

ENERGY

Anterix Launches Unique Cybersecurity Collective For Electric Utilities

Llewellyn King Contributor 

I've been a player in energy since founding The Energy Daily in 1973.

Follow

Dec 7, 2021, 09:52pm EST

3:24
-2:04 1.0x



Collective security in the digital age. ANTERIX

Suppose the Wright brothers, before their first airplane flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina on Dec. 17, 1903, had been able to assemble a band of suppliers interested in aviation. Things would have gone much faster. These suppliers would have included engine makers, spar manufacturers, fabric merchants, aircraft dope producers, wheel makers, aluminum smelters, radio pioneers, and sheet metal merchants.

[Anterix](#) (NASDAQ: ATEX), the innovative Woodland Park, New Jersey-based firm that is focused on moving electric utility

communications to private LTE (4G) broadband networks, has done what the Wright brothers couldn't do. The company created what it calls an “ecosystem” of LTE suppliers last May. So far, it has signed up 70 leading technology companies, which range from giants Motorola, Ericsson, and General Electric GE -5.5% to many small ones, to support electric utilities' switch to private broadband.

Now Anterix has taken its ecosystem concept a step further. The company has added what it calls a “collective” of cybersecurity firms — six already. Anterix believes electric utilities building out private broadband networks will want the same wealth of cybersecurity supplier options that they will have from telecommunications suppliers to the ecosystem.

The collective and its emphasis on cybersecurity comes despite the implicit cybersecurity advantages of private broadband networks.

This implicit defense results from what Chief Operating Officer Ryan Gerbrandt calls the “air gap” between an Anterix private broadband network and the internet. They simply aren't connected, shutting off a lot of cyberattacks that come through the internet.

Security Appeal To The Utilities

This security emphasis should have immediate appeal to the utilities. I talk to a lot of CEOs, and they tell me that the one thing that keeps them up at night is cybersecurity.

MORE FOR YOU

Here's The List Of 317 Wind Energy Rejections The Sierra Club Doesn't Want You To See

Revisiting The Blame For High Gas Prices

Why Do 'Fracking' Opponents Ignore Its Moral Benefits?

In the security collective, Anterix has established a network of leading firms in the field which will provide electric utilities installing private networks additional security, taking cyber defenses to a new level.

The six founding members of the cyber collective are Mandiant, Onclave Networks, PacketViper, Q-Net Security, Qubitek, and Sierra Nevada Corporation.

Ronald Indeck, CEO of Q-Net Security, said, “As a charter member of the Anterix active ecosystem, we are excited to take this next step with Anterix in forming the Anterix network security system. Utilities demand the strongest network cybersecurity, and we are proud to bring our data authentication to this unique collaboration.”

AD



“Mandiant recognizes that collective and collaborative action is key to delivering comprehensive security for utilities,” said Marshall Hellman, the company’s chief technology officer.

While members of the ecosystem and now the collective sign a collaborative contract, they remain independent and competitive with each other. A secretariat is provided by Anterix.

Anterix is a company born of the digital age. It has accumulated significant holdings of spectrum on the 900 MHz band and offers private, exclusive broadband networks to electric utilities. These are designed to move data from all sources.

There is a saying that data is the new oil. In a world of microgrids, windmills, solar panels and smart grids, the data generation points are everywhere and increasing. Utilities need this data flow to manage their operations, to produce efficiencies, and to take control in crisis.

When the wildfires that have so plagued the West started, communications were found to be inadequate. Electric utilities couldn't communicate with their customers, each other, or their state emergency offices.

Once an electric utility signs up for a private broadband network, that becomes its network. The utility is in charge, Anterix CEO Robert Schwartz told me. "They get control; they give up nothing," he said.

Spectrum As 'Beachfront Property'

At a United States Energy Association meeting, Schwartz said Anterix's spectrum holdings amount to the equivalent of "beachfront property." He also said if a utility has a break in a live line, information can be transmitted to the data analysis center and the line deenergized in 1.4 seconds or before it hits the ground, thus possibly avoiding a wildfire.

Anterix owes something to the spirit of the innovators who created Nextel, revolutionized cell phones and made them ubiquitous. The company's executive chairman is Morgan O'Brien, who cofounded Nextel with Brian McAuley, who is a former Anterix executive. Schwartz is alumnus of Nextel, as are many of the employees and consultants at Anterix. This points to a culture of innovation.

Anterix NDAQ -0.9%, appears to be on a roll, having signed up three major electric utilities for private broadband networks: San Diego Gas & Electric; Ameren AEE -1.5% and Evergy, which are adjoining utilities. Other contract negotiations are ongoing as well as a number of tests at utility sites. One of these tests is at the New York Power Authority.

What Anterix is doing with its ecosystem and now with the collective is, I believe, unique. It may become a template for the launch of new technologies that depend on a wide, tertiary system of suppliers. It is likely to be studied in business schools and marketing courses as a creative, new way to jumpstart change.



Llewellyn King

Follow

I'm the creator, executive producer, and host of "White House Chronicle," a weekly news and public affairs program, airing on PBS and SiriusXM Radio. My career in journalism... **Read More**

[Editorial Standards](#)

[Reprints & Permissions](#)

ADVERTISEMENT
