



"Can you hear me now?"

Dennis F.

Strigl could not resist asking when he called Verizon's corporate headquarters from atop a ski lift in Hunter Mountain, NY. An avid skier, it is not uncommon for the chairman and CEO of one of the nation's largest wireless companies to call from mountain tops across the country to test Verizon's service.

Most people today recognize the popular ad campaign but Dennis "Denny" Strigl, a veteran of the wireless industry, first asked that famous question back in 1984. As president of Ameritech Mobile Communications in Chicago, Strigl was charged with marketing what was then brand new wireless technology. But, he says, the real challenge was making the system work. Strigl recalls he drove his engineers crazy while he rode up and down the streets of Chicago to test the service.

"Denny is really the godfather of wireless," says Lowell C. McAdam, executive vice president and chief operating officer at Verizon Wireless. "The technology was literally born on his watch." In charge of the operation that made cellular phone calls possible, Strigl was on site when that first call was made during a news conference at Soldier Field.

A 1974 graduate of Canisius College, Strigl began his telecommunications career in Buffalo in 1968. He landed his first job in the industry with New York Telephone and worked there full-time, in addition to taking his college courses. But Strigl's original plan was to work for a commercial airline. Prompted by a friend to take a look at the

Godfather of Wireless

industry before he accepted a position with the airlines, Strigl says he walked up and down Buffalo's Main Street, and applied at both the gas company and the telephone company. "The telephone company was paying more than twice what the airlines were paying, so I took the job!" That last minute career change marked the launch of a successful telecommunications career that now spans nearly four decades. But Strigl still holds a commercial pilot's license and says he flies almost every weekend.

After New York Telephone, he held positions at AT&T, Wisconsin Telephone Company, and was president of American Bell before making wireless history at Ameritech Mobile. Strigl laughs as he recalls those early days.

"Very few people could afford the first mobile phones, which were mounted in cars and cost about \$4,000!" he says. Those who *could* afford a cell phone, had to drive around with a large receiver unit in the trunk of their car. The first phone that didn't require a transceiver in the trunk was, what those in the industry called, a 'brick phone.'

"I don't know how many pounds that thing weighed but I'll tell you it was heavy," says Strigl. "It had a six-inch antenna on it and when we first started selling them, the cost was again nearly \$4,000."

While the cell phone has evolved into a sleek, compact and affordable piece of technology, the cellular business has grown into a more than \$25 billion industry. As the industry grew, wireless companies began to merge.

In addition to launching the nation's first cellular telephone network, Strigl is also credited with some of the largest mergers in the cellular industry. He joined Bell Atlantic in

1989 and was named president and CEO of Bell Atlantic Mobile in 1991. In that position, he oversaw its merger with Metro Mobile CTS in 1992, which was the largest cellular acquisition of its day. He subsequently was named president and CEO of the combined Bell Atlantic Mobile and NYNEX Mobile when those two companies merged in 1995.

Strigl was the lead executive in charge of integrating Verizon Wireless when that company was formed in 2000, by combining the domestic wireless operations of Bell Atlantic, Vodafone AirTouch and GTE. It's at Verizon that Denny Strigl continues to make his mark on the ever expanding wireless industry. It is estimated that 70 percent of people, young and old, in the United States own a cell phone. With camera phones, text messaging, Internet access and games, there seems to be no boundaries of the attraction to cellular technology. And there is no one in the industry that embraces new technology more than Denny Strigl.

"When text messaging first came out, he started sending everyone text messages," says James Gerace, vice president of corporate communications at Verizon Wireless. "If he didn't receive an answer quickly, he knew you didn't know how to use the new technology!"

Adds McAdam, "We took a President's Cabinet trip to Aspen, CO in March, and we had just launched our new push-to-talk product. So Denny and his wife, and my wife and I, took push-to-talk phones with us and used them to talk to one another throughout the week. Believe me, I came back with a long list of things that Denny didn't particularly like about the product. Those things got fixed very quickly."

The best way to get a glimpse of the

newest wireless technology is to see what top Verizon executives have clipped to *their* belts. Both Strigl and McAdam have phones that can download MP3 quality music, news clips, and sports and weather information. GPS technology gives them complete navigational directions, as well.

With unlimited technology, the question no longer is 'Do you have a cell phone,' it's 'What can your cell phone do.' Verizon executives predict the answer will soon be: "Everything!"

"Because your phone is the one thing that you don't leave the home or office without, cell phones will ultimately have capabilities that will eliminate the customer's need to carry several devices with them," says Gerace. "For instance, who would have ever thought there was a need for a camera in a cell phone?" he says. "But how many times have you been out and wished that you had a camera?"

Imagine your cell phone as a portable PC and credit card. Imagine your cell phone as a miniature television that can also access your bank account and unlock the door of your home. Those capabilities now exist and will be available to customers in the very near future. Verizon's newest device will include the capabilities of a palm pilot and camera, and will provide services that your radio and television provide. "It will serve as a pocket PC, phone and entertainment center," says Gerace.

Technology is only part of the reason that Denny Strigl has been able to grow Verizon Wireless into one of the nation's top wireless companies. Verizon's success can also be attributed to a CEO who is quick to answer the calls of both employees and customers.

"Denny says that the most dangerous view of an organization is from behind the desk, so



he is out there all the time and that is the culture that he instills in his team,” says McAdam. When McAdam describes Strigl, he says that the first words that come to mind are passion and integrity.

The fact that he knew the names of all 300 employees at Ameritech Mobile is testimony to Strigl’s management style. “We have 52,000 Verizon employees and I will admit I don’t know all of their names, but I do try to spend most of my time in the field communicating with employee groups,” says Strigl. “That is how to learn what is happening in the business and the way to learn how we treat our customers.”

Gerace says of the 52,000 employees in the business, Strigl has had meetings in front of 27,000 and is on pace this year to see more than 35,000 employees. These meetings usually consist of Strigl giving a 10-minute company update in front of about 200 employees, with 45 to 60 minutes reserved for questions. And any question is an appropriate question.

“Many CEOs would think that is risky but he sees it as essential,” says Gerace. Strigl is also noted for promoting from within the company. “It is difficult to bring someone in from outside of the business and have them quickly assimilate to the culture that we have created,” he says.

Strigl leads by example when it comes to putting his customers first. “We have a company credo that talks about customers first, integrity in the business and treating each other with respect,” he says. In fact, the July issue of *Consumer Reports* says if you’re considering a change of wireless carrier, you may want to look first to Verizon. It says

1968: Strigl lands his first job in the industry at New York Telephone in Buffalo, NY

1983: Wireless telecommunications makes its U.S. debut in Chicago

1968 1969 1970 1971 1972 1973 1974 1975 1976 1977 1978 1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986

1974: Graduates from Canisius College, Buffalo, NY

1984: Named President of Ameritech Mobile Communications

that Verizon had the lowest number of complaints per customer among national carriers, and relatively few complaints about service, quality and billing.

It was also out of respect for the customer that Strigl made national headlines in 2003 with his bold decision to let customers keep their cell phone numbers when they switched carriers; a move that was not at all popular within the industry.

“We thought long and hard about it, and even in spite of the rest of the industry being opposed to it, we decided that it made no sense to us to continue to resist something that our customers really wanted,” says Strigl.

“Frankly, the industry that he helped found was very angry with him because they didn’t want to give customers that right,” says McAdam. “Denny stood up alone and was able to swing the whole industry back to his point of view. He will take a tough stand if it is the right one.”

When it comes to customer satisfaction, Strigl says that a wireless company is only as good as its last call. “So when we say ‘Can you hear me now,’ we mean that.”

Verizon’s catchy ad campaign, boasts clarity and coverage. Verizon executives came up with the idea for the ads in 2000 but it wasn’t until late 2001 that the “Can you hear me now” guy actually made his appearance.

“Denny and the rest of the team insisted that what we deliver truly lives up to the ads,” says Gerace. So, Verizon spent a year and \$4 billion making sure that the network was ready to stand up to the claim. Verizon has since spent \$4 billion a year to ensure the company *continues* to live up to the claim.

So, who is the “Can you hear me now” guy and does he really drive around the country testing Verizon’s coverage? He represents about 100 Verizon Wireless employees, who travel more than a million and a half miles every year testing Verizon’s service. Where are the most remote places Verizon customers can get service?

“Probably in an elevator,” says Strigl. “You are in the middle of a concrete building with steel girders and we work hard to provide service in the center of those buildings.” Verizon also boasts coverage in national parks, deserts and

even in Amtrak train tunnels under Manhattan. And, adds Gerace, "We do a great job covering ski resorts!"

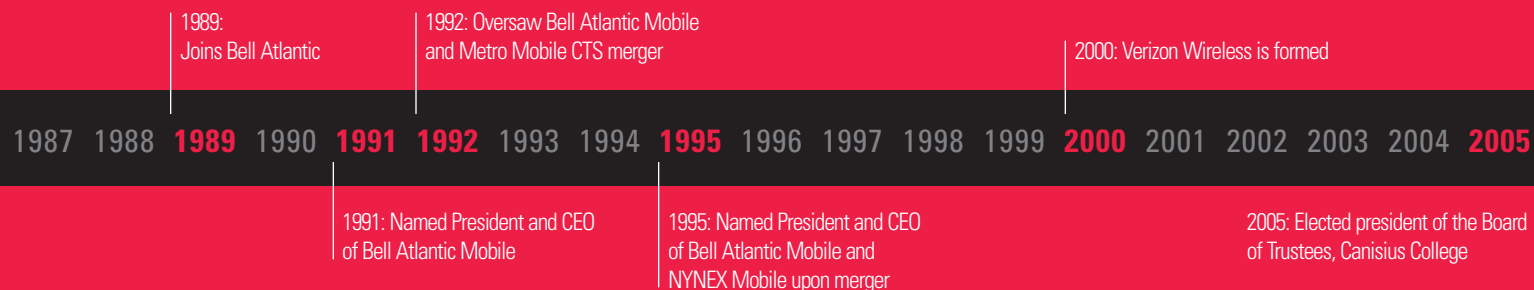
Under Strigl's leadership, Verizon has done more than just invest in its wireless network, it has invested in its community. In 1995, Strigl created HopeLine to give women in shelters a voice mailbox that they could use when leaving a phone number with a prospective employer.

"That evolved into learning more about domestic violence and how widespread it is, and eventually the program grew from providing a voice mailbox, to donating cell phones to shelters," says Strigl.

Verizon collects old cell phones from customers and refurbishes them for distribution to shelters across the country. Marking its 10th anniversary in 2005, HopeLine donated more than \$3.7 million in monetary and other contributions to domestic violence shelters and prevention programs this year alone.

In 2000, Strigl was recognized with the New York City Victim Services' Champion Award for Verizon's Wireless at Work program, which uses wireless technology to help individuals and communities improve security and emergency communication. Most recently, Strigl initiated Verizon's association with the nation's Amber Alert Program, a coordinated national notification effort that has led to the recovery of many abducted children. Now, Verizon customers can receive a free text message to inform them of an Amber Alert in their area.

Strigl's passion for his job and his community is second only to his passion for his family. "But, Denny has an extended family too," says McAdam. "He considers the employees of Verizon Wireless his family. He views Canisius as



part of his family as well and his passion applies to the college. And Denny will fight very hard for the well being of his family."

A distinguished alumnus and Canisius College Trustee since 2002, Strigl was elected president of the Board of Trustees and will begin his term on July 1, 2005. "I am very excited," says Strigl. "I think the quality of the education that I have is a broad-based education that has served me well. Canisius is a wonderful institution and one that I am looking forward to continuing to giving something back."

"Denny's demonstrated leadership in his field, his community and at *alma mater* makes him the ideal person to lead Canisius to a new level of excellence among the very best regional universities in the Northeast," says President Rev. Vincent M. Cooke, S.J.

When asked what he sees as his role in the college's future, Strigl says he hopes to help continue to grow Canisius so that it will continue to provide a high quality Jesuit education for its students and play an influential role in the Western New York community.

Strigl will also continue to grow Verizon Wireless. But one wonders what could possibly be on the horizon in wireless technology? Right now Strigl says that when he opens his phone, he sees a picture of his wife and a special ring is associated with her telephone number. The next step is to actually see the person that you are talking to on the phone.

So it looks like it won't be long before Denny Strigl will ask, "Can you see me now?" ■

