Sprint Network Exec Azzi Retiring, Saw Named New Network Chief

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Sprint is bidding farewell to Bob Azzi, senior vice president of networks. Azzi will be leaving March 14, according to Reuters [1], after 26 years with the company.

A Sprint spokeswoman confirmed to Wireless Week that Steve Elfman, president of network operations at Sprint, will also be leaving this year and that former Clearwire CTO John Saw has been named Sprint's new chief network officer.

"Bob Azzi and Sprint reached a mutual understanding and Bob will be leaving. He is very actively engaged with the team to ensure a smooth transition of responsibility and we wish him well," Sprint said in a statement. Sprint does not historically comment on personnel moves and declined to share any further details.

The change to the networks team comes as Sprint pushed toward completing its Network Vision initiative, which aims to overhaul its legacy network infrastructure.

Sprint now covers 200 million people with its LTE network and its tri-band LTE initiative, Sprint Spark [2], recently expanded to Philadelphia and Baltimore to bring its market total to 14. But the scope of the rebuild has negatively impacted the carrier’s business.

“The intense network replacement phase we’re in is affecting customer satisfaction,” Sprint CEO Dan Hesse said during a recent earnings call, addressing high customer churn and the hiccups in a complete “rip and replace” network overhaul.

Last year saw Sprint decommission its Nextel iDEN network in order to free up its 800 MHz airwaves for LTE deployment. In addition, Sprint closed its acquisition of Clearwire and gained access to the company’s large 2.5 GHz spectrum holdings. Sprint expects to cover 100 million customers with 2.5 GHz LTE by the end of 2014.

Sprint’s new deployments join the ongoing efforts in 1.9 GHz. The carrier’s three LTE bands combined will apparently offered 50-60 Mbps downlink speeds in Sprint Spark markets. The carrier has said it plans to bring Spark to 100 markets over the next three years.

Sprint added 58,000 postpaid subscribers [3] during its fourth quarter, a marked improvement over the 360,000 postpaid losses in the previous quarter and the near-one million lost in the quarter before that.

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