Pipeline's Red-Carpet Night: 2013 Innovation Awards

By Tim Young

Last month, on a particularly lovely day on the French Riviera, Pipeline had the occasion to recognize some of the most innovative companies working in the communications and entertainment technology (COMET) industry. As yachts motored by and vacationers and locals meandered through the streets of quaint Beaulieu-sur-Mer, just a few miles from Nice, we were honored to host a gala reception to present the 2013 COMET Innovation Awards.

The awards ceremony, scheduled to coincide with the annual Management World event, took place at Les Salons de la Rotonde Lenôtre, a stunning, sun-filled venue constructed in the Belle Epoque as the restaurant of the adjacent Bristol Hotel, once a favorite haunt of Europe's upper crust.

[The incredible view from the terrace of Les Salons de la Rotonde Lenôtre]

But on the evening of May 13 it was the communications information technology (CommIT) elite who sipped champagne on the terrace of this historic building, enjoying the seaside view and an opportunity to hear the results of Pipeline's comprehensive awards process. A large number of the event's attendees represented companies that were finalists for Innovation Awards, which recognize the most innovative and compelling solutions for helping communications service providers (CSPs) deliver better services more reliably and more profitably.

Competition was particularly fierce this year. Pipeline received more than 130 nominations from 75 companies, and the high quality of each nomination made the task of selecting finalists particularly difficult. Fortunately, we once again assembled a crack team of external judges comprised of industry experts who could draw on their wealth of collective experience to evaluate the nominations fairly and thoroughly.

This year's judging panel included:

- **Jason Cook**, CTO of BT Americas

- **David Lindsay III**, chief architect, BT Global Services

- **Juggy Sihota**, vice president of client experience strategy and development at Telus

- **Carol Borghesi,** founder and principal of Customers First Culture and former senior vice president at Telus

- **Debra Osswald**, research vice president of CSP operations at IDC

- **Mark Mortensen**, principal analyst at Analysys Mason

- **Shira Levine Enstrom**, directing analyst for service enablement and subscriber intelligence at Infonetics Research

- **Craig Clausen**, executive vice president and principal analyst at New Paradigm Resources Group

- **Nancee Ruzicka**, president of ICT Intuition

- **Jeffrey Mitchell**, executive architect of OSS at Tech Mahindra and former senior principal engineer of OSS for Intelsat, Sprint and others

A formidable collection of analysts and service providers, this judging panel combed through extensive nomination forms and supporting documentation to determine the top vendor solutions in a number of key areas. Some submissions were over 50 pages in length and leveraged many megabytes of multimedia information to support the submission. Once their submission packages were assembled and submitted to the esteemed judges panel, the names of our winners emerged; some award recipients were chosen nearly unanimously, while others were determined by a single vote. But regardless of the voting margins, the competition was tremendous, and the judges faced tough decisions from beginning to end.

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[Guests enjoy champagne on the terrace of Les Salons de la Rotonde Lenôtre]

"This second year for me was even more impressive in terms of nominations," said Carol Borghesi, one of several judges who also served on Pipeline's 2012 panel. "I was particularly struck by the focus on customer experience that ran as a golden thread throughout all of the submissions."

[Attendees of the 2013 COMET Awards enjoyed networking with industry analysts, service provider executives, and members of the press]

Over the course of a top-notch evening featuring a jazz quartet and multiple courses of cuisine that, with apologies, reminded us we most certainly weren't in Dublin anymore, our winners and runners-up made their way to the center of the rotunda to be presented with their Innovation Awards by Pipeline publisher Paula Zimmerman.

Here are the vendors who took home trophies from Beaulieu-sur-Mer:

- Product Innovation: **Tribold**
  (runner-up: Tekelec)

- Innovation in Connectivity: **Comarch**
  (runner-up: Orga Systems)

- Technical Innovation: **Cycle30**
  (runner-up: Aepona)

- Innovation in CEM: **Comptel**

(runner-up: Orga Systems)

- Innovation in Cloud and Virtualization: **Microsoft**
  (runner-up: Nokia Siemens Networks)

- Innovation in Big Data and Analytics: **Ontology Systems**
  (runner-up: Subex)

- Content Innovation: **CSG International**
  (runner-up: Nokia Siemens Networks)

- Innovation in Networking: **InfoVista**
  (runner-up: Infinera)

- Innovation in Security and Assurance: **ISC8**
  (runner-up: Nokia Siemens Networks)

- Innovative Collaborations: **Nakina Systems and Türk Telekom**
  (runner-up: Tribold and Sigma Systems)

- Innovative Deployment: **Tribold and BSkyB**
  (runner-up: EXFO)

- Editors' Choice: **Nokia Siemens Networks**
  (runner-up: Oracle)

- Vendor of the Year: **Orga Systems**
  (runner-up: Tekelec)

Vendors weren't the only winners at this year's event. During last year's awards process, Pipeline received comments from a number of service providers who served on the judging panel who said that while it was all well and good to recognize innovative excellence among solution vendors, they wanted an opportunity to compete as well. To accommodate their request Pipeline created a separate competition track for CSPs in select categories and this year's CSP winners were:

- Product Innovation: **NTT Docomo**
  (runner-up: AT&T)

- Innovation in Connectivity: **Sprint**
  (runner-up: Tata Communications)

- Technical Innovation: **Telefónica**
  (runner-up: AT&T)

- Innovation in CEM: **AT&T**
  (runner-up: Virgin Mobile)

- Content Innovation: **Comcast**
  (runner-up: AT&T)

- Innovation in Networking: **AT&T**
  (runner-up: Global Capacity)

- Innovative Collaborations: **AT&T Foundry**
  (runner-up: Sprint Velocity)

- Provider of the Year: **AT&T**
  (runner-up: SK Telecom)

[Pipeline's Paula Zimmerman with Joe Martin of Sprint, CSP winner for Innovation in Connectivity]

[And the winners are…]
(Picture courtesy of Sergio Pellizzari,Nakina Systems)

With its raft of wins, AT&T demonstrated yet again that it's not your grandfather's Ma Bell, and was among a number of major tier 1 operators offering proof that innovation isn't just a game for tiny companies with nothing to lose. In an era of changing consumer demand and increasing technical possibilities, every company must look for ways to be more agile and enable new and different approaches to the problems they face.

For at least some award recipients, the COMET trophy was a source of validation for their chosen strategies. "This award shows that we are following the right path," said Zekeriya Erkan, manager of operations management systems for Türk Telekom. "Both Nakina and Türk Telekom worked together in a collaborative way. This award also proves the success that is a result of collaboration and a partnership based on trust."

The judges and other attendees also rated the awards ceremony as a resounding success. "I can truly say I have never experienced a more professionally done event," said David Lindsay III of BT Global Services. "The opportunity to

gather with people across many types of providers within our industry and speak with them about innovation, trends they are seeing in the market and general business was an absolute once-in-a-lifetime event."

Now that the music has ended and the taste of chocolate mousse and raspberry sorbet has (tragically) faded away, what resonates with me and the rest of the Pipeline editorial staff, not to mention our esteemed judging panel, is the technical acumen, pioneering spirit and keen market awareness demonstrated by each and every one of our winners and runners-up. These vendors and CSPs are empowering the modern age of communications and entertainment technology, which in turn is providing services to end users around the world that allow them to work, live, share and communicate in new places and new ways.

As Pipeline looks forward to next year's Innovation Awards, we're excited about the technological advances we'll encounter and the lessons we'll learn from every nomination that's evaluated. I anticipate that we'll all face even tougher decisions than we did this year, but the truth is that nothing would please us more.

We aren't the only ones looking forward to next year. "I hope I have the opportunity in the future to attend this event again," said Lindsay, "to meet again with the familiar faces from this year's event" as well as "new faces from future years' events."

Congratulations to all of our award recipients, and we'll see you on the red carpet in 2014.