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Cell Phone Vending of Prepaid Electricity: Lessons Learnt in South Africa

Dr. Walter Smuts

Expertron Group (Pty) Ltd, South Africa

Abstract

When selling prepaid electricity, the challenge of providing a convenient payment point close to every home, can easily be underestimated. There is a need for large numbers of light-weight and mobile payment points. This paper shares experiences in rolling out a cell phone-based vending system for prepaid electricity in South Africa. Some of the technologies that can be used to put together a cell phone-based vending system are presented. Operational issues and lessons learnt during two years of managing both vendors and clients when using the system, are discussed. This includes sales statistics, system throughput, network reliability, user acceptance and the social aspects of involving people from the community in the business opportunities provided by selling electricity.