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Pipeline's Preview of GLOBALCOMM 2006

By Tim Young

Hot town, summer in the city. Well, the way the summer is going in Chicago so far, the this particular city has a ways to go before the back of our necks get too dirty or gritty. But I don't think the weather, hot or cold, is going to deter the crowds from making their way to Chicago's McCormick Place for the first annual GLOBALCOMM 2006. The show is brand new... and yet may seem somewhat familiar to many attendees, as it will likely bear a strong resemblance to the now-defunct Supercomm. TIA, the organization behind GLOBALCOMM, co-owned Supercomm with USTelecom. The two organizations decided to part ways after last year's event, leaving the world with two new supershows, ostensibly competing for your trade show dollars. The inaugural USTelecom Event, TelecomNEXT, strutted its stuff in Las Vegas in March with slightly mixed opinions about the overall success of the show. Will GLOBALCOMM fare better, or will freshman kinks shake up the other Supercomm calf as well?

At first glance, GLOBALCOMM already has location in its favor. Chicago had housed the last two Supercomms, since the show moved to the Windy City from Atlanta after the 2003 show. While the 2005 Supercomm offered 309,000 sq ft of exhibit space, GLOBALCOMM has only publicized around 180,000 (though the co-location of the OSP Expo tacks on an additional 45,000 sq ft of expo space to the total event, making the net expo space around 225,000). That doesn't seem to bother TIA's president, Matt Flanigan. He reports that the show has 'surpassed expectations'. The show had, as of the middle of May, over 17,000 attendees preregistered. The show expects over 20,000. Flanigan seems cool about the early successes, noting that "This is the same team that brought you GLOBALCOMM for 18 years". Still, the final test of the show will be what happens on the floor. There are products to be unveiled and deals to be made. The ultimate test of any show is its end result.

And the big boys are by no means shying away from GLOBALCOMM. Exhibitors include Cisco, Ciena, Intel, Microsoft, Lucent, Motorola, Juniper, and tons of other heavy hitters. You'll be able to spot these booths a mile away, as subtlety is not an attribute of the standard-issue ambitious trade show exhibit. However, there are over 450 exhibitors on the roster, and quite a few worth perusing.

So what are some highlights for the OSS professional? Telemangement Forum has a booth that is definitely worth a look. As TMF has done in the past, the group will host a pavilion for several of its members, including Nakina, Syndesis, S2Net, and DigitalFuel. Pavilions are always solid spots for one-stop shopping, and the lineup is strong. Also, take a look at the Interoperability in Action Pavilion. The area features demonstrations and exhibits by the MetroEthernet Forum, the IMS forum, and the University of New Hampshire's

InterOperability Laboratory. This will be a nice, generally academic oasis from the pervasive sense of salesmanship of the exhibit floor.

Individual companies will be out in full force as well. TTI Telecom will be exhibiting its Netrac-based solutions, and will be worth a look. Also, check out GE's exhibit on their Smallworld Network Inventory software. It'll be interesting to see what's new with the company over a half-decade after the electrical giant's acquisition of Smallworld. Expect Comarch to be touting their 'process-driven inventory management solution', which launched just over two weeks ago. They'll certainly want to continue to trumpet the product while the announcement is still somewhat fresh. Also, VeriSign will have a strong presence at the show. In addition to their exhibit, VeriSign's CEO, Stratton Sclavos, will deliver the keynote for IEC's conference.

And the conferences are not to be ignored. There is some solid programming to be caught at the event. There will be several GLOBALCOMM-sponsored summits, covering each of the major world business regions, plus a few specialty summits for executives (by invitation only, and featuring tracks for information security and disaster preparedness) or about government (which will feature Congressman Rick Boucher and Congresswoman Marsha Blackburn). Personally, I'm interested to hear more about the Broadband over Power Lines conference. The event is sponsored by the United Power Line Council, and the topic is one that is generally unexplored in the clamor for market dominance by telcos and cablecos. The DataComm Enterprise conference is drawing a lot of attention, and besides being somewhat broad, the conference does appear polished and well thought out. Speakers include representatives from end-user groups like PBS and GMAC, which will likely provide a welcome break from a generally long chain of telecom-types. And, as always, the IEC's Communications Forums promise to be solid. It is noteworthy that the IEC has made the transition from Supercomm to GLOBALCOMM, as there was some doubt among critics about whether or not any turmoil associated with the cessation of Supercomm and the creation of two new shows would leave the IEC caught in the middle and lost in the shuffle.

The listed hottest topics in the IEC conference materials are relatively unchanged from previous years, and include next-gen TV, IMS, and WiMax. Indeed, Flanigan concurs that "a lot of the focus is going to be on convergence and IPTV. Video is going to be a hot commodity." And video generally is a hot commodity. But what new buzz will circulate on the exhibition floor? What will be the technology that is to GLOBALCOMM 2006 as IMS and IPTV were to SuperComm 2005? We could speculate all day, but ultimately, only the attendees can decide what creates buzz and what doesn't.

And so far, the event itself is creating a little bit of buzz. As of May 19, TIA reported that 85% of their hotel block was already booked, which is not a bad sign. And it's a beautiful time to visit Chicago. And why Chicago again this year? "Chicago is an excellent city for this event," says Flanigan. "It's the largest enterprise arena in the country, in terms of enterprises within a given area." GLOBALCOMM plans to make its way back next year as well, and TIA is confident that the event will be an even bigger success in 2007. "After SuperComm, lots of people were upset over the split [between TIA and USTelecom]. We want everyone to know that GLOBALCOMM is going to be the replacement for Supercomm."