

Pipeline

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Were You at NXTcomm 2007?

by Tim Young

If you were among the thousands who made the trip to Chicago's McCormick Place for NXTcomm 2007, you were no doubt impressed by the glossy and professionally run event. The show, which embodies the reintegration of the USTA and TIA flagship show efforts into a single concentrated event, delivered what many have come to expect – a well-planned and precisely executed, premier telecommunications event. The signage, venue, keynote lightshows, and other production touches were spot-on (though it's a touch surreal to watch a panel of mainstream CTOs walk onto the stage to the Timbaland-produced beats of Justin Timberlake's *My Love*. Talk about juxtaposition.)

Another impression you may have walked away with was that, in keeping with other events Pipeline has covered lately, the discourse was functional and business-oriented. The volume of hype and buzz was somewhat muted and topics like IPTV, which were the realm of study and theory at Supercomm '05, and even Globalcomm '06, were now in the forefront, and were being analyzed within a real-world context.

In keeping with the more realistic content, the general tone of the show was also business-like. In the words of Trevor Hayes, LTC International industry analyst, "People [were] making bold statements, but they [weren't] saying them in bold ways." Hayes was, in that particular case, referring to DiTech Networks, whose voice quality optimization solutions have the potential to make programs like Skype truly disruptive.

Within the software space, however, not everyone was making bold statements in meek ways. Some were making few statements at all. Some software companies we spoke to shelved press releases for later distribution after taking note of crowd levels that were less than anticipated. People were there, to be sure. While we don't have final tallies, there was definitely a solid turn out for the show. And, some booths were packed. These micro hubs of activity were seen at several exhibits, many of which were operated by hardware companies. In all, more than 500 companies elected to exhibit their latest technology at NXTcomm this year.

Speaking of booths, some of the displays were pretty spectacular. UTStarcom comes to mind, with its massive jetliner booth, complete with a satellite-clad Hummer protruding from the display. The Nokia display with its clean

Scandinavian lines and general mass was also interesting, and Alcatel-Lucent and Microsoft were drawing crowds to their respective massive booths. Several vendors noted that the show was an ideal environment for strengthening their partnerships, and many exhibitors chose to team up in order to present a range of related solutions.

In terms of topics and concepts floating around at the show, one central focus was taking what has been accomplished and making it better. That is, at previous shows, technology like IPTV and even VoIP were treated as vague and wonderful ideas with few real-world applications or deployments. Now these technologies are in full swing and it's up to the industry to ensure that QoS is maintained, and all services are properly ordered, billed for, and provisioned. Real stuff.

Security was another topic on the lips of a number of companies. While it has always been an issue in the tech and telecom space, the sheer stakes involved with modern denial of service attacks and other dangers lurking about, it was a more visible issue than ever. Narus was on hand asserting its position as a leader in security. The network security firm has recently expanded its footprint with an development center opening in India, but was in Chicago to reiterate its relevance in a dangerous world.



Allot mentioned security as being part of the need for advanced deep packet inspection (DPI). The firm was exhibiting its new Service Gateway, which supports two 10 Gigabit Ethernet links. Though the focus is clearly on maximizing efficiency and ensuring QoS, security is also a concern, as DPI can be used to locate not only problems naturally occurring in the network, but problems occurring as a result of malice as well.

Some other presence of note at the event:

- Nakina was doubly present, both with a booth and through its new partnership with Anda Networks. The partnership is one of many strategic pairings that Nakina has announced recently, including a deal with

Magdalene in the UK involving reselling Nakina's Network OS products and in-region network engineering, implementation and support services to Nakina's European customers.

- Empirix was on hand, and they brought with them more than a few copies of their new book on IMS adoption. The book, entitled "Ensuring a Quality Experience: A Practical Guide to Testing and Monitoring IP Multimedia Subsystems and Services," is a strong thought leadership move for the testing and monitoring firm, and focuses on real-world IMS issues, testing IMS, and industry best practices for IMS devices and applications. This educational push is a part of Empirix's recent company philosophy, it would seem, as the firm has carefully developed its role as educator, with frequent workshops for firms dealing with real problems and real solutions dealing with IMS, VoIP, and other areas of the industry.
- Wipro was available as well, and the amiable firm addressed some of the shifts occurring in the industry. The shifts in question are the move of applications from the laptop screen to the mobile screen, and, on a longer timescale, mobile applications that can really shake up the way individuals receive information and are marketed to. One example, presented by Sunil Kand, CTO of Wipro, was of an application that could, when you access it looking for movie showtimes, show you where the nearest theaters were, what times the movie was playing, and send a streamed trailer of the movie at hand, thereby converting a mobile device into a much more flexible piece of equipment than was previously available.
- Polystar was present at the event, which marks a new chapter in the life of the Swedish testing and monitoring firm, as this was their first time exhibiting at a US show. Christer Holmberg, VP of Marketing for Polystar, seemed excited for the new possibilities available for the company, which has had the enviable position of claiming profitability since Day 1.
- Representatives from Amdocs were at the show, though after the massive presence of the firm (and, more specifically, its Cramer division) at TMW-Nice, their presence was hardly deafening (with no booth, opting for a speaking spot and direct partner/customer meetings.) Perhaps they, like many software firms, decided to back off this year as everyone waited to see how this years show played out since the split and refit of the USTA and TIA shows.
- BEA was on hand, in part to promote its release of WebLogic Network Gatekeeper 3.0. It's designed, according to BEA, "to help operators maximize investment in existing networks, as well as generate additional revenue from new SDP and IMS network capabilities." This was joined by an announcement that Vodafone Netherlands has deployed WebLogic Network Gatekeeper as the foundation of its SDP. That, joined with an OSS Oberver report that BEA is the market leader for middleware with 36% of the market (a 2:1 lead over its nearest competitor) made for a strong show for the firm.
- Tekelec, who also had a strong presence at the show, made an

announcement that they have teamed with HP and BEA to accelerate deployment of IMS services. The HP-Tekelec Open IMS solution has been in place for some time, and the inclusion of BEA WebLogic SIP Server is a strong move for all companies involved.

Ultimately, NXTcomm 2007 was a strong event with a good sense of its pedigree as a major industry function. Perhaps NXTcomm was not the best attended show in the history of the USTA/TIA partnership, but it had elements of excitement and forward-looking optimism. In some ways, in the opinion of the author, the telecom industry feels that some of its bubble-days glory is reemerging, and perhaps that has left the industry sated, yet somewhat cautious. Also, some of the hype was sucked away by what we've been told was a very successful cable event in Orlando (the SCTE show, which took place the same week as NXTcomm).

And what of that shift? The premiere telco event in North America being passed over by some firms in favor of a cable show? I think that it can only be extended to imply that companies know where the growth may occur and where the less-tapped resources reside. Telco alliances are often old and well-entrenched. Perhaps companies would rather spend their dollars where there's more potential for new business. There is, however, a pendulum effect that tends to moderate hype. Maybe it's cable today, but it could just as likely be back to telcos tomorrow. Not that it ever really left! Hype is a fickle beast, and it tends to favor perceived, not actual, reality.

At the end of the day, NXTcomm 2007 continued the tradition of Supercomm by being a well-run and professional event. It can still be safely considered the cornerstone of the telco event calendar in North America. However, admittedly, that calendar has changed. There is a growing quantity of niche shows, user conferences, seminars, webinars, speaking engagements, workshops, launch events, cable shows, wireless shows, shows in other regions, and every other type of industry event that dollars and calendars are stretched as thin as is conceivable. One thing is certain, vendors will continue to have a plethora of options when it comes to trade show exhibits and attendance in the coming months and year. The question is: Will they... and you... be attending NXTcomm 2008?

In our estimation, you should. The NXTcomm structure is sound. The pieces are all there. The only piece that is perhaps missing is you.

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