

# Under the HAMMER

*In the first of a series offering channel insight to new technology Matt Townend examines the implications of the recent Ofcom wireless spectrum auctions. Is it the future for fixed to mobile convergence?*

One of the major events that will drive fixed to mobile convergence, happened last month in one of the most unlikely places - Ofcom's offices in London.

The event was Ofcom's wireless spectrum auctions which were concluded at the end of May. Ofcom placed 12 licences under the hammer for low power wireless spectrum most likely to be used for private GSM networks. These networks will enable providers to offer integrated fixed to mobile services in office buildings or campuses, utilising existing GSM or GPRS handset configurations.

One of the particularly interesting things about these auctions was the type of companies bidding and winning these licenses. Throwing their hats into the ring were mobile operators such as O2, fixed operators such as BT, Colt, C&W and specialist companies such as TeleWare Mapesbury Communications.

To find out a bit more on the services they and other license winners will be offering I spoke to Dean Parsons, Operations Director of Private Mobile Networks Ltd, a TeleWare Group company, and asked him in layman terms how does the cell technology work?

"The mobile phone will use standard existing GSM technology in a small Pico cell area. The new capability is being able to take this GSM traffic and route it over an IP network. From an end-user point of view they will simply use their mobile as normal but on a private mobile network (PMN) avoiding tariffs for calls made to other users 'on net' on the PMN."

There is a lot of talk around these services, when do you plan to launch your service and will it be available to the channel?

"The solution for enterprise-based solutions is available today. Our internal beta site was completed in November 05 and we currently have six external beta test sites deployed. Now that spectrum is available to us we can begin to move these to live sites. We plan to seed the market through our partners working in conjunction with

our direct sales force. Once the product is proven to be steady, reliable, easy to install and support we will consider it mainstream and focus on deployment through our channel partners. We anticipate this will take place gradually over the next six to nine months as the partners gain in expertise."

Where will the services be pitched in terms of size of customer, and where have you had original interest from?

"Initially the product is pitched at larger organisations with their own buildings, MTUs or campus. Once the hosted service becomes available this will extend to SME customers. Our beta sites include corporate, education, health service and government deployments. Any customer who has a campus or building where mobiles are can benefit from using a PMN. In addition, any site where mobile coverage is poor due to interference or lack of coverage in the geography can overcome their coverage problems."

Why would you use this instead of a secured WiFi solution?

"Customers already have and use mobile phones. With a private mobile network they can continue to use their handset and network provider of choice and use the PMN when in the campus or building area. Technically the main consideration is that GSM was designed for voice whereas WiFi was designed for data and later adapted to support voice. Therefore GSM has a full complement of voice capabilities already in place".

A number of the other new Spectrum owners have also announced the intention to offer services in the coming months. Although there are bound to be issues in the development of these services, I believe they will have significant market impact in the next 18 months.

As well as the spectrum announcements above, we have seen advances in all the other fixed mobile convergence areas. Nokia for example has been amongst a number of handset



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manufacturers to announce new devices, with WiFi on board at cheaper prices. (See our June issue article for details)

BT has recently announced an agreement to offer a WiFi-based converged service to large sites working with Alcatel and building on their existing Fusion product set. Also in the May issue of Comms Business we heard about announcements from other providers such as Panasonic.

Indeed when I spoke to Rob Bamforth, Mobility Analyst for Quocirca, he was concerned that companies may get 'option paralysis' as they are bombarded by a multitude of solutions. This may lead to some of them deciding to take a 'wait and see' approach.

I believe private mobile network will have an important role in the market as the various solutions compete for mindshare. Let's be clear; channels will definitely have a key part to play with whichever solution(s) succeed as vendors will only provide fragments of the total solution required by customers. The channel will have to provide the converged skills and product integration to deliver the customer the total solution.