

Cox Introduces Speed Previews via PacketCable Multimedia Nationwide

Cox Communications is moving to nationwide rollout of an easily managed means of offering subscribers free previews of broadband access at rates above their present levels.

Cox is the first major MSO to announce widescale implementation of PacketCable Multimedia technology to facilitate high-speed previews, which heretofore required hands-on engineering manipulation of bandwidth controls to raise and lower individual users' access speeds. With PCMM technology supplied by Camiant, controlling the data rates can be executed from policy servers in a highly automated fashion, avoiding any inconvenience to subscribers.

The MSO is launching the speed-preview initiative to give its broadband customers an opportunity to taste its tiered data service speeds, which go as high as 15 megabits per second in some markets. Cox is currently wrapping up a trial phase in its Pensacola, Fla., market prior to an upcoming nationwide launch.

"Cox high-speed Internet customers will be able to experience speed previews without service interruptions or the need to reboot their modems," says Scott Hightower, vice president of data product development and support, Cox. "By offering a more convenient way to experience faster speeds firsthand, we can help our customers make an educated decision about which tier of service works best for them."

Hightower says the speed-preview program isn't new, but the use of Camiant's next-generation network technology makes for a much more seamless experience on the operational side and affords Cox the opportunity to tailor the speed previews to meet specific customers' needs.

"A technology like this gives us much more flexibility in terms of timing and how we deliver the message and how we manage the networks so our customers will be able to sample our different services at a timetable that's convenient for them," Hightower says.

Cox currently offers three broadband access tiers, which vary in data rates but are similarly priced from market to market. A "Value" tier delivers downstream speeds of 256 kbps or 768 kbps for \$24.95. The Preferred tier offers downstream speeds between 4 and 6 mbps for an unbundled price of \$49.95. And the Premier tier offers speeds of 5, 9 or 15 mbps, for an unbundled price of \$59.95-\$64.95. Cox also offers discounted pricing with the Preferred and Premier tiers when bundled with other Cox services.

The Premier tier of 15 mbps is being offered first in markets including Connecticut, Rhode Island and Northern Virginia where Cox is competing with Verizon's high-capacity FIOS fiber-to-the-home solution.

Hightower, noting thousands of customers have already taken advantage of the speed preview in Florida, says he's excited to roll out the program nationally to all Cox customers. PCMM technology is making such steps possible across the cable industry, with the likelihood that other MSOs will soon follow suit.

"The use of our policy server is a really innovative way to build upon something that Cox has experimented with in the past, but to do it in a very elegant way, without cable modem reboots," says Ed Delaney, VP of marketing and business development, Camiant.

Camiant's policy solution enables operators to deploy both non-IMS (IP multimedia subsystem) and fully compliant IMS applications. Delaney says policy servers are put in

place to assure that applications behave in a consistent manner on the network side, and they also provide fine-grained control of a broadband pipe.

Delaney explains that the PCMM solution allows operators to closely control both upstream and downstream bandwidth to guarantee quality of service. As a result, Camiant policy servers can support a host of QoS-based premium services.

"We have installations with three different operators, Cox, Buckeye and StarHub, Delaney says. "Each of them have deployed policy infrastructure, but each of them are using it in very different ways."

Ohio-based operator Buckeye CableSystem deployed Camiant's policy solution in January to provide bandwidth-on-demand for its subscribers. Buckeye's broadband customers can now pay for additional bandwidth in a dynamic manner for a variety of high-speed data needs. Delaney says this application differs from what Cox has implemented because it's more individualized to a unique subscriber seeking greater bandwidth for a specific purpose, versus upgrading an entire tier of subscribers to preview higher speeds.

StarHub is using policy servers for two distinct applications. The Singapore-based communications company leverages policy to QoS-enable voice traffic for a SIP-based (session initiated protocol) telephony application. StarHub also uses the policy system for QoS in the gaming world.

"Any high bandwidth application, like video, or latency-sensitive applications like voice or games are definitely targets for the use of policy to enhance the overall subscriber experience," Delaney says. "So I think policy is a natural evolution of broadband."