

DENVER INC.: Qwest CEO takes comfort in his VP

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Qwest CEO Ed Mueller's coming-out party this week at the ritzy St. Regis Hotel on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan featured gourmet sandwiches, pasta salad and a couple of pieces of sushi served in an attractive Bento box.

Many of the 180 analysts in attendance had finished their lunches by the time Mueller (pronounced Miller) strode into the room, circulating among the tables and greeting analysts individually.

Stephanie Comfort, a onetime analyst herself and formerly Qwest's investor relations director, was congratulated on her recent promotion to Qwest's executive vice president of corporate strategy.

Comfort spent the entire lunch asking analysts at her table about their concerns and answering their questions. They especially wanted to know how Qwest was being affected by the economy as well as competition from wireless and cable.

When Mueller reached Comfort's table, he quipped: "Stephanie is going to spill all the inside secrets."

Mueller allowed as how maybe he should just put her in front of the group and have her run the meeting.

Wattles raises voice

Mark Wattles is ready for the big leagues in terms of consumer electronics companies, having gotten his feet wet turning around bankrupt Thornton-based Ultimate Electronics over the past three years.

In the past three months, he's accumulated a 6.5 percent stake - worth about \$50 million - in Circuit City, and now he's challenging the company to get rid of some board members and name a new CEO.

"I've seen that this type of business can be turned around, and Circuit City has a great brand and has a lot of upside opportunity to get the right management team in place, and this company can make a lot of money," Wattles said on CNBC Friday.

But, what about his grand requests and relatively small stake in the company, whose stock price has lost about 80 percent of its value over the past 12 months? Circuit City basically told him to take a hike in a statement Friday because his requests are "disproportionate to his relative ownership of the company's shares."

"I would agree with that if I was taking all the five board seats myself," said Wattles, head of Wattles Capital Management in Salt Lake City.

He says he picked only one replacement board member who has an affiliation with his company and that the others are independent.

"I've seen that this type of business can be turned around, and Circuit City has a great brand and has a lot of upside opportunity. Get the right management team in place and this company can make a lot of money," he said.

From odd to weird

Steve Demos owned White Wave when soy milk was weird. Now that it's not anymore, Demos and his company NextFoods have moved on to the next newly weird thing.

NextFoods has recently launched GoodBelly, an organic fruit drink with multivitamins and probiotics, which, to really simplify, are bacteria or yeasts intended to help the body's naturally occurring gut flora.

GoodBelly, according to NextFoods, "contains an impressive 20 billion live and active probiotic cultures, which are clinically proven to restore the balance of gut flora in the intestinal tract and promote immunity."

It should be noted that GoodBelly does not, however, contain soy.

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