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ITEXPO West 2007: Exhibitor Highlights 2

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By Richard Grigonis
Executive Editor, IP Communications Group

TMC's ITEXPO West in Los Angeles was a resounding success, with thousands of telecom purchasing agents, venture capitalists, industry pundits and otherwise curious parties swarming over the many exhibitor booths and attending the various conference sessions. Yours Truly spent most of the show on his own private booth safari, and here's my final installment of interviews and observations from the show. (To read the first installment, click here.)

Berbee Software

Berbee Software was one of the first companies to offer value-added applications for the Cisco CallManager telephony environment. The company's broadcast product, InformaCast, is said to be the most widely used paging system in the IP telephony market. With Atlas Sound IP speakers (patent pending) and Power-over-Ethernet (PoE), you can extend your paging system beyond the capabilities of conventional systems.

At the booth, Berbee's Cisco channel manager, Brad Jungemann, said, "We're best known for our InformaCast application, which is actually sold through Cisco Systems. That's a paging broadcast application that supports predefined messages and sends messages to your IP phone—either text or audio or a combination of both. The new application we've been showing quite frequently here at ITEXPO is Push-to-Talk. It uses the sidecar button on the new Cisco 7921 Wireless Phone, and it does paging phone also, either solely to the wireless phones or to the desktop phones, or even a combination of both. It employs your wireless infrastructure instead of having to go out to use a data provider or Nextel, or somebody like that, which saves money."

Cisco Systems

Cisco Systems was talking up version 4.0 of its Unified Customer Voice Portal (CVP), enabling customers to quickly retrieve the information they need from contact centers. Customers can use touchtone signals or speech recognition to request self-service information. If they request live agent assistance, Unified CVP can transfer information given by the customer directly to the agent along with the call itself to provide a smooth customer service experience. VoiceXML runs on the router with this solution which ties into a web-space environment.

Cisco was also showing the accompanying Eclipse development environment for building self-service applications. The whole portal system Web-based and runs in a Web application environment for the applications server. So you have the VoiceXML end that runs on the router, and you have your applications server which Cisco believes for medium and large customers should be treated as a web application. So it's built in Eclipse with a Java base so customers can add Java. It also supports the Web Services Definition Language.

Contactual

Contactual is a global provider of on-demand contact center solutions. Its Contactual OnDemand Contact Center is delivered using the Software as a Service (SaaS) model, and requires no specialized hardware or software, no telecom equipment and no up-front capital expenditures.

Contactual's Roshni Sadarangani, Regional Sales Manager, said, "We're a hosted contact center solution, basically a virtual call center, for small-to-medium businesses, since the suite spot for call centers right now is really less than 100 agents. Ninety percent of call centers in the market right now have less than 100 agents. Anything from a help desk to a support center or an order-taking facility. So that's what we're aiming at. We manage incoming calls, chats and emails. We can then route any of those to the appropriate agents on your staff. The agents can be sitting anywhere in the world. All they need is a high-speed Internet connection, a Internet Explorer window, and a phone. You can use a cell phone, but if you have agents that are based internationally, I would recommend VoIP such as a softphone on a computer or a VoIP desktop phone. At the moment, it's a Windows-based platform. In our next release we will support Safari and Mozilla. We can already create a 24x7 'follow the sun' call

center."

At the close of the show, Sylantro Systems, known for its Multiplay Application Feature Server, announced a commitment to support the interoperability of its combined products, as well as Contactual's Silver Level sponsorship of the Sylantro Global Summit. Contactual and Sylantro will provide the OnDemand Contact Center on the Sylantro Platform.

CTI Labs

CTI Labs is a major German SS7 softswitch maker, providing carrier-class VoIP, Intelligent Network (IN) and billing solutions for service providers and Mobile Virtual Network Operators (MVNOs). The comapany's CompactPCI-based CoolSwitch platforms interconnect more than 40 carriers worldwide. The latest version of CoolSwitch on display at ITEXPO West supports up to 256 T1/E1s or 16 DS3s in a single chassis. A true "All-in-one-box solution" is can be configured as an SS7 VoIP Media Gateway, SS7 Softswitch, Transcoding Gateway, and Session Controller with an integrated Prepaid/Postpaid Billing System. Voice Services run on this platform include wholesale, prepaid mobile, calling cards and class4 switching,

CTI Labs' Technical Director, Rolf Unger, said, "The CoolSwitch is amazingly flexible. It's a gateway with an integrated softswitch. We sell it mostly in Europe to smaller IP carriers that have connections to TDM carriers and want a replacement for something such as an XL switch or Class 4 switch. It's a 19-inch rackmount 'pizza-box' and fits into a small suitcase, but can handle about 960 calls in parallel. The codecs are executing on the hardware and are not CPU-based. CTI Labs also offers various revenue-generating value-added services technologies for service providers, based on the CoolSwitch."

FaxBack

FaxBack is known for its NET SatisFAXtion fax server software that automates inbound and outbound fax traffic and takes advantage of VoIP systems, extends MFP devices, eliminates fax machines, integrates with applications, and improves workflow processes.

FaxBack had a joint product announcement with AudioCodes at the show. AudioCodes is bundling FaxBack's FaxBack Port Server with AudioCodes' Mediant VoIP Gateways: the Mediant 1000, 3000, 5000 or 8000 VoIP Gateways. The company officially released this combination at the show. The product is being rolled out under the AudioCodes brand.

Instant InfoSystems

Instant InfoSystems is a major implementer of Enterprise Message Management solutions including enterprise fax management and email archiving to enterprises nationwide. They were exhibiting their capabilities of implementing FoIP (Fax-over-IP) solutions based on the latest technology from Cantata (formerly Brooktrout) and Captaris (formerly RightFax). The company resells hardware from Cantata and software from Captaris.

A IIS spokesman said, "We found that the telephony space is a good niche for us because we are working with RightFax, which is FoIP (Fax-over-IP) technology, and a lot of the infrastructure set up for VoIP translates very nicely into FoIP. We're here at ITEXPO to showcase our fax technology, but also to observe the industry vendors, see what the trends are and try to get a grasp of what other people are doing. Recently we've partnered with ZL Technologies, formerly known as ZipLip."

ISI Telemanagement Solutions

ISI Telemanagement Solutions offers telecom software and services relating to the now-burgeoning area of Telecom Expense Management (TEM). The company's scalable solutions help businesses manage costs, improve productivity and increase revenue. The company had its portfolio on display.

David Dishek, Vice President, IP Communications Practice at ISI, said, "We still offer our traditional CDR billing application that works across multiple platforms, including unified communications or IP telephony, however you want to do it. We're also looking now to deliver business metrics within a call center environment and bring it down to endpoints. We also offer financial consulting that can help you justify the acquisition of this technology as well as clean up your existing inventory of legacy equipment, and we offer an actual TEM application. So, essentially, we're doing all of the 'un-sexy' stuff behind the scenes so that you can justify installing the new platforms. It's about hardcore realization and savings from the back office perspective."

Ixia

A first-time exhibitor at ITEXPO West, Ixia, an IP performance testing company, focused on touting its IPTV solution. Triple play subscribers expect IPTV service quality to be comparable to or better than traditional TV. Users even expect streaming rich multimedia content delivered over the Internet to their web browsers to be of acceptable quality even if not all content is created in a studio. Fortunately, Ixia's Aptixia IxLoad is a comprehensive solution for testing IPTV networks and services, and for streaming video applications.

IxLoad emulates millions of IPTV broadcast video and Video on Demand (VOD) subscribers to assess a subscriber's Quality of Experience (QoE), and to determine a given service provider's network capacity. Another Ixia offering, Aptixia IxNetwork, tests the routing control plane and simultaneously stresses the data plane by directing both real-world video and stateless, packet-based network traffic over emulated Layer 2 and Layer 3 topologies. IxNetwork's application traffic capabilities provides a way to accurately determine the performance of real IPTV applications running on real networks.

George Zecheru, Product Specialist at Ixia, said, "We have IxLoad with us here today. We can test SMS and we have a very strong solution for SIP that combines flexibility and performance testing. We can also do web traffic generation, including HTTP, FTP, and email, so you can emulate very well the kind of traffic associated with an enterprise. Our strong IPTV test solution can emulate both the subscriber side and the server side. For IPTV we can measure the Quality of Experience, providing standard metrics to highlight how well the transmission went through the network. We can also measure how fast the user can switch channels. That is one of the important metrics. We can do testing from Layer 2 through Layer 7, so you can go with IxNetwork to test switching and routing applications at Layers 2 and 3, and with IxLoad you test Layer 4 to Layer 7 applications."

MERA Systems

MERA Systems provides VoIP switching platforms, applications for calling card business and IP Centrex platforms. MERA Systems has 600 deployments in 68 countries of the world, and controls 70 percent of the VoIP softswitch market in Russia & CIS countries and about 4 percent worldwide.

A MERA spokesperson said, "We're basically a softswitch company. We built our first softswitch about five years ago. We were one of the pioneers in the softswitch market and VoIP switching. Now we have a whole line of products, ranging from a fairly simple softswitch solution, to a pretty large and complex solution, along with a billing system and prepaid services. We don't have a stand-alone billing solution, but we do offer billing integrated with our second generation switch. We offer a calling card application, IP Centrex, virtual IP PBX technology, a Class 5 switching solution for residential people and a Class 4/tandem type replacement device. Those are our major products, which are mostly for carriers and wholesalers."

Nuvio Corporation

Nuvio's full-featured hosted PBX phone system for smaller businesses, the nPBX, achieves its cost effectiveness by being based upon software. For example, nPBX Unlimited service plan offers unlimited local and long distance calls for only $44.99 a month. Nuvio's IP based phone can be plugged into any Internet connection anywhere, enabling users to take their office with them. The service supports Web-based administration.

Nuvio exhibited the Microsoft integration that will debut in a couple of months. Basically, the company will be adding click-to-call, some better desktop widgets where you can have actual widgets on your desktop. It also plan to develop some iGoogle widgets, which can be customized and will appear when you sign into your iGoogle account. So you can have a follow-me feature to your cell or home phone and you can see your call list and call history, as examples. That way you can still instruct the system to forward calls to you even if you forgot to do so before you left the office.

Nuvio will also be offering SIP trunking. They call it "In-Trunk".

Panduit

Panduit returned to ITEXPO after being absent for a few years. They came back as a Cisco Technology developer/partner and to get a feel for the unified communications market space. Panduit makes high-quality products for wiring and communications applications. Founded back in 1955, Panduit has expanded from its initial headquarters facility in the Chicago suburb of Tinley Park, Illinois, to multiple U.S. locations, as well as plants and sales subsidiaries throughout the world.

The company's extensive line of connected infrastructure solutions can be found in use by businesses and service providers around the world. Panduit offer an interesting line of flexible Power-over-Ethernet (PoE) products, including power patch panels and mid-spans. They play very heavily in the datacenter space, in telecom closets, dealing with many VoIP customers. As such customers migrate to VoIP, they're looking for their cabling and connectivity infrastructure, and that's where Panduit provides comprehensive solutions that fit perfectly into that space.

Patton Electronics

A first-time exhibitor, Patton Electronics Co. of Gaithersburg, Maryland, offers business-class network access, connectivity, and Voice-over-IP equipment. Technology Marketing Corporation (TMC) has named Patton's SmartNode 4562 SoHo Voice-over-VPN router a recipient of the 2007 INTERNET TELEPHONY Excellence Award presented by *INTERNET TELEPHONY* magazine.

Patton's Director of Sales, Sean Gerrity, said, "The attendance here at ITEXPO has been very good for us, and the exhibitors here have brought another level of engagement as well, because over the years we've made a lot of products for other people. However, in the last few years we've actually started branding our own products and are not just being an engineering resource company. Our products are 'built like a tank and built in America'. We do pretty much everything from little interface converters all the way through country-wide DSL deployments or carrier-grade equipment. We've sold a lot of equipment lately in the Middle East: Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and countries such as those are running their DSL backbones on our equipment. We're seeing most of our devices used as trunk solutions. People want to keep a Nortel or Siemens traditional PBX on which they've spent a lot of money, and they want to maintain their phone systems, but they want a bridge into the next technology."

PEER 1 Network Enterprises

PEER 1, based in Canada, specializes in managing your IT infrastructure, freeing up your time so you can focus on managing your business. They deliver highly scalable managed, self-managed

(ServerBeach), and co-location hosting services through 17 advanced datacenters across North America, connected together by an ultra-fast Internet network backbone. They are a first-time exhibitor at ITEXPO.

Matthew Easton, Peer1's Account Manager, said, "We're here to show off our existing portfolio of services. We're an owner/operator of datacenters throughout the U.S. and Canada. We provide bandwidth, total case-and-space, and power, here in Los Angeles at 600 West Seventh Street. We also have bandwidth coming out of One Wilshire and Wilshire Annex. We're also debuting a partnership with Ensynch, a managed services company."

Polycom

Polycom, once known simply for its superb triangular speakerphones, today delivers end-to-end, rich media collaborative applications for voice, video, data and the Web from desktop and mobile personal systems to room systems to the network core. They are also now making a big splash in unified collaboration solutions. As the company says, "Our vision is to enable people to connect anytime, anyplace and with any device in a virtual experience as natural as being there."

Ben Guderian, Vice President, Marketing, Wireless Business Unit, Voice Communications, said, "At ITEXPO we're showing endpoints and software for Cisco Call Manager. We've got a suite of endpoints that run the Cisco Skinny Client Control Protocol (SCCP), Cisco's proprietary protocol used between Cisco CallManager and Cisco VoIP phones. Our endpoint run SCCP and register directly with CallManager. We've also announced new Polycom applications that run in the Cisco unified application environment and allow you to use your Cisco phone to control video endpoints. We're doing a lot of Cisco value-add. People are looking to take video and integrate into the Cisco environment, which makes it a lot easier to use. It's a common call control platform and has a common dialing plan. When you want to make a video call you have access to a simple application to type in the basic extension and then dial. Every executive in the world knows how to use a telephone."

Guderian continued: "Video has struggled for the past 10 years trying to find acceptance as more than just a niche application. Primarily that's because it has been difficult to use. We used to struggle with having to set up special ISDN connections and bandwidth, but of course IP has now come along and has replaced all of that. We've had issues with the user interface in which you had to learn to navigate to actually make a connection. But we're now reaching the point where video has become as easy to use as a telephone, and it's ready for mainstream adoption. People are ready to step up their collaboration to include rich media, as opposed to just voice."

Sangoma

Sangoma's new ISDN BRI card started to ship when the show started. The day before the show opened, Sangoma also announced a partnership with Parasip Technologies, a developer of IP connectivity products, wherein Sangoma PCI telephony cards now integrate with Sangoma's NetBorder, a software-only connectivity suite for Windows and Linux. (Parasip also had a booth at the show.)

Sansay

Sansay, based in San Diego, was founded in June 2002 and immediately made a name for itself by developing and selling high-quality VoIP infrastructure systems (particularly session controllers) for carriers and service providers worldwide. Today, hundreds of service providers have deployed Sansay solutions.

Andy Voss, Sansay's President and CEO, said, "When people come by this booth, they already know they're looking for Sansay. The most qualified prospects already know what we do. One fellow who visited the booth said, 'The sign on your booth doesn't say what you do'. So we asked him, 'Then why did you stop at our booth?' and he replied, 'Because I know one of my customers is using Sansay products, and they said they're great'.

Sansay's VSX and SPX VoIP Session Controllers support multiple applications (wholesale, SIP Trunking, retail, prepaid, hosted) with extensive routing, peering and security. Popular among providers for peering applications, the VSX VoIP session controller provides graceful expansion up to 50,000 sessions with 99.999 percent availability. The carrier-grade VSX can be positioned at the core or edge of the network to manage VoIP traffic between SIP proxies, SIP UAs, H.323 gateways, IP-PBXs and H.323 gatekeepers to provide an extensive suite of features. In access applications, Sansay's SPX VoIP session controller works in conjunction with Class 5 switches, feature servers and gateways. The SPX enables a many differentiated services while ensuring interoperability and secure firewall/NAT/call admission control. The SPX also acts as a registrar.

Siemon

Siemon, maker of fine network cabling solutions, was showcasing its rather amazing, super high bandwidth, Category 7/Class F cabling solution.

Han Kim, Simon's Regional Sales Manager, said, "We sell low-voltage, structured cabling hardware. Cables, patch panels, all of the connectivity things associated with structured cabling. We sell an interesting Category 7/Class F cabling solution. We're the first company to market it. When people first see it they get a bit confused, because it doesn't have a conventional RJ-45 interface. We call this new interface the TERA interface. With it, you can share three applications on one cable. So you can send video, data and voice over one cable. Otherwise it resembles a typical four twisted-pair copper cable, but it's the highest performing cable we offer. It can handle 10 Gigabits per second with ease, and indeed

our product can handle from 40 to 100 Gigs. We're the only company in North America to market this technology."

Syntellect

Syntellect is know for its Customer Interaction Management solutions for contact centers. They offer a mix of agent-assisted and self-service applications, along with performance optimization solutions. The Syntellect Customer Interaction Management Suite is comprised of software-only PBX/IP-PBX-independent, enterprise grade, solutions. These seamlessly integrate with external applications, and can be deployed in a single location or across multiple physical locations and business groups to provide a cohesive network supporting complex customer interactions.

Suzette Tzineff, Syntellect's Business Development Manager, said, "We do Multichannel communication solution for contact centers. However, we did launch a new solution in New York a few weeks ago called Voyager. Voyager is a solution that runs an end-to-end test on any VoiceXML application. There's no need to write a script. Basically you have a URL and as long as you have that you can test any changes in the system and see if there's any complications or any points of interest that you may need to look into on, say, your IVR. If you've just set up an IVR and you want to test it out, you can. And it has an onboard intelligence, so next month it will tell you if something has happened to the system, such as if you made a change to the IVR system. It can give you all sorts of alerts."

Every month at www.Syntellect.com conducts a Webinar about Voyager.

TelStrat

TelStrat provides solutions for wireline access networks and enterprise telecom environments. At the end of ITEXPO TelStrat announced that it would sell all components of its Access division to Pannaway Technologies, Inc., of Portsmouth, NH. As part of the agreement, Pannaway will acquire the Inteleflex BLC product portfolio and technology base. The deal enables TelStrat to concentrate its focus on enhancing its increasingly popular CallParrot Business Call Recording and Holly Street product lines and customer efforts. The CallParrot Business Call Recording portfolio enables call center quality monitoring and business liability protection.

Speaking about CallParrot with Yours Truly, Andrew Blakely Director Product Management, Marketing, Sales Engineering at TelStrat, said, "We're now totally integrated with Cisco. We used to be solely focused on the Nortel space, mostly on the big CS1000s. One of the big things we bring on the Nortel side is that we blend with the server, we handle both TDM and IP. Nortel did a deal with Witness Systems for their own product that they call Nortel Contact Recording. But if they want to do IP it must occur on one server and if they want to do TDM, that capability has to run on another server. We at TelStrat can do it all in one box. A company could have TDM licenses today, and as they start pulling out their TDM equipment and move over to IP, they can keep the one box and move their licenses and everything to an IP environment. They don't need a new piece of hardware in there."

"It all goes along with the Evergreen theory," said Blakely. "Nortel's been doing digital phones for so many years, and now people are transitioning over to IP. Since we can do it all in one box, we don't care whether they're digital sets or whether they're IP sets. It's all in the same box."

Veramark Technologies

A first-time exhibitor, Veramark recently announced the release of VeraSMART 6.0., featuring enhanced invoice processing, payment tracking, contract management, wireless plan management, and new report functionality. Veramark also offers eCAS, a totally web-based call accounting software for convenient user access from any computer on your network. It supports easy allocation of telecom usage and equipment costs for up to five levels of organization hierarchy for a single location or six levels for a multi-switch environment.

Veramark's Major Accounts Manager, Ken Cogut, said, "We're showing two different software platforms. One is a call accounting package and the other is a business process platform which includes telemanagement and Telecom Expense Management (TEM). TEM is a big, growing area of our business. In fact, it's big everywhere these days. We manage clients that do up to 20 million dollars a month in phone calls."

Indeed. *INTERNET TELEPHONY* magazine now has a special news section devoted entirely to TEM.

VPI (Voice Print International)

VPI provides integrated interaction recording and workforce optimization solutions for enterprises, trading floors, government agencies, and first responders. Its solutions enable organizations to proactively improve customer experience, increase workforce performance, ensure compliance, and align tactical and strategic objectives across the enterprise.

Kevin Saul, Product Manager, said, "In August VPI we announced availability of our Activ! Performance Suite 4.0 which is a series of tightly integrated, modular solutions for call recording, call quality monitoring, speech analytics, performance management and agent eCoaching. The suite enables organizations to proactively manage contact center operations and gain business intelligence from their interactions, so they can optimize processes, boost productivity, enhance customer loyalty, minimize risk, and ensure regulatory compliance throughout the enterprise. We're our debuting our web-based client at this show."

XO Communications

XO Communications was out in force ready to discuss its varied portfolio. The company has a product suite that offers businesses of every size flexible and powerful solutions. Whether it's local and long distance voice, or High-Speed Dedicated Internet Access and Firewalls, XO has something for everybody. IVR and conferencing services are also on their extensive list, as is a calling card for local and long distance calling via toll-free access for business travelers. All XO voice products feature convenient one-invoice billing, one point of contact, and 24 x 7 customer service.

Richard Grigonis is an internationally-known technology editor and writer. Prior to joining TMC as Executive Editor of its IP Communications Group, he was the Editor-in-Chief of VON Magazine from its founding in 2003 to August 2006. He also served as the Chief Technical Editor of CMP Media's Computer Telephony magazine, later called CommunicationsConvergence, from its first year of operation in 1994 until 2003. In addition, he has written five books on computers and telecom (including the Computer Telephony Encyclopedia and Dictionary of IP Communications). To see more of his articles, please visit his columnist page.

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