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## Consolidated, Ruckus take the wires out of IPTV

By Sarah Reedy

*ILEC takes away in-home wiring by upgrading customers to Ruckus' beamformed WiFi-enabled IPTV*

Part 1 of 2.

Independent telco Consolidated Communications ([NASDAQ: CNSL](http://www.google.com/finance?q=NASDAQ%3ACNSL)) is among the first IPTV providers to remove the wires from its digital TV service through a partnership with WiFi vendor Ruckus Wireless. The incumbent local exchange carrier (ILEC) [announced today](http://www.reuters.com/article/pressRelease/idUS127140+08-Sep-2009+PRN20090908) it is deploying Ruckus' multimedia system Smart WiFi (<http://telephonyonline.com/iptv/news/80211n-upgrades-0225/index.html>) as its in-home connectivity standard, bringing IPTV sans the Ethernet line to its subscriber base.

Consolidated is offering the Ruckus MediaFlex gear to its new subscribers as a standard – and free – part of its digital video service. The twelfth-largest ILEC, which serves customers in Illinois, Texas and Pennsylvania, is one of the first broadband providers to offer the service in the US. Ruckus already [works with regional provider Pioneer Telephone](http://www.ruckuswireless.com/casestudies/pioneer) for Smart WiFi, but otherwise [most of its business has been abroad](http://telephonyonline.com/iptv/technology/portugal_sonaecom_ipvt_040407/index.html) with operators serving smaller regions. Ruckus, which makes [WiFi hotspot technologies for both indoor and outdoor deployments](http://telephonyonline.com/iptv/news/80211n-upgrades-0225/index.html) (<http://telephonyonline.com/iptv/news/80211n-upgrades-0225/index.html>), has shipped more than 1.5 million WiFi units to carriers across the globe since commercializing its Smart WiFi technology in 2005.

Broadband operators in the US have looked at WiFi in the past, but have largely dismissed it for IPTV services. As a technology, WiFi has a history of being unstable and subject to interference. Simply closing a door can interrupt the WiFi connection, so navigating around all the furniture, mirrors, doors, cordless phones and other interference-causing objects in the home made it undesirable for a service that requires a constant connection, said Ruckus Wireless vice president of marketing David Callisch.

"WiFi has been phenomenally lousy for any kind of in-home significant useful services," Callisch said. "Carriers up until this point had a bad taste in their mouth relative to WiFi. They had tried to deploy it in different applications and found it to be highly unreliable, since it really wasn't designed to deliver a constant flow of traffic without packet errors."

For this reason, Ruckus had a hard time convincing carriers that its system would be any different. It has taken the last 12 to 18 months to just prove its validity, Callisch said, but once they did, it became useful for both the carrier and subscriber. According to Callisch, Ruckus' patented beamforming technology quadruples the range of WiFi signals by focusing them only where they are needed. The Smart WiFi technology automatically steers the signals around any obstacles in the home. When interference is detected, the WiFi signal continuously reroutes to find the best path. Even if consumers move their TV or add a new couch, for example, the system can adapt to the environment and support real-time, delay-sensitive applications like streaming digital video, Callisch said.

"It is like holding a flashlight in the hand in the dark room," Callisch said. "If you have a flashlight in hand, it's focused where you are pointing it. If someone walks in front of that light, I can point it in a different direction. I do this all automatically in my box. They call it beamforming, making the signal go where it needs to go. As a result, if we start to see errors, we can literally steer it in real time."

Until now, IPTV installations consisting of wiring or rewiring customers' homes with Ethernet cabling took between three and six hours. Using Ruckus' Smart WiFi system allows Consolidated to significantly [reduce its install time](http://telephonyonline.com/iptv/news/iptv-operators-slow-0327/index.html) by as much as half, as well as the costs associated with traditional cabling, said J.J. Hollie, product manager for Digital Video Services at Consolidated. He estimated that it has saved the

company between \$150 and \$300 per install. It also gives the customer flexibility to put their TV sets wherever they choose, without worrying about range or reliability.

Consolidated has been deploying Ruckus units for about the past month in its own offices and the homes of its customers. Thus far, Hollie said there have been no problems with the signal outside of slight interference issues with cordless phones that Ruckus has overcome through frequency hopping. He said the company has also seen an increase in its sales and the number of installations it has done as a result of going wireless.

"That was the key for us to use Ruckus – that we no longer have to get that CAT5 wire from the wire closet to the router to each TV," Hollie said. "All we have to do is get that wireless signal from that Ruckus base unit and transmit that to wherever the TV might be. It really opens it up to where we might have to be – the TV in a garage or bathroom or non-conventional places you don't have to worry getting a physical wire to."

Consolidated offers three levels of IPTV service including 240 standard and high definition broadcast IPTV channels, as well as advanced features, music channels, on-demand and personalized and local content ([http://telephonyonline.com/independent/news/telecom\\_video\\_gets\\_personal/index.html](http://telephonyonline.com/independent/news/telecom_video_gets_personal/index.html)). The carrier has more than 300,000 access lines across its coverage area to support a triple play of video, digital voice and data services. Consolidated currently has more than 95,000 and 20,000 DSL and IPTV subscribers, respectively.

Next: How wireless IPTV can open up in-home opportunities

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