ISSUE 10 | VOL 3-20 | 2020

Alexicon insider

INFORMATION AND ADVOCACY FOR THE RURAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

Regulatory Headlines

Keep Americans Connected Pledge

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the challenges that many Americans will face in the coming months, FCC Chairman Ajit Pai recently announced the Keep Americans Connected Initiative.

Huawei/ZTE Replacement Funding

The President signed into law the Secure and Trusted Communications Networks Act of 2019 (HR.4998). The legislation authorizes the FCC to spend up to $1 billion in reimbursement funding to help small telecommunications carriers, mostly in rural markets, to replace existing Huawei and ZTE equipment (and associated services) with new equipment that does not pose a risk to the country's national security.

USF Contribution Factor Drops

The FCC's Office of Managing Director (OMD) has released a Public Notice announcing that the proposed Universal Service Fund contribution factor for the second quarter (Q2) of FY2020 will be 19.6%.

COVID-19 Reveals Digital Divide

The president declared a national emergency over the novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, which will provide $50 billion to the states working to accelerate virus screenings and deploy other emergency responses. But the funding may have come too late as concerns over COVID-19 have already injected chaos into American society…

Schools, Hospitals Get Help from FCC

On Wednesday, the Federal Communications Commission temporarily waived rules in a move to foster internet access for hospitals and schools stuck in the broadband gap as the coronavirus pandemic continues to disrupt everyday life.

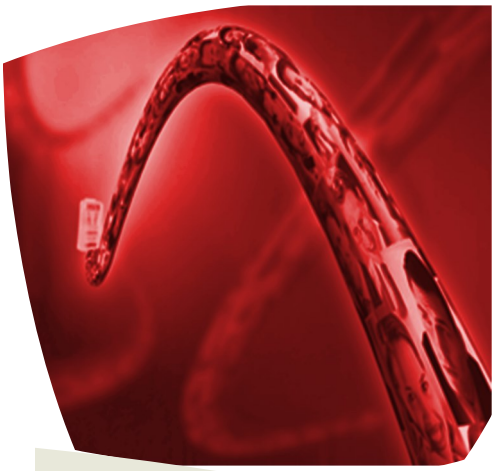
WISPs Catch a Break on CBRS

The FCC took the heat off a lot of smaller fixed wireless service providers when it extended the deadline for certain licensees in the 3650-3700 MHz band to transition their existing 90 operations to the Citizens Broadband Radio Service band standards.

Market Watch

Alexicon

Questions? Comments?
Contact Chris Barron
cbarron@alexicon.net



Technology Trends

New and notable technology and services

Remote Working 101

Even before COVID-19 coronavirus disrupted the planet, remote work had gone from that rare unicorn of workforce arrangements to a standard component of many people's work-week. According to a recent Gallup poll, 43% of employed Americans log at least some out-of-office, on-the-clock time. A full 31% of those who work remotely at least some of the time spend four or five days a week out of the office.

How Cybercriminals Target Company Emails

Even though malware code is always evolving and Emotet has morphed from a banking trojan to weapon that targets many industries, email still remains one of the most popular attack vectors for hackers. Phishing attacks are on the rise, spear phishing is becoming more targeted, and now text messages are turning into spam.

Trickbot Malware Targets Telecoms

A new form of the infamous Trickbot malware is using never-before-seen behaviour in attacks targeting telecommunications providers, universities and financial services in a campaign that looks to be going after intellectual property and financial data. The campaign, which has been active since at least January, has been discovered and detailed by researchers at cybersecurity company Bitdefender who warn that it's likely to still be active. Trickbot has been in operation since 2016 and, while it started life as a banking trojan, the modular nature of the malware means it can be easily re-purposed for other means…

Coronavirus Creates Opening for Hackers

As people disperse to their homes to work and study because of the coronavirus pandemic, taking their laptops and company data with them, cyber security experts say hackers will follow, seeking to take advantage and infiltrate corporations. Government officials in the United States, Britain and elsewhere have issued warnings about the dangers of a newly remote workforce, while tech companies are seeing surges in requests to help secure out-of-office employees.

YouTube, Netflix Reduce Stream Quality

Netflix and YouTube have announced that they would be reducing their quality of streaming in Europe to lessen the strain on the continent's internet capabilities during the coronavirus pandemic. The moves comes after European Union Commissioner Thierry Breton, who oversees the EU internal market, implored streaming services to switch all streams to standard definition in a Wednesday tweet.

In Focus

Draft Robocall Order and FNPRM

The FCC released a draft Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking that would move forward with implementing STIR/SHAKEN on a national level and otherwise proceed with implementing the TRACED Act signed into law on December 31 (see January 3, 2020 Special Bulletin). The main action the FCC proposes to take is to "*Require originating and terminating voice service providers to implement the STIR/SHAKEN caller ID authentication framework in the Internet Protocol (IP) portions of their networks by June 30, 2021, a deadline that is consistent with the TRACED Act, which was recently passed by Congress*." This item will be taken up at the FCC's March 31 Open Meeting.

In the FNPRM, the FCC is poised to request comment on a number of issues, most of which are directly related to mandates contained in the TRACED Act. One that is not contained in the Act, however, is the FCC's proposal to apply the STIR/SHAKEN framework to intermediate providers (or those providers in the call path that do not originate or terminate the traffic).

The FNPRM, if adopted, will provide a deadline extension for implementation of STIR/SHAKEN in the IP portion of networks operated by small and rural carriers (and those relying mainly on TDM-based networks). This extension period would be for one year, and would only apply, at least initially, to the IP portions of the affected carriers' networks.

Also according to the TRACED Act, the FCC is to assess any burden or barriers of implementing the STIR/SHAKEN call authentication protocol on TDM voice providers, and small/rural providers. To this end, the FCC will request comment on, among other things, equipment cost and availability to this class of provider. Finally, the FCC's Wireline Competition Bureau may reevaluate granted extensions in the future to revise or extend as circumstances warrant.

During the pendency of any granted extensions, the FCC is to adopt interim measures to mitigate the adverse effects of Robocalling. These would be, by necessity, solutions workable on non-IP networks, or that could work on hybrid (TDM and IP) systems. In addition, the TRACED Act requires the FCC to address caller ID authentication on non-IP networks, and mandates that providers take "reasonable measures" to implement an effective framework on the non-IP portions of the network.

As expected and as necessary, the FCC is moving forward with implementing congress' mandates contained in the TRACED Act. For many carriers, there could potentially be a reprieve for full STIR/SHAKEN implementation, and, as of now, this would only be on the IP portions of carriers's networks. More work needs to be done to make sure all customers eventually have access to the robocall fighting capabilities promised by STIR/SHAKEN.

Alexicon at Work

Alexicon's consultants are quickly adapting to the working from home process. As noted in the article above "Remote Working 101" there are a number of factors to consider and many tools to assist people to get used to the non-office atmosphere. However, we are still available and are still working on projects as we usually do.

We will be looking into filing limited challenges with the FCC in regards to the RDOF initial eligible areas list—due April 10. We will be in touch if this filing affects your company.

Alexicon

Questions? Comments?
Contact Chris Barron
cbarron@alexicon.net