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# Seismic Changes

A few years ago, fiber to the home was a “gimmick.” Now, everybody wants to get into the act.

**A**s the fiber-to-the-home industry gathers in Anaheim for FTTH Connect, it’s worth noting the seismic changes taking place in FTTH today.

The “Game of Gigs” that Google Fiber sparked continues to heat up. A provider’s ability to deliver gigabit Internet access offers assurance even to customers that don’t yet need that access. Recently, a TDS Telecom executive said that company’s gigabit speed tier gives it “credibility that’s difficult for other competitors to match” and noted that the gigabit’s halo effect increased take rates for other tiers as well.

The overlapping territories of telephone companies, cable companies and competitive providers have spurred nearly all large providers – and many small ones – to offer broadband speeds unheard of a few years ago. Or, as FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler would put it, “Competition, competition, competition.” (See p. 46.) Companies that once poooh-pooohed fiber to the home as gimmicky and unnecessary have changed their tunes.

Perhaps this competitive leapfrogging should be renamed the “Game of 2Gigs.” In an astonishing move, Comcast announced in April that it would make symmetrical 2 Gbps service available to 18 million U.S. homes by the end of this year – an FTTH rollout nearly as large as Verizon FiOS, accomplished in far less time (thanks to Comcast’s prior rollout of fiber to businesses). As of press time, pricing for the 2 Gbps tier was not yet available. Speculation is the initial price will be so high that few households will adopt the service; however, prices can change.

Comcast’s Gigabit Pro deployment is a reminder that FTTH technology is moving forward at a rapid clip. Vendors introduced early versions of 10 Gbps PON several years ago, but these products gained little traction in the marketplace. With more economical and powerful versions of 10G technology entering the market today, multiple-gigabit services should become commonplace.

**THOSE LEFT BEHIND**

Gigabit providers – at least the larger companies – seem to choose many of the same locations. For example, Google Fiber, AT&T and Comcast all plan to offer gigabit services in Atlanta. Is there any hope for less-favored regions?

Fortunately, not all FTTH news concerns giant companies and flourishing cities. Localities at the bottom of the list are taking steps to build broadband themselves or partner with providers. Nontraditional companies are showing a willingness to invest in fiber to the home. New types of financing are being developed.

Would you have expected to see these quotes a year ago?

*“I think we’re at the beginning of a 10- to 15-year fiberization.”*

– Elliot Noss, Tucows

*“There is a huge demand for long-life infrastructure investments.”*

– Nick Hann, Macquarie Capital

See the article on p. 50 for more details. ♦

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