there were just 635,000 analogue mobiles in Australia, and less than 4% of people had one. Today there are 14 million mobile phones in the country and around 70% of people have one.

Ten years ago only voice calls were offered over the expensive, bulky phones commonly referred to as 'bricks' that weighed more than half a kilogram.

Without the digital network of today we would not be able to do simple things we take for granted, like send SMS, or use new mobile data services such as Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) which allows people to send each other photos or video images.

There are now 6.3 million mobile services operating across Telstra's two digital networks compared to 100,000 in 1995.

The GSM digital network was officially switched-on on 27 April 1993, providing coverage to 53% of the population. In 1995 the GSM network had 100,000 customers, in 1996 that had risen to 300,000 and at the beginning of 2003 the company had over 5.4 million on the GSM network alone.

The CDMA digital network was launched in September 1999. The CDMA network covers more than twice the area of the GSM network and will reach more than 98% of Australia's population by mid-2004. As at March 2003 there were 700,000 customers using Telstra's CDMA network. In conjunction with the Federal Government Telstra is rolling out coverage to a range of communities with populations in excess of 300 and a number of regional highways.

History of Mobile Phones in Australia

1981

- In August Telecom launched the first public automatic mobile phone system PAMTS in Melbourne (Sydney followed in November). Abbreviated to MTS or just 007 (after the telephone number prefix used) this service was fully automatic but not cellular.
- The boot-mounted radios had a handset and cradle in the cabin and cost \$4,990 .00to buy or \$1,000.00 pa to lease. Connection fee was \$350.00 and annual access fee was \$800.00.

1987

- Telecom launched Australia's first cellular network based on the USA AMPS (Advanced Mobile Phone System) – or analogue standard.
- Car mounted and transportable were sold and for the first time (bulky) hand held phones could be used – they sold for \$4,250. 00.
- AMPS first launched in Sydney in February and in Melbourne in May. It was extended into the other capitals and major cities then into country areas.

1989

- 100,000th AMPS service connected. (June)

1992

- Optus licensed as carrier (January)
- Optus starts to resell AMPS service (June)
- The 500,000th AMPS connection was made (October)
- Vodafone licensed as carrier (December)

1993

- Telstra launched new digital (GSM) network
- Optus launched GSM (May)
- Vodafone launched its GSM digital network (October).
- MTS Phone System for mobiles phased out.

1994

- The one-millionth analogue connection network was made (early March)

1995

- By July there were 300,000 connections on the now three digital GSM networks and the two millionth AMPS connection was made.

1996

- In June the one millionth GSM connection was made and the AMPS network connections had peaked at 2.6 million customers.

1998

- Telstra MobileNet customers (both AMPS and GSM) exceed three million
- Telstra announced plans to build a new mobile network to replace the AMPS Analogue network, which will be phased out due to government regulation.
- The new network will be based on CDMA (Code Division Multiple Access) technology

1999

- Telstra CDMA network launch (September)
- Majority of the AMPS networks closes (31st December)

2000

- Hutchison launches CDMA in Sydney and Melbourne (March)
- OneTel launches GSM 1800 (June)
- AMPS fully closed (September)

2001

- OneTel GSM 1800 closes (June)
- Number of mobiles in Australia exceeds the number of wired access lines 10.7 million (February)
- Telstra commercially launches GPRS data network across GSM
- Mobile number portability (September)

2002

- The one billionth mobile service in the world connected (April)
- The 12 millionth Australian mobile service connected (March)

2003

- Telstra launches Telstra Mobile Loop – based on its 3G network (March)

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