

Experts hope it won't be another false dawn for LTE

The US needs Long Term Evolution, but we don't

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IT WAS MAYBE HOPE rather than expectation, but the message was clear - the drive towards Long Term Evolution (LTE) is moving out of first gear - though perhaps not in the UK.

The amount of network data is growing exponentially, with networks already highly congested. LTE is seen as the way forward to a "promised land", as it is an open standards based mobile network technology that has greater speed, latency and security.

Just before Mobile World Congress is set to start, vendors and analysts in Barcelona agreed that significant movements are happening behind the scenes, with signs that it could soon become the next generation mobile network's time in the spotlight. But there are still issues.

LTE has already been deployed in parts of the world, and there wasn't much argument that companies are already putting a lot of investment into it, as it has been proven to deliver what it advertises.

There are still issues and challenges, though, as there is a lack of clarity about the business model and problems remain regarding traffic management. Also, in countries like the UK, the frameworks for auctioning off wireless spectrum to networks that want it are a mess, while there is also the simple question of whether we actually need it.

Phil Tilley, marketing director of Alcatel Lucent, said that it wasn't that long ago that 3G licences in the UK were being handed out. "We were questioning why we wanted 3G, when's 3G going to happen, when is it going to be mainstream? That's a huge amount to pay for a licence."

He added, "It's exactly the same now. Especially in North America, CDMA is reaching the end of the runway. The data explosion is really pushing the edge of those radio technologies, and therefore we are seeing LTE pushed out very aggressively by Verizon. It's here, it's happening, and we're going to see continued growth until 2012."

But he acknowledged that uptake has been slower in the UK and Europe, with problems remaining in allocating spectrum and the fact that we have more runway still ahead with High Speed Packet Access (HSPA) for mobile vendors.

"HSPA from a users point of view is going to be able to deliver a perfectly acceptable experience for many years," said Nigel Wright, VP of wireless marketing at Spirent. "My phone is capable of 3.6 megabits per second. I've barely started to tap the potential of HSPA and HSPA+."

He concluded, "There are many networks out there which can support 4.2 megabits per second. There is an evolutionary part for many HSPA operators. And the end user couldn't care less whether they are on LTE or HSPA+."

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