Google Keeps Everyone Guessing

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Keeping us all in suspense until the last minute, Google waited until just three days before the application deadline to announce that it plans to submit its formal application to participate in the FCC's upcoming auction of the new 700 MHz wireless spectrum, without any partners.

Despite early speculation that Google was just bluffing, it appears now that they are serious. In July, Google promised the FCC that they would make a bid of at least US 4.6 billion for a block of spectrum providing the FCC agreed to certain changes in the auction process. Advocacy by public interest groups and Google persuaded the FCC to mandate that the spectrum must be open for users to use any mobile device and operating system of their choice, regardless of who wins the auction.

Eric Schmidt, Chairman and CEO of Google stated, "We believe it's important to put our money where our principles are. Consumers deserve more competition and innovation than they have in today's wireless world."

Although it appears the company has only the best intentions, I question the motives behind Google's recent interest in purchasing wireless spectrum. Are they really interested in becoming a player in the wireless market or was this all a ploy on their part to get the FCC to mandate open networks? Are they sincerely interested in what is best for the consumer, or are they looking to open business practices so their software and ads can run free?

We won't know Google's real intentions until January 14, 2008, 10 days before the actual auction at which time bidders identities can be announced. The consensus seems to be that Google will put in a bid, but it will not exceed the 4.6 billion it originally promised the FCC. Why? Because they have basically accomplished what they wanted to do &#151 they got the FCC to make changes to the auction rules that benefit them and the consumer. And let's face it &#151 doesn't it take some real expertise to set up a network, to service the networks and provide customer support 24/7? Does Google have this kind of capability? One thing is for sure, if the company wins a block, it will most likely change the way other service providers do business.

On another subject, don't miss our annual "A Year in Wireless" supplement this

month. The editors of ECN, MDT, PD&D and WDD have combined efforts to bring you commentaries from industry experts across a variety of industries including Test & Measurement, Sensors, Telecom/Datacom, Mililtary/Aero Electronics, Power, Medical Electronics, Consumer Products and Communications Hardware. Plus special sections on Distribution and WDD's Editorial Advisory Board responds to some interesting industry-related questions.

Lastly, on behalf of the entire staff of WDD, I would like to wish you a safe and happy holiday season.

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