

Julie Lutz Telecommunications Ponderings

11 December 2007

Greetings,

This is to inform the world that we have entered a Brave New World in Communications in PNG.

1. Our Telikom phones are essentially non-functional. This means no e-mail or FAX over phone lines. We have not had a productive phone call in over a month. ("Ehhh? Can you speak up??? Who??? What???" doesn't count as a call.) We will continue paying our phone bills in case Telikom makes an agonal gasp at restoring basic service. It's hard to believe this really is the end of radio phone service to Enga.
2. We have a Telikom Cell Phone, but there is no easy service from Mambisanda. If the planets align, we can walk to the top of the rise by our house and hope for a fleeting, open window – when Wapenamanda has power – to make a call out. It's happened once so far, and no one was home. We do not keep it on, so that is not a number to phone in on. Digicel, the new company which is pushing Telikom to the brink of implosion by offering cell phone competition, does not yet have transmitters in Enga Province. We await the telecommunication revolution Digicel will bring, though it's still not e-mail or internet.
3. We still have a satellite phone and phone patch radio telephone capability, so we can be in touch with the world. Sorry it isn't easy to phone in on any of those, though it is possible with some advance preparations.
4. We are now doing e-mail over an hf radio modem, just as we do when we're in the bush. We purchased a used modem from CRMF (Christian Radio Missionary Fellowship, the chaps who oversee all of our radio and computer needs). We're thankful we were able to get the system for about USD \$1,000, rather than the \$3,500 standard price for a new unit.
5. For your education: an hf radio modem is dependent on atmospheric conditions, a free frequency (2 available), an open computer at CRMF to handle the request (2 available), a good ear to read the static (a good connection stirs an image of Viennese cross-country skiing), and p a t i e n c e. No. More than that – p a t i e n c e. We're in line with all the other mission folks in the bush who routinely use this system, plus all of the others in towns who, like us, are finding themselves without service. The bytes swoosh in and out about as fast as a smoke signal. Regarding attachments – we lose them regularly. Regarding size – we can only handle up to 50 kilobytes. This is our reality. Don't knock it. We're thankful for even this much.
6. We are looking into high speed internet access with the hospital, but PNG in its inimical wisdom, has just closed the legal door to competition again, after grandfathering in the brash ones who purchased systems under the legal red light, and the bold ones who snuck through on a yellow. Telikom does offer their own system, but the cost is over \$500 / month just for the equipment rental with use above that. Price tag – over \$750/mo just for minimal internet access. The Mt Hagen Telikom office has not hoodwinked anyone into buying into that system. Yet.

7. We still drive up to Amapyaka (HLIS) when we need internet service, though that is not a panacea, either. Yesterday, Linda spent 2 hours trying to send out her newsletter – unsuccessfully. She’s back to the drawing board, stripping down the LCMS template, minimizing all of her photos, etc, etc, etc, before making the trip again to try to nudge it through the best system PNG offers. Anton figured that he spent 5 hours total yesterday in communication exercises which could have been accomplished in 30 minutes, if PNG had a functioning telecommunication system.

Just in case you wanted to know. ☺

We are learning from this process. Who else would know the following about failing systems without having lived it?

Transformation

Complacent use
Fragile connects
Futile attempts
Expensive flailings
Creative contortions
Desperate hope
Impotent rage
Justified villification
Hysterical rantings
Depressed resignation
Comic reinterpretation
Agonal urges
Complexity overload
Death of expectation
Heroic understatement
System irrelevancy
Resigned acceptance
Historic blip.

:-) Have a good day. This will come to you when the planets next align.

Julie Lutz, for the LCMS Communicators in PNG

BOTTOM LINE – send simple e-mails