

Innovators earn CIA awards

By Dan O'Shea

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As co-founder of broadband wireless company Towerstream, Jeff Thompson has every right to consider himself an innovator. But shortly after he accepted a Communications Innovators Award for Most Innovative Deployment of Broadband Wireless on behalf of Towerstream at a spring leadership forum co-hosted by New Paradigm Resources Group and Telephony, Thompson demurred from taking too much credit.

At the event held during NXTcomm, Thompson (pictured top right) participated in a post-awards panel with executives from the three other CIA award winners: AT&T, Verizon and Yipes. At one point, he turned to his fellow panelists and said: "I think we're kidding ourselves if we claim to be the real innovators of this industry. I don't think any of us know what the Internet will show us next. We're all old men up here on this panel, and the people creating and influencing the next generation of applications are college kids right now."

Kamran Sistanizadeh, co-founder and chief technology officer of Yipes, which won for Most Innovative Carrier Ethernet Service (Pure Play), agreed. "There is no technology for its own sake," he said. "It only becomes useful if able to solve a problem for someone."

Besides Towerstream and Yipes, other CIAs went to AT&T, which received the award for Most Innovative Carrier Ethernet Service (Diversified), and Verizon, which netted Most Innovative Broadband Access Package.

The awards program and networking reception at Chicago's Mid-America Club featured discussion about some of the risks inherent in being an innovator. Paul Tassinari, vice president of national engineering for Verizon's FiOS project (pictured bottom right), said: "The nature of the new form of broadband access is that there are so many pieces beyond getting the [operations support systems/business support systems] right and everything else. There's a such a huge amount of work that goes into launching that very first customer."

That attention to detail paid off. Verizon received its award the same week Chairman and CEO Ivan Seidenberg announced during NXTcomm that the company had signed up its one-millionth FiOS Internet customer and had signed up more than 500,000 FiOS TV customers.

"Network investment pushes the whole industry forward by fueling innovation in consumer electronics, equipment, content and software," Seidenberg said during his keynote speech at the show. "It also generates economic benefits far beyond our industry by transforming the way business gets done — squeezing out costs, speeding up time and connecting millions of people around the globe to the opportunities of the information economy."

NPRG WINNERS

Most Innovative Deployment of Broadband Wireless

— Towerstream

Most Innovative Carrier Ethernet Service (Pure Play)

— Yipes

Most Innovative Carrier Ethernet Service (Diversified)

— AT&T

Most Innovative Broadband Access Package

— Verizon