

Coalition for Carrier Neutrality

Keep the Calls Coming: Grass Roots Campaign Raises the Issue of Network Neutrality

March 9, 2007 will live as a day of infamy within the world of telecommunications. On this date, several major telecom carriers including AT&T, Qwest, and Sprint/Nextel took it decided to intentionally (and illegally) block conference calls that were generated by teleconferencing services such as FreeConferenceCall.com and a host of others. These telecom giants alleged they were losing revenue to a group of small local telecommunications providers in the heartland of America who operated free teleconferencing services in their respective regions.

As customers increasingly experienced outages when using the free teleconferencing services, a grass roots movement around the issue of “network neutrality” emerged. As part of this movement, which involved hearings with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), FreeConferenceCall.com and a coalition of local carriers engaged Springboard Public Relations to spearhead a media relations campaign in April 2007.

The coalition included FreeConferenceCall.com and LEC (Local Exchange Carrier) partners Great Lakes Communication Corp and Farmers’ Telephone Co. of Riceville.

Springboard worked with the group, known as the “Coalition for Carrier Neutrality” to respond to the media frenzy that resulted from the call blocking practice. It helped create a blog that served as the forum for the multitude of non-profits and other organizations affected by the blocking. Customers flocked to the blog to voice their opinion on the network neutrality issue.

As the campaign gained momentum and support, other LECs and conferencing providers joined the effort. The result of the campaign led to high impact newspaper articles including Wall Street Journal (front page), Associated Press (two syndicated features), Los Angeles Times and Des Moines Register. Articles in major business magazines and telephony trade publications included: BusinessWeek, Telephony, Communications Daily, RCR Wireless News and Phone+. The blog community demonstrated its influence with GigaOm breaking the original story in addition to hundreds of others such as ZDNet, TechDirt, and PennPIRG.

In terms of metrics, the campaign generated more than **500** articles and nearly **50 million** reader impressions. The outstanding coverage generated by the campaign soon led to the cessation of the blocking by the major telecom carriers and the beginning of settlement negotiations among the parties.
