

# WHAT IS WLR3?

By Barry McErlean, Key Account Manager for Telco Unit, Singularity

A year into the rollout of WLR3, with the first CPs going BAU (business as usual) on the Equivalence Management Platform (EMP), it is worthwhile considering the progress made to date by OpenReach and what CPs should plan for in 2008. Let's begin with a short recap of why WLR3 has become a hot topic, writes Barry McErlean, a Key Account Manager at the telco unit of Singularity.

Under the Telecoms Strategic Review Ofcom stipulated that BT Retail and third party resellers should use the same mechanisms to access the Openreach network, to ensure 'equivalence of input'. The WLR3 (Wholesale Line Rental 3) standard specifies how CPs should interact with Openreach in future so they have equivalent access to the network. Openreach implemented a new system known as the Equivalence Management Platform (EMP). Communication providers (CPs) can access the EMP to purchase Wholesale Line Rental (WLR3) which will, in time, replace the WLR2 gateway previously provided by BT Wholesale.

Unlike WLR2, WLR3 does not have a standard web portal provided by Openreach to allow CPs to place orders. Instead, CPs will need to either develop their own gateway or partner with a solution provider.

All customers of the Wholesale Line Rental portfolio (aka Wholesale Access, Wholesale Digital Access and Wholesale ISDN30) will be affected, including all CPs as well as BT Retail and BT Global Services. Existing users of WLR2 will have a grace period to continue using the current protocol, but migration to the new standard will be encouraged over time.

WLR3 was introduced to enable CPs to compete more effectively and provide better service to their customers. The new protocol significantly improves the speed, accuracy and ease of placing orders for access products. CPs are also given full control of the order process, including the ability to log faults and obtain order status in real-time.

The new EMP for WLR3 is a 24 hour high-volume platform with no requirement for CPs to forecast. Some of the benefits offered by WLR3 include: Faster orders; fewer rejected orders; enhanced number reservation; faster appointment scheduling; better customer information (Keeping



Customers Informed); better visibility of compensation SLA breaches; better testing and fault reporting.

Back in May 2007, EMP was at version 400. Since then there has been significant stabilisation of the platform through releases 500 and 600 (which dealt with PSTN) and 700 (which focused on ISDN30). Based on our experience bringing customers on to the EMP, through product establishment and BAU, EMP is now a mature platform. With a forthcoming release addressing ISDN2, the services provided through EMP are also pretty comprehensive.

While we advise customers to plan carefully for issues like bulk like-for-like transfers, overall we're not aware of any remaining technical issues that could discourage our client CPs from adoption and in fact we're actively encouraging them to move forward. OpenReach has also begun to encourage CPs to use Third Party Integrators (TPIs) to help push faster rates of adoption, and hosted a well attended TPI event at BT Tower in December to reinforce this message, which we believe will create market momentum in the next two quarters.

The advantages of moving early include reduced costs, competitive advantage over other CPs and better customer satisfaction. We also believe that taking a business process based approach to WLR3 opens wider opportunities for enhancing end-to-end processes that will further improve revenues and costs. The EMP is stable and open for business, and we expect the rate of adoption to accelerate now that the first CPs have gone BAU.