Mobile World Congress Americas

By: Susana Schwartz

In the MWC Americas pre-show article last month, *Pipeline* spoke to GSMA about its goals in partnering with CTIA to deliver a quality event in the Americas. The event ran from September 12-14 in San Francisco, and there were positives and negatives for this inaugural show. In the pre-event interview, the GSMA reported to *Pipeline* it was "on track" to reach their anticipated 30,000 in attendance; yet the actual show attendance was nearly 30 percent less than expected according to the official GSMA numbers. It is also unclear whether the final, reported number represents actual number of attendees or included those that registered but did not attend. *Pipeline* sought clarification, but the GSMA failed to respond.

Participants also seemed reticent to use this event as a platform for major news announcements, which has become standard fare for MWC in Barcelona. But, despite the less-than-anticipated attendance and lack of news, the quality of attendees, keynotes and conference sessions seemed to garner positive feedback in general, and exhibitors seemed to think the overall energy on the floor was quite good. However, the majority of exhibitors to which *Pipeline* spoke cited prescheduled customer meetings and location to be the primary factors to their event success; which may not bode well for MWC Americas as the show moves locations next year. Below we look at some of the event highlights, topics and speakers, and then summarize observations from the show floor including those from *Pipeline*'s own Mark Cummings.

MWC Americas Highlights

The Battle for 5G

The battle for 5G and the opportunities it would open up for operators and vendors in North America were highlighted in keynotes and panel discussions at MWC Americas. Nokia President and CEO Rajeev Suri, in his keynote speech, predicted the United States would experience its second major productivity jump of 30-35 percent in the years of 2028-2033, likening it to the boom of the 1950s.

Verizon Wireless' Ronan Dunne, executive vice president and group president, echoed that sentiment, talking of the ways in which 5G would be inducted into an elite group of technologies

known in history to truly transform industries across every sector of the economy, as well as redefining the way people work, elevating living standards and creating sustained impact on global economic growth.

Cristiano Amon, executive vice president and president CDMA at Qualcomm said $12 trillion in goods and services would be realized by 2035 because of the transition to 5G, with mobile being a major pillar of that growth.

And AT&T Business CEO Thaddeus Arroyo talked about how 5G would take people and businesses to new places in terms of apps and the experiences that would be unlocked through virtual presence, augmented reality, autonomous driving, telemedicine and other 5G-driven initiatives. That theme was pushed further in a panel discussion about autonomous cars and vehicles as-a-service, a topic discussed among Uber's Nundu Janakiram, group product lead, Rider Experience; Steve Zipperstein, chief legal officer, Blackberry; General Motors' executive director, Urban Mobility, Peter Kosak; Alex Manea, chief security officer, Blackberry; Cisco Jasper's James Dawson, and Krish Inbarajan, global heads of strategy, Connected Car; and Junting Zhao, investor relations AI Motive.

Autonomous cars would account for just part of the 100 million 5G connections that Mats Granryd, director general of the GSMA and Meredith Attwell Baker CEO and president CTIA, predicted as a possibility.

To reach that goal, the role of the U.S. government in 5G was also debated. Sunil Bharti Mittal, founder and chairman of Bharti Enterprises (and chairman of GSMA) joined Sprint CEO Marcelo Claure to speak of the importance of U.S. government interest at federal, state, and municipal levels to encourage 5G investments. They noted that California has become the primary stage for innovation and noted the "remarkable turnaround" in what was once a weak ecosystem now rich with collaboration and innovation not only on the West Coast but in Boston and other clusters of transformation taking place across the United States.

FCC Chairman, Ajit Pai, talked about mobile operators' role in aiding Irma and Harvey victims—with wireless communications networks becoming more resilient than they were in the era of Hurricane Sandy. He noted that only five percent of cell cites were down in Harvey as opposed to 25 percent during Sandy. He also talked of Net Neutrality, stating that the FCC was actively examining the many comments it received about Internet regulations. He said the FCC was looking at how to encourage greater deployments and bring digital innovation to more people through construction and expansion of next-gen networks.

The importance of government support also came up in a keynote by Carlos Slim Domit, chairman of American Movil. He spoke about next-gen networks in Latin America, and the transformation fostered by moving to 4.5 G this year, and to SDN, virtualization and cloud-based solutions, as well as narrowband for IoT through 5G.

Mobile and Collaborative Ecosystems

Mobile was another pillar of most keynotes, as with Paypal CEO and President Dan Schulman, who said mobile would redefine the entire digital commerce and retail experience from discovery through to purchasing and delivery. Gina Bianchini, founder and CEO of Mighty Networks, said compelling interest around medical conditions, new professions, and emerging opportunities would soon compel people to leave the one-size-fits-all platforms like Facebook or Google to seize and engage through new apps and platforms.

That collaboration was punctuated over and over in talks, as that about "diverse ecosystems" in the 4th Industrial Revolution during which Verizon Wireless' Dunne joined UPS' Juan Perez CIO and engineering officer; Nokia's Rajeev Suri, President and CEO; and AT&T's Arroyo to discuss how collaboration would drive innovation, as did ZTE CEO Cheng Lixin in a separate keynote.

Further highlighting the importance of China-United States relations, AT&T Global Connection Management's Bill Hague and China Unicom's Vice President Zhigang Han talked about 5G development and collaboration through ecosystems.

That focus on ecosystems was also a strong thread in a panel comprised of Qualcomm's Amon, Paypal's Schulman, along with Mitchell Baker, executive chairwoman of Mozilla Foundation and Gina Bianchini, Founder and CEO of Mighty Networks.

Customer Experience

Facebook's Anand Chandrasekaran, a former Yahoo Inc., Snapdeal and Bharti Airtel Ltd. executive, talked about how existing platforms would evolve in the democratization of technology. He also joined a panel discussion about how virtual assistants and chatbots would impact consumer experience in the IoT. Also involved were Google's Jason Douglas, product management director for Actions on Google, as well as Rob High, vice president and CTO for IBM Watson, and Dr. Ashwin Ram of Amazon's AI arm, along with Robin Wheeler, director of sales at Twitter.

Customer experience was also prevalent in content-and-media discussions, as that held by San Francisco 49ers President Al Guido and Unity CEO John Ricciteiello, who joined Essential's President and COO Niccolo De Masi, Lauren Kunze CEO and co-founder PandoraBots and Amanda Kahlow, founder and chief security officer, 6Sense. They talked about the importance of "customer engagement" in content and advertising, with location-based services, user experience, content and media dominating conversations as that between Univision's Matt Kaplan, senior vice president, Digital Ad Sales, and Conde Nast's Arlie Sisson, vice president, Emerging Products joined Vivoom CEO and Founder Katherine Hays, and Founder and CEO of Apester Moti Cohen.

A Glance:
Exhibitor and Attendee Feedback

In addition to the keynote juggernauts, panel discussions and conference tracks revolved around "women4tech" policy, content strategies, AI, 5G, AR, VR in entertainment, digital education and sustainability, technology and climate change, FCC regulatory issues, net neutrality, smart cities, video and entertainment in 5G, technology and climate change, drones, among many others.

Below we summarize some of the thoughts from several companies highlighted in our MWC Americas pre-show article to see whether this inaugural GSMA-CTIA event met expectations, and gather their impressions of show. The overall feedback was generally good, but mixed and exhibitors were reluctant to go on the record with negative feedback. Of the positive feedback, most pointed to prearranged meetings and proximity to customers as the primary reason for their positive experience at the show — which may change when the event moves to LA next year.

Sigma Systems exhibited its catalog-driven B/OSS, and demonstrated its Sigma Catalog (enterprise-wide catalog), Configure Price Quote, Order Management, Provisioning, and the recently launched Sigma Insights — a product for intelligent data mining and analytics that provides meaningful insights into the commercial and technical performance of the business. Simon Muderack, executive vice president and chief commercial officer at Sigma stated, "We saw a lot of interest around catalog-driven agile B/OSS and how it can help CSPs and businesses create, sell, and deliver digital products and services. We also had a lot of appointments as the location and access to Silicon Valley players was a draw to customers and partners interested in how the future of communications will take shape."

Nokia showcased the technologies that connect the world through innovation, software, and a universe of expertise in IoT revenue models, software-defined business through the Cloud, ultra broadband (UBB), digital health, virtual reality, among other things. According to Jimmy Mathai, head of Customer Marketing and Communications at Nokia and board member of Tech Titans, "We did not come here expecting this to be Barcelona, but rather a big regional event, important to us because of the innovation taking place in California and the proximity of the show to Canada and Mexico, which makes it logistically easy for customers and partners to travel. But we found that even our customers in China and Japan wanted to travel here as well; after all, this is the backyard of Silicon Valley, with Nokia Bell Labs right here and high-tech all around. So we consider this a great venue to see how technology is evolving."

Mathai further explained, "the showroom has been packed, with booths in the North, South, and West Halls very busy after the keynotes. And we have had a lot of traffic at our booth. In fact, we have achieved 80-90 percent of the target for booth tours and demos. Additionally, almost every one of our pre-scheduled meetings with CSPs and enterprises took place. Our President and CEO Rajeev Suri spoke in a keynote about the Fourth Industrial Revolution, highlighting that interest in 5G is accelerating, with deployments planned in 2019. He also talked about the importance of IoT ecosystems and how we are getting closer to live launches for 5G. His talk definitely drove traffic to our booth."

CSG International showcased its Ascendon digital services platform as well as Ascendon IoT, and [a partnership it announced at the show](#) with Arrow Electronics, to monetize the IoT through cloud-based SaaS for IoT providers. CSG is launching a new division for IoT connected health, automotive, manufacturing, agriculture and others to be monetized through an AWS-based platform. "This has been very surprising, as I was here eight years ago and it wasn't good, but now you walk around and the movers-and-shakes of the tech world are all around in the halls and conference sessions. I just saw Carlos Slim Domit and the ex-CEO of HP walking around. There's a really good mix of ecosystem stakeholders here," said Ian Watterson, CSG's president of Americas and Asia-Pacific.

"It's about time, as there was a huge need for a show in North America with the growing interest in IoT, which will require that everything be connected from cars to refrigerators, representing growth for the industry. So that's why Arrow, which wouldn't have been at a show like this in the past, is here with us. Where the North American market was saturated in terms of new initiatives, the faster networks and IoT is driving renewed interest."

"We do see that the Apple iPhone announcement raised the bar in terms of what people were talking about, and there were people that went to see that one day and then back here afterward."

[The Apple iPhone X announcement](#) was very conspicuously absent from MWC Americas. Instead Apple held a separate event at the Steve Jobs Theater which may have also contributed to the decline in expected attendance.

The MulteFire Alliance met with individuals interested in learning more about the MulteFire technology roadmap, and its recent Release 1.0.1 and the upcoming Release 1.1, as well as membership with the Alliance.

"Traffic has actually been quite good. The show seems to be well attended and the audience is really interested in learning about our ability to allow anyone to deploy and operate their own private network in unlicensed or shared spectrum," stated Mazen Chmaytelli, president of MulteFire. "We have had excellent attendance at our pre-arranged meetings, particularly those for potential members. Although this is the first year for MWCA, the attendance was positive and grown from CTIA in previous years. That level of interest in the industry is very nice to see.

With all that said, the growing pains were evident with logistical challenges getting things set up. The separated halls and spaces have also been a bit of a challenge, but we are looking forward to a new venue next year as well as potentially a more prominently located booth. "

Mark Cumming of *Pipeline* reported, "In terms of aesthetics, it appeared the show was dressed to look bigger than it was, with extra-wide aisles and enormous booths. The Moscone was also under construction, which made it difficult to navigate at times. On the upside, there was an area set up for start-up companies that had a lot of energy. I thought that was a good idea, as some shows stick the smaller companies in a corner.

I did think the press presence ended up being smaller than anticipated, as the Apple announcement probably sucked some oxygen out, along with the hurricanes and travel issues. I also noticed a dearth of press releases and announcement coming out of the show, but perhaps next year, that aspect will grow if companies feel this show proved substantial enough to get the attention needed.

Lastly, I think the move to Los Angeles caught some off guard. Moving it away from Silicon Valley might be a mistake, as the innovation most are talking about is right here. But, maybe [LA] is close enough that it won't matter."