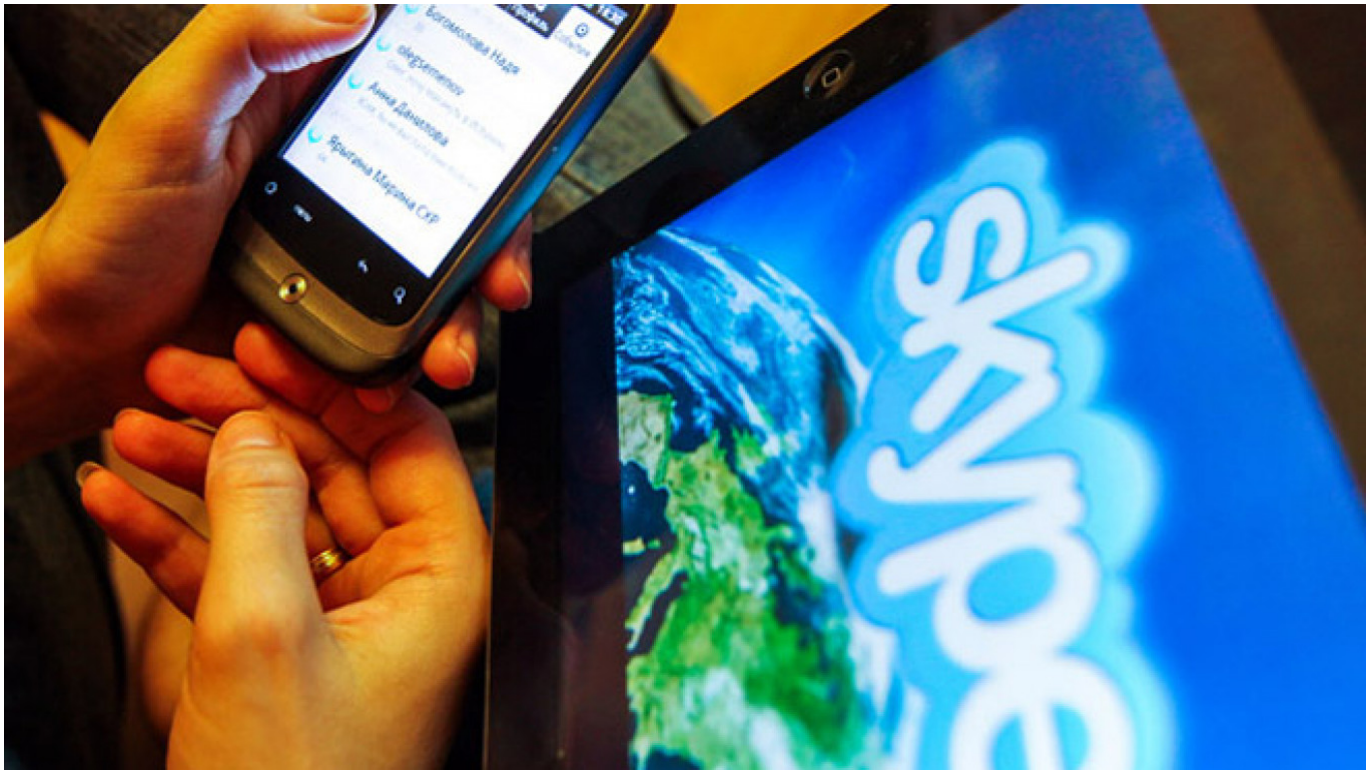
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Top Russian Phone Operator MTS to Launch Answer to Skype and WhatsApp

By The Moscow Times

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Penetration of OTT services such as Skype and WhatsApp is relatively low in MTS's subscriber base.

Russia's leading mobile phone operator MTS plans to challenge leading chat applications Skype and WhatsApp with a service that would take the place of both.

The service will provide a range of multimedia services including file exchange, calls and video conferencing via a single application that is integrated with the user's telephone number and social network pages, MTS spokesman Dmitry Solodovnikov told RIA Novosti.

The over-the-top (OTT) service will be based on Rich Communication Suite (RCS) technology, the spokesman said.

The new product will identity users based on their mobile phone number, enabling calls and messaging with users in outside networks too. This could be a comparative advantage, as the typical OTT service only facilitates communication within its own network.

The service is currently in user testing. It will be available to subscribers in the first half of the year, first in Moscow and then in other regions of Russia.

MTS has invested more than 100 million ($1.5 million) in the service, Solodovnikov said.

Penetration of other OTT services such as Skype and WhatsApp is relatively low in MTS's subscriber base, so the service will aim to win over new users rather than active users of other services, he said.

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