

Verizon exec: Wireless innovation spurs job growth

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Steve Smith, Verizon Wireless regional president, answers reporters' questions prior to his presentation at the Tulsa Press Club's Page One Luncheon. (Photo by Rip Stell)

TULSA – Innovation by wireless carrier Verizon Wireless is driving job growth in Oklahoma, according to Steve Smith, regional president for Verizon Wireless.

Smith discussed Verizon's presence in Oklahoma during a speech at the Tulsa Press Club on Tuesday.

Verizon first entered the Oklahoma market in 2007 and had established a strong presence by 2009, Smith said.

"We've been able to penetrate the Oklahoma market, spreading across Oklahoma with stores – not only in the metro areas like Oklahoma City and Tulsa, which have multiple locations – but by adding stores in places like Poteau, Duncan and Stillwater," Smith said.

Verizon has approximately 1,500 employees across the state, in a Tulsa call center, retail locations, and information technology and network positions, Smith said.

Employment figures are expected to increase in the 7-percent to 10-percent range, Smith said.

Even through the downturn in the economy through 2009 and '10, Verizon experienced customer growth,

Smith said.

"Some customers had a difficult time paying their bill and we had a modest increase in customer churn, but a number of customers were able to eliminate other communications services and become totally wireless," Smith said.

"My focus is from a wireless perspective, and for us, we are a company that continues to see strong growth, with double-digit, year-over-year growth," said Smith, who declined to provide detailed figures. "And, we expect to continue to see that kind of growth."

Verizon's smartphone market increases 90 percent annually, Smith said.

"That is where the growth is from a wireless perspective," Smith said. "We are close to 40-percent smartphones throughout the business."

There remain plenty of opportunities in Oklahoma as Verizon has spread its 4G LTE, or fourth-generation, long-term evolution network, across 70 percent of the state's population. Oklahoma City was one of the original markets to receive the 4G late last year while Tulsa was the 100th market to receive the 4G LTE this summer.

Since 2006 Verizon has spent \$300 million on its wireless network in the state. In 2010, Verizon spent \$16.5 billion on its nationwide network.

"When people think of Verizon, they think of this – a cellphone, right?" Smith said, holding up a mobile device. "

But customers make more than 140 million connections annually through computer tablets,

laptops, cellphones or their Nintendo to access the Internet, Smith said.

“What hopefully is clear is that we are more than just a cellphone company,” Smith said.

And, in the first quarter, Verizon purchased Terremark, a company that provides cloud computing services, for \$1.4 billion. In June, Verizon entered the cloud computing marketplace, launching its cloud initiative, Smith said.

“There is tremendous change and opportunity for us to provide not just cellphone service but mobile access to the Internet,” Smith said. “A decade ago, only two out of 10 Americans had a cellphone. Today, that number is more than nine Americans out of 10.”

Smith has more than 19 years of telecommunications experience with Verizon Wireless and its legacy companies. Smith held various leadership positions within the organization and was ultimately responsible for successfully overseeing Verizon’s acquisition efforts, as well as leading, developing and growing the region’s business, retail, finance and operations functions.

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