

Sprint's Son Pledges Spark Access, Financial Support for Rural Carriers

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SAN ANTONIO - Masayoshi Son made a pledge to put SoftBank's and Sprint's scale and assets, including access to Sprint's Spark 2.5 GHz network, behind rural carriers.

Speaking Thursday at the CCA Global Expo, the SoftBank CEO/Sprint Chairman talked about the need for teamwork between Sprint and the carrier members of the CCA in order to take a "real fight" to the AT&T and Verizon "duopoly." And he had the GSMA Intelligence numbers to back up his doubt.

Son pointed to 2008, when AT&T and Verizon controlled 56 percent of U.S. postpaid subscriber share and then marveled at the how the same carriers now take home 73 percent of the market.

"All of these 100 companies are being pushed out by these top two companies," Son said, referring to the CCA membership. "So what happens in the next five years?"

Son talked about the "rural situation," which he broke down as a need for LTE and a need for compatible devices. He pointed out the huge gap between the number of LTE devices in the portfolios of the big two as compared with everyone else.

He showed an overlay map, combining Sprint's EV-DO coverage with the collective coverage of CCA carriers minus T-Mobile.

"This is a complete network," Son said.

His map was a visual companion to the news Sprint revealed yesterday about its newly formed partnership with CCA and the NetAmerica Alliance. That program will see Sprint put its network, infrastructure and spectrum toward helping rural carriers build out LTE networks. Sprint will also make LTE devices more readily available for those carriers and make its nationwide LTE network available for roaming. In return, Sprint LTE customers will be able to freely roam on all these new LTE networks, effectively filling in the holes in Sprint's LTE footprint.

Son elaborated on the offer with a series of promises for CCA members in the audience. In addition to pledging access to "new technology," namely Sprint Spark 2.5 GHz that promises around 200 Mbps speeds, Son promised SoftBank would be able to provide financial support for smaller carriers' LTE aspirations.

"I would like to make a strong commitment, as the chairman of Sprint, to make this happen," Son said. "Theory is becoming reality."

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Son again criticized the state of wireless in the U.S., praising the country to pioneering but scolding it for not being fast enough and not reaching far enough.

Briefly speaking of his own upbringing and his rise from humble beginnings, Son emphasized the social importance of ensuring a level playing field for the future exists in all corners of the country.

“Even if you are not born in a metropolitan area,” Son said, “All our kids deserve equal opportunity. Let’s fight back.”

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