



CABLE/VIDEO / CABLE WI-FI

WiFiForward Presses for 5 GHz



NEWS ANALYSIS
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Independent
Technology Editor
3/7/2014

Just three weeks ago, that cable, retail, and consumer electronics companies put aside their competitive differences and joined together to form the WiFiForward coalition. The new group has one primary goal: to make it easier to use unlicensed spectrum for the steadily growing deployments of WiFi in the US. (See Rival MSOs, Tech Rivals Unite on WiFi.)

On Friday morning, the coalition put a finer point on that mission with its inaugural event in Washington. The group's breakfast session, entitled, "WiFi in the 5 GHz Fast Lane," focused on the economic benefits of unlicensed spectrum, and specifically on the arguments for opening up new parts of the 5-gigahertz spectrum band to WiFi use.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel headlined the WiFiForward event with her take on the importance of WiFi. "WiFi is an essential on-ramp to the Internet," said Rosenworcel. "But more than that, nearly one-half of wireless data connections are now offloaded onto unlicensed spectrum."

Rosenworcel argued that in addition to looking at the 5.35-5.47 GHz and 5.85-5.925 GHz frequency bands, the FCC should allow the expansion of WiFi into the frequency band between 5.15 and 5.25 GHz. She cited a letter from the US Department of Defense last summer, which said that it no longer needed the lower frequency band for telemetry use and that the spectrum could be re-allocated for WiFi.

"We should seize this opportunity right now," said Rosenworcel. "We can take the flexible WiFi rules that have already been the script for an unlicensed success story in the 5.725-5.825 GHz band and expand them to the 5.15-5.25 GHz band. If we do, we could effectively double unlicensed bandwidth in the 5 GHz band overnight."

Raul Katz, an adjunct senior research scholar at the Columbia Institute for Tele-Information and the author of "The Value of Unlicensed Spectrum," also spoke at the WiFiForward event. Katz cited his own research indicating that unlicensed spectrum provided \$222.4 billion in economic value in 2013. He also stated that 68% of wireless traffic is now being conducted over WiFi and noted that in some ways WiFi has become the primary wireless transport mechanism for Internet data, while mobile carrier networks now handle offload traffic.

For cable companies, securing greater WiFi capacity is critical for several reasons. Service providers need more wireless throughput in the home to support wireless video networking and more WiFi outside the home to support public hotspots and the sale of WiFi offload services.

In a final panel discussion at the WiFiForward event, several technology company and association representatives made their own arguments for opening up more unlicensed wireless spectrum. Memorably, Steve Schwartz

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FLASH POLL

With 100G deployments ramping up and work already underway on 1Tbit/s capabilities, is there any need for 400G?

Definitely, 400G will be needed to deal with capacity pressures

Maybe for some, but 400G won't be deployed widely

opening up more unlicensed wireless spectrum. Memorably, Steve Schwartz, representing the International Association of Venue Managers, pointed out that 43% of stadiums and arenas currently offer WiFi to consumers, while another 48% plan to add WiFi to their venues this year. "We simply don't have enough capacity," Schwartz said.

That statement is likely to be a common refrain for the WiFiForward coalition in 2014.

— Mari Silbey, special to [Light Reading](#)

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Argument against

It's hard to think of an argument against expanding the unlicensed spectrum. This would seem to be a development that benefits everyone.

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- maybe for some, but 400G won't be deployed widely
- Probably not, as 100G will give network operators the capacity they need for a long time yet
- Definitely not - the next natural step will be from 100G to 1 Tbit/s, not 400G

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- Targeting Ads in the Multiscreen World: Breakfast @ NCTA Cable Show** April 29, 2014, Los Angeles
- Mobile Network Security Strategies** May 21, 2014, London
- Light Reading's Big Telecom Event** June 17-18, 2014, Chicago, IL
- Light Reading's Leading Lights Awards 2014** June 17, 2014, Chicago, IL
- NFV & the Data Center - Website Coming Soon!** September 11, 2014, Santa Clara
- Cable's Mobile Maneuvers: Breakfast @ SCTE - Website Coming Soon!** September 23, 2014, Denver
- Virtualization, Big Data and the OSS Revolution - Website Coming Soon!** October 1, 2014, London
- Backhaul Strategies for Mobile Operators - Website Coming Soon!** October 29, 2014, TBD
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- The Future of Cable Business Services - Website Coming Soon!** December 2, 2014, New York City
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APP	2013	2013	2014	2014
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NET MOBILE APP	100%	100%	100%	100%
NET MOBILE APP	100%	100%	100%	100%
NET MOBILE APP	100%	100%	100%	100%

WiFi Data Offloading Soars in 2013

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