



Small businesses, industry players look at telecom competition

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Small businesses rarely take more than "one bite of the competition apple" and if the experience isn't positive they're likely to give up on competitive alternatives, Georgetown U. professor warned at a roundtable Tues. sponsored by the Phoenix Center, a small think-tank. Small businesses "don't have time to fiddle with alternatives," said John Mayo, dean of Georgetown U.'s business school. As the FCC began to close in on its Triennial UNE Review proceeding, participants at the roundtable, who represented a cross section of the parties involved in the UNE debate, were encouraged to take a broader look at the relationship between local competition and small businesses, or as Phoenix Center Pres. Lawrence Spiwak described it, engage in a "Socratic" debate.

Jack Goldberg, board member of InfoHighway Communications, said the company provided 3 things that small businesses wanted: (1) A single source of all telecom services in one package. (2) Tailored billing that, for example, differentiated among clients or locations. (3) Lower prices. Sue Ashdown, exec. dir., American ISP Assn., said ISPs were early customers of CLECs because they offered a "more responsive service" along with lower prices. However, USTA Senior Vp Daniel Phythyon cited a recent Washington Post article on a local bakery that lost CLEC service and "there wasn't one technician in the Washington area." Karen Kerrigan, chmn. of the Small Business Survival Committee, responded that for every story like that, "I can give you hundreds of other stories involving the Bells." She said for small businesses to do well, "there has to be certainty" and one of the big challenges they face is "the regulatory uncertainty that continues to plague both competitors and consumers."