AT&T's John Donovan Talks LTE-A, 700 MHz Interoperability

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AT&T's LTE-Advanced upgrade is ready to go, making faster speeds and capacity that come with network features like carrier aggregation a reality in the near future.

"Our LTE-Advanced is now ready and so what that means for us is that our network is now ready to do carrier aggregation, which is the capability to take spectrum that is not contiguous and have that operated as if it were contiguous block of spectrum," said AT&T's John Donovan, Senior Executive Vice President of AT&T Technology and Network Operations during the Bank of America Merrill Lynch Media, Communications & Entertainment Conference Wednesday.

Dononvan also said that other features like self-optimizing network capabilities and a higher-order MiMo, at both the antenna and the tower levels, are in the pipeline.

Donovan declined to comment on when the carrier would have handsets capable of supporting LTE-Advanced.

According to Donovan, AT&T now has nearly 240 million people covered with LTE across 400 markets.

As AT&T pushes its "most reliable" network message recently it has had to endure push back from T-Mobile's uncarrier drive. Donovan said that AT&T has made a concerted effort to get its employee base "load and proud" about what they do. But Donovan also admitted that even as AT&T improves its network there has been a "lag in perception" on the consumer side.

When asked about last week's deal to commit to interoperability in the lower 700 MHz A Block, which AT&T had resisted, Donovan contended it wasn't a matter of the company changing its mind.

"We solved the problem, and so we broke through with an innovation," Donovan said. "That was a vital breakthrough and that was great work by the partners at Qualcomm and you know our technical teams and our infrastructure guys with Ericsson and ALU to come up with a solution that was not a political compromise, but it made political compromise possible because we have the technology that afford us to do."

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