



BY MAURY WRIGHT, EDITOR IN CHIEF

## Foggy crystal ball yields 2007 wishes

**W**ell, 2007 has arrived, along with the New Year's resolutions and the ever-present pundit technology predictions. Unfortunately, my crystal ball is a bit foggy when it comes to such things as wireless LANs, video over Internet Protocol, UWB (ultrawideband), and home-video networks. So, rather than offer a set of predictions for tech in 2007, I'll offer a short

list of wishes. Given the track record of the principals, I'm not confident that I'll see my wishes fulfilled. But I'm sure the tech industry would be better off if they do come true.

For starters, I'm hoping the IEEE 802.11n players finally come to an understanding. Their bickering hasn't stopped consumers from buying up Wi-Fi gear. Wi-Fi is now a standard feature in notebooks and is coming soon to handsets. But we've yet to have a chance to really figure out whether 802.11n might serve up whole-house video. I'm also just tired of the posturing and words such as "draft-n-compliant." And although I've been an Airgo supporter, the company even further crossed the line by declaring "draft-2.0" compliance with its recent chip announcement that coincided with the announcement that Qualcomm would acquire Airgo.

I'm also wishing for the streets in my neighborhood to be excavated once again. I hate the inconvenience but recognize that fiber must reach North American homes. AT&T has boasted that its U-Verse service is 100% video over IP. But AT&T isn't pushing fiber all the way to the home, and, even with VDSL2, the service provider will strug-

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gle to offer compelling HDTV services. Verizon is pushing fiber to homes, but mainly only in new developments or in areas where the company can string the fiber overhead. Meanwhile, Korea, Japan, and China are all working on massive fiber deployments. We need fiber for symmetrical data services and the best in video services, including true on-demand service. The last mile is still gating what can happen behind it in the core networks and in front of it in homes.

I hope the UWB crowd either finally delivers products in 2007 or just disappears. The Wireless USB supporters that base the cable-replacement technology on UWB appear close. But most of the chip vendors had pledged that end products would ship for the 2006 holiday season. No luck there. I'm also unsure about how fast consumers will adopt a nice-to-have technology such as Wireless

USB. The success may depend on how well it handles video, even over short distances. And Tzero Technologies is still claiming that its flavor of UWB can serve up whole-house video. If it does, I'll be first in line.

Perhaps my most fervent hope is that some industry players will again move toward the goal of building great products rather than chasing royalty streams. Sony has long been my favorite target in this regard. I was once one of Sony's biggest fans. At one time, my living room was all-Sony. Today a single, and admittedly dated, Sony DVD player is still present. Of late, Sony proves time and again that it cares more about getting IP adopted into standards such as next-generation DVD players than it does about building great products that consumers want to buy. The company isn't happy with just making money selling consumer products; it wants a slice of competitors' revenue as well, such as it has seen from the audio CD. It's increasingly clear that the strategy hasn't served Sony well; the company has lost status as a premium brand.

Unfortunately, the patent-troll philosophy isn't limited to Sony. Qualcomm has been guilty to some extent. Patriot Scientific comes to mind in the microprocessor area. It appears that former Microsoft executive and industry luminary Nathan Myhrvold plans to build a business around all types of IP with his Intellectual Ventures.

I'm not sure that we wouldn't be much better off with more open cross-licensing. One of the best interviews I did in 2006 was with Wally Rhines, Mentor's chief executive officer, in preparation for our 50th-anniversary issue last September. Rhines believes that massive cross-licensing in the early days of the semiconductor industry made for the explosive growth that we witnessed over several decades. We aren't seeing that growth these days. **EDN**

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