

CES 2018: FirstNet Sees Growth Potential of App Ecosystem, Partnerships

Theo Douglas | January 11, 2018



LAS VEGAS — Now that [54 jurisdictions](#) have joined the FirstNet first responders network, its applications store is actively seeking developers and will soon convene technologists to work on solutions for public safety personnel, officials said at the 2018 Consumer Electronics Show (CES).

This March in San Francisco, FirstNet will host its inaugural hackathon for ideas to revolutionize public safety and law enforcement communication, AT&T's Prathima Simha told an audience at CES in Las Vegas. AT&T is FirstNet's service provider.

“This event will bring together developers, first responders, designers and creators to hack new and innovative solutions for our nation’s first responders,” AT&T said in a statement via email after the panel discussion titled *FirstNet’s Applications Ecosystem*.

Its ecosystem, Simha said, encompasses devices and apps, and is an “end-to-end system that provides resources to third parties, to create, certify, monetize and distribute apps and solutions” to first responders.

FirstNet SIM cards have been available to public safety agencies for some time, [along with](#) pre-emption and priority status.

“The next question becomes how do these FirstNet apps get to the applications store? The [FirstNet Developer Program](#) is open to everyone. Large companies, midsize, small companies. Individual innovators and of course public safety agencies to join the program,” said Simha, who works in product management and marketing for AT&T.

Apps will be rigorously screened for security, performance and reliability before being certified and made available. The ecosystem's ultimate goal, Simha said, is to bring stakeholders closer together and enable collaboration.

FirstNet has said it intends to complete its core network in March through 56 states and territories, and wrap a complete infrastructure buildout around 2020.

Law enforcement officials who attended the morning session and two others on Jan. 11 dedicated to the future of public safety communications said the network and its additional bandwidth will be welcome.

Current app developers in the public safety realm often promise and deliver effective products. But as Kevin McMahon, undersheriff at the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, told the room, the impact of deployments can be blunted by a lack of local resources and an indifference to technology.

"Oftentimes, what happens is in that local environment, that pipeline that comes into your local police department doesn't have the capacity to allow you to do things like take video or take pictures and get it out to ... the user in the field," McMahon said.

"This opportunity that FirstNet provides gives us an opportunity in law enforcement to be far more effective than we ever have been. To me, it's just this unlimited opportunity," he added.

Other speakers throughout the morning warned that officials will have to plan for warehousing and analyzing all of that data, but advancements were also a consistent theme of the gathering.

Also during the apps ecosystem discussion, Nathaniel Wish, founder and managing partner of [Responder Ventures](#), a venture capital firm dedicated to funding public safety technology, announced the upcoming launch of Responder Labs, a new incubator in partnership with Amazon.

The company began as venture capitalists and now has eight portfolio companies — having looked at more than 400 during the past two years, Wish said in an interview. But founders have discovered the process is about more than just providing funding.

"We've expanded our platform of innovation to include Responder Labs, which is our incubator platform. We're formally launching in March, our first cohort with Amazon," Wish said, confirming the endeavor is funded by Responder Ventures and sponsored by Amazon.

"We think that will enable people that haven't been in public safety before and don't know the sales process, to educate them and bring them through a whole boot camp workshop, to help get those solutions to the first responders," he said, adding, "That's the end goal here."