



"I Wish For Some Holiday Cheer"

By Bryan Rader ■ *MediaWorks*

This is a great time of year to think about all the presents you want to get for the holidays. New jewelry, new wardrobe, new digital camera, faster computer...oh, how the list begins to grow.

Well, the holiday "wish list" for our industry has grown this year too, and there are many great presents I would like to see us find under our private broadband tree this holiday season. I made my list (and of course checked it twice) to be sure that there was something for everyone. And I'll be sure to leave it out for Santa with milk and cookies (or beer and pizza to get his attention) so we have a shot at getting some of these gifts for our industry this coming year.

My holiday wish list:

1. More capital investment flowing into our industry. Come on Santa, can't you tell the private equity guys and the angel investors about our business model? We have solid penetration rates on our analog and digital cable services, and we are seeing a boom in our broadband business. And these numbers are only growing. Mr. Clause, we'll trade in our Tickle Me Elmo dolls for a little extra capital in the industry next year.

2. More property owners willing to re-try private broadband. Sure, many real estate companies got burned several years ago by working with marginal providers with bad business plans, but most of those companies are gone. Yet, the reputation still lingers. Please Santa, can you throw a little "encouragement" toward the multi-family property owners throughout the country? Tell them that we are a new breed — with better service, better technology, better discipline. Maybe put some of the PCOs on your Christmas Day Parade float and convince reluctant own-

ers to try us again.

3. Quick asset sales of the former PCOs. It would be a wonderful holiday gift if our industry could see some of these old private cable assets change hands and end up with operators who can better manage them, and afford to upgrade these systems. I know, Santa, this is asking a lot (but it's not like we're pushing for a new car). We just want to clean up our image, and improve our standing with property owners. It would be great if you could throw some "acquisition dust" onto many active buyers in our business.

4. New PCOs getting into the business. There are a lot of unserved markets in our industry, Mr. Claus, and we need to provide property owners with an alternative. The ideal gift would be a few, well-positioned, well-targeted and disciplined new private operators starting up next year that excel in customer service and product delivery. Am I asking too much? Eat another cookie Santa...

5. DBS being a true partner to PCOs. This could be a tough gift to pull off Santa (kind of like the dirt bike I wanted when I was eight), but it would truly help a lot of PCOs. The DBS platforms are all excellent products—DirecTV, Dish, HITS, and now VOOOM—and we want to partner with them. Putting together the right delivery vehicle and the right economic model to satisfy all parties would be great.

6. Cheaper digital boxes. Ok Santa, this is sort of like asking for a super-cool helmet to wear on my new dirt bike...but we need cheaper boxes. As more consumers go digital, we are placing a lot of digital set-top boxes on top of customer's TVs, and it can get very expensive (Think about this like it is marking down last year's Buzz Lightyear

toy or Lilo & Stitch DVD). That may make it easier to help us out.

7. Access to more specialized programming. For us to remain unique Santa, we need to have access to more Spanish programming, HD programming and regional sports channels. This is a gift that benefits everyone. Mr. Claus, do you know anybody at Viacom, Disney, or Time-Warner? It might help here if you do. You should, they have put you in enough movies.

8. Fewer computer viruses. Nobody likes to see a sick child (or a sick data subscriber) during the holidays. Especially if it can hurt the private broadband business. Can we get something from you Santa that will block all viruses?

9. Fewer satellite dishes on properties. Many customers are responding to cheap promotions from the Dish companies and illegally installing satellites on properties. Maybe your reindeer can knock down a few on multi-family communities as you travel the globe.

If at least some of these gifts show up under our tree, it will be a very good new year. Of course, these gifts require some work on our industry's part to make them happen. Please don't be a Scrooge; let's enjoy some holiday cheer! Happy New Year. ■

About the Author

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