

Look Ma, No Wires!

The ever-growing need for more bandwidth to satisfy subscribers' seemingly insatiable cravings was a hot-button talking point that many speakers returned to time and again at last month's SCTE Emerging Technologies (ET) Conference 2007 in Houston. However, cable's engineering brain trust also hit on many other advanced technology topics as well, including wireless integration for seamless application delivery.

In the "Look Ma, No Wires" session, panelists considered how the industry would get to a point of true mobility, featuring device and network transparency, with the same customer experience and capabilities of the access network.

Panel moderator Susie Riley, CTO of Camiant, was quick to point out that the cable industry isn't looking to wireless just for technology's sake. Business and the bottom line are the true drivers, and ops that "connect all the dots" would be the winners, she said.

"Broadcast video as we know it is dying," Chris Maloney, senior manager at Cisco Systems, said. "The YouTube generation wants content when they want it and where they want it. Operators must adapt or lose relevance."

Maloney warned that siloed approaches might succeed in the short term but lack flexibility for the long term. Instead he suggested that cable keep a firm eye on the emergence of video over IP.

Sudeep Gupta, business development director, broadband wireless access at Alcatel-Lucent tackled Universal WiMAX (802.16e-2005) – a broadband wireless access technology that can provide mobile IP capabilities to complement ops' existing plays.

Gupta said that Universal WiMAX provides a way for ops to achieve ubiquity in three areas. Firstly, service ubiquity by offering fixed and mobile services. Second is application ubiquity where IMS combined with WiMAX can allow users to access their applications regardless of whether they are fixed or mobile. The third is device ubiquity where Universal WiMAX will deliver new devices, including next-gen handsets, desktop devices and multiple user combo WiMAX/Wi-Fi routers.

On the quality of service front, Ken Jackson, director of wireless solutions at Camiant, took on QoS's role for fixed mobile convergence of voice over IP and high-bandwidth multimedia applications.

In Jackson's technical paper on the topic he explored policy peering between 3GPP Policy Control and Charging Rules Function (PCRF) policy server and a PacketCable Multimedia-based policy server in the network control plane to enable QoS for VoIP and other apps offered via access agnostic fixed mobile convergence (FMC).

He explained how differentiation is achieved by applying QoS to appropriate customers when they're using specific applications and only during the duration of the session (depending on the wireless access net being used at the time). Jackson concluded that the dynamic application of QoS when and where its needed "can result in flawless delivery of applications to subscribers, regardless of the conduit."