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This Week's Stories

A Third Of The Country Has Signed On To AT&T's Network For First Responders

September 8, 2017

Twenty states and territories have opted into AT&T's plan to build a nationwide network for first responders through the FirstNet Authority, the company said this month.

The contract for the network, which gives first responders a priority lane for communication during crises or other times of high traffic, was awarded to AT&T in March. Under the terms, the federally funded FirstNet Authority will pay \$6.5 billion toward the buildout of the network. AT&T (NYSE: T) agrees to pay \$40 billion to build out and maintain the network for the life of the 25-year contract.

It also gets valuable spectrum in the deal, which it can use to serve commercial customers, as well.

The Dallas telco released individualized state plans in mid-June. From that point, states had 45 days to submit comments to AT&T, which had 45 days to respond. The state then gets 90 days to decide whether it wants to "opt in" to the network. Opting out means the state will choose a proposal from an outside vendor to build their own statewide first responder network.

States and territories that have opted in to the network include: Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Puerto Rico, Tennessee, U.S. Virgin Islands, Virginia, and Wyoming.

The idea for a nationwide network for first responders came from the 9/11 Commission. Just as high mobile traffic in stadiums and concert venues can clog the network, times of crises can also jam communication pathways and make it difficult for first responders to do their jobs.

bizjournals.com

Free Wi-Fi During Hurricane Irma: Comcast Opens Thousands Of Hotspots

September 7, 2017

Comcast is offering free Xfinity Wi-Fi service in parts of Florida to help residents and emergency personnel stay connected as they prepare for Hurricane Irma.

On Wednesday, Comcast said it would open more than 137,000 Xfinity Wi-Fi hotspots throughout the state free for anyone who needs them, including non-Xfinity customers, through September 15.

The company expanded their free Wi-Fi offer on Thursday to other coastal communities expected to feel impacts from the storm.

They also made 10,000 free Wi-Fi hotspots available in Georgia and 6,000 in South Carolina.



"We know it's critically important for everyone to have a means of communication at their disposal before, during and after a storm with the potential impact of Hurricane Irma," Amy Smith, senior vice president for Comcast's Florida region, said in a statement online.

Residents can visit Xfinity.com/wifi to view a map of Wi-Fi hotspots, which are located both indoors and outdoors in places such as shopping districts, parks and businesses.

People in range of the hotspot can select the "Xfinitywifi" network name in list of available hotspots and be automatically connected. Xfinity customers can sign in with their usernames and passwords for an automatic connection.

Non-Xfinity internet subscribers should visit the "Not an Xfinity Internet Customer" section on the sign-in page. From there, non-customers will be able to renew their complimentary sessions every two hours, the company explained.

This isn't the first time the company has offered their services during a disaster.

Last weekend, Comcast opened 53,000 Wi-Fi hotspots around Houston after flooding from Hurricane Harvey devastated the area. The company also made a \$1 million commitment toward Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner's Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund and the American Red Cross.

This time, the company said it is working to prepare ahead of the storm.

"It's critical that impacted residents have a means of communication at their disposal before, during and after a storm with the potential impact of Hurricane Irma," Doug Guthrie, regional senior vice president for Comcast in Atlanta, said in a statement. "By activating our Wi-Fi network today throughout impacted communities, we can help more people stay connected at a critical time."

cbsnews.com

Chilean Regulators Approve AT&T Acquisition Of Time Warner

September 5, 2017

The Chilean Fiscalía Nacional Económica (FNE) has approved AT&T's pending acquisition of Time Warner Inc.

"The AT&T-Time Warner merger will combine premium content with the networks to deliver that content on any screen viewers want," said David McAtee, Senior Executive Vice President and General Counsel, AT&T Inc.

"We appreciate the FNE's diligent work to evaluate and approve this merger on the strength of its benefits to competition in Chile and, most importantly, Chilean consumers."

FNE approved the merger with targeted behavioral conditions to address specific competition issues identified by FNE in its review of the transaction. FNE's approval does not require the sale or divestiture of any AT&T or Time Warner assets.

With Chile's approval, AT&T and Time Warner have received merger approval from 17 competition authorities reviewing the transaction worldwide outside the United States.

att.com

Products & Services

Spotify, Hulu Target Students With Discounted Bundle

September 7, 2017

“The entertainment bundle, \$13 cheaper than the regular combined price, is the latest effort in the industry to gain young millennial customers, who favor inexpensive online streaming and listening.”

U.S. college students can buy Spotify Premium music streaming and Hulu TV streaming for a combined, deeply discounted \$4.99 per month, in a new student subscription bundle the companies announced on Thursday to lure younger consumers.

The entertainment bundle, \$13 cheaper than the regular combined price, is the latest effort in the industry to gain young millennial customers, who favor inexpensive online streaming and listening.

The package is Spotify's first TV and movie partnership, and combines with Hulu's limited commercials plan. Hulu's shows include original content like the hit drama "The Handmaid's Tale," and exclusives such as "Seinfeld" and "Fear the Walking Dead."

Mark Mulligan, managing director of MIDiA Research, a media and technology research company, said in a blog post Thursday the partnership gives Spotify "a smart way to get into the video market without getting in over its head."

Spotify had more than 60 million paid subscribers as of July, but can use the video subscribers as it fends off competition from Apple Music, which had 27 million subscribers, according to Apple Inc in June.

The partnership with Spotify may also help Hulu to compete with rival streaming service Netflix Inc. T-Mobile US Inc said Wednesday it will offer a free Netflix subscription with its unlimited data family plans.

Spotify plans to go public with a direct listing on the New York Stock Exchange later this year or early next year.

reuters.com

Wi-Fi Alliance Introduces Enhancements To Improve Wi-Fi Experience

September 7, 2017

The Wi-Fi Alliance is getting all kinds of industry support for new enhancements for Wi-Fi Certified Vantage, which are designed to elevate the user experience.

Wi-Fi Vantage devices soon will include functionality to enable quick, secure authentication and consistent, quality connections in Wi-Fi networks, according to WFA. The two new features are Wi-Fi Agile Multiband and Wi-Fi Optimized Connectivity.

Wi-Fi Agile Multiband is a new certification available now that allows infrastructure devices to work efficiently with mobile devices to manage network resources and efficiently respond to changing network conditions. Intelligent steering allows devices to exchange information for the access point (AP) to guide a mobile device to a recommended band, channel or AP. Steering capabilities maximize overall spectral efficiency by minimizing congestion and improving device connection speeds, as well as helping transition devices from Wi-Fi to cellular networks when appropriate.

Wi-Fi Optimized Connectivity complements Wi-Fi Agile Multiband and includes features that optimize the process of discovering Wi-Fi networks, establishing initial connectivity and roaming between APs

serving the same network or different networks. Network discovery enhancements prioritize which channels a device scans during the discovery process, assisting devices in more rapidly discovering APs.

Wi-Fi Optimized Connectivity also reduces management frame overhead, resulting in more efficient sessions because devices spend less time sending or responding to network management traffic and more time moving user data. Certification for Wi-Fi Optimized Connectivity will be available in late 2017.

CableLabs, Broadcom, Qualcomm Technologies, Ruckus and Marvell voiced their support for the new programs. Christopher Szymanski, director of product marketing for the Mobile Connectivity Products Division at Broadcom Limited, said in a statement that the programs will deliver “cellular-class network steering and improved network management, increased capacity, and the lower latency necessary for livestreaming and other social applications in dense scenarios.”

“Carrier Wi-Fi is an essential tool for enhancing consumer mobility and maximizing operator networks. As a driving force behind wireless innovations that are transforming connected experiences, Qualcomm Technologies is a proud supporter of Wi-Fi Alliance’s efforts to improve the way people connect to managed Wi-Fi networks. These enhancements to the Wi-Fi Vantage program represent a significant step toward better spectral efficiency, simplicity and roaming,” said Irvind Ghai, vice president of product management, Qualcomm Technologies, in the release.

Wi-Fi Vantage addresses three key pillars—manageability, mobility and performance, said WFA VP of Marketing Kevin Robinson. However, he said the improvements are not necessarily Wi-Fi trying to be more like cellular.

The Wi-Fi industry is intent on delivering a consistent quality experience. “What the Wi-Fi industry is really trying to do is deliver technology and solutions that leverage some of the inherent benefits in Wi-Fi, particularly around cost effectiveness, ease of deployment and customer affinity” and the ability to service a significantly larger number of devices than cellular serves today, he told FierceWirelessTech.

“It’s taking those inherent advantages and adding this level of manageability and mobility,” and while it does sound similar to what cellular does, “it’s not making Wi-Fi like cellular.” Rather, it’s striking a good balance with these new management capabilities while retaining the existing advantages of Wi-Fi, he said.

fiercewireless.com

T-Mobile To Give Free Netflix Subscriptions To Its Smartphone Customers

September 6, 2017

T-Mobile USA is giving free Netflix subscriptions to customers who buy at least two lines of T-Mobile One service.

“Through an exclusive new partnership with Netflix, T-Mobile One family plans will now come with Netflix—at absolutely no extra charge... anyone with two or more qualifying T-Mobile One lines can get Netflix on us,” T-Mobile announced today.

T-Mobile One is the carrier's unlimited voice, data, and text plan, and it costs \$120 a month for two lines (\$60 for each line). The per-line charges go down as you buy more lines. The Netflix promotion will begin on Tuesday, September 12. Starting on that day, T-Mobile customers with at least two lines

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“The subscriptions will work just like video plans purchased directly from Netflix, so you can watch on any Netflix-compatible device.”

can activate their free Netflix subscription online, in T-Mobile stores, or by calling T-Mobile customer service.

"[I]f you already have a Netflix subscription, T-Mobile will cover the cost of a standard subscription for you—meaning you'll save nearly \$120 every year," the carrier said.

Works On Any Device, Not Just T-mobile Phones

The subscriptions will work just like video plans purchased directly from Netflix, so you can watch on any Netflix-compatible device. Viewing is not limited to T-Mobile-connected cellular devices, T-Mobile told Ars.

T-Mobile customers will get the standard Netflix plan that normally costs \$9.99 a month, which includes HD video and allows viewing on two screens simultaneously.

Netflix also sells a premium subscription for \$11.99, which adds 4K video and allows viewing on four screens at once. T-Mobile said that customers can upgrade to Netflix's premium subscription by paying the \$2-per-month difference to T-Mobile.

It's not clear how long the promotion will be available. But for people who sign up in time, the Netflix subscription will be "good for as long as they are T-Mobile customers," T-Mobile told us. You can find more details here.

Carriers are increasingly bundling video with mobile phone subscriptions, in some cases as free add-ons and in others as higher-priced bundles. AT&T has been bundling DirecTV with its mobile service and exempting DirecTV from its mobile data caps. AT&T has also bundled HBO with unlimited mobile plans. Verizon Wireless has made its own Go90 service a free add-on and exempted it from data caps.

T-Mobile started exempting third-party video services such as Netflix from data caps in late 2015 (while downgrading video quality), but the company has moved away from data caps and overage fees since announcing the T-Mobile One plan. T-Mobile has also been giving customers free MLB streaming subscriptions.

arstechnica.com

Emerging Technology

Facebook Is Testing Features To Help You Make New Friends

September 8, 2017

Facebook wants to show you more of what you have in common with potential new friends and make sure you don't forget about your old ones either.

The company is rolling out a feature that allows you to get a closer look at your friend's buddies. It's not only showcasing connections you've yet to make but a lot of current friends as well, which seems a bit odd, but I suppose it helps you orient yourself with friends you haven't interacted with in a bit.

Once you tap on a button urging you to "get to know [name's] friends" you're cast into a carousel of the connections. Previously, the most prominent way Facebook orients you with potential new friends was by showing you your mutual friends. This option digs deeper, showing you events that you both attended, pages you both like, places you've both worked or lived.

In February, Facebook began rolling out “Discover People,” a feature designed to help you find new connections largely through groups and events. The friend cards are the same here, but this roll out throws them into a more wide feature release.

Facebook is also looking to get you closer to some of the friends you already have in the app. Motherboard reports that a new feature is bringing some Tinder-like functionality to Messenger, allowing users to connect if they both indicate that they’re interested in hanging out. It’s also a little reminiscent of some of Snapchat’s efforts to get you to interact with friends you haven’t traded messages with in a while. Having this functionality inside Messenger is, again, a bit of an odd choice given that you’d have to switch to the main app to view a person’s profiles.

There doesn’t seem to be any clear “dating app” language present instead it’s more focused on friendly encounters, i.e. “Would you like to meet up with [name] this week?” The changes that would need to be taken to transform this feature into a Tinder or Bumble-like applet don’t take any major mental leaps though and dating could be a huge move for the company in the future.

Ultimately, Facebook is better with friends and even if the connection suggestions that Facebook comes up with are already stellar, it’s good to see some of the thinking that’s being done behind the scenes in terms of common interests.

techcrunch.com

Apple Just Released iOS 11 Beta 10 To Developers

September 8, 2017

Apple is pushing the limits of its beta program as the company just released the tenth beta version of iOS 11. If you have a developer account and want to try out the next version of iOS, you can download the new beta version right now.

iOS 11 is the next major release of the operating system for the iPhone and iPad. Apple first unveiled iOS 11 at its WWDC event back in June 2017. Developers and early adopters have been able to try out the new version for three months. And the wait is almost over as Apple should release iOS 11 a week after the new iPhone event on September 12. Existing iPhone and iPad owners will be able to update for free.

At this point, beta versions of iOS 11 feel quite stable. I wouldn’t recommend installing iOS 11 on the iPhone you use every day — beta versions of iOS usually drain your battery life. But if you have an iPad and are feeling adventurous, you can install it right now.

If you have a developer account and pay \$99 per year to access new betas, developer tools and content, you can download iOS 11 beta 10 on Apple’s developer website. If you don’t want to pay \$99, Apple now has a public beta program.

The iPad is going to receive the biggest changes in iOS 11. The update turns your iPad into a more capable tablet as you can drag and drop files, app icons and more across the operating system. There’s a system-wide dock, a new app switcher and a Files app so you can launch apps and manage your documents more easily.

If you don’t have an iPad, most of the changes are under the hood, starting with Apple’s augmented reality framework ARKit. Many developers have been working on ARKit-enabled apps, but they’re not in the App Store just yet. There’s also a completely redesigned Control Center with customizable shortcuts.

techcrunch.com

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“...the wait is almost over as Apple should release iOS 11 a week after the new iPhone event on September 12.”

Mergers and Acquisitions

Google Reportedly In Talks With HTC For Smartphone Business

September 7, 2017

Google is reportedly in final talks with HTC about a deal for the latter's smartphone unit.

According to the Commercial times, per Digitimes, HTC has reportedly entered the final stage of negotiations for either selling its smartphone business outright to Google, or a potential strategic investment.

In August, Bloomberg reported that the Taiwanese firm was working with an advisor to potentially sell its Vive virtual reality headset, but the new report says the potential deal will not involve the VR business or the entire company.

HTC could use the help as the company's reported revenues of \$99.69 million for August represent a dip of 51.5 percent from July, and down 54.4 percent from last year. That figure was the company's lowest revenue in 13 years.

Digitimes indicated HTC is likely to begin shipping next-generation Pixel smartphones to Google in September.

wirelessweek.com

IBM Commits \$240 Million To Fund An MIT A.I. Lab

September 7, 2017

IBM on Wednesday said it will spend \$240 million to open a Watson-branded artificial intelligence research lab in collaboration with a long-time partner, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

IBM has made larger financial commitments in the past. Still, the amount of money is notable in the world of AI research.

MIT is no stranger to that field: The university was home to one of the first AI labs and continues to be well regarded as a place to do work in the sector.

And MIT is also accustomed to working with IBM. In the 1950s Big Blue worked on a computer for an air defense system together with MIT's Lincoln Laboratory, and in the 1980s IBM Research and MIT were both part of a consortium on superconductivity.

The new deal, which will play out over a decade, is a reply to academic partnerships formed recently by other technology companies. In July Alphabet's DeepMind group committed to growing its AI research presence with the University of Alberta in Canada. Alphabet and Microsoft have also made announcements about gifts to fund research at McGill University and the University of Montreal — but the total of contributions between the two companies in Montreal falls below \$10 million.

"AI as a field has been going on for many decades, but it is quite obvious right now it has raised to a level of centrality for every major technology company, including us and frankly every other business and area," Dario Gil, vice president of AI and Q (for quantum) at IBM Research, told CNBC.

The people in the new Watson AI lab will work at the MIT campus as well as IBM's Watson Health and Security facilities nearby. Researchers will develop algorithms, look for hardware optimizations — including with quantum computing chips — and explore the implications of AI in society.

"The new deal, which will play out over a decade, is a reply to academic partnerships formed recently by other technology companies."

With respect to industry applications, the researchers will specifically focus on cybersecurity and health care. Health care is an area where IBM has sought to commercialize its Watson "cognitive computing" software.

In health care, in particular, Watson has come under some scrutiny.

"The field of artificial intelligence, despite its progress, is in its infancy," Gil said.

cncb.com

Samsung & Red Bull Announce A Gear VR Content Partnership

September 6, 2017

"As part of the partnership, Red Bull will produce 360-degree content via its Rulebreakers campaign that covers the company's social media and web properties and its YouTube channel."

South Korean tech giant Samsung Electronics and Austrian energy drink company Red Bull have teamed up to expand the number of 360-degree content for the Gear VR ecosystem and compatible head-mounted displays.

As part of the partnership, Red Bull will produce 360-degree content via its Rulebreakers campaign that covers the company's social media and web properties and its YouTube channel. The goal of the campaign is to encourage individuals to exhibit their capabilities, with kitesurfers Ruben Lenten and breakdancer Jeffrey Verschoor being some of the most well-known participants.

The Rulebreakers campaign was launched in conjunction with Samsung's international campaign called #DoWhatYouCant aiming to inspire the youth to showcase their talent. For its part, Samsung will provide support for Red Bull's various events in the Netherlands, including the world breakdance championship, the BC ONE World Final, the Big Air Kitesurf Contest, and the Red Bull Megaloop Challenge to be held in the municipality of Zandvoort.

In addition to encouraging the youth to push themselves to their limits in terms of showing what they can achieve, Samsung currently has other similar campaigns in the works, including the #BeFearless program intended to help people conquer their fear of public speaking. In order to address people's fear of public speaking, the program funded the creation of a virtual environment where the Gear VR wearer was standing in front of a pack of people inside a room and was encouraged to participate in a public speaking event.

The campaign comprised a coaching program powered by Samsung's virtual reality solutions that span four weeks of mentoring participants in overcoming their fear of public speaking.

Samsung has also introduced several improvements to the Gear VR as a part of an effort to assist in the mental health diagnosis programs of health care organizations.

Most recently, the South Korean original equipment manufacturer forged a partnership with Gangnam Severance Hospital and Korean VR development organization FNI to develop various mental health diagnosis tools that make use of the Gear VR headset and ecosystem.

The partnership aims to support suicide prevention endeavors and basic psychological evaluation, with related tools being slated for commercial availability at some point next year.

androidheadlines.com.

Industry Reports

T-Mobile, Qualcomm, Nokia, Hit 1.175 Gbps Speeds In LTE Lab Tests

September 8, 2017

“The Un-carrier indicated the demos show that commercially available 4G technologies can provide customers with top speeds, well beyond those seen currently.”

T-Mobile, working alongside partners Qualcomm, and Nokia, have passed the gigabit speed threshold using advanced 4G LTE technology in lab tests.

The Un-carrier announced it achieved download speeds of 1.175 Gbps using 12 independent streams of LTE data. The demonstration utilized 4x4 MIMO, 256-QAM technology, and three carrier aggregation across 60 MHz of downlink spectrum on T-Mobile’s network. The test was conducted using Nokia’s 4.9G network powered by the Nokia AirScale Base Station. Qualcomm provided a test device running on a Snapdragon X20 LTE modem.

“Using the Snapdragon X20 LTE modem we are breaking through the gigabit barrier, further enhancing network capacity and real user data rates,” Cristiano Amon, EVP of Qualcomm Technologies and president of Qualcomm CDMA Technologies, commented. “And working with Nokia and T-Mobile, using our second-generation gigabit LTE modem, we’ve now shown the steady strides we are making as we progress on the path to 5G. User devices supporting these speeds are expected to be made commercially available in the first half of 2018.”

The Un-carrier indicated the demos show that commercially available 4G technologies can provide customers with top speeds, well beyond those seen currently.

“We are helping customers maximize the value of their existing networks by bringing performance closer to that expected from 5G in the future,” Marc Rouanne, president of mobile networks at Nokia, noted. “With this key test, using T-Mobile’s network and Qualcomm Technologies’ modem, we have not only broken the gigabit speed barrier but have exceeded existing performance using Nokia 4.9G technology, showing the way forward for higher-quality user experiences and services with fiber-like speeds over mobile connections.”

The tests come on the heels of Ookla’s 2017 U.S. Market report that ranked T-Mobile as the leader for fastest mobile speeds across the country. More on that here.

Those headed to Mobile World congress Americas 2017 in San Francisco next week can check out 1.2 Gbps data rate demos at Nokia and Qualcomm Technologies’ booths.

wirelessweek.com



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