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Pipeline's Look at GLOBALCOMM 2006:
The Highs and Lows of TIA's supershow

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In case you haven't been keeping track, it is now July. For those of us in the Northern Hemisphere, that means several more months of sunshine, lemonade, and beach days. Within the telecom industry, it means that GLOBALCOMM 2006, the first ever, has now officially come and gone. TIA's supershow, proffered as a replacement for the now-defunct Supercomm, and operating in competition with USTA's TelecomNEXT, snatched up several hundred thousand square feet of expo space in Chicago's McCormick Place for a week in early June. The dates and venue were nearly identical to Supercomm, as were many aspects of the event itself. So did it measure up? Was it the forum for discovering what's to come for the next year within the world of telecom? Pipeline was there, and now offers you our take on GLOBALCOMM 2006.

As we somewhat expected, the look and feel of GLOBALCOMM was very similar to Supercomm, which was to be expected considering that the same venue was utilized and that TIA was responsible for many of the on-the-ground operations for the former show. The show was somewhat smaller in terms of square feet, but when you're in the middle of the expo floor, it's hard to tell the difference. The booths were glossy and the hype was thick, but what *really happened?*

The main buzzwords at the event were not unlike the main buzzwords from last year's event. It was tough to get away from IMS and IPTV, but the entire context of the discussion was somewhat different than what was being discussed a year ago. "IPTV was a buzzword before, but it's actually happening now," says Dave Bass of Agilent Technologies. "And what goes along with that is the complexity of actually delivering these services, and delivering the quality of service." That sentiment, that technologies that were theoretical a year ago are now active and dynamic, was echoed across the exhibition floor, and the number of firms dealing with IPTV were myriad. The consensus was that IPTV is possible, would be a boon for telcos, and is notoriously unforgiving in terms of QoS. While jitter, delay, and packet loss are tolerable over VoIP lines and nearly unrecognizable over data connections, a similar problem over IPTV is a serious affront to QoS, especially in an age where viewers are increasingly accustomed to high-resolution, fluid images. "The definition of a service is changing," said Adam Boone of Syndesis. "It's no longer just connectivity... It's now that connectivity and the application that is delivered over that connectivity to the end user." Boone was speaking specifically about IPTV and Triple Play services, and how those applications are changing the face of the industry.

The shadow of IPTV was felt in multiple realms. It could be seen in our meetings with firms like Kasenna, who claims the title of 'The IPTV Company', and supplies IPTV and VOD solutions for telcos and cablecos alike. It was overheard in our conversations with Christian Pinon, CEO of Globecast, who likens his firm to FedEx, and views IPTV as yet another channel for television distribution (though an advantageous one, given Globecast's status as a subsidiary of France Telecom).

Likewise, IMS is moving from idle talk to execution. An ABI Research study released during the show forecasted over $10B worth of investment in IMS over the next five years, and more than a few firms at the event are a part of this influx of IMS fever. "We committed to two protocols very early" said Bruce Trvalik of Sonus. "One was SIP and the other was Diameter. IMS got to be popular a few years ago, and

we got to looking at it and said, 'This is us!'." And indeed, within the pages of every show daily and on the lips of multiple speakers were those three magical letters: IMS.

However, not everyone was as bullish on IMS. "I'm not an opponent of IMS. I am saying that it's not much new" says Mark McIlvane of Personeta. "IMS in a greenfield environment would be the best thing in the whole world, because everything would be IMS enabled. There's going to be stuff in the network that won't be IMS enabled for the next 15 years. Innovation is driven by the ability to handle the needs of the customer economically." John Burnham of Brix Networks explains that he is also not entirely convinced that IMS is the cure-all. "Our customers aren't asking us when we're testing and measuring our IMS... Job one is to get our customers a competitively priced solution." So clearly IMS is not universally heralded as a silver bullet, but no one can deny its power as a tool, both in the hands of network architects and marketing gurus.

The event also had its fair share of launches and relaunches. S2Net, which was formerly known at Open Telecommunications, is in the middle of some serious rebranding, and had a presence at the show as a part of the Telemanagement Forum's Pavilion (which also featured Nakina, Syndesis, and DigitalFuel). Paul Sethy, the brains behind AirPrime, was also at the show promoting his new firm, Aviva, which is currently in its 'Soft Launch' phase.

The event also served as an opportunity for a few firms to simply let the rest of the telecom world know that they are alive and kicking. Such is true for VeriSign, which, in spite of its size (over 4000 employees), is plagued by misconceptions concerning corporate identity. "From a communications standpoint, one of the challenges that we have is that people say 'Oh VeriSign. You're the dot com company' or 'you're the security company'," says Lori Sinsley, of VeriSign's Media Relations department. "The San Jose Mercury News did a story once on a VoIP partnership we had as 'VeriSign gets into the telecommunications business', but we had been in it for years." Shows like GLOBALCOMM can ostensibly be opportunities to rectify those misconceptions, though a show that spans all elements of the telecom industry may not be the most advantageous venues for declaring specifics about the spaces in which you are active.

Still, with hundreds of exhibitors, there were plenty of stories to tell. Narus was at the show promoting their traffic processing solutions, which provide security, lawful intercept (a topic that flew under the radar in many meetings, but is certainly timely), and traffic classification. Security is always a hot topic, especially in the age of distributed denial of service attacks. The concept of monitoring and classifying types of traffic was hot with other firms as well, including Allot. In fact, as the number and types of IP services offered continues to increase, traffic classification is the key to managing and billing for service providers.

And, no trip to a major telecom event is complete without a spate of press releases. Syndesis announced their converged fulfillment workflow and order management solution, dubbed Syndesis Controller, which they developed in a partnership with ConceptWave. The two firms held joint meetings at the show touting the promise of their unified product. Other announcements included S2Net's BusinessEdge partnership and various new product announcements from hardware companies.

However, in spite of all of its positive elements, GLOBALCOMM 2006 was not without its negative points. Chief among these, as was the case with USTA's TelecomNext, was attendance. The event was by no means sparsely attended, but some vendors expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of foot traffic at the event. Ultimately, many vendors wondered whether the industry can afford the added cost of both TelecomNEXT and GLOBALCOMM. Many of these same vendors have decided to take on the cost to travel to both events this year, but have no intention of maintaining such a pattern of spending. They'll double up now, but are extremely keen on picking an event as soon as possible.

However, in spite of decreased traffic, the show still showed undeniable promise and provided a venue for the meeting of minds. Pipeline looks forward to the future of this event, and we are eager to see what is in store for GLOBALCOMM 2007!