

OOREDOO ENHANCES ITS PREPAID PORTFOLIO

XPRESS CUSTOMERS TO GET FREE ACCESS TO 4 TOP APPS

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait, a member of the international Ooredoo Group, has enhanced its prepaid portfolio and introduced an innovative service offering its prepaid customers free usage of four of the most popular smartphone applications. The applications included in this service are WhatsApp, Tango, Viber and Skype, says Mijbil Alayoub, Director of Corporate Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait. Talking to Kuwait Times in an interview yesterday at Ooredoo Kuwait's corporate office, Alayoub spoke about how the telecom operator's new service gives customers free and unlimited access to four of the

most used communication applications. Excerpts from the interview:

Kuwait Times: Where did the idea of launching a new Xpress prepaid service come from?

Alayoub: Kuwait is one of the pioneering countries in the region to have introduced prepaid services for its customers. In Kuwait, Wataniya Telecom, now Ooredoo, was the first to introduce prepaid lines way back in 2000, changing the telecom market in the country to make it adapt to a customer-centric policy. We aim at providing our customers with best/top prepaid service in town and offer them value for money.

KT: Can you brief us on the all-new Xpress recharge service?



KUWAIT: Mijbil Alayoub, Director of Corporate Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait, during the interview at his office in Ooredoo Kuwait's HQ yesterday. —Photo by Sajeev K Peter

Alayoub: Any customer who buys an Xpress prepaid SIM card will have the ability immediately to use four free smartphone applications up to 200 megabytes. When you top up it with Xpress top-up cards, you get more benefits. Ooredoo's new service gives customers free and unlimited access to four of the most used communication applications. The network recognizes the usage of these applications automatically. Data consumption of these applications is free and unlimited for a period that varies from 24 hours to 30 days, depending on the value of the recharge.

KT: What are the applications included in this service?

Alayoub: In Kuwait, we are the earlier adopters of new technology. The applications included in this service are WhatsApp, Tango, Viber and Skype as they are considered to be the most widely used apps by our customers and help them connect with their families and friends everywhere in the world.

KT: Can you explain the value for money new Xpress customers will be getting?

Alayoub: Users recharging with KD 1 will get 24 hours of free unlimited usage of WhatsApp, Skype, Tango and Viber, while recharging with KD 2 gives users 7 days of free usage. KD 3 users can enjoy the free service for 15 days, while KD 5 and above can enjoy the services for 30 days which is a great value for money.

KT: Can old Xpress subscribers benefit from this service?

Alayoub: The service is activated by default on all new Xpress SIM cards. However, current Xpress users who are signed on to other packs can get this service by dialling the USSD code *500# on their phone or sending X to 500 via SMS.

In a nutshell, it is the ability to utilize these four applications to communicate with your family and friends around the world for free. No other telecom company in Kuwait

offers such a service. With such innovative products, we hope to get more customers and build on our customer base in the country further.

● Mijbil Alayoub joined Ooredoo Kuwait in January 2015 as the Director of Corporate Communications. His main role is setting up and executing strategies related to public relations and corporate image and reputation as well as working on corporate social responsibility strategies. Alayoub has more than 20 years of experience in the corporate communications field, worked in different establishments such as EQUATE, Zain Group, and the Kuwait Fund for the Advancement of Sciences. Mijbil holds a degree in mass communications from Northeastern University and a degree from the London School of Business in management.

Recharge and get free unlimited usage of your favorite apps with Xpress

Get unlimited access to WhatsApp, Tango, Skype and Viber for up to 30 days with the new Xpress prepaid plans.

ooredoo

T S V W

How does Xpress work?

Step 1: SMS X to 500
Step 2: Recharge your prepaid line
Step 3: Enjoy free unlimited usage of the mentioned apps

What is the validity of my free usage and credit?

Voucher	Validity of Credit	Validity of free apps usage
KD 1	20 days	1 day
KD 2	40 days	7 days
KD 3	60 days	15 days
KD 5	100 days	30 days
KD 10	100 days	30 days
KD 20	100 days	30 days

To activate: Ooredoo prepaid customers should dial *500# or SMS X to 500. New prepaid customers get these benefits by default.



Ooredoo Kuwait's corporate headquarters in downtown Kuwait.

TAX CUTS ARE RIGHT PATH TO CUT ITALY'S DEBT, RENZI AIDE

ROME: Italy is confident of getting European Union backing for a program of sweeping tax cuts because only by boosting economic growth can it hope to lower its huge public debt, the economic adviser to Prime Minister Matteo Renzi said. Renzi faces tough talks in the next few weeks to convince the European Commission to approve his plan to reduce taxes by 35 billion euros (\$39.59 billion) by 2018, instead of using higher tax revenues as the economy grows to accelerate debt reduction.

Yoram Gutzgeld, an Israeli mathematician who moved to Italy in 1989, told Reuters the tax cuts were needed to reverse previous austerity measures and generate growth. "We are now creating a virtuous cycle to unwind a vicious cycle," he said, arguing that Renzi's predecessors had created a "huge recession" by increasing taxation by 50 billion euros since 2011.

At a record 132 percent of gross domestic product, Italy's debt is the highest in the euro-zone after Greece's. Gutzgeld, who has a key role in policy formation, argued it could only be brought down in a lasting way by fuelling a still fragile economic recovery, and tax cuts were crucial to achieve this.

Renzi has long urged Europe to focus more on growth and less on austerity and he now seems determined to take on the Commission, if necessary. A government forecasting document to be presented by Sept. 20 will revise up the economic growth outlook, while at the same time raising the targets for the deficit and public debt in 2016 and 2017, sources have told Reuters.

The so-called "structural" budget deficit, which is adjusted for the business cycle and is closely watched by the Commission, will also be revised up to show no targeted improvement between 2015 and 2016. Gutzgeld defended the strategy and played

down the importance of the structural deficit, saying it was a complicated formula which ordinary people didn't understand and that even economists disagreed over how it should be calculated.

Renzi, whose approval ratings have fallen sharply in the last year, plans tax cuts of more than 5 billion euros next year, mainly by abolishing taxation on primary residences, municipal services, agricultural buildings and industrial equipment. He wants to proceed with deeper cuts to corporate tax and income tax in 2017.

He has said next year's budget deficit will remain below the EU's 3 percent of gross domestic product ceiling, but that he should be allowed to raise it by up to 0.6 percentage points from the current target of 1.8 percent of GDP. He may not get all the leeway he wants, but with the euro zone debt crisis defused by the expansionary policies of the European Central Bank, the Commission is likely to cut him much more slack than previous Italian governments obtained.

Last week Economy Minister Pier Carlo Padoan began negotiations with top Commission officials. These are likely to continue at least until mid-October, when Italy presents its 2016 budget to parliament. Renzi says he deserves flexibility to reward reforms he has passed in areas such as the banking system and the labour market to try to make the economy more competitive.

Gutzgeld said it was natural that observers were sceptical about Italy after "decades of fundamentally bad management and broken promises," but that under Renzi things would be different. Now a member of parliament, Gutzgeld was a director of the management consultancy firm McKinsey until he met Renzi in 2012 and agreed to change career course. "I made a bet that he would change the country," he said. —Reuters

UK INFLATION SLIPS BACK TO ZERO, BOE RATE HIKE MONTHS AWAY

LONDON: British inflation fell back to zero in August after oil prices dropped at the fastest rate since the start of the year, keeping annual price growth far below the Bank of England's target and an interest rate rise off the table for now. Headline consumer price inflation (CPI) dipped into negative territory for the first time in more than 50 years in April, and has been 0.1 percent or lower over the past six months, despite solid economic growth and rising wages.

What the BoE first expected to be a short-lived phenomenon is now proving somewhat more persistent, though surveys still show neither the British public nor analysts expect the economy to slip into a deflationary spiral of falling prices. The Office for National Statistics said the fall in annual CPI to zero in August from 0.1 percent in July was due to lower fuel costs and a smaller rise in clothes prices than a year ago. Clothing was also responsible for core inflation which the BoE now looks at

more closely as it strips out volatile energy prices falling to 1.0 percent from 1.2 percent.

Price pressures look set to stay low, too. The cost of goods leaving factories fell by an annual 1.8 percent in August—matching January's record decline—while manufacturers' crude oil costs are down by almost half compared with a year earlier. "Against this backdrop, hawkish comments by (BoE policymakers) Kristin Forbes or Martin Weale over the weekend sound hollow," economists at Barclays wrote to clients.

"To remain on track for a rate hike in Q1 2016, domestic data, including inflation, will now need to consistently surprise on the upside."

While a rate rise by the US Federal Reserve could come as soon as Thursday, BoE Governor Mark Carney has said similar action by the BoE will not come into sharper focus until the turn of the year.

Most economists polled by Reuters last week forecast

the BoE would start to raise rates early next year, but financial markets think it will be rather later in 2016. The British central bank has had to postpone planned tightening in past years.

BoE forecasts last month pointed to inflation returning to and then exceeding its 2 percent target in a couple of years. Some policymakers think this rebound could be sharper, and one, Ian McCafferty, voted for a rate rise last week.

Forbes said on Friday that rates would need to rise "sooner rather than later" and Weale said on Sunday that a move should come "relatively soon".

But most MPC members think wage pressures are too weak for prices to rise rapidly, especially as economic productivity is finally starting to rise, taking the edge off the inflation impact. Data today is forecast to show a 2.5 percent annual increase in wages in the three months to July. —Reuters

WORLD BANK WARNS OF MORE TURBULENCE FROM FED TIGHTENING

WASHINGTON: The World Bank warned yesterday that monetary policy tightening by the Federal Reserve could spur a "perfect storm" of threats to growth and financial stability in developing economies. Regardless of whether the Fed begins raising interest rates at this week's meeting or later, Bank economists said in a report that the shift in policy could pose huge challenges to so-called emerging and frontier economies (EFEs) that are particularly vulnerable. It would come as both global economic growth and trade have turned down and sinking commodity prices have particularly hurt a number of developing economies, the report noted, and economic growth among EFEs is already the

lowest since the financial crisis.

Many have trade and budget shortfalls, and their governments and companies have high levels of US dollar debt, that make them particularly vulnerable to tighter conditions in global markets and a stronger dollar. In the worst case, the report said, capital flows to developing economies could dry up suddenly, creating "formidable policy challenges for vulnerable countries."

"Emerging and frontier market economies may hope for the best during the upcoming tightening cycle, but given the substantial risks involved, they would do well to buckle their seatbelts in case the ride gets bumpy," Carlos Arteta, lead

economist in the Bank's Development Prospects Group. The Fed's initial hike, expected to be just 0.25 percentage points, would be the first in more than nine years and come after the US central bank held the benchmark federal funds rate at an extraordinary 0-0.25 percent since the 2008 crisis.

But it would likely begin a series of increases as the Fed seeks to get rates back to more "normal" levels around 3.0 percent over the next couple years. The report said that, since the Fed has already given ample warning of its plans, markets could actually stay fairly calm.

And it noted that, if a real strengthening of the US economy underpins the rate

increases, that is likely good for the rest of the world. "Since the tightening cycle has been widely anticipated and will take place gradually in the context of a robust US economy, it is expected to have a benign impact on capital inflows to EFEs."

But the report stressed that, in the worst case, weak global conditions could lead to sudden, severe "systemic" halts to capital flows that could sharply hit growth in some countries, forcing some into contraction. "Financial market volatility during the tightening cycle could potentially combine with domestic fragilities into a perfect storm that could lead to a sharp reduction in capital flows to more vulnerable countries," it said. —AFP



FRANKFURT: President and CEO of Automobili Lamborghini Stephan Winkelmann presents the new model Huracan during a press day ahead of the 66th IAA auto show in Frankfurt yesterday. —AFP



FRANKFURT: A fair hostess poses by the "Cactus" concept car with its inflatable roof doubles turned into a tent at French carmaker Citroen booth during a press day of the 66th IAA auto show in Frankfurt am Main yesterday. —AFP