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BUSINESS REPORT

NEWS

Northwestel 'Trying to pull a fast one' with unlimited plans: SSI Micro

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 Bailey Moreton, staff  Monday, Nov. 2nd, 2020

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 Unlimited internet plans proposed by Northwestel are anti-competitive, according to SSI Micro. Photo from Pexels.

Northwestel's plan to roll-out unlimited internet plans in the Northwest Territories is facing more challenges, with smaller competitor SSI Micro filing an intervention with the federal regulator.

SSI Micro buys access to Northwestel's fibre optic network "wholesale" and have installed "last-mile infrastructure" — connections branching off the main fibre optic network to expand internet access — and offer internet plans which compete with Northwestel, according to Dean Procter, chief development officer with SSI Canada.

Last week, the company filed an intervention with the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

Procter says Northwestel is trying to monopolize the market for internet services in NT by providing unlimited plans when competitors like his company aren't able to.

"Northwestel is trying to pull, what we can describe quite clearly, as a fast one," said Procter. "This is a naked grab on their part to run competition out of the market."

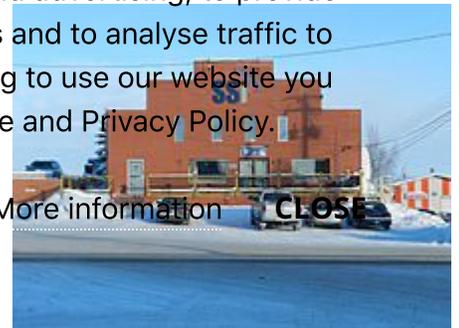
SSI Micro says Northwestel says the prices being made available to retail customers aren't being made available to them, and offering unlimited internet at those prices is unsustainable.

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According to Procter, this means either the company is trying "to run SSI out of business" or, the federal funding Northwestel received is making offering those plans sustainable.

A shot of the SSI Micro office in Yellowknife. Photo supplied by Wikicommons.

Northwestel had previously announced its plans to make unlimited internet access available in every community in the Northwest Territories, backed by more than \$62 million in funding from the CRTC.

Procter said if the federal funding is making the unlimited internet plans sustainable, than Northwestel should offer the same prices to non-retail customers like SSI Micro.

"We understand that Northerners pay too much for internet, we get that — we pay too much for internet," said Procter. We're not trying to prejudice consumers. On the contrary, we're trying to give proper competition to make sure that competition is maintained in the north, but to make sure that competition is actually healthy competition."

"By having a monopoly backbone provider, treat so badly, their wholesale customers and give such benefits to the retail customers," Procter added. "It's clear, something's wrong. We can't stand by and let that happen."

Northwestel declined to comment on the intervention.

"Our focus is on introducing new Internet services to meet the changing needs of our customers," Andrew Anderson, Northwestel's director of communications, said in an email. "We are confident that the services and rates we put forward are balanced and reasonable."

Northwestel had announced its unlimited internet plans would be available to order on November 2, but announced on Twitter last week that that date would have to be pushed back, after the CRTC said they needed more time to review their application.

No date has been set for when unlimited internet plans will be rolled out.

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