LTE is Coming – Are We Ready this Time?

The 2010 Mobile World Congress, produced by the GSMA organization, will open on February 15th in Barcelona, Spain. Those who are fortunate enough to attend this event will be able to witness first hand what the future holds for the mobile broadband industry. Exhibitors will be anxious to showcase their cutting edge products and technologies that will contribute to broadening and defining the mobile ecosystems to come.

In addition to producing this event, the GSMA organization represents the interests of the worldwide mobile communications industry. Spanning 219 countries, the GSMA unites nearly 800 of the world's mobile operators, as well as more than 200 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem.

Although it will be interesting to follow the evolving mobile broadband landscape as it unfolds, it is accompanied by one constant concern spectrum availability. Where is the necessary spectrum going to come from? New research indicates that the 2.6 GHz band is one option and some consider the band vital for the growth of LTE. The licensing of the 2.6 GHz band will be critical to unlocking the benefits of global scale economies in the mobile broadband market, according to a new report by US-based research firm Global View Partners in partnership with the GSMA.

In Europe, much progress has been achieved towards the allocation of the 2.6 GHz frequency, as specified in the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Option 1 plan. Option 1 is a mix of FDD (paired) and TDD (unpaired) spectrum plan which avoids interference problems with these two different modes of operations.

I think most would agree that LTE has finally arrived, but what does that mean exactly and are we prepared for it? The first two LTE networks were launched by TeliaSonera around the turn of the decade in the capitals of Sweden and Norway. But how close are we in the U.S.? Here the major spectrum owners are Sprint and Clearwire deploying TDD WiMAX. Verizon Wireless has stated they will have one of the world's first large-scale LTE networks with plans to cover 25 to 30 markets and 100 million pops (points of presence) by the end of 2010. Wow that's a pretty bold prediction! The question is what type of LTE services will be offered on the first day these new networks are deployed? Will consumers be bombarded with countless new devices and applications?

If you recall, 3G first emerged at the beginning of the millennium preceded by a great deal of fanfare. Unfortunately it failed to deliver on much of what was hyped. It is only now, a decade later, that the industry can claim to have lived up to 3G's promises. Will the LTE launch resemble 3G's or have we learned slow and steady is the safest course of action? Let's take the conservative approach this time and only promise what is realistic to achieve. If we are able to provide more than expected, it will be a win-win for consumers and providers.

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