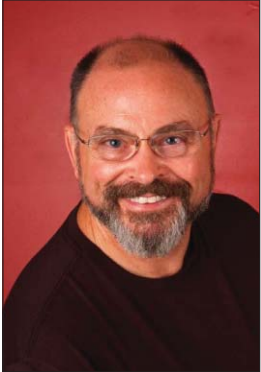


das and beyond

# Trying Harder ... to Be Number 3

By **Ted Abrams, P.E.**

Neville Ray, chief technology officer of T-Mobile USA, said that improving coverage inside buildings and in areas not served by the macro network is high on his priority list. He said that T-Mobile would extend the reach of its network with new distributed antenna system (DAS) and in-building wireless (IBW) network elements. In a multipronged approach, that outreach will occur through im-



proved link budgets at the carrier's 49,000 existing sites and via new builds, including IBW and DAS, to deliver richer experiences for subscribers in buildings.

T-Mobile consistently wins top honors from J.D. Power for customer service. Ray predicts that all of the ships are rising on the tide of HSPA+42. The veteran CTO proudly talked about the results of the HSPA+ 42 tests in Las Vegas: 20 to 30 megabits per second average and 33 megabits per second peak through the beta ZTE stick.

T-Mobile's chief marketing officer, Cole Brodman, explained that "4G is shorthand for modern and faster." That

explanation makes sense to subscribers and proves again that perception is reality. Given the success of their claim to the 4G high ground (Nielsen surveys, *Wall Street Journal*, etc.) why are the T-Mobile leaders emphasizing IBW? Because 20 percent of T-Mobile churn is attributable to customers unhappy with coverage in buildings.

An aggressive launch by T-Mobile called Challenger Strategy is intended to build its business into a position to claim undisputed third place among U.S. operators. That goal in large part depends upon flawless execution of its plan to improve coverage in buildings.

Sprint Nextel launched a network modernization initiative named Project Leapfrog to surpass the top operators. According to Bob Azzi, the carrier's vice president of network engineering, 58,000 cell sites don't provide adequate coverage in buildings, a problem he intends to remedy. Even after repurposing spectrum and winnowing the site count to 48,000, Sprint's team recognizes the need for specialized solutions to serve customers inside buildings, and Bob Azzi is moving quickly to deliver those solutions.

With SON/RRH state-of-the-art technology, Sprint could leap over the market leaders during the 4G frenzy. The determination of T-Mobile to be the undisputed third-place operator is strong. Both Sprint and T-Mobile pointedly emphasize coverage for customers in buildings. T-Mobile's pink motorcycle ads may be sending a message through the symbolism of the orange mini-bike. Without knowing which third-place contenders will be in the arena, it seems likely that the winner will have the best plan for in-building wireless. ■

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