

# Pipeline

Knowledge Is Power

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## The NXT Big Thing?

by Claire Hara

Trade shows can be tough. Every fiscal year, potential exhibitors and vendors alike have tough calls to make: what shows to attend, how much to spend on each event, how to promote their presence at the show, and many others.

One thing that makes these decisions harder is the fact that there are so many events from which to choose. Especially around this time of year, we are all barraged with a thousand trade show invitations. This issue of Pipeline, alone, has three separate trade show features.

Relief from this over-saturation, however, may be on the horizon. There is one fewer supershow out there.

Two major trade associations have reconciled after a bitter divorce. The upcoming NXTcomm event on June 18 marks a new beginning for the Telecommunications Industry Association (TIA) and the United States Telecom Association (USTA). After a short breach, the two organizations have come full circle. They have forgiven and forgotten, reuniting to form a show aimed to be superior to its predecessors. A short while ago, however, the situation was anything but amicable.

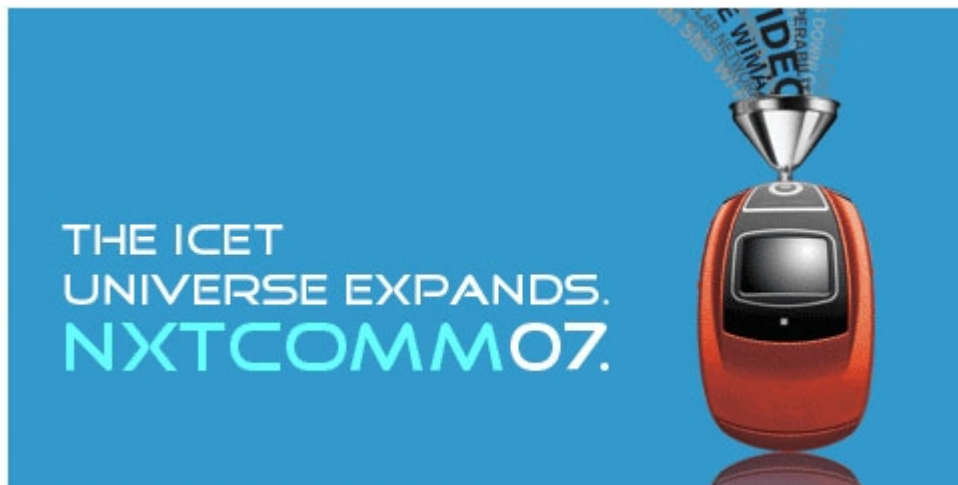
After a solid relationship of over 25 years and a joint sponsorship of the groundbreaking Supercomm trademark dating back to 1988, the TIA and the USTA made the surprising decision not to renew their five-year sponsorship contracts in 2004, each deciding instead to become resolute competitors and battle for service provider and carrier attention.

Executive Director of NXTcomm, Wayne Crawford simply cites contradicting viewpoints for the split. "They had different philosophies on what direction to go in."

Their breakup following the Supercomm 2005 show left the two organizations to initiate independent efforts. Neither being legally allowed to take on the Supercomm name, the TIA named their show Globalcomm while the USTA began work on TelecomNext.

What took place after the separation was grim. TelecomNext, held in Las Vegas, met with an unimpressive attendance record and a generally unfavorable response

from vendors and exhibitors alike. Though Globalcomm fared better than its rival by retaining several aspects of Supercomm in its layout, as well as its location at McCormick Place in Chicago, neither carriers nor attendees were very pleased with either of the contending tradeshows. They were resentful of the added expense of having to attend both shows in a year. Many vendors who had gone to both venues that first year even claimed to plan only on traveling to one or the other in the future. What began as a split between two trade associations became a possible divide in the telecom industry entirely. The seemingly unnecessary financial upkeep was too much to ignore.



Regardless, both the TIA and the USTA had set to plan their individual shows again for the 2007 season. Eventually; however, they appealed to the masses. As exhibitors and vendors sighed a giant breath of relief, the two associations made the decision to come back together to plan one large industry venue once again. Conveniently, the change in plans proved seemingly effortless as NXTcomm made for an easy substitute for would-be Globalcomm 2007. It will be held during Globalcomm's planned dates of June 18 to 21 and in its established McCormick Place location.

Though the rift had been rectified, the TIA and the USTA wisely wanted to avoid a recurrence of past events. They made the decision to form a third company that would serve as an equally owned yet independent intermediary between the two associations. They named the third party NXTcomm. Wayne Crawford comments, "They said, 'Hey, let's form a company that represents the best interest of the industry. NXTComm is actually a L.L.C so they're a private company.'"

When asked whether he saw the relationship between the USTA and the TIA continuing after NXTcomm 2008, Crawford was confident, saying, "They're in it for the long haul."

Part of the beauty of NXTcomm's arrival is its steadfast objective of keeping the relationship equal and flowing smoothly on both sides of the arrangement. Jim Forlenza, Director of Public Relations and Business Development, was one of a few professionals brought in from the outside, apart from both organizations to help in

NXTcomm's growth. "We have a staff of about a dozen that make up NXTcomm. It's really a mix of people from both associations and people from the outside."

With its new adjustments the USTA and the TIA are both relying on considerable success out of the NXTcomm tradeshow. Despite a tinge of familiarity in the air, NXTcomm insists there are marked differences between itself and the other tradeshows prior. "What makes it different from the other shows is the broadness of what it is that we're trying to accomplish," said Crawford. "We're trying to focus more on the satellite and cable entertainment industry. We're focusing more on reuniting the product with the industry."

Indeed, the goal of NXTcomm is to establish and identify itself as a brand and become known as the voice of the telecommunications industry. Keynote speakers from AT&T, the US Information Technology Office of Beijing, Bell Canada, and NBC Universal, among others are slated to deliver speeches this year. The show will span 200,000 net square feet of exhibit space and offer conferences on Digital Hollywood, WiMax Strategies, ATIS TechThink Technology, and BICSI, along with several others. Forlenza says that the show will focus primarily on Internet protocol and situations involving the entertainment industry. Still, however changed and glamorized the evolution, Supercomm's tremendous influence on the telecom industry is still integral to the success of its descendant. NXTcomm is merely making what has already been long established bigger and better.

While Supercomm's first show brought in 15,000 attendees and over 300 exhibitors, NXTcomm anticipates over 20,000 attendees and close to 500 exhibitors from over 100 countries at the show in Chicago this year. "Both companies have had a pretty good history in Chicago. It has a very large independent industry," Crawford said. Regarding the company's announcement in early May that it will join InfoComm International in Las Vegas for its 2008 tradeshow, Crawford answered, "As far as the switch to Las Vegas, we wanted to create a more diverse geographic draw and move closer to the Southern California entertainment community."

Will the reunification of the TIA and USTA result in the industry flocking to NXTcomm, immediately setting aside all doubt and caution? Complete trust is unlikely. Once bitten, twice shy. However, the sheer magnitude of the show is probably worth exhibitors and attendees temporary trust. Indispensable contacts will be made. Exciting new products will be unveiled.

On a different note, the USTA and the TIA's fairytale ending (or as close to fairytale as we get in this sector) demonstrates just how much communication and the identification of problematic and unproblematic areas are integral to sustaining any healthy connection. The NXTcomm tradeshow will be a three-day testament to maintaining a successful relationship without the aid of expensive therapy.

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