



Hammerman: Seeing Red (Tape)

A streamlined FCC merger-review process is designed to benefit small and midsize communications firms.

*By Ted Hammerman
for Office.com*

May 9, 2000 — In response to unprecedented consolidation this year in the telecommunications industry, Federal Communications Commission Chairman William Kennard ordered an assessment of the panel's merger-review process.

The result: guidelines were developed to ensure that even the most complex transactions are processed in 180 days and that internal procedures are uniform and transparent across the agency.

So far, the effort seems to be working. On Nov. 16, [CBS Corp.](#) and [Viacom Inc.](#) filed applications seeking FCC consent to transfer control of CBS, which holds the licenses or construction permits of 20 television and 162 radio stations, to Viacom. The latter company already held 18 television-station licenses.

Two weeks before its self-imposed 180-day deadline, the FCC last week approved the deal, with conditions that included giving the companies 12 months to comply with FCC ownership rules.

Though the FCC seems to be meeting its own internal deadlines, Congress wants to limit the regulatory panel's ability to scrutinize license transfers even more.

Senate Bill 467 was drafted in 1999 to impose deadlines of three or six months on the FCC's review of license applications, depending on a merger's size. House Resolution 4019 would impose even tighter deadlines.

The Clinton administration and lawmakers have been debating this issue vigorously.

Streamlined merger reviews by the FCC allow smaller companies to save time and money. Monitoring the transaction takes less time. Filing comments costs less money.

The FCC has established a Web page dedicated to making the public aware of the [status of specified mergers](#). And now, with the implementation of the Commission's Electronic Comment Filing System (ECFS) on the [Commission's Internet home page](#), interested parties may review and file comments directly to commission proceedings.

Electronic versions of the documents are available 24 hours a day through ECFS. Electronic

Talk to the Expert

Office.com insider Ted Hammerman, an attorney, will be available to answer your questions during the next several days via the Office.com [Telecom bulletin board](#).

review is faster and more economical than copying applications and reviewing documents during normal hours at the FCC's Reference Center in Washington.

Generally, only one copy of an electronic submission must be filed, compared with an original and sometimes more than a dozen hard copies that must be served to the FCC (not to mention all of the interested parties and their attorneys) if filed the old-fashioned way.

Upon review of proceedings on the FCC's Transaction Team's page, consult with an attorney to determine if your company is eligible to comment as an interested party.

For instructions on how to comment on a case via the Internet, [send an e-mail](#) to the FCC that includes the following words in the body of the message: "get form [your e-mail address]."

A sample form and directions will be sent in reply.

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