



# Bill Burhop Leads IMCC Gathering at Summit

**B**ill Burhop, executive director of the Independent Multi-Family Communications Council ([www.imcc-online.org](http://www.imcc-online.org)), offered a rousing defense of the private cable operators' future. But PCOs gathering in a special meeting at the Summit were also warned that the industry will have to evolve with new regulatory, financial, and technical realities.

On the plus side, he said, successful PCOs have a local presence, and tend to be in metropolitan regions. They tend to serve college housing, condominium homeowner associations, and new developments. All this allows PCOs to be nimble in customer response. "Products are whatever the residents need. Customized channel lineups. Special demographics, like Hispanic and senior citizens," Burhop noted.

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**Bill Burhop opens the formal private cable operator session. (Steve Ross photos)**

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But he insisted that PCOs should remain "technology agnostic," using fiber "where it makes sense... remember CapEx and cash flow."

What breeds success for any provider? Burhop said it comes down to this:

- Market understanding
- Desired products
- Technology expertise
- Partnering
- Financial
- SERVICE

"I personally believe we'll have closer relationships with local markets

and governments," Burhop said. But, he asked, rhetorically, "Is there enough bread to go around," in competition with franchise operators (MSOs and now telcos)?

He sees MSOs, local exchange carriers, and direct-to-home satellite providers as each having assets and liabilities in competition with PCOs. MSOs, for instance, do not uniformly focus on specific MDUs. But, as with other industries, "The huge guys fight and spend – and they get the giant share, mainly the single-family-home markets. They are increasingly moving into MDUs."

What's left, Burhop asked? "Maybe



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IMCC president and BBP columnist Bryan Rader (standing) answers questions at PCO breakfast meeting.



Bill Burhop breaks an egg over the conference table. Goal: enough “bread” to feed PCOs.

just crumbs, crumbs, crumbs. But let the lions be lions – eat each other. Let the lambs be profitable. It takes less to feed a PCO than an MSO. Been in the jungle a long time.”

The question may have been rhe-

torical, but he moved away from his PowerPoint slides long enough to pour some milk, scatter some flour and break an egg over the table next to the podium – before pulling a baked bread out of the mess, to much applause.

The main message: Public policy should be pro-competition, and PCOs should not fear it. They should fight against states allowing “exclusive and perpetual contracts” with service providers, for instance, and educate small property owners about their rights to bring video to tenants.

Burhop doubts the telecommunications bill now pending before Congress will actually pass. The issues are complicated, and the RBOCs are getting statewide franchise rules from the states themselves and no longer find the idea of a federal franchise law imperative.

Burhop also warned, “A la carte... It’s coming. Multicast must carry... is just an NAB power grab. Now, SDTV channels have to go back to public use [by 2009]. NAB wants must carry because with compression the channels take up less room. **BBP**”

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