

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

Telecom industry ready to expand networks, services

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BY MICHAEL KRAUSS

The talk on the South Side is on triple plays, but the venue is McCormick Place, not U.S. Cellular Park.

The mood at SuperComm 2004, the global telecom trade show held here, was decidedly upbeat. The telecom industry appears headed into investment mode. The reason: Telephone companies and cable TV providers are vying for a bigger share of high-end services.

Service providers are poised to grow their networks to provide consumers with television, telephone and Internet data services over a single broadband connection. That's the triple play. It's good news for the equipment providers who gathered here. It's great news for consumers who will have service providers like Comcast and SBC competing for their business, offering new products.

SBC Communications CEO Ed Whitacre Jr. set the tone at SuperComm, announcing program to bring fiber-optic cable and digital television to the home. SBC could spend up to \$6 billion on the initiative. FCC Chairman Michael Powell stressed his commitment to a regulatory environment that facilitates innovation.

Cable television leader Don Logan, chairman of Time Warner's media and communications group, said cable providers are in the last stages of an \$85 billion build-out of a network that will give customers "convenience, control and the benefit of choice."

Expect a lot more competition for your video, voice and Internet data services dollars in the months ahead.

Chicago views

Perspectives on Chicago from the tech glitterati visiting SuperComm:

Matthew Bross, group chief technology officer, British Telecom, sees Chicago as a networking city. He lined up more meetings here in 24 hours than anywhere in the world. He's installing a new technology infrastructure for BT that's the envy of the industry. Estimated spending: \$3 billion to \$5 billion annually. What did he do for fun in Chicago? "The first thing a Brit does when he comes to Chicago is have a steak," says Bross, who dined at McCormick & Schmick's on East Chestnut.

Gianfranco Tomaino Beltrami, a managing director with Spain's Telefonica, explores ways to encourage Europeans to adopt new technologies. This cosmopolitan Venezuelan makes his home in Madrid. He is struck by Chicago's architecture. "It was a real surprise," says Beltrami. "One of the most beautiful cities in the world."

Ned Barnholt, CEO, Agilent Technologies, predicts wireless communications will dominate. Would he move his corporate headquarters from Palo Alto to Chicago? Barnholt quips, "The way our business is going it needs to move to Asia. One thousand new wireless subscribers are added every 15 minutes in China." Barnholt spent his evening barbecuing with his Schaumburg-based employees.

Kathy Bagin, vice president, AT&T, is CEO David Dorman's point person to launch VoIP. Taking a break from promoting her new service, Bagin raves about dinner at Aria in the Fairmont Hotel and Frank Gehry's bandshell, which she referred to as "that strange roof structure in Millennium Park."

Tatsuro Murakami, project manager for Japan's NTT, designs the future telecommunications network serving 60 million subscribers. Tokyo-based Murakami took Metra to the Ravinia Festival to unwind. "I'm crazy about classical music," says Murakami, who heard the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Illinois best

Computerworld's annual rankings of the best places to work in IT are out, and Illinois is in. Our state placed 14 companies on the list, more than any other. Topping the list (rank in parenthesis): CDW (6), Grant Thornton (26), Allstate (39), Forsythe Technology (40), Household International (46), United Stationers (53), Caterpillar (56), Northern Trust (67), Discover Financial Services (68), CNA (85), Hewitt Associates (86), VW Credit (88), International Truck & Engine (91) and Peoples Energy (95).

Bits & bytes

iBIO president **David Miller** and Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Director **Jack Lavin** led a delegation to BIO 2004 in San Francisco. It's a tune-up for hosting the global BIO 2006 convention here. Also in California last week, **Alexandra Graham**, co-founder of Chicago-based LaGray Chemical Co., presented at Springboard: Silicon Valley 2004. The forum showcased two dozen top women entrepreneurs to the Valley's leading venture investors. LaGray Chemical Co. aims to provide drugs to the people of Africa to treat HIV-AIDS, TB and malaria.

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