

TELEMASTERS**Travelling light**

By Larry Claasen

If Mario Pretorius had his way, he would pay dividends on a monthly basis.

The CEO and founder of telecom company TeleMasters argues that if he can pay salaries and commissions every month, what's stopping the company from paying dividends monthly?

Pretorius says TeleMasters specialises in compiling information as quickly as possible, so it would be easy for the company to make these payments. "We are a 21st-century company. Information must be live and available," he says.

TeleMasters is one of several new technology companies that have listed on the JSE's AltX in the past 12 months. It calls itself a "least-cost router" - a company that specialises in finding the cheapest way to route phone calls over various telecom networks.

The nature of Pretorius's business makes it easy for him to show bravado on dividend payments. TeleMasters has only 23 employees and most processes are automated, making billing a lot easier.

But it will be some time before he can deliver on this ambition. TeleMasters listed a month ago and is still very much a startup business. There was no dividend to go with its maiden results for the half-year to end-March.

But the results were better than predicted in the pre listing statement, with headline earnings/share of 13,26c coming in 53% higher than forecast.

With only 15% of the company's shares listed, Pretorius acknowledges that liquidity is not the greatest. Investors wanting to get their hands on TeleMasters will not have to wait long, though, as he plans to increase the free flo at to 25% over the next few months.

Pretorius sees TeleMasters becoming more than a least-cost router. He wants to grow its consulting service, which does telecom audits and advises companies on how to save on communication costs.

Pretorius says though least-cost routing has been around for 10 years, he does not want TeleMasters to depend on a single service. He wants to move to offering advice rather than selling a product. "I have choices. I can own the product or I can own the client."