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Skartel to Open Network to More Operators

By Rachel Nielsen

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Skartel, which operates under the Yota brand, said it would grant network access to more operators by early next year. **Andrei Makhonin**

Wireless Internet provider Skartel is reportedly preparing to open its network to more operators, increasing its clout in the market.

Skartel, which operates under the Yota brand, will make technical changes to its 4G network by the beginning of next year, which will enable it to give network access to more mobile operators, Vedomosti reported Tuesday, citing sources close to the operators.

Currently, Skartel's network is used only by Skartel itself and MegaFon, which has been offering 4G services on the network since April, becoming one of the earliest providers of the high-speed wireless Internet access in the country.

The cooperation is unsurprising given that Skartel is 100 percent owned by Garsdale Services

Investment, which owns 50 percent plus one share of MegaFon. Billionaire Alisher Usmanov holds more than 80 percent of Garsdale.

According to Vedomosti's company database, MegaFon's other shareholders are Swedish-Finnish telecommunications company TeliaSonera, with 35.6 percent, and MegaFon Investments, with 14.4 percent.

Mobile TeleSystems, VimpelCom, Swedish telecom company Tele2 and state-owned Rostelecom are the mobile operators most likely to use Skartel's network, Vedomosti reported.

Though Rostelecom and Big Three operators MTS, VimpelCom and MegaFon won 4G frequencies from the government in July, that bandwidth still hasn't been converted from military use.

Skartel's addition of partners is happening against the backdrop of MegaFon's planned initial public offering on the London Stock Exchange and MICEX. That offering could happen as soon as Nov. 1, Kommersant has reported.

Meanwhile, MegaFon has been solidifying plans to snap up a 50 percent stake in cell phone and SIM card retailer Yevroset, a move that would further consolidate its market position.

Through a series of deals involving MegaFon, Yevroset shareholder Alexander Mamut and Garsdale, MegaFon would spend up to $1.33 billion to buy half of Yevroset.

VimpelCom would own the other half of Yevroset, Reuters reported this week.

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