

Meet V-COMM Experts: Rick Opalesky & Stephanie Koles

We sat down with Rick Opalesky, former senior real estate and construction manager at AT&T, and Stephanie Koles, former radio frequency engineer at Verizon, to get their unique takes on the wireless industry as they transition their careers from big-name wireless carriers to our own independent wireless engineering firm.



Prior to working for V-COMM, you worked for some of the biggest names in wireless. How do your experiences from these large corporations translate to an independent consulting firm?

RICK — Fluently, I suppose would be the best word choice. We work in a specialized industry, from the “boots on the ground” technician installing and maintaining hardware to executive management’s strategic plotting of the course, few are fluent in the specific nuances associated with the concept, design, installation, integration and optimization of wireless architecture; especially in the cellular arena. This is a very exciting industry to be a part of, the “tip of the spear” in communication technology, if you will. For me, the timing seemed right to make a

move as the pendulum began swinging toward third-party operators building more of the architecture necessary to support evolving technology. So, here I am at V-COMM, happy to translate the needs of the large corporation.

STEPHANIE — I find my large corporation experiences enable me to confidently serve our clients and lead those around me through the challenging technical projects on which we embark. We get the tougher challenges and I welcome them.

Do you find yourself with a different perspective of the wireless industry when working for an independent consulting firm versus the large wireless carriers?

RICK — There is certainly more on the line, without a doubt. The large wireless carriers are always going to be around and they will always be in need of assistance from qualified entities. Providing the supply to meet that demand creates a fiercely competitive atmosphere. That competitiveness, coupled with a tight knit and specialized industry, means that if you are not doing a good job, people

find out fast. The wireless carriers are virtually unsinkable. Sure, they may change names or merge or be acquired, but they remain. When it comes to the smaller players—or support vessels—you have to “put up or shut up.”

STEPHANIE — I must say stepping into V-COMM has made me more aware of the different technologies and equipment vendor providers. This

is a welcomed opportunity to expand my knowledge base and certainly nice to be considered a well-rounded expert.

How has the wireless industry changed since you began your engineering career?

RICK — Ha! That is like asking someone how their kids have changed over 20+ years. In one word: iPhone. The launch of Apple's now iconic device — and it was a 2G EDGE model at launch to boot — changed *everything*. Seemingly overnight, the industry's priority went from just call quality to both call quality and increasing throughput. From coverage to capacity. Suddenly, having four or five signal bars did not mean a darn thing if a video became pixelated. Data became king fast and, man, did we work hard to keep up. Heck, we still are, from AMPS to 5G. From "can you hear me now" to "can you see me now" and beyond.

STEPHANIE — Wireless continues to morph forward as technology brings us yet more stunning handheld devices. I have seen the entire cellular industry start from a Bell Laboratories concept and grow through many generations of devices to our current infatuation with holding a device in our hands that now rules the many facets of our lives. It continues to amaze me that we went from "no one will ever carry these around with them," to these devices being valued as a fashion accessory in one's back pocket. Wow.

You started working for V-COMM shortly before the pandemic swept the nation. How has your brief time with V-COMM so far been changed because of this momentous current event?

RICK — It's hard to tell. I started on March 16, 2020, almost exactly when the pandemic began causing widespread shutdowns, so all I have known is working for V-COMM during a pandemic. From what I expected, the major difference is being much more strategic about when, where and why I am on-site at a venue. I focus mainly on making the absolute most of my time on-site. So I guess this pandemic has made me more efficient with my time in the field, but it also limits the frequency with which I am able to manage the task at-hand in real time and in-person. It's probably more a "six of one and half dozen of the other." I can tell you, though. I am grateful to be working hard during this pandemic. If

anything, the pandemic has made me feel part of an effort that seems bigger than just working to ensure a good user experience at airports, train stations, hospitals and the like. I believe we, as an industry, are critical to our success in making it through this *hopefully* once-in-a-lifetime event.

STEPHANIE — The word "scary" comes to mind when the virus first hit hard in the New York Metropolitan area. Being considered an essential business in the midst of this health crisis grants me the courage to strive through the madness to serve our clients well. 2020 is yet another challenge in life that we all must overcome.

As an independent consulting firm, V-COMM gets involved in many different technical projects, across a variety of clients. Has this broadened your technical horizon, and if so, how?

RICK — Not so much yet, but only because of the nature of my introduction to V-COMM being associated with one large client and venue. However, I know it will broaden, as I am always eager to learn. It is just a matter of time.

STEPHANIE — I was always destined to work in wireless and wrapping my head around large-scale DAS deployments has been a new excitement for me. It is another feather in my cap of RF-related endeavors. Small cells, iDAS, oDAS and DRAN deployments continue to be a major focus for many in the industry and being fully involved in this is very cool stuff.

Being in the wireless industry for many years and working with large wireless carriers, you obviously bring a wealth of experience to V-COMM. Have you been able to share some of this expertise with the other V-COMM engineers and how has that experience been for you?

RICK — Yes, and it has been humbling. My biggest strengths are experience, communication and eagerness to help. I am happy to share that knowledge with anyone who needs my help, or sometimes with someone who does not necessarily need it! To be able to share my first-hand work experience with colleagues who are usually younger and smarter than I am is humbling.

STEPHANIE — One of most rewarding experiences in my career has been to share my knowledge with my co-workers along the way and here at V-COMM. I gladly continue this practice. Being able to bring other engineers up-to-speed on our current projects enables us to serve our clients more efficiently. Growth is very important to everyone.



V-COMM is a leading provider of integrated network engineering, radio frequency engineering and business services. V-COMM delivers the needed expertise and cost-effective solutions to governmental agencies and wireless operators. V-COMM also provides design and design/build services for In-building, In-tunnel and other wireless telecommunications networks.

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