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Sigve Brekke
sigve@dtac.co.th

“Competition is not only the basis of protection to the consumer, but is the incentive to progress” - Herbert Hoover

Do you remember your first mobile phone?

More than ten years ago, it's only rich people who could afford a mobile phone. Back then, a handset cost tens of thousands of baht, some were even priced higher than 100,000 baht. The classic model was surely the big, fat, heavy one that the users could easily build up his arm muscle by lifting it up and down for a few times. The call rate was also terribly high. Calling within Bangkok could cost you a fortune, let alone making long-distant calls to other provinces. This was because there was no nationwide flat-rate as we have today.

As well as being rich and healthy, mobile users back then also needed to be extremely patient because the network was so bad that users literally needed to ride a bike to find the signal!

Tell these stories to teenagers today and they'll scarcely believe you, because what they see today is totally different.

Today, the cheapest handset costs about 2,000 baht. Customers now have plenty of promotions to choose from. The signal is clear and nationwide available, and calling to any province is based on the same rate. There are also a lot of value-added services which allow customers to send text and pictures, watch movies and listen to music via their mobile phone. Importantly, the call rates are much more affordable than in the past.

None of these things came from nothing. They are the result of business competition.

Imagine if there was only one small food shop in a village, say, run by Auntie Imm. Villagers would have no choice but to put up with Auntie Imm's moody face and her expensive, awful food. One day Auntie Aim opens another shop with a greater variety of dishes at a lower price. To prevent her customers from fleeing to the new shop, Auntie Imm has to adjust her strategy by being friendlier to customers, serving bigger proportion and cooking tastier food.

Who is the real winner in this competition? The customers! They enjoy better meals at a more reasonable price.

The free competition mechanism can be applied across all markets and industries. If there was only one operator in the mobile industry, for example, there wouldn't be any competition, meaning that customers wouldn't have any alternative. But more operators had come into the market, and everyone had to compete to make their services most attractive to the customers. This, in turn, put a pressure on the market leader, who used to enjoy market monopoly, to improve its services and pricing to retain its customer base.

As a result, we see cheaper price, better network, better customer service and a greater variety of new services. And since there are more users, vendors compete to lower the price of handsets to serve the rising demand.

None of these things could have happened without competition.

To make things even better, the competition must also be based on free and fair principles. This has been the most important factor in creating a systematic market development in countries around the world.

Under free and fair competition, operators have incentives to expand their services to cover wider areas, especially rural areas, and customers have more alternatives from which to choose.

Today, some countries have a mobile phone penetration rate of more than 90%. Thailand can also enjoy the same growth if operators are allowed to compete on the same footing. More importantly, the competition will be healthier and more enjoyable, because every operator will be able to compete across the board: instead of competing only on price, they will be able to focus more on services. At the end of the day, customers will be the ones who judge whose service is best.

That's the beauty of the kind of competition that everyone is looking forward to.