

## CASE STUDY

## How Etisalat Went from Regional Leader to the World's Fastest Mobile Network Operator in 2020



The upheaval of the COVID-19 crisis has created acute challenges for mobile network operators. As consumers are more reliant on their networks for access to work, education and other vital services, the resulting surges in traffic have disrupted years of careful network planning for most operators. Already the winner of the Speedtest Award™ for Fastest Mobile Network in the Middle East for 2019, Etisalat sought both to maintain its high standard of network performance and quality — and to support the United Arab Emirates' national initiatives to ensure connectivity while citizens stayed safe at home.

Etisalat used Ookla® Speedtest® data to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the state of networks, to support national initiatives from the Ministry of Education and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) and to consistently improve their network performance and capabilities in the face of unprecedented demand. As a result of their network's performance, Etisalat was awarded the Speedtest Award for World's Fastest Mobile Network in 2020.



“ This milestone achievement, supported by Ookla network intelligence, is a testament to our relentless efforts towards our strategy and vision to ‘Drive the digital future to empower societies.’ ”

- Mr. Haitham Abdul Razak, Chief Technology Officer, Etisalat

### Benefits

- ✓ Proactive network planning and timely response to changing patterns in customer behavior
- ✓ Minimized service disruptions while customers were increasingly reliant on network for work, learning and entertainment
- ✓ Improved network capacity, performance and coverage in critical areas

## The Situation

As the country locked down, Etisalat was faced with an exponential surge in network demand. In addition to meeting their own customers' expectations, the operator also needed to meet goals set by the regulatory bodies and to help fulfill national initiatives for the UAE Vision 2021 plan, which aims to establish the country as a cohesive knowledge economy by 2021. In support of these missions, Etisalat focused efforts on improving their mobile network, supporting business continuity in a work-from-home environment, facilitating distance learning and providing entertainment to families at home.

## The Solution

The global crisis highlighted the importance of having a robust and up-to-date network. In the immediate wake of the lockdown in late March 2020, Etisalat's network traffic surged exponentially, exceeding planned capacity and leading to downtime. With network intelligence from Ookla, Etisalat was able to understand the state of their networks throughout the first half of the year, make network optimizations and expand capacity to meet demand.

A massive change in network usage patterns emerged overnight due to the pandemic. [Speedtest Intelligence](#)™ data showed a significant increase in consumers testing their network connections with Speedtest in the UAE in the first weeks of the lockdown. With consumers more dependent on their networks in 2020, Speedtest testing volume in the country continued to grow. In Q2 2020, performance test counts in the UAE increased 25.67% over Q4 2019 and 41.96% over Q2 2019.

As soon as the lockdown began, a traffic migration from commercial districts to residential areas was expected. With timely monitoring through Etisalat's hourly intelligent alert system and traffic insights observed through Ookla's crowdsourced data in Speedtest Intelligence, the operator proactively planned improvements and capacity expansions on both the 4G and 5G networks to support home workers and distance learning.

Additionally, maintaining network performance and quality during this time was essential to helping businesses maintain their continuity and ensuring consumers had access to educational opportunities and essential services. Etisalat teams worked nonstop to make sure that its customers — including government departments, large enterprises, small businesses and subscribers across the country — stayed connected. Achieving this connectivity was made possible by Etisalat's digital transformation strategy, which uses automation and artificial intelligence to proactively enhance the customer experience through the operator's fully autonomous network.

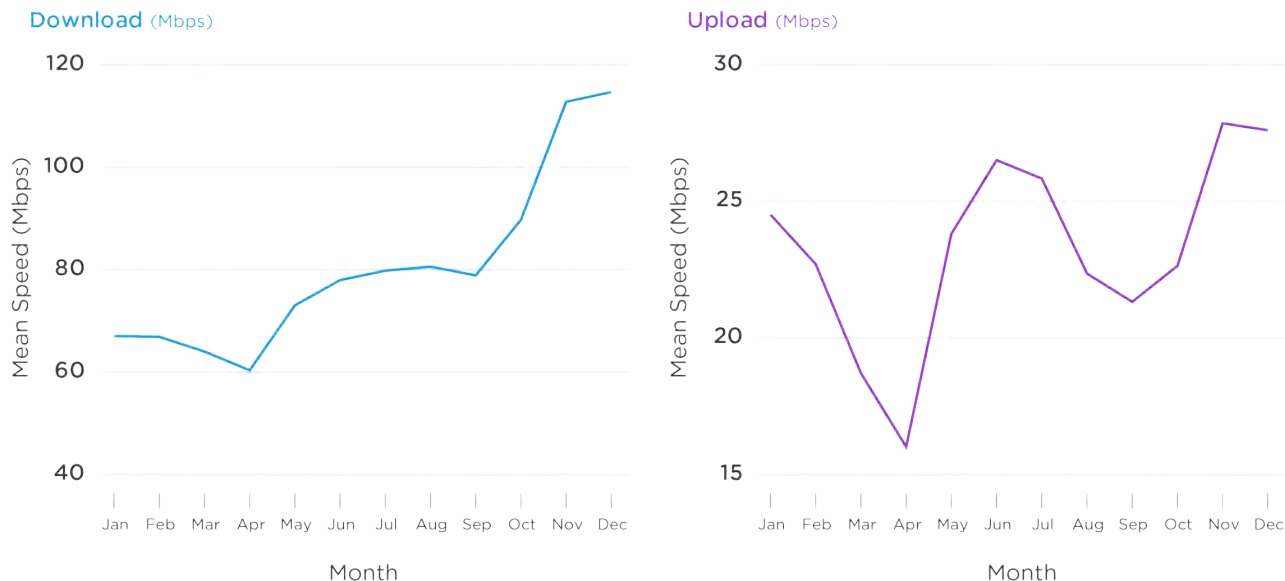
Backed by these insights, new 5G sites were deployed on the lower band, ensuring better indoor customer network experience for home workers and students learning from home — as well as better overall coverage extension, reaching more remote residential areas.

## The Outcome

Over the course of the year, Etisalat's average mobile download speed went from 97.80 Mbps in Q1 2020 to 170.74 Mbps in Q4 2020, and average upload speed went from 24.69 Mbps in Q1 2020 to 27.39 in Q4 2020.

### Etisalat Mean Download and Upload Speeds in United Arab Emirates

Speedtest Intelligence® | 2020



As a result of the operator's standout network performance in 2020, Etisalat was awarded the [Speedtest Award for World's Fastest Mobile Network](#) with a Speed Score™ of 109.41. The operator achieved the world's fastest network speeds while also showcasing their commitment to both COVID-19 relief efforts and the UAE Vision 2021 plan. Etisalat's individual performance greatly impacted the country's overall performance — and as a result the UAE was ranked the fastest country in the world in January, March, July and November 2020 for average mobile download speed, as reported on the [Speedtest Global Index](#)™.

### World's Fastest Mobile Network

Speedtest Intelligence® | 2020

Rank	Operator	Country	Test Count	Speed Score
1	Etisalat	United Arab Emirates	251,90	<b>109.41</b>
2	Ooredoo	Qatar	105,338	<b>100.72</b>
3	SK Telecom	South Korea	104,937	<b>99.67</b>
4	Vivacom	Bulgaria	47,018	<b>89.19</b>
5	T-Mobile	Netherlands	242,448	<b>79.84</b>

[Read the full report here](#)

## Further Benefits from Etisalat's Network Improvements

- Strengthened network capacity enabled all customers the best possible, experience while learning, working and accessing entertainment from home — during an exponential increase in data traffic on the network
- Enabled over one million students in the country to benefit from free access to distance learning websites and platforms, supporting the government initiative to keep people safe at home
- Extended dedicated support to local authorities to maintain security and safety, including free access for the public to Dubai Police websites and apps
- Allocated extra network resources and services to the health sector and front-line workers addressing COVID-19, providing connectivity to the health care sector, quarantined areas and other critical populations



### About Etisalat

Etisalat is the largest telecommunication corporation in the GCC. Headquartered in Abu Dhabi, UAE, Etisalat serves 12 million+ consumers and over 300,000 small, medium and large enterprise and government customers in the UAE. Etisalat Group has captured significant market share as it expands across Africa, Asia and the Middle East, most notably in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, where the introduction of innovative mobile broadband services has changed market dynamics and provided affordable mobile internet access for millions of people.

Etisalat is the winner of the Speedtest Awards for both Fastest Mobile Network and Fastest Fixed Broadband Network in United Arab Emirates for Q1-Q2 2019, as well as World's Fastest Mobile Network Q1-Q4 2020.

### About Ookla

Ookla is the global leader in mobile and broadband network intelligence, testing applications and technology. Speedtest, Ookla's flagship network testing platform, collects hundreds of millions of measurements about the performance and quality of networks around the world each day. Operators, businesses and government agencies alike rely on Ookla for unparalleled and immediate information on the state of networks and online services.

Speedtest Awards, presented by Ookla, are an elite designation reserved for fixed broadband and mobile providers in a market. Based on consumer-initiated tests and coverage scans from Speedtest applications, Speedtest Awards represent real-world network conditions and the internet speeds and coverage provided to customers.