

Virgin Launches Mobile Virtual Network Operator in Russia

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The closest thing Britain has to an oligarch entered the Russian market with a telecoms venture this week. Richard Branson's Virgin Group launched a mobile virtual network operator (MVNO), in Russia on Nov. 27.

MVNO Virgin will use network capacities of T2 RTK Holding, which runs the mobile phone operator Tele2, the upstart fourth mobile phone service provider in the Russian capital, the Vedomosti business daily has reported.

Few details are available at this point, except that MVNO Virgin will initially only be available in a test mode.

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Virgin has been present in Russia's telecom industry since 2007 as an investor in the local

company Trivon, which provides fixed-line, IP telephony and pay-TV services under Virgin Connect brand. The new deal to create MVNO Virgin represents a significant expansion of the firm's business in Russia.

The exact makeup of Trivon shareholders or the company's financial data has not been revealed.

Meanwhile, Russia's MVNOs market — mobile virtual network operators, providing mobile phone services using capacities of larger operators — remains relatively small. It is set to reach 6.8 million subscribers by the end of 2017, which would be less than 2 percent of all mobile phone users.

MVNOs have mostly attracted customers dissatisfied with their traditional mobile phone service providers and people arriving in other cities on short visits.

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