

Pipeline

Knowledge Is Power

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OSS NewsWatch for February, 2008

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It's only the second month of the year, but there is plenty of news to report that's already happened in 2008. Customers seem to be showing more initiative by demanding services be brought to their areas or by taking the bull by the horns and doing it themselves, no matter how daunting a task. Download speeds are going up and privacy is going down on the Internet, while the struggling POTS tries to come up with some new features to attract business. And, as in 2007, the mobile phone arena is filled with surprise moves by unlikely contenders. Here is your February 2007 NewsWatch.

It seems that some towns in Vermont, small by most standards, are seeking to build their own regional broadband networks instead of waiting for the pros to do it. Since advances in technology have lowered the cost of start-up telecom businesses, the small towns are looking into building their own. Burlington Telecom, the regional service provider who was originally supposed to help the towns get wired, decided to put the project on the back burner in favor of addressing their current, city-dwelling customers' needs. If successful, this maneuver may very well encourage other small towns to follow suit, putting a crimp in the plans of some big businesses that were already looking into wiring the rural areas.

In other small town news, residents of Iowa Hill, California, an old gold-mining town that doesn't have electricity or indoor plumbing and has a population of about 150, is now getting landline telephones. The local telephone company and a \$2.5 million grant from the state is responsible for the town's technology upgrade. While many residents already have cell phones, the reception is poor in the rural area, leaving the cell phones unreliable at best. Townspeople feel that it's safer to have the phones installed.

ISPs are beginning to track user habits in order to provide a more targeted advertising experience. The ISPs have help in this matter by new technology vendors of a different sort, like NebuAd and Phorm, who will install hardware on ISP networks that will allow the ISPs to gather information about their customers' web-browsing habits in order to tailor advertising to individual customers. This may worry advocates of privacy who don't want their ISPs tracking their individual Internet moves. Depending on consumer reaction, ISPs may or may not choose to aggressively pursue this means of garnering Internet ad revenue.

Verizon Communications is planning to fight cable internet services by doubling their available DSL connection speeds, up to 7 mbps. The new, faster service is currently available in about 400 locations across the United States and Verizon hopes to have it available nationwide sometime in the future.

In another blow to cable technology, AT&T is bringing its U-Verse technology to Illinois, but not to Chicago just yet. In order to get the Illinois franchise approval, AT&T made a commitment to not only hit benchmark in customer service, but also to make U-Verse available to low-income areas, and have it available to 35% of its customers within three years. U-Verse is an alternative service to cable TV, where customers can record up to four channels at once, and is served up through AT&T's pre-existing fiber optic network. Steve Mitchell, AT&T's vice president for Illinois and Ohio, hopes to have the service reach Chicago by the end of March.



Vonage, after being battered in several patent-infringement lawsuits and court rulings that prevented them from seeking new customers for a time, is now focusing its efforts on customer retention. Reporting a 3% customer loss per month, Vonage is now trying to make things easier for customers in the hopes that fewer will defect. The company is making it easier for customers to set up their services by using color coded equipment and offering the V-Portal, which is designed to keep track of customer services in-home and help with basic troubleshooting, features that customers were previously able to take advantage of online only.

Backup Manager is a service that Canada's Bell Mobility communications company is now providing to its customers using MightyBackup service provided by FusionOne, a San Jose, California-based company. The service will backup mobile phone address books, preventing data loss in the event of phone loss or theft and also making it easier to migrate data to a new phone. Nauby Jacob, director of product development for Bell mobility, said in a press release, "They provide clients the peace of mind of knowing that the content of their mobile address book is protected and retrievable whenever they need it." The service will cost Bell Mobility's customers \$3.00 Canadian per month.

Virgin Mobile is now using an open-source MySQL database platform to manage its back-end SMS database, a move which seems to say that MySQL is enterprise-ready, a good thing for MySQL. The system was developed internally at Virgin is said to be highly scalable.

A La Mobile, a start-up software developer based in San Ramon, California, is planning to show off a suite of applications based on Google's "Android" operating system. The applications, which include a phone dialer, Google browser, Google maps, camera, audio player, calendar, calculator, contacts manager, and note pad, were installed on a Qtek 9090 smartphone (from HTC). A La Mobile is planning to present the device to handset makers soon.

Bill Gates has announced that Microsoft has no plans to launch any sort of product that will compete with the iPhone. In an interview with Germany's Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Gates is quoted as saying, "No, we won't do that. In the so-called smart phone business we will concentrate solely on software with our Windows Mobile program." This is most likely viewed as good news by other handheld manufacturers who are already competing with the very popular Apple iPhone device.

Yahoo is not planning to make its own mobile phone software, but instead plans to make its Internet services compatible with existing phones in the hopes that it will become the top gateway to the web on mobile phones. Yahoo has plans to allow other companies to create "widgets," or mini-web sites, that will be featured inside Yahoo web pages.

In another move to broaden its scope, Skype has made an agreement with Sony Computer Entertainment to allow the PlayStation Portable (PSP) to function as a device that is capable of making and receiving phone calls. PSP users can also purchase Skype credits in order to call landlines and cellular phones.

Cordless home phones are getting a makeover from Thomson, who will introduce GE-branded phones with some interesting features. Among these features will be a phone/digital photo frame, and a Bluetooth adapter, useful for making a landline phone into a combination landline/cellular phone, among other features. Thomson also has several other high-tech features to offer on phones, something that may get customers to sink some more money in the landline industry.

SR Telecom has sold its legacy product lines to the French Duons Group. SR Telecom plans to focus more on its WiMAX Forum-certified symmetryMX product line, which led to the decision to sell the legacy product line, leading to a reduction in SR Telecom's expenses.

BBS News has chosen five technologies that it feels will be key in 2008. Heading up that list is web to go, followed up Ultra Mobile PCs, IPTV, WiMAX, and then Mobile VoIP.

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