

Stoke: 'This Is Our Big North American Party'

BY MAISIE RAMSAY

Mobile broadband startup Stoke isn't busting out confetti and paper hats, but its appearance at 4G World marks a big moment for the company.

"This is our big North American party," Stoke marketing executive Dan McBride says. He doesn't mean party in the "blowing out the candles" sense – think more of a debut ball.

Stoke is a bit like a debutant, after all. The company has gone through some major grooming, raising venture capital, fine-tuning its product lineup and making a dramatic first showing through its deal to supply mobile broadband gateways for NTT DoCoMo's LTE network in Japan. Now it's ready for the big time: North America.

This is the second year Stoke has appeared at 4G World; the 2010 show marked the first big event in the company's seven-year existence. Stoke is telling operators that their 4G deployment doesn't have to be a repeat performance of their 3G networks, when they ran into difficulty handling massive increases in data traffic.

"The 3G network experience for mobile operators is recent history and sticks with their memory as the case where it was very difficult to grow and scale the network to meet the demands that were coming from their users," McBride says. "The experience that has been told to us by many operators is these large incumbent vendors were very quick to react with purchase orders and sales orders to put more equipment into the network, but very slow to provide them with the real leverage that they needed to stay ahead of demand."

Stoke's pitch: Our products are fast and nimble enough to outpace established competitors.



Stoke hopes its mobile broadband gateways like this SSX-3000 will catch on with operators.

Incumbent vendors no doubt take umbrage with McBride's characterization of their products. Established equipment providers have long-standing relationships with operators and argue that it's better to stick with a single vendor solution instead of muddling things up with a third-party vendor.

But Stoke thinks it has found a niche and is out to convince operators to shake up the product mix in their networks with best-in-class equipment from a relative newcomer.

"There's a renewed interest in looking for innovation, in finding avenues to allow innovative companies to gain access and prove their new approach to solving problems that weren't there before," McBride says. "That's what we think our chance is."

Stoke has not publically announced any customers since its high-profile win with NTT DoCoMo, but that's not because it doesn't have any. Michael Homeier, vice president of product management, says Stoke has "more than 10, a little bit less than 20" top-tier operator customers, though "a majority of those aren't in commercial deployment yet."

Stoke hopes to use the conference to lure in potential customers. One of the products it is showing off is its new LTE security exchange solution, which it claims is capable of encrypting the evolved packet core without sacrificing performance, thanks to 40 Gbps of throughput. ●