

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Viya To Launch Internet MiFi Service And 4G LTE Cellular On St. Croix In Two Weeks; More Internet Hot Spots Announced

Business / **Published On October 21, 2017 11:01 AM /**

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ST. CROIX -- Viya, which was hit hard by Hurricanes Irma and Maria and has been working alongside the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority to restore service to its thousands of customers who went offline following the storms, told The Consortium in an interview at the company's Frederiksted facility on Friday, that it would be launching an internet MiFi service -- which is a wireless router that serves as a mobile hotspot -- on St. Croix in the next two weeks, making available 10,000 devices to current customers and newcomers that will enable residents to stream the web and, according to Viya CEO Alvaro Pilar, watch movies on Netflix and enjoy other services.

The MiFi device will be given to current customers free of charge, while new signups will have to pay a fee for the box. Once the MiFi device is in service, current Viya customers will pay a monthly bill that matches what they were paying before Hurricane Maria struck, and newcomers will be given an opportunity to choose their plans. Mr. Alvaro did not reveal the exact data speeds that will be available, but whatever it winds up being, it will not match what customers were receiving before Hurricane Maria ravaged St. Croix. For example, someone who has Viya's \$150 plan that gives 100 megabits per second (Mbps) download and 10 Mbps upload, will not receive more than 25 Mbps download and about 3 Mbps upload, according to Mr. Alvaro, information that The Consortium corroborated with an internal document the publication was privy to. It remains to be seen whether Viya will decrease the payments to match the data speeds, but with Mr. Alvaro stating that it's more costly to provide internet service through LTE (4G mobile communications standard) than it is landline -- a statement apparently aimed at justify the current rates -- it appears unlikely that the pricing will be altered.

Mr. Alvaro stressed that what Viya is offering through its LTE service, which is powered by the [Ericsson Network](#), will meet the needs of residents, as the company has the capability to give each resident 100 Mbps download speeds. That's the capability, but not the reality. "We will cut off abusers," Mr. Alvaro warned, noting that some people have been using high amounts of data daily.

Those with Viya mobile phone service are also expected to see vast improvements once the LTE network is launched, Mr. Alvaro said. The company plans to install in total 40 towers territory-wide, half of which have already been erected.

The announcement of Mifi for St. Croix and the LTE network (the service has been deployed in St. Thomas, and Viya is daily working on St. John), represents another move by Viya to provide service to customers, along with the wider community, even as the company continues to sustain losses; with most of its system down, Viya has almost zero revenues coming in, and The Consortium has learned that the company was forced to layoff at least seven employees in the past few days. Mr. Alvaro told The Consortium that the losses were "significant," but he did not give an exact figure, noting that Viya's parent company, ATN International, Inc., is publicly traded, and divulging such details would not be prudent.

Asked for a projection as to when all Viya customers would receive their regular service, Mr. Alvaro said because Viya's lines are on WAPA poles, regular service would be restored to customers along with WAPA's own restoration work (WAPA expects to power 90 percent of the USVI by Christmas).

Aside from working to reinstate service to its customers, Viya has gone out of its way to provide Internet to the wider community, with Internet hotspot locations installed across the territory. It has also been prioritizing businesses and government entities critical to the recovery. Jennifer Matarangas-King, Viya's vice president of public relations, told The Consortium that Viya's commitment to the U.S. Virgin Islands runs deep, adding that the islands weren't a "line item" on a document that includes a vast amount of locations. "This is where we are," she said. "

"We want to be sure that we are a critical part of the restoration effort. And it's not just about taking care of the current customer base. But we also know that as we're

rebuilding, potential investors or even current businesses are going to be figuring out what's the path with the USVI. Do I want to stay? Do I want to move here? So we're taking our role very seriously, that's why we're trying to do as much and as quickly as possible," Mrs. Matarangas-King said.

Viya trucks are easily seen throughout the islands as employees work to restore service. Many of the company's roughly 400 employees were adversely affected by the storms, Mrs. Matarangas-King said, with some losing their roofs but nonetheless showing up to work. "They've been affected, their families have struggled, but they're still committed to getting their community up, and they take it very, very seriously," she said.

Below, find Viya's updated WiFi hotspot locations:

St. Croix

- Henry E. Rohlsen Airport
 - Government House
 - VITEMA Emergency Operations Center
 - Plaza West
 - Plaza East
 - Viya Customer Experience Center
 - Laundry Time (across from the Canegata Ballpark)
 - Cost-U-Less
 - Marshall Command (V.I.P.D.)
 - FEMA Ship in Frederiksted (not public)
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St. Thomas

- Emile Griffith Ballpark (near GERS)
 - Havensite Buccaneer Mall
 - Havensite Port of Sale
 - Viya Charam Building
 - Viya Customer Experience Center
 - Cyrile E. King Airport
 - Yacht Haven Grande
 - Crown Bay Marina
 - Moe's Supermarket in Red Hook
 - AYH in Red Hook
 - FEMA ship in Crown Bay (not public)
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St. John

- Cruz Bay
 - Pastory Area
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Soon-to-be-launched locations on St. Croix