

IBM, Cisco soft launch IPTV in Europe



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IBM and Cisco Systems have "soft launched" an IPTV (Internet Protocol TV) with HD, video on demand, and other capabilities at a demonstration center at the IBM Industrial Solutions Center in La Gaude, outside Nice, France.

The demo facility, aimed at telecommunications and cable TV operators and other network operators, such as municipal fiber networks and power utilities, was opened Monday, ahead of Cisco's European-wide networkers event in Cannes.

Olli Patja, an IBM Finland executive, described the modular IPTV offering during an unscheduled presentation at an all-day event for IBM and Cisco customers from the Nordic region and Baltic States.

The package from IBM and Cisco will consist of six modules: the "head end" feeding digital TV and HDTV satellite signals into the network supplied by Cisco subsidiary Scientific-Atlanta; "conditional access" provided by Verimatrix and IBM; video on demand by Kasenna and IBM; the "core network" by Cisco; the "metro" (citywide or district-wide) network by Cisco, and the access or "last mile" DSL or fiber to the home from Cisco.

The IPTV package will be officially launched in March, so IBM and Cisco officials were reluctant to be quoted by name regarding details. However, Henning Glegg-Sorensen, manager of IBM's Nordic Network Services said it would be fair to describe the opening of the demo facility as comparable to the distribution of beta software to testers and selected customers.

The IPTV package, which can be integrated piecemeal with some existing cable and IPTV services, is aimed as an end-to-end product at operators who are upgrading or switching their networks to IP-based platforms. "This can be a major revenue source resulting from such an upgrade if you can deliver HDTV to households who are buying ever-cheaper flat TVs that are HD ready and capable," said one IBM executive.

The demo center, when fully functional, will show how the package works during normal operations and under various sets of extraordinary conditions of concern to potential customers, such as fiber breaks, network congestion, and various critical equipment and software failures.

IBM and Cisco representatives said reliability will be a key selling point as a study in Norway showed that breaks in cable TV broadcasts generated heavy complaint traffic to call centers much faster than electric power failures or interruptions of Internet service.

The IPTV package to be presented in March is not the first time IBM has been involved in IPTV in Europe. In 2005, local IBM officials in Latvia together with Ericsson presented an IPTV offering at about the time the incumbent national telco Latttelecom was examining IPTV. Latttelecom later launched its own service based on Microsoft software and a high-speed ADSL2+ network.

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