

COGENT COMMUNICATIONS GROUP INC
Form 10-K
March 02, 2009

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**UNITED STATES
SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION**
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20549

FORM 10-K

(Mark One)

**ANNUAL REPORT PURSUANT TO SECTION 13 OR
15(d) OF THE SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934.**

For the fiscal year ended December 31, 2008

OR

**TRANSITION REPORT PURSUANT TO SECTION 13 OR
15(d) OF THE SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934.**

For the transition period from _____ to _____
Commission file number 1-31227

COGENT COMMUNICATIONS GROUP, INC.

(Exact Name of Registrant as Specified in Its Charter)

Delaware
(State or Other Jurisdiction of
Incorporation or Organization)

52-2337274
(I.R.S. Employer
Identification No.)

1015 31st Street N.W.
Washington, D.C.
(Address of Principal Executive Offices)

20007
(Zip Code)

(202) 295-4200

Registrant's Telephone Number, Including Area Code

Securities registered pursuant to Section 12(b) of the Act:
Common Stock, par value \$0.001 per share

Securities registered pursuant to Section 12(g) of the Act:
None

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Indicate by check mark if the registrant is a well-known seasoned issuer, as defined in Rule 405 of the Securities Act. Yes No

Indicate by check mark if the registrant is not required to file reports pursuant to Section 13 or Section 15(d) of the Exchange Act. Yes No

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant: (1) has filed all reports required to be filed by Section 13 or 15(d) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 during the preceding 12 months (or for such shorter period that the registrant was required to file such reports), and (2) has been subject to such filing requirements for the past 90 days. Yes No

Indicate by check mark if disclosure of delinquent filers pursuant to Item 405 of Regulation S-K is not contained herein, and will not be contained, to the best of registrant's knowledge, in definitive proxy or information statements incorporated by reference in Part III of this Form 10-K or any amendment to this Form 10-K.

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant is a large accelerated filer, an accelerated filer, a non-accelerated filer, or a smaller reporting company. See definitions of "large accelerated filer," "accelerated filer," and "smaller reporting company" in Rule 12b-2 of the Exchange Act. (Check one):

Large accelerated filer Accelerated filer Non-accelerated filer Smaller reporting company

(Do not check if a smaller reporting company)

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant is a shell company (as defined in Rule 12b-2 of the Exchange Act). Yes No

The number of shares outstanding of the issuer's common stock, par value \$0.001 per share, as of February 20, 2009 was 44,341,898.

The aggregate market value of the Common Stock held by non-affiliates of the registrant, based on the closing price of \$13.40 per share on June 30, 2008 as reported by the NASDAQ Global Select Market was approximately \$569 million.

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**COGENT COMMUNICATIONS GROUP, INC.
FORM 10-K ANNUAL REPORT**

FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2008

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DOCUMENTS INCORPORATED BY REFERENCE

Portions of the registrant's definitive proxy statement for the registrant's 2009 annual shareholders meeting are incorporated by reference in Part III of this Form 10-K.

SPECIAL NOTE REGARDING FORWARD-LOOKING STATEMENTS

This report may contain forward-looking statements within the meaning of Section 21E of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended. Forward-looking statements are not statements of historical facts, but rather reflect our current expectations concerning future results and events. You can identify these forward-looking statements by our use of words such as "anticipates," "believes," "continues," "expects," "intends," "likely," "may," "opportunity," "plans," "potential," "project," "will," and similar expressions to identify forward-looking statements, whether in the negative or the affirmative. We cannot guarantee that we actually will achieve these plans, intentions or expectations. These forward-looking statements are subject to risks, uncertainties and other factors, some of which are beyond our control, which could cause actual results to differ materially from those forecasts or anticipated in such forward-looking statements.

You should not place undue reliance on these forward-looking statements, which reflect our view only as of the date of this report. We undertake no obligation to update these statements or publicly release the result of any revisions to these statements to reflect events or circumstances after the date of this report or to reflect the occurrence of unanticipated events.

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PART I

ITEM 1. BUSINESS

Overview

We are a leading facilities-based provider of low-cost, high-speed Internet access and Internet Protocol, or IP, communications services. Our network is specifically designed and optimized to transmit data using IP. We deliver our services to small and medium-sized businesses, communications service providers and other bandwidth-intensive organizations through approximately 17,800 customer connections in North America and Europe.

Our primary on-net service is Internet access at a speed of 100 Megabits per second, much faster than typical Internet access currently offered to businesses. We offer this on-net service exclusively through our own facilities, which run all the way to our customers' premises. Because of our integrated network architecture, we are not dependent on local telephone companies to serve our on-net customers. Our typical customers in multi-tenant office buildings are law firms, financial services firms, advertising and marketing firms and other professional services businesses. We also provide on-net Internet access to certain bandwidth-intensive users such as universities, other ISPs and commercial content providers at speeds of up to ten Gigabits per second. For the years ended December 31, 2006, 2007 and 2008, our on-net customers generated 70.6%, 79.0% and 81.7%, respectively, of our total net service revenue.

In addition to providing our on-net services, we also provide Internet connectivity to customers that are not located in buildings directly connected to our network. We serve these off-net customers using other carriers' facilities to provide the "last mile" portion of the link from our customers' premises to our network. For the years ended December 31, 2006, 2007 and 2008, our off-net customers generated 23.1%, 17.3%, and 16.1%, respectively, of our total net service revenue.

Non-core services are those services we acquired and continue to support but do not actively sell. For the years ended December 31, 2006, 2007 and 2008, non-core services generated 6.3%, 3.7% and 2.2%, respectively, of our total net service revenue.

We also operate 36 data centers comprising over 340,000 square feet throughout North America and Europe that allow customers to co-locate their equipment and access our network.

Competitive Advantages

We believe we address many of the IP data communications needs of small and medium-sized businesses, communications service providers and other bandwidth-intensive organizations by offering them high-quality Internet service at attractive prices.

Low Cost of Operation. We offer a streamlined set of products on an integrated network that operates on a single protocol. Our network design allows us to avoid many of the costs associated with circuit-switched networks related to provisioning, monitoring and maintaining multiple transport protocols. We believe that our low cost of operation gives us greater pricing flexibility and an advantage in a competitive environment characterized by falling Internet access prices.

Independent Network. Our on-net service does not rely on infrastructure controlled by local incumbent telephone companies. We provide the entire network, including the last mile and the in-building wiring to the customer's suite. This gives us more control over our service, quality and pricing and allows us to provision services more quickly and efficiently. We are typically able to activate customer services in one of our on-net buildings in fewer than ten days.

High Quality, Reliable Service. We are able to offer high-quality Internet service due to our network, which was designed solely to transmit IP data, and dedicated intra-city bandwidth for each

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customer. This design increases the speed and throughput of our network and reduces the number of data packets dropped during transmission.

Low Capital Cost to Grow Our Business. We have incurred relatively minimal indebtedness in growing our business because of our network design of using Internet routers without additional legacy equipment and our strategy of acquiring optical fiber from the excess capacity in existing networks.

Experienced Management Team. Our senior management team is composed of seasoned executives with extensive expertise in the telecommunications industry as well as knowledge of the markets in which we operate. The members of our senior management team have an average of over 20 years of experience in the telecommunications industry. Our senior management team has designed and built our network and led the integration of our network assets, customers and service offerings we acquired through 13 acquisitions.

Convergence. There is a clear industry and market trend for legacy products (e.g., TDM voice, Private Line, Frame Relay, and Asynchronous Transfer Mode) to be replaced with IP based services. Many of our competitors will have to migrate their existing customers and products to IP. This migration can be costly, lengthy, and risky. We do not face this challenge because our network and products are IP.

Our Strategy

We intend to become the leading provider of high-quality Internet access and IP communications services and to continue to improve our profitability and cash flow. The principal elements of our strategy include:

Focus on Providing Low-Cost, High-Speed Internet Access and IP Connectivity. We intend to further load our high-capacity network to respond to the growing demand for high-speed Internet service generated by bandwidth-intensive applications such as streaming media, online gaming, video, voice over IP (VOIP), remote data storage, distributed computing and virtual private networks. We intend to do so by continuing to offer our high-speed and high-capacity services at competitive prices.

Pursuing On-Net Customer Growth. We intend to increase usage of our network and operational infrastructure by adding customers in our existing on-net buildings, as well as adding buildings to our network.

Selectively Pursuing Acquisition Opportunities. In addition to adding customers through our sales and marketing efforts, we will continue to seek out acquisition opportunities that increase our customer base, allowing us to take advantage of the unused capacity of our network and add revenues with minimal incremental costs. We may also make additional acquisitions to add network assets at attractive prices.

Our Network

Our network is comprised of in-building riser facilities, metropolitan optical networks, metropolitan traffic aggregation points and inter-city transport facilities. We believe that we deliver a high level of technical performance because our network is optimized for IP traffic. We believe that our network is more reliable and delivers IP traffic at lower cost than networks built as overlays to traditional circuit-switched telephone networks.

Our network serves 135 metropolitan markets in North America and Europe and encompasses:

over 950 multi-tenant office buildings strategically located in commercial business districts;

over 360 carrier-neutral Internet aggregation facilities, data centers and single-tenant buildings;

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over 285 intra-city networks consisting of over 12,000 fiber miles;

an inter-city network of more than 32,100 fiber route miles; and

multiple high-capacity transatlantic circuits connecting the North American and European portions of our network.

We have created our network by acquiring optical fiber from carriers with large amounts of unused fiber and directly connecting Internet routers to our existing optical fiber national backbone. We have expanded our network through key acquisitions of financially distressed companies or their assets at a significant discount to their original cost. Due to our network design and acquisition strategy, we believe we are positioned to grow our revenue and increase profitability with limited incremental capital expenditures. We expect our 2009 capital expenditure rate to be similar to the rate we experienced in 2008.

Inter-city Networks

Our inter-city network consists of optical fiber connecting major cities in North America and Europe. The North American and European portions of our network are connected by transatlantic circuits. Our network was built by acquiring from various owners of fiber optic networks the right to use one or two strands of optical fiber out of the multiple fibers owned by the carrier. We have installed the optical and electronic equipment necessary to amplify, regenerate, and route the optical signals along these networks. We have the right to use the fiber under long term agreements. We pay these providers fees for the maintenance of the optical fiber and provide our own equipment maintenance.

Intra-city Networks

In each metropolitan area in which we provide high-speed on-net Internet access service, our backbone network is connected to a router connected to one or more of our metropolitan optical networks. We create our intra-city networks by obtaining the right to use optical fiber from carriers with optical fiber networks in those cities. These metropolitan networks consist of optical fiber that runs from the central router in a market into routers located in our on-net buildings. In most cases the metropolitan fiber runs in a ring architecture, which provides redundancy so that if the fiber is cut, data can still be transmitted to the central router by directing traffic in the opposite direction around the ring. The router in the building provides a connection to each on-net customer.

Within the cities where we offer off-net Internet access service, we lease circuits from telecommunications carriers, primarily local telephone companies, to provide the last mile connection to the customer's premises. Typically, these circuits are aggregated at various locations in those cities onto higher-capacity leased circuits that ultimately connect the local aggregation route to our network.

In-Building Networks

In office buildings where we provide service to multiple tenants we connect our routers to a cable containing 12 to 288 optical fiber strands that typically run from our equipment in the basement of the building through the building riser to the customer location. Service for customers is initiated by connecting a fiber optic cable from a customer's local area network to the infrastructure in the building riser. The customer then has dedicated and secure access to our network using an Ethernet connection. We believe that Ethernet is the lowest cost network connection technology and is used almost universally for the local area networks that businesses operate.

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Internetworking

The Internet is an aggregation of interconnected networks. We have settlement free interconnections between our network and most major and hundreds of smaller Internet Service Providers, or ISPs, at approximately 70 locations. We interconnect our network through public and private peering arrangements. Public peering is the means by which ISPs have traditionally connected to each other at central, public facilities. Larger ISPs also exchange traffic and interconnect their networks by means of direct private connections referred to as private peering.

Peering agreements between ISPs are necessary in order for them to exchange traffic. Without peering agreements, each ISP would have to buy Internet access from every other ISP in order for its customer's traffic, such as email, to reach and be received from customers of other ISPs. We are considered a Tier 1 ISP and, as a result, we have settlement-free peering arrangements with most other providers. This allows us to exchange traffic with those ISPs without payment by either party. In such arrangements, each party exchanging traffic bears its own cost of delivering traffic to the point at which it is handed off to the other party. We also engage in public peering arrangements in which each party also pays a fee to the owner of routing equipment that operates as the central exchange for all the participants. We do not treat our settlement-free peering arrangements as generating revenue or expense related to the traffic exchanged. However, we charge customers representing approximately 2,300 networks for transit services across our network and we sell this service at approximately 400 locations.

Network Management and Control

Our primary network operations centers are located in Washington, D.C. and Madrid, Spain. These facilities provide continuous operational support in both North America and Europe. Our network operations centers are designed to immediately respond to any problems in our network. To ensure the quick replacement of faulty equipment in the intra-city and long-haul networks, we have deployed field engineers across North America and Europe. In addition, we have maintenance contracts with third party vendors that specialize in optical and routed networks.

Our Services

We offer high-speed Internet access and IP connectivity to small and medium-sized businesses, communications providers and other bandwidth-intensive organizations located in North America and Europe.

The table below shows our primary service offerings:

On-Net Services	Bandwidth (Mbps)
Fiber500	0.5
Two Meg	2.0
Fast Ethernet	100
Gigabit Ethernet	1,000
10 Gigabit Ethernet	10,000
Colocation with Internet Access	2 to 10,000
Point-to-Point	1.5 to 10,000

Off-Net Services	Bandwidth (Mbps)
T1 or E1	1.5 or 2.0
T3 or E3	45 or 34
Ethernet	10, 100 or 1,000

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We offer on-net services in 132 metropolitan markets. We serve over 1,300 buildings of which more than 1,100 are located in North America with the remainder located in Europe. Our most popular on-net service in North America is our Fast Ethernet service, which provides Internet access at 100 megabits per second. We typically offer our Fast Ethernet (Internet access) service to our small and medium-sized business customers at \$1,000 a month for month-to-month service. We offer lower prices for longer term commitments. We also offer Internet access services at higher speeds of up to ten Gigabits per second. These services are generally used by customers that have businesses, such as web hosting, that are Internet based and are generally delivered at data centers and carrier hotels. We believe that, on a per-Megabit basis, this service offering is one of the lowest priced in the marketplace. We also offer colocation services in 36 locations in North America and Europe. This service offers Internet access combined with rack space and power in a Cogent facility, allowing the customer to locate a server or other equipment at that location and connect to our Internet service. Our final on-net service offering is our "Point-to-Point" or "Layer 2" service. These point-to-point connections span North America and Europe and allow customers to connect geographically dispersed local area networks in a seamless manner. We emphasize the sale of on-net services because we believe that we have a competitive advantage in providing these services and our sales of these services generate higher gross profit margins.

We offer off-net services to customers not located in our on-net buildings. These services are provided in the metropolitan markets in North America and Europe in which we offer on-net services and in approximately three additional markets. These services are generally provided to small and medium-sized businesses in approximately 2,750 off-net buildings.

We support certain non-core services assumed with certain of our acquisitions. These services include voice services in Toronto, Canada, and legacy point-to-point services. We expect the revenue from these non-core services to decline. We do not actively sell these services and expect the growth of our on-net Internet services to compensate for this loss.

Sales and Marketing

Sales. We employ a direct sales and marketing approach including telesales. As of February 1, 2009, our sales force included 291 full-time employees. Approximately one-third of these employees are located in our call centers with the remaining two-thirds located in our sales offices. Our outside direct sales personnel work through direct face-to-face contact with potential customers in, or intending to locate in, on-net buildings. Through agreements with building owners, we are able to initiate and maintain personal contact with our customers by staging various promotional and social events in our on-net buildings. Direct sales personnel are compensated with a base salary plus quota-based commissions and incentives. We use a customer relationship management system to efficiently track activity levels and sales productivity.

Agent Program. We also have an agent program used as an alternate channel to distribute our products and services. The agent program consists of value-added resellers, IT consultants, and smaller telecom agents, who are managed by our direct sales personnel, and larger national or regional companies whose primary business is to sell telecommunications, data, and Internet services. The agent program includes over 180 agents.

Marketing. Because of our focus on a direct sales force, we have not spent funds on television, radio or print advertising. Our marketing efforts are designed to drive awareness of our products and services, identify qualified leads through various direct marketing campaigns and provide our sales force with product brochures, collateral materials and relevant sales tools to improve the overall effectiveness of our sales organization. In addition, we conduct public relations efforts focused on cultivating industry analyst and media relationships with the goal of securing media coverage and public recognition of our Internet communications services. Our marketing organization is responsible for our product strategy

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and direction based upon primary and secondary market research and the advancement of new technologies.

Competition

We face competition from incumbent carriers, Internet service providers and facilities-based network operators, many of whom are much larger than us, have significantly greater financial resources, better-established brand names and large, existing installed customer bases in the markets in which we compete. We also face competition from other new entrants to the communications services market. Many of these companies offer products and services that are similar to our products and services. Unlike some of our competitors, we do not have title to most of the dark fiber that makes up our network. Our interests in that dark fiber are in the form of long-term leases or IRUs obtained from their titleholders. We rely on the maintenance of such dark fiber to provide our on-net services to customers. We are also dependent on third-party providers, some of whom are our competitors, for the provision of connections to our off-net customers.

We believe that competition is based on many factors, including price, transmission speed, ease of access and use, breadth of service availability, reliability of service, customer support and brand recognition. Because our fiber optic networks have been recently installed compared to those of the incumbent carriers, our state-of-the-art technology may provide us with cost, capacity, and service quality advantages over some existing incumbent carrier networks; however, our network may not support some of the services supported by these legacy networks, such as circuit-switched voice and frame relay. While the Internet access speeds offered by traditional ISPs typically do not match our on-net offerings, these slower services are usually priced lower than our offerings and thus provide competitive pressure on pricing, particularly for more price-sensitive customers. These and other downward pricing pressures have diminished, and may further diminish, the competitive advantages that we have enjoyed as the result of our service pricing.

Regulation

In the United States, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates common carriers' interstate services and state public utilities commissions exercise jurisdiction over intrastate basic telecommunications services. Our Internet service offerings are not currently regulated by the FCC or any state public utility commission. However, we may become subject to regulation in the U.S. at the federal and state levels and in other countries. The offerings of many of our competitors and vendors, especially incumbent local telephone companies, are subject to direct federal and state regulations. These regulations change from time to time in ways that are difficult for us to predict.

In the United States, we are subject to the obligations set forth in the Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement Act, which is administered by the FCC. That law requires that we be able to intercept communications when required to do so by law enforcement agencies. We are required to comply or we may face significant fines and penalties.

There is no current legal requirement that owners or managers of commercial office buildings give access to competitive providers of telecommunications services, although the FCC does prohibit carriers from entering contracts that restrict the right of commercial multiunit property owners to permit any other common carrier to access and serve the property's commercial tenants.

Our subsidiary, Cogent Canada, offers voice and Internet services in Canada. Generally, the regulation of Internet access services and competitive voice services has been similar in Canada to that in the U.S. in that providers of such services face fewer regulatory requirements than the incumbent local telephone company. This may change. Also, the Canadian government has requirements limiting foreign ownership of certain telecommunications facilities in Canada. We are not subject to these

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restrictions today. We will have to comply with these regulations to the extent they change and to the extent we begin using facilities in a manner that subjects us to these restrictions.

Our European subsidiaries operate in a more highly regulated environment for the types of services they provide. In many European countries, a national license or a notice filed with a regulatory authority is required for the provision of data and Internet services. In addition, our subsidiaries operating in member countries of the European Union are subject to the directives and jurisdiction of the European Union. We believe that each of our subsidiaries has the necessary licenses to provide its services in the markets where it operates today. To the extent we expand our operations or service offerings in Europe or other new markets, we may face new regulatory requirements.

The laws related to Internet telecommunications are unsettled and there may be new legislation and court decisions that may affect our services and expose us to liability.

Employees

As of February 1, 2009, we had 531 employees. A union represents twenty-two of our employees in France. We believe that we have a satisfactory relationship with our employees.

Available Information

We were incorporated in Delaware in 1999. We make available free of charge through our Internet website our annual report on Form 10-K, our quarterly reports on Form 10-Q, our current reports on Form 8-K, and any amendments to those reports filed or furnished pursuant to Section 13(a) or 15(d) of the Exchange Act. The reports are made available through a link to the SEC's Internet website at www.sec.gov. You can find these reports and request a copy of our Code of Conduct on our website at www.cogentco.com under the "Investor Relations" link.

ITEM 1A. RISK FACTORS

If our operations do not consistently produce positive cash flow to pay for our growth or meet our operating and financing obligations, and we are unable to otherwise raise additional capital to meet these needs, our ability to implement our business plan will be materially and adversely affected.

We currently generate positive cash flow from our operations. If we acquire or invest in additional businesses, assets, services or technologies we may need to raise additional capital beyond that available from our cash flow. We may also face unforeseen capital requirements for new technology required to remain competitive or to comply with new regulatory requirements, for unforeseen maintenance of our network and facilities, and for other unanticipated expenses associated with running our business. In addition, if we do not retain existing customers or add new customers, our cash flow may be impaired and we may be required to raise additional funds through the issuance of debt or equity. We cannot assure you that we will have access to necessary capital, nor can we assure you that any such financing will be available on terms that are acceptable to our stockholders or us. If issuing equity securities raises additional funds, substantial dilution to existing stockholders may result.

We need to retain existing customers and continue to add new customers in order to become profitable and remain cash flow positive.

In order to become profitable and remain consistently cash flow positive, we need to both retain existing customers and continue to add a large number of new customers. The precise number of additional customers required to become profitable and remain consistently cash flow positive is dependent on a number of factors, including the turnover of existing customers and the revenue mix among customers. We may not succeed in adding customers if our sales and marketing plan is unsuccessful. In addition, many of our target customers are existing businesses that are already

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purchasing Internet access services from one or more providers, often under a contractual commitment. It has been our experience that such target customers are often reluctant to switch providers due to costs associated with switching providers. Further, as some of our customers grow larger they may decide to build their own Internet networks. While no single customer accounted for more than 2.6% of our 2008 revenues, a migration of a few very large Internet users to their own networks or the loss or reduced purchases from several significant customers could impair our growth.

Our growth and financial health are subject to a number of economic risks.

Negative developments throughout 2008 in the credit and financial markets in the United States and worldwide have resulted in extreme disruption in recent months, including, among other things, extreme volatility in security prices, including our own, severely diminished liquidity and credit availability, rating downgrades of certain investments and declining valuations of others. If the capital and credit markets continue to experience volatility and the availability of funds remains limited, it is possible that our ability to access the capital and credit markets for significant purchases or operations may be limited by these conditions or other factors at a time when we would like, or need, to do so. This could have an impact on our ability to react to changing economic and business conditions.

The economic downturn has significantly affected the financial services industry, which includes many of our customers. In addition, the current tightening of credit in financial markets potentially adversely affects the ability of certain of our customers to obtain financing for operations, and could result in a decrease in sales to new customers or existing customers canceling services as well as impact the ability of our customers to make payments, which would negatively impact our cash flow. We are unable to predict the likely duration and severity of the current disruption in financial markets and adverse economic conditions in the U.S. and other countries.

We are experiencing rapid growth of our business and operations and we may not be able to efficiently manage our growth.

We have rapidly grown our company through acquisitions of companies, assets and customers as well as implementation of our own network expansion and the acquisition of new customers through our own sales efforts. Our expansion places significant strains on our management, operational and financial infrastructure. Our ability to manage our growth will be particularly dependent upon our ability to:

expand, develop and retain an effective sales force and qualified personnel;

maintain the quality of our operations and our service offerings;

maintain and enhance our system of internal controls to ensure timely and accurate compliance with our regulatory reporting requirements; and

expand our accounting and operational information systems in order to support our growth.

If we fail to implement these measures successfully, our ability to manage our growth will be impaired.

We may experience difficulties in implementing our expansion in Eastern Europe and may incur related unexpected costs and regulatory issues.

In 2007, we began to expand our network into Eastern Europe. We have experienced difficulty in acquiring dark fiber and other difficulties in making our network operational in this region. The expansion may cost more than we have planned. We also may experience regulatory issues. Finally, we may be unsuccessful in selling our services in this region. If we are not successful in developing our market presence in Eastern Europe our operating results could be adversely impacted.

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We may experience delays and additional costs in expanding our on-net buildings.

Currently, we plan to increase our carrier-neutral facilities and other on-net buildings by approximately 100 buildings in 2009 from 1,326 at December 31, 2008. We may be unsuccessful at identifying appropriate buildings or negotiating favorable terms for acquiring access to such buildings, and consequently, may experience difficulty in adding customers to our network and fully using the network's capacity.

Our connections to the Internet require us to establish and maintain relationships with other providers, which we may not be able to maintain.

The Internet is composed of various public and private network providers who operate their own networks and interconnect them at public and private interconnection points. Our network is one such network. In order to obtain Internet connectivity for our network, we must establish and maintain relationships with other providers and incur the necessary capital costs to locate our equipment and connect our network at these various interconnection points.

By entering into what are known as settlement-free peering arrangements, providers agree to exchange traffic between their respective networks without charging each other. Our ability to avoid the higher costs of acquiring paid dedicated network capacity and to maintain high network performance is dependent upon our ability to establish and maintain peering relationships. The terms and conditions of our peering relationships may also be subject to adverse changes, which we may not be able to control. For example, several network operators with large numbers of individual users are arguing that they should be able to charge or charge more to network operators and businesses that exchange traffic to those users. If we are not able to maintain or increase our peering relationships in all of our markets on favorable terms, we may not be able to provide our customers with high performance or affordable or reliable services, which could cause us to lose existing and potential customers, damage our reputation and have a material adverse effect on our business. We have in the past had disputes with certain of other network providers that resulted in a temporary disruption of the exchange of traffic between our network and the network of the other carrier which occurred as recently as November 2008. We have resolved the majority of such disputes through negotiations. We continue to experience resistance from certain incumbent telephone companies, especially in Europe, to the upgrade of settlement free peering connections necessary to accommodate the growth of traffic we exchange with such carriers. We cannot assure you that we will be able to continue to establish and maintain relationships with providers or favorably resolve disputes with providers.

We may not successfully make or integrate acquisitions or enter into strategic alliances.

As part of our growth strategy, we intend to pursue selected acquisitions and strategic alliances. To date, we have completed 13 acquisitions. We compete with other companies for acquisition opportunities and we cannot assure you that we will be able to effect future acquisitions or strategic alliances on commercially reasonable terms or at all. Even if we enter into these transactions, we may experience:

delays in realizing or a failure to realize the benefits we anticipate;

difficulties or higher-than-anticipated costs associated with integrating any acquired companies, products or services into our existing business;

attrition of key personnel from acquired businesses;

unexpected costs or charges; or

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unforeseen operating difficulties that require significant financial and managerial resources that would otherwise be available for the ongoing development or expansion of our existing operations.

In the past, our acquisitions have often included assets, service offerings and financial obligations that are not compatible with our core business strategy. We have expended management attention and other resources to the divestiture of assets, modification of products and systems as well as restructuring financial obligations of acquired operations. In most acquisitions, we have been successful in renegotiating long-term agreements that we have acquired relating to long distance and local transport of data and IP traffic. If we are unable to satisfactorily renegotiate such agreements in the future or with respect to future acquisitions, we may be exposed to large claims for payment for services and facilities we do not need.

Consummating these transactions could also result in the incurrence of additional debt and related interest expense, as well as unforeseen contingent liabilities, all of which could have a material adverse effect on our business, financial condition and results of operations. Because we have purchased financially distressed companies or their assets, and may continue to do so in the future, we have not had, and may not have, the opportunity to perform extensive due diligence or obtain contractual protections and indemnifications that are customarily provided in corporate acquisitions. As a result, we may face unexpected contingent liabilities arising from these acquisitions. We may also issue additional equity in connection with these transactions, which would dilute our existing shareholders.

Revenues generated by the customer contracts that we have acquired have accounted for a substantial portion of our historical non-core and off-net service revenues. However, following an acquisition, we have experienced a decline in revenue attributable to acquired customers as these customers' contracts have expired and they have entered into standard Cogent customer contracts at generally lower rates or have chosen not to renew service with us. We anticipate that we will experience similar declines with respect to customers we may acquire in the future.

We depend upon our key employees and may be unable to attract or retain sufficient qualified personnel.

Our future performance depends upon the continued contribution of our executive management team and other key employees, in particular, our Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Dave Schaeffer. As founder of our company, Mr. Schaeffer's knowledge of our business and our industry combined with his deep involvement in every aspect of our operations and planning make him particularly well-suited to lead our company and difficult to replace.

Our business could suffer because telephone companies and cable companies may provide better delivery of Internet content originating on their own networks.

Broadband connections provided by cable TV and telephone companies have become the predominant means by which consumers connect to the Internet. The providers of these broadband connections may treat Internet content delivered from different sources differently. The possibility of this has been characterized as an issue of "net neutrality." As many of our customers operate websites and services that deliver content to consumers our ability to sell our services would be negatively impacted if Internet content delivered by us was less easily received by consumers than Internet content delivered by others.

We have substantial debt which we may not be able to repay when due.

As of December 31, 2008, we have \$92.0 million of face value of senior convertible notes outstanding. The holders of the notes have the right to compel us to repurchase for cash on June 15, 2014, June 15, 2017 and June 15, 2022, all or some of their notes. They also have the right to be paid the principal upon default and upon certain designated events, such as certain changes of control. We

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may not have sufficient funds to pay the principal at the time we are obligated to do so, which could result in bankruptcy, or we may only be able to raise the necessary funds on unfavorable terms.

Our operations outside of the United States expose us to economic, regulatory and other risks.

The nature of our European and Canadian business involves a number of risks, including:

fluctuations in currency exchange rates;

exposure to additional regulatory and legal requirements, including import restrictions and controls, exchange controls, tariffs and other trade barriers;

difficulties in staffing and managing our foreign operations;

changes in political and economic conditions; and

exposure to additional and potentially adverse tax regimes.

As we continue to expand our European and Canadian businesses, our success will depend, in part, on our ability to anticipate and effectively manage these and other risks. Our failure to manage these risks and grow our European and Canadian operations may have a material adverse effect on our business and results of operations.

Fluctuations in foreign exchange rates may adversely affect our financial position and results of operations.

Our European and Canadian operations expose us to currency fluctuations and exchange rate risk. For example, while we record revenues and financial results from our European operations in Euros, these results are reflected in our consolidated financial statements in U.S. dollars. Therefore, our reported results are exposed to fluctuations in the exchange rates between the U.S. dollar and the Euro. We fund certain of our cash flow requirements of our European operations in U.S. dollars. Accordingly, in the event that the Euro strengthens versus the dollar to a greater extent than we anticipate the cash flow requirements associated with our European operations may be significantly greater in U.S.-dollar terms than planned.

Our business could suffer delays and problems due to the actions of network providers on whom we are partially dependent.

Our off-net customers are connected to our network by means of communications lines that are provided as services by local telephone companies and others. We may experience problems with the installation, maintenance and pricing of these lines and other communications links, which could adversely affect our results of operations and our plans to add additional customers to our network using such services. We have historically experienced installation and maintenance delays when the network provider is devoting resources to other services, such as traditional telephony. We have also experienced pricing problems when a lack of alternatives allows a provider to charge high prices for services in an area. We attempt to reduce this problem by using many different providers so that we have alternatives for linking a customer to our network. Competition among the providers tends to improve installation, maintenance and pricing.

Our network could suffer serious disruption if certain locations experience serious damage.

There are certain locations through which a large amount of our Internet traffic passes. Examples are facilities in which we exchange traffic with other carriers, the facility through which our transatlantic traffic passes, and certain of our network hub sites. If any of these facilities were destroyed or seriously damaged a significant amount of our network traffic could be disrupted. Because of the large volume of traffic passing through these facilities our ability (and the ability of carriers with whom we exchange traffic) to quickly restore service would be challenged. There could be parts of our network or the networks of other carriers that could not be quickly restored or that would experience substantially reduced service for a significant time. If such a disruption occurs, our reputation could be negatively impacted which may cause us to lose

customers and adversely affect our ability to attract new customers, resulting in an adverse effect on our operating results.

If the information systems that we depend on to support our customers, network operations, sales, billing and financial reporting do not perform as expected, our operations and our financial results may be adversely affected.

We rely on complex information systems to operate our network and support our other business functions. Our ability to track sales leads, close sales opportunities, provision services, bill our customers for those services and prepare our financial statements depends upon the effective integration of our various information systems. If our systems, individually or collectively, fail or do not perform as expected, our ability to process and provision orders, to make timely payments to vendors, to ensure that we collect revenue owed to us and prepare our financial statements would be adversely affected. Such failures or delays could result in increased capital expenditures, customer and vendor dissatisfaction, loss of business or the inability to add new customers or additional services, and prepare accurate and timely financial statements all of which would adversely affect our business and results of operations.

We have historically incurred operating losses and these losses may continue for the foreseeable future.

Since we initiated operations in 2000, we have generated operating losses and these losses may continue for the foreseeable future. In 2006 we had an operating loss of \$46.6 million, in 2007 we had an operating loss of \$29.9 million and in 2008 we had an operating loss of \$22.2 million. As of December 31, 2008, we had an accumulated deficit of \$269.2 million. Continued losses may prevent us from pursuing our strategies for growth or may require us to seek unplanned additional capital and could cause us to be unable to meet our debt service obligations, capital expenditure requirements or working capital needs.

We may have difficulty intercepting communications as required by the U.S. Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement Act and similar laws of other countries.

The U.S. Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement Act and the laws of other countries require that we be able to intercept communications when required to do so by law enforcement agencies. We may experience difficulties and incur significant costs in complying with these laws. If we are unable to comply with the laws we could be subject to fines in the United States of up to \$1.0 million per event and equal or greater fines in other countries.

Our business could suffer from an interruption of service from our fiber providers.

The carriers from whom we have obtained our inter-city and intra-city dark fiber maintain that fiber. If these carriers fail to maintain the fiber or disrupt our fiber connections for other reasons, such as business disputes with us and governmental takings, our ability to provide service in the affected markets or parts of markets would be impaired. The companies that maintain our inter-city dark fiber and many of the companies that maintain our intra-city dark fiber are also competitors of ours. Consequently, they may have incentives to act in ways unfavorable to us. While we have successfully mitigated the effects of prior service interruptions and business disputes in the past, we may incur significant delays and costs in restoring service to our customers in connection with future service interruptions, and we may lose customers if delays are substantial.

Our business depends on agreements with colocation operators, which we could fail to obtain or maintain.

Our business depends upon access to customers in carrier neutral colocation centers, which are facilities in which many large users of the Internet house the computer servers that deliver content and applications to users by means of the Internet and provide access to multiple Internet access networks. Most colocation centers allow any carrier to operate within the facility (for a standard fee). We expect to enter into additional colocation agreements as part of our growth plan. Current government

regulations do not require colocation operators to allow all carriers access on terms that are reasonable or nondiscriminatory. We have been successful in obtaining agreements with these operators in the past and have generally found that the operators want to have us in their colocation facilities because we offer low-cost, high capacity Internet service to their other customers. Any deterioration in our existing relationships with these colocation center operators could harm our sales and marketing efforts and could substantially reduce our potential customer base.

Our business depends on license agreements with building owners and managers, which we could fail to obtain or maintain.

Our on-net business depends upon our in-building networks. Our in-building networks depend on access agreements with building owners or managers allowing us to install our in-building networks and provide our services in these buildings. These agreements typically have terms of five to ten years, with one or more renewal options. Any deterioration in our existing relationships with building owners or managers could harm our sales and marketing efforts and could substantially reduce our potential customer base. We expect to enter into additional access agreements as part of our growth plan. Current federal and state regulations do not require building owners to make space available to us or to do so on terms that are reasonable or nondiscriminatory. While the FCC has adopted regulations that prohibit common carriers under its jurisdiction from entering into exclusive arrangements with owners of multi-tenant commercial office buildings, these regulations do not require building owners to offer us access to their buildings. Building owners or managers may decide not to permit us to install our networks in their buildings or may elect not to renew or amend our access agreements. The initial term of most of our access agreements will conclude in the next several years. Most of these agreements have one or more automatic renewal periods and others may be renewed at the option of the landlord. While we have historically been successful in renewing these agreements and no single building access agreement is material to our success, the failure to obtain or maintain a number of these agreements would reduce our revenue, and we might not recover our costs of procuring building access and installing our in-building networks.

We may not be able to obtain or construct additional building laterals to connect new buildings to our network.

In order to connect a new building to our network we need to obtain or construct a lateral from our metropolitan network to the building. We may not be able to obtain fiber in an existing lateral at an attractive price from a provider and may not be able to construct our own lateral due to the cost of construction or municipal regulatory restrictions. Failure to obtain fiber in an existing lateral or to construct a new lateral could keep us from adding new buildings to our network and from increasing our revenues.

Impairment of our intellectual property rights and our alleged infringement on other companies' intellectual property rights could harm our business.

We are aware of several other companies in our and other industries that use the word "Cogent" in their corporate names. One company has informed us that it believes our use of the name "Cogent" infringes on their intellectual property rights in that name. If such a challenge is successful, we could be required to change our name and lose the goodwill associated with the Cogent name in our markets.

The sector in which we operate is highly competitive, and we may not be able to compete effectively.

We face significant competition from incumbent carriers, Internet service providers and facilities-based network operators. Relative to us, many of these providers have significantly greater financial resources, more well-established brand names, larger customer bases, and more diverse strategic plans and service offerings.

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Intense competition from these traditional and new communications companies has led to declining prices and margins for many communications services, and we expect this trend to continue as competition intensifies in the future. Decreasing prices for high-speed Internet services have somewhat diminished the competitive advantage that we have enjoyed as a result of our service pricing.

Our competitors may also introduce new technology or services that make our services less attractive to potential customers. For example, some providers are introducing a new version of the Internet protocol (Ipv6) that we do not plan to introduce at this time. If this becomes important to Internet users our ability to compete may be lessened or we may have to incur additional costs in order to accommodate this technology.

We issue projected results and estimates for future periods from time to time, and such projections and estimates are subject to inherent uncertainties and may prove to be inaccurate.

Financial information, results of operations and other projections that we may issue from time to time are based upon our assumptions and estimates. While we believe these assumptions and estimates to be reasonable when they are developed, they are inherently subject to significant business, economic and competitive uncertainties and contingencies, many of which are beyond our control. You should understand that certain unpredictable factors could cause our actual results to differ from our expectations and those differences may be material. No independent expert participates in the preparation of these estimates. These estimates should not be regarded as a representation by us as to our results of operations during such periods as there can be no assurance that any of these estimates will be realized. In light of the foregoing, we caution you not to place undue reliance on these estimates. These estimates constitute forward-looking statements.

The utilization of our certain of net operating loss carryforwards are limited and depending upon the amount of our taxable income we may be subject to paying income taxes earlier than planned.

Due to the uncertainty surrounding the realization of our net deferred tax asset, we have recorded a valuation allowance for the full amount of our net deferred tax asset. As of December 31, 2008, we have combined net operating loss carry-forwards of approximately \$989 million. This amount includes federal and state net operating loss carry-forwards in the United States of approximately \$379 million and net operating loss carry-forwards related to our European operations of approximately \$611 million. Section 382 of the Internal Revenue Code in the United States limits the utilization of net operating losses when ownership changes, as defined by that section, occur. We have performed an analysis of our Section 382 ownership changes and have determined that the utilization of certain of our net operating loss carryforwards may be limited. This restricted amount includes the limitation on annual utilization related to the remaining \$183 million of federal and state net operating loss carry-forwards of Allied Riser Communications Corporation that were acquired by us via a 2002 merger. The net operating loss carryforwards in the United States will expire, if unused, between 2022 and 2027. The net operating loss carry-forwards related to our European operations include \$493 million that do not expire and \$115 million that expire beginning in 2016.

Network failure or delays and errors in transmissions expose us to potential liability.

Our network uses a collection of communications equipment, software, operating protocols and proprietary applications for the high-speed transportation of large quantities of data among multiple locations. Given the complexity of our network, it is possible that data will be lost or distorted. Delays in data delivery may cause significant losses to one or more customers using our network. Our network may also contain undetected design faults and software bugs that, despite our testing, may not be discovered in time to prevent harm to our network or to the data transmitted over it. The failure of any equipment or facility on the network could result in the interruption of customer service until we effect necessary repairs or install replacement equipment. Network failures, delays and errors could also

result from natural disasters, power losses, security breaches, computer viruses, denial of service attacks and other natural or man-made events. Our off-net services are dependent on the networks of other providers or on local telephone companies. Network failures, faults or errors could cause delays or service interruptions, expose us to customer liability or require expensive modifications that could have a material adverse effect on our business.

As an Internet access provider, we may incur liability for information disseminated through our network.

The law relating to the liability of Internet access providers and on-line services companies for information carried on or disseminated through their networks is unsettled. As the law in this area develops and as we expand our international operations, the potential imposition of liability upon us for information carried on and disseminated through our network could require us to implement measures to reduce our exposure to such liability, which may require the expenditure of substantial resources or the discontinuation of certain products or service offerings. Any costs that are incurred as a result of such measures or the imposition of liability could harm our business.

The holders of our senior convertible notes have the right to convert their notes to common stock.

The holders of our senior convertible notes are under certain circumstances able to convert their notes into common stock at a conversion price of \$49.18 per share of common stock and to obtain additional shares of common stock. If our share price exceeds \$49.18 and the conversion right is exercised by the holders of the notes the number of our shares of common stock outstanding will increase which could reduce further appreciation in our stock price and impact our per share earnings. Rather than issue the stock we are permitted to pay the cash equivalent in value to the stock to be issued. We might not have sufficient funds to do this or doing so might have other detrimental impacts on us.

Legislation and government regulation could adversely affect us.

As an Internet service provider, we are not subject to substantial regulation by the FCC or the state public utilities commissions in the United States. Internet service is also subject to minimal regulation in Europe and in Canada. If we decide to offer traditional voice services or otherwise expand our service offerings to include services that would cause us to be deemed a common carrier, we will become subject to additional regulation. Additionally, if we offer voice service using IP (voice over IP) or offer certain other types of data services using IP we may become subject to additional regulation. This regulation could impact our business because of the costs and time required to obtain necessary authorizations, the additional taxes that we may become subject to or may have to collect from our customers, and the additional administrative costs of providing voice services, and other costs. Even if we do not decide to offer additional services, governmental authorities may decide to impose additional regulation and taxes upon providers of Internet service. All of these could inhibit our ability to remain a low cost carrier and could have a material adverse effect on our business, financial condition or results of operations.

Much of the law related to the liability of Internet service providers remains unsettled. For example, many jurisdictions have adopted laws related to unsolicited commercial email or "spam" in the last several years. Other legal issues, such as the sharing of copyrighted information, transborder data flow, universal service, and liability for software viruses could become subjects of additional legislation and legal development. We cannot predict the impact of these changes on us. Regulatory changes could have a material adverse effect on our business, financial condition or results of operations.

Terrorist activity throughout the world, military action to counter terrorism and natural disasters could adversely impact our business.

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States and the continued threat of terrorist activity and other acts of war or hostility have had, and may continue to have, an adverse effect on business, financial and general economic conditions internationally. Effects from these events and any future terrorist activity, including cyber terrorism, may, in turn, increase our costs due to the need to provide enhanced security, which would adversely affect our business and results of operations. These circumstances may also damage or destroy the Internet infrastructure and may adversely affect our ability to attract and retain customers, our ability to raise capital and the operation and maintenance of our network access points. We are particularly vulnerable to acts of terrorism because our largest customer concentration is located in New York, our headquarters is in Washington, D.C., and we have significant operations in Paris, Madrid and London, cities that have historically been targets for terrorist attacks. We are also susceptible to other catastrophic events such as major natural disasters, extreme weather, fire or similar events that could effect our headquarters, other offices, our network, infrastructure or equipment, which could adversely affect our business.

ITEM 2. DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTIES

We lease and own space for offices, data centers, colocation facilities, and points-of-presence.

Our headquarters facility consists of approximately 15,370 square feet located in Washington, D.C. The lease for our headquarters is with an entity controlled by our Chief Executive Officer. The lease expires on August 31, 2012.

We also lease a total of approximately 462,000 square feet of space in 72 locations to house our colocation facilities, corporate headquarters, regional offices and operations centers. The remaining term of these leases ranges from 3 months to 10 years with, in many cases, options to renew.

We believe that these facilities are generally in good condition and suitable for our operations.

ITEM 3. LEGAL PROCEEDINGS

On September 2, 2008, Sprint Communications L. P. (a subsidiary of Sprint-Nextel Corporation) filed suit against us in the Circuit court of Fairfax County, Virginia seeking payment for services allegedly provided by Sprint related to the exchange of Internet traffic by Sprint and the Company. Sprint sought \$1.9 million and additional amounts. The lawsuit has been dismissed.

We are involved in legal proceedings in the normal course of our business that we do not expect to have a material adverse affect on our business, financial condition or results of operations. For a discussion of the significant proceedings in which we are involved, see Note 6 to our consolidated financial statements.

ITEM 4. SUBMISSION OF MATTERS TO A VOTE OF SECURITY HOLDERS.

No matters were submitted to a vote of our security holders during the quarter ended December 31, 2008.

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PART II

ITEM 5. MARKET FOR THE REGISTRANT'S COMMON EQUITY, RELATED STOCKHOLDER MATTERS AND ISSUER PURCHASES OF EQUITY SECURITIES

Our sole class of common equity is our common stock, par value \$0.001, which is currently traded on the NASDAQ Global Select Market under the symbol "CCOI". Prior to March 6, 2006, our common stock traded on the American Stock Exchange under the symbol "COI". Prior to February 5, 2002 no established public trading market for our common stock existed.

As of February 1, 2009, there were approximately 160 holders of record of shares of our common stock holding 44,341,898 shares of our common stock.

The table below shows, for the quarters indicated, the reported high and low trading prices of our common stock.