

A Look at AfricaCom

By Matthew Clark and John Wilson

Under the theme “Driving the Next Stage of Growth in African Telecoms”, the 13th annual AfricaCom could be the continent’s largest-yet Pan-African telecommunications. Last year’s AfricaCom attracted over 3,500 attendees and this year’s attendance is predicted to be over 4,000.

Taking place in Cape Town, South Africa on November 10th and 11th; the program features over 40 hours of strategic keynotes, interactive panel discussions, roundtables, breakfast briefings and special focus sessions. The conference has offerings for OSS/BSS sector, including all-day, multi-session focus areas in “Mobile Money” on Wednesday as well as “Value-Added Services” and “Marketing, Pricing and Loyalty” on Thursday.

Pipeline interviewed Julie Rey, Research Director

“The program features over 40 hours of events.”



at Informa Telecoms & Media (the producers of AfricaCom), to get an inside preview of the major topics and events at this year’s AfricaCom:

Pipeline: What are some of the big events happening in AfricaCom 2010 that attendees don’t want to miss out on?

Julie Rey: “This year the event is bigger than ever with eight special focus sessions in the conference, four keynotes covering strategic issues, a separate two-day conference dedicated to Capacity & Wholesale, a pre-event seminar on fiber and a breakfast briefing. There is something for everyone, as the sessions are targeted to different needs and job titles. However I

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“What happens in Africa over the next few years could drastically alter the global telecoms industry.”

would say the ‘must-see’ sessions will be the keynotes, where senior representatives of operator groups (MTN, Vodacom, Orange and more) will share their strategies for Africa in the year to come.”

PL: What are some important events for those on the OSS/BSS side of the telecom industry, and who are some of the main OSS/BSS vendors that are attending?

JR: “People involved in the OSS/BSS side of the industry will be interested in the sessions on operational efficiency (“Efficiency & ROI Strategies” on day one) and on customer management (“Marketing, Pricing & Loyalty” on day two). They will also have plenty of opportunities to meet suppliers

and discuss the latest solutions with them. Among the companies represented at the event are: Agilent, Amdocs, Astellia, Celtro, Cerillion, Convergys, Intec, Intracom, Opera Software, Redknee, Sitronics, Subex, Tecnotree, We Do, VAS-X, as well as major vendors such as Nokia Siemens Networks, Ericsson, Comviva and Huawei.”

PL: What technological changes have taken place in Africa, and developing markets in general, that make this event so important right now? Where do you perceive the biggest places for market growth to be?

JR: “Africa’s telecommunications market is going through major changes. The market has been growing at exceptional rates, but organic growth is slowing down and operators are looking for new services and business models to maximize their profitability. In the last couple of years, international connectivity has been vastly improved by the arrival of submarine cables and improved satellite networks, meaning broadband will be made more accessible and more services will be available. Most operators have deployed 3G, and a number of them are already looking at LTE to enable more services.”



Outsourcing is also a key trend in the market, as operators are looking at ways to reduce their costs. The arrival of Indian operator Bharti Airtel following its acquisition of Zain Africa is creating a lot of hype, whose low-cost model is based on outsourcing, and should provide new opportunities for solutions suppliers.”

PL: Are there any challenges facing these developing markets, where are there areas for improvement and how does AfricaCom help to further these advances?

JR: “The major challenges facing Africa’s telecommunications market is the lack of infrastructure, be it in terms of fixed-line telephone, of power supply or of road networks to reach the more remote areas. In addition, some countries still lack the adequate regulatory framework to support the growth of a healthy competitive telecommunications industry. Not to mention the low disposable incomes of the consumers.”

Our role at AfricaCom is to bring together all the stakeholders of the industry (operators, service providers, infrastructure vendors, solutions suppliers, regulators, investors) to share best practices and to help develop the solutions that will help the market grow despite those challenges.”

The Road Ahead

These are exciting times for African telecoms, and with the world’s largest untapped market. What happens in Africa over the next few years could drastically alter the global telecoms industry. With African telecoms set to explode, AfricaCom could be a great way to get the lay of the land and see what the future may hold.