

Telstra launches IoT lab and expands muru-D to Melbourne

• May 2 2017 at 5:05 PM



Telstra chief technology officer Hakan Eriksson inside the new Telstra Internet of Things Lab. **Supplied**

Telecommunications giant Telstra has launched the country's first public Internet of Things innovation lab in Melbourne, opening up its infrastructure expertise and resources to burgeoning start-ups.

Telstra chief technology officer Hakan Eriksson said the GSMA Mobile IoT Open Lab would be open to anyone from high school students to large corporations, with the aim of providing innovators with an environment to test their ideas and build new devices.

"We're experts in the network part of it, but not in all the applications that run on top such as agricultural applications, power distribution applications or logistics applications... and they are not experts in networks, so we needed a meeting place and this is that meeting place," Mr Eriksson said.

"This Lab will help foster a community focused on quality IoT product design, encouraging best-practice sharing of ideas, experience, research and insights amongst engineers from startups through to global enterprises," he said.

On Tuesday, the telco also announced that it was expanding its renowned muru-D accelerator program to Melbourne, where it will be housed at the new

Telstra Labs facility and run by former Salesforce executive Julie Trel, who replaced Annie Parker as the head of the accelerator earlier this year.

All of Telstra's innovation and technology development projects will fall under the newly formed Telstra Labs and it will also house the development of some of the telco's blue sky ideas, such as a prototype it has developed for an app which would utilise augmented reality technology to show a user on their smartphone how to set up a WiFi router without needing a manual.

Telstra has also been experimenting with augmented reality using Microsoft's HoloLens and testing how it could be used in the workplace.

Entrepreneurs or enterprises that want to trial their ideas in Telstra's IoT lab can apply online and they will be able to use the space for two hours up to multiple weeks. Only one company will be allowed in the space at a time in order to protect intellectual property.

For Telstra, the lab will also provide a funnel of companies that could participate in the muru-D accelerator. The dates of the first Melbourne intake of muru-D is yet to be confirmed, but it will likely take on five or six start-ups.

Mr Eriksson, who replaced former Telstra CTO Vish Nandlall in December after allegations emerged that he had falsified his CV, said innovators in the lab would be able to access fully functioning Cat-M1 and NB-IoT radio networks, as well as a dual 3D printer, a mill (to make circuit boards) and a laser engraver.

When asked whether or not Telstra would own all or part of the products that were developed in the labs, Mr Eriksson said it would depend on a case-by-case basis.

"If the business comes through muru-D we will take a stake in a company, that's very common, but when it comes to someone who comes into the lab for two hours to test an idea, no," he said.

"There is no form where if you come here and try something you sign off all your rights to Telstra ... If someone comes in with an idea, it's their idea, but if we end up having to work together and put our ideas into their ideas and blend it into something, we'll have to come up with a solution."

Mr Eriksson also believed that Telstra would be the dominant IoT network provider in the years ahead, despite the emergence of startups such as Thinxtra and National Narrowband Network Communications.

The establishment of the IoT lab comes ahead of a major decision from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, which is set to make a decision this week on whether telecommunications companies like Telstra

should be forced to provide roaming services. This decision would remove a key advantage from Telstra – the size and reach of its network.