

Pipeline

Knowledge Is Power

www.pipelinepub.com Volume 6, Issue 6

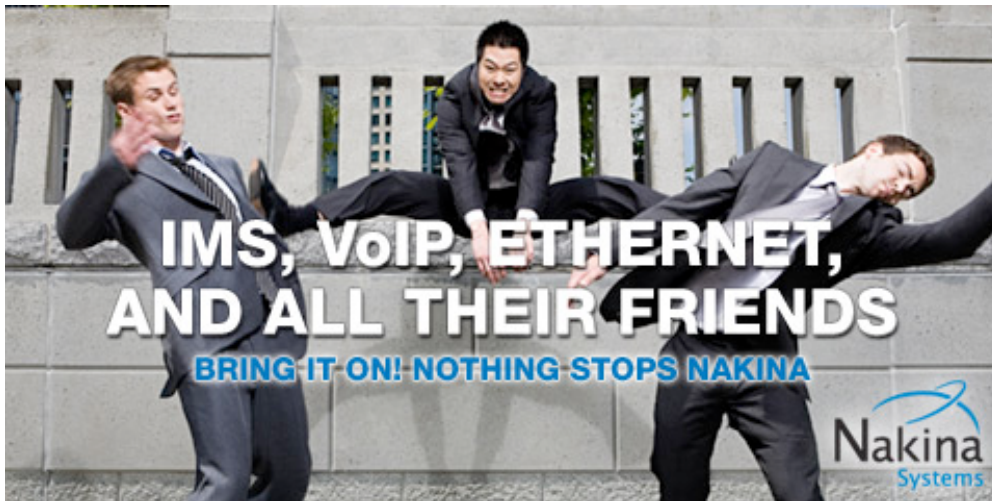
SUPERCOMM or SUPERCALM

By Tim Young

SUPERCOMM 2009 visited Chicago's McCormick Place a few weeks ago (Oct 21-23). The flagship show for the major telecom trade associations in the US (TIA and USTelecom) has been around since 1988, and was a regular fixture on any self-respecting North American's telecoms event calendar throughout the 1990s and beyond.

Over the past few years, there have been some bumps in the road for the show developers regarding show vision and show ownership. This SUPERCOMM was intended, in many ways, to be a return to form for the event.

The event staff assembled an impressive array of speakers. C-level executives from major telco, wireless, and even cable companies were on hand to extol the virtues of their offerings, blast net neutrality, talk up their community service angle, express concern over over-the-top content, and generally address the state of the industry.

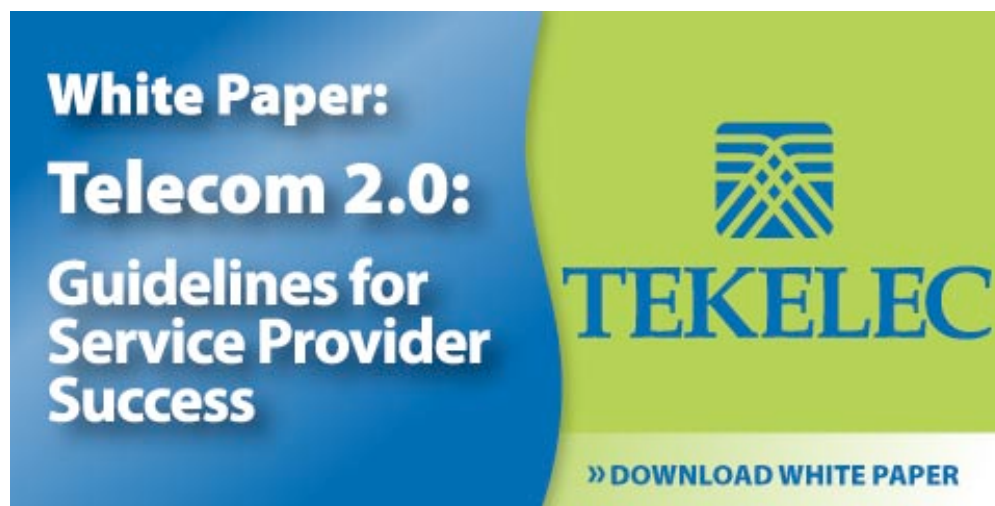


On day one of the keynotes, Ivan Seidenberg, CEO of Verizon, took issue with proponents of net neutrality and their suggestion "that network providers like Verizon and applications providers like Google, Amazon and others occupy fundamentally different parts of the Internet ecosystem - a binary world of 'dumb pipes' on the one hand and 'smart applications' on the other."

Seidenberg went on to say that this sort of thinking "is a mistake, pure and simple: an analog idea in a digital universe. It fundamentally misreads how innovation happens in a dynamic and collaborative industry."

AT&T CEO John Stankey opened his keynote, on day two of the event, by saying that preparing for his address and attending the event on the day before the FCC's hearings on net neutrality were slated to begin was a bit like preparing for the day before a funeral.

SUPERCOMM also assembled a high-powered panel discussion for day one, consisting of CTO-types from an impressive slate of companies: AT&T CTO John Donovan, Qwest CTO Pieter Poll, Verizon SVP-Technology Mark Wegleitner, BT 21CN President George Nazi, and Sprint VP of Device and Technology Management Matthew Oommen. The group discussed the ups and downs of the communications space, and each underscored the need for increased fiber rollouts, green technology, safe and reliable cloud computing, and other key growth areas for telcos around the globe.



In addition to strong talks from carrier representatives, the keynotes featured a couple of government types who spent time expressing the positive benefits of increased broadband infrastructure for government and social purposes. Aneesh Chopra, CTO of the United States and Associate Director for Technology in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, talked up the current administration's desire to increase innovation in the United States, and underscoring the need for broadband growth to make such innovations possible. Chopra also mentioned the lagging nature of US competitiveness, globally, and that competitiveness can be improved, as well as an overall need for public-private cooperation for growth.

Likewise, Hardik Bhatt, CIO for the City of Chicago, mentioned the public safety, health and welfare, education, and other implications of broadband growth. Like Chopra, Bhatt underscored the need for a smart, secure communications infrastructure.

In addition, there were a few keynotes that were interesting, but may have slightly missed the mark for an audience made up of telecom execs. Richard Cotton, VP and General Counsel for NBC Universal, engaged in a pre-formed Q&A session in which he spoke of the myriad problems of piracy. He mentioned that Hulu is a great success story, and an example of a situation in which content went from being pirated and viewed on sites like YouTube, to one in which content was sent through

legitimate channels. However, a room full of executives already bracing for the potential negative impacts of net neutrality legislation probably don't see Hulu as being any less of a threat to their business model than YouTube. If anything, some execs may see Hulu-type over-the-top applications as being MORE dangerous as they actually duplicate much of the home TV viewing experience while completely side-stepping the traditional delivery channels. Hulu is capable of making subscribers drop paid TV altogether, opting for a standalone data connection. Could the same be said for YouTube?

Cotton's point was well taken: Piracy is a problem. However, some consideration of the audience would have been wise.

The same goes for Tom Rogers, President and CEO of TiVO. While he had many interesting things to say, he could have spent a little more time underscoring what would have been the single most relevant point for the telco executives in the room: Current video offerings are woefully inadequate at incorporating the broadband capability that many of them could easily possess. There's a wealth of benefit awaiting CSPs who connect broadband and video in a way that provides a seamless user experience between the two. Rogers touched on this, but the topic is deep enough for its own conference track.

In short, the keynotes covered a nice breadth of topics. They were generally 'safe', as keynotes tend to be. However, they were a solid offering and a promising component of SUPERCOMM.



Expo:

Before we talk about the 2009 Expo, let's talk about a little backstory on SUPERCOMM.

In August of 2000, a few months after SUPERCOMM 2000 wrapped up in Atlanta, the official attendance numbers were released. These numbers revealed the extent to which that event had been an unmitigated success. 53,260 attendees had made their way to the event, an increase of almost 25% over the previous year.

2001's event was almost as successful, still boasting over 50,000 attendees. We all know that things went south in the telecom sector around that time, and SUPERCOMM's numbers reflected these

pains. The event's attendance dipped to 37k after the telecommunications industry's crisis, and settled around 25k for its mid-decade shows.

Then came USTA and TIA's parting of ways for the 2006 show season, with TIA hosting GLOBALCOMM in Chicago and USTA hosting TelecomNext in Las Vegas. In 2007 and 2008, the groups reunited and put together NXTComm, first in Chicago and then in Las Vegas.

We expected another NXTComm in Chicago in 2009, but we instead got promises of a summertime return to the SUPERCOMM title, which was later pushed back by several months to land in October.

While latter-day SUPERCOMMs failed to live up to the bubble-days glory, the otherwise-named shows that took place in 2006-2008 were even weaker. Numbers dipped well below 20k, and other shows in the wireless and cable space have grown stronger as SUPERCOMM has dipped.

However, SUPERCOMM 2009 was a chance for a rebound. It took place at the peak of the fall show season. It was a return of the SUPERCOMM badge. It was in a town that's a little sore from its Olympics loss, but eager to draw as much convention traffic as it can fit into its expo space (which, with McCormick Place's West building complete, is a heck of a lot).



Unfortunately, the show wasn't a return to glory. It wasn't a triumphant coronation to former prominence. It was... by SUPERCOMM standards... quiet.

Official numbers from the show haven't been released, but word in the pressroom was that unofficial numbers placed the event at around 7,000 attendees. The show floor had greatly decreased in size from its original design, and a peek behind divider curtains at the rear of the exhibition floor revealed a cavernous bare space of polished concrete that the show floor would have covered in years past.

Now, there are many reasons for the dip: The economy is still rocky (and was, even more so, when expo contracts were signed) and the show dates had changed fairly late in the game.

However, I think there's something even more fundamentally problematic about the model of the expo-style trade show in this industry. Productive meetings – the kind that lead to sales -- no longer take place on the expo floor. For companies like the OSS/BSS players we generally work with, an expo is not really an avenue for customer and potential-customer meetings. The booths are only

necessary for brand awareness, and in a show like SUPERCOMM, smaller OSS/BSS booths are easily lost in the noise. Furthermore, in spite of telco CTOs blasting net neutrality, a lot of the major innovation in the space is taking place among third party companies who are developing the content and apps that people are clamoring to use. These companies were almost completely absent from the event. That left us with a tradeshow with precious little to trade.

As far as news goes, there was relatively little of that as well. There was a time when companies would be sure to save news for SUPERCOMM. Not so this year. However, we did have a few news releases we wanted to mention.

Pitney Bowes Business Insight, which is a capable billing vendor tucked behind a larger corporate name we generally associate with postage, was at the event with a release on the newest version of their MapInfo MapXtreme software development kit. This was version 7.0, and is designed for use by Microsoft .NET developers looking to create map-centric and location-based applications.

Mu Dynamics also had a release at the show (available in its full form on Pipeline's NewsWire here: <http://www.pipelinepub.com/pipelinednn/static/NewsArticle.aspx?ItemID=93>) on their new test suite. Mu does interesting things on emulating logic of an IP service to enable testing of a full system, rather than just individual components. In addition, the suite can accurately simulate end-user behavior by sampling multiple streams of IP service traffic, including customer content.

Amartus announced at the show that it is entering the service management market with its new offering, Service Commander. Service Commander is a service management platform designed to accelerate delivery of next-gen services.

Some of the OSS/BSS companies we met with were disappointed with the lack of booth traffic, though many said the overall quality of attendee was fairly high. Other companies we met with valued the show because it was a chance to rub elbows with hardware players who are also sales targets for their solutions. For vendors whose target is other vendors, a slower show may be better than a busier one, as it provides opportunities to pitch your booth-neighbors.

Still, the notable absences of major companies from the show floor (Can we say "Cisco"? The giant had no booth, opting to meet with potential customers and partners in a hospitality suite) suggest that the booth-based tradeshow model may be past its prime in this particular space.

Hope:

We're rooting for SUPERCOMM. It's got a pedigree and venerable nature that few shows in the telecommunications space can rival. However, the need for innovation encouraged by the keynotes and conference session leaders could be a powerful tool for show developers, as well. I eagerly await SUPERCOMM 2010, hoping that it will be stronger, leaner, more innovative, and better-attended than SUPERCOMM 2009. I think it can be.