

## B360 brings wireless internet to the farmers of the Western Cape



Farmers in the Overberg, Western Cape area are reaping the benefits of reliable, fast and affordable wireless internet thanks to the efforts of Caledon-based internet hosting and connectivity provider, B360.

Agriculture is a major contributor to the Western Cape's economy. The area produces roughly 20 percent of South Africa's total agricultural output and contributes around 55 to 60 percent to the total of South Africa's agricultural exports. For farmers in this region of the country, it is critical to have the ability to monitor local and international markets, to trade on electronic platforms and to track something that affects their livelihoods – weather forecasts.

Despite the desperate need for internet connectivity in this region and given the fact that farmers are generally far removed from any conventional infrastructure and services, Telkom has not prioritised making internet services available to the farming communities in the Western Cape.

“As one of the dominant internet hosting and connectivity providers in the Overberg, we started receiving requests as early as 2007 for an alternative to Telkom's ADSL service,” explains Ferdi Scholtz, MD of B360. “The Overberg farming community suffers from poor service delivery and continual cable theft resulting in disrupted landline voice and data services, but at the time, wireless internet was too expensive and therefore not a viable alternative.”

At the beginning of 2009, B360 invested in infrastructure (basically everything that supports the flow and processing of data) and started rolling out a test base in Caledon. By the end of that year B360 was satisfied with the quality of service they were providing and started supplying wireless internet to the outlying farmers.

B360 now has more than 320 farmers on its client base, covers more than 15 towns in the Overberg, Heldeberg and Caledon regions and is soon planning to expand its coverage to the Cape Town metropole.

Realising the demand for wireless internet services in Telkom-poor regions, B360 has signed up V Internet Solutions in Villiersdorp and Sea View Internet in Gansbaai to assist with the rollout of infrastructure.

“The big attraction for our customers is the reliability, speed and affordability of wireless internet compared to conventional ADSL services,” says Scholtz. “Another key benefit is that users pay a monthly subscription fee as opposed to a line rental fee as is the case with ADSL.”

B360 also provides Voice over IP (VoIP) services which enable users to make telephone calls to landline and mobile numbers at significantly cheaper rates than Telkom, while calls to other users on the network are free of charge on certain packages.

Because of the overwhelming support that B360 has received from their loyal customer base, they decided to give back to the community and now provide free internet access to The Foundation For A Safe South Africa along with several schools in the Overberg and Helderberg areas.

Scholtz says competition in their market is hotting up, which is one of the reasons why B360 joined the Wireless Access Providers' Association (WAPA). This industry representative body sets standards and guidelines for the outdoor fixed wireless and indoor wireless industries, while also assisting its members with technical and licensing issues.

“WAPA has helped us tremendously since we started up, particularly with the processing of our license applications,” he says. “Not only does membership ensure we live up to our promises and industry standards, but it also strengthens collaboration and co-operation.”

He sees strong demand in the future as more users start to understand the benefits of wireless internet services over traditional means.