ENABLING BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

THROUGH WI-FI DEPLOYMENT

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This article was written by Mark Samuels, Chief Editor at CIONET UK, and Roger Camrass, Director of Research at CIONET International. The content is based on an event sponsored by Telstra and Cisco held on 12 June at the Savoy Hotel in London.

Setting the context

As the business executive speeds through the airport, as the opera lover enters the historic arts venue, and as the teenager moves around the shopping mall, they all expect a seamless digital experience offering a boarding pass, digital programme, or store discount codes exactly when they need them. As the discussion at the recent Telstra and Cisco roundtable shows, this experience can only be enabled by having a transformative wireless network.

In today's digital world, the modern consumer's expectations of a digital experience as they move through venues and spaces, such as an airport or a shopping centre, are a given when executives are considering an upgrade of the business wireless infrastructure.

As time becomes more precious, people want to use every moment to be more effective or productive. Customers moving through venues and locations, consuming large volumes of data, booking their next meeting, or interacting with applications expect a seamless experience. And yet, physical environments still present many unique challenges.

Having a footfall purpose is the foundation for consumer digital experiences. Venues overlaying the physical environment with the digital environment must be aware of that purpose. Reflecting on the different business challenges, Roger Camrass and James Whitebread, former CTO at Royal Opera House, discussed the fast-changing communication challenges of today's digital world.

Using digitalisation to increase revenues, dealing with governance, assessing the impact of AI, enhancing services for clients, migrating technologies to a future state, understanding drivers for change, leveraging real-time data, and managing cybersecurity challenges were some of the key points and common challenges that the technology leaders explored during the evening's conversation.

James Whitebread, former CTO at The Royal Opera House, talked about the business challenges and customer-engagement opportunities he had encountered while going through a recent digital transformation project. Rob Robinson, Head of Telstra Purple EMEA, and Adam Wreathall shared their first-hand experiences of capturing and prioritising stakeholder requirements, the variability of physical buildings and spaces and the importance of clear business objectives. The roundtable discussion covered the following areas:

- How can we deal with complex spaces and large historic venues?
- Upgrading a network alone will not deliver transformative change, processes and people need to change too
- How to build a business case to secure funds and quantify the value of different use cases / quantitative metrics the business can track to showcase innovation
- How can we deliver innovative and valuable services?
- How can we build secure and future-proof networks?

Roundtable discussion: Key points

How can we deal with complex network infrastructures?

Many digital leaders must contend with complex buildings that require intricate networking solutions. Most building and campus networks are fragmented into separate functions across voice, data, security and operations. This fragmentation can lead to suboptimal control and a legacy of wired and Wi-Fi networks.

A commercial case exists to integrate complex networks in a unified wireless network that brings agility, control and futureproofing. Unified networks should lower the total cost of ownership and present new opportunities for revenue growth via innovative services.

Budgets are tight across most businesses at the moment. However, Adam Wreathall drew on his experience of modern unified networks by making the point that an upgraded network does more than simply allow additional applications to be layered over the top. He said the network itself brings innovation by, for example, tracking movement through the building, showing dwell time and providing analytics about the consumers who engage with your offer.

How can we build the business case for a network transformation?

By understanding the opportunities for unlocking additional values, technologists can work with other parts of the business to build the metrics that form a compelling use case. Technology leaders must get to the heart of business requirements to enable their organisations to generate a return on investment that meets strategic aims.

Before the digital era, a network used to be mainly pipes, a means to an end to get the data where it needs to be. Today, a network is about enhancing and enriching the customer experience to differentiate the business, generate new revenue streams and tap into ways to engage with customers in different and unique ways.

The first key step is to engage with non-technical stakeholders to identify use cases. If technologists step into the shoes of day-to-day users and bring to life the transformed capabilities that unified networks can support, they develop an engaged approach that accelerates stakeholders' buy-in to the network upgrade,

Taking a user-centric approach is key. When presenting your business case, articulating the benefits and outcomes in users' language makes the process more powerful. Beyond building network diagrams, you should spend a day in the life of the end user. Experiencing the consumer's world will help technologists understand their varied needs and demands as they enable the delivery of vibrant digital experiences.

How can we start to build the network of the future?

But with so many competing requirements, where should you start? Focus on areas of the network upgrade that will have the most transformative impact on the business. Align to the company mission and strategy – focus on prioritisation and the core intent. Consider calling out changes that will have the most impact on the business and present them to stakeholders to secure buy-in.

Maintaining an optimised network throughout its lifetime is an important consideration. Your board must recognise the risk of interrupted service. Look for a network provider with assurances of uninterrupted provision through enforceable service-level agreements.

All responsible businesses are focused on ESG. Use the technology in an intelligent way to control and adapt key factors that contribute to ESG strategy. Having accurate metrics is the bedrock of ESG reporting and improvement. If you can't measure it, you can't improve it.

Managing risk and providing continuity builds confidence across the business. The key to success in these discussions is finding a way to boost the board's understanding of network capabilities. Open their eyes to the power of change by showing them value-focused solutions to business challenges.

An Agile approach, where the network is improved in small, iterative steps, is a potential alternative to an expensive, big-bang transformation. Agile steps require effective governance. Establish clear goals to receive support from senior business stakeholders. You must know your long-term aims to get the board to buy into your ideas.

Look to build a positive experience from the outset. Responsible project delivery will be phased to minimise business disruption. Any project delivery needs to have business operations and processes in mind. Ensure business continuity during project implementation and ensure the experience is positive.

How can we deliver innovative and valuable services?

Your aim should be to enable innovation through high-performance wireless networks. An upgraded network is the foundation for all digital applications. Ultimately, the network can drive innovation through data and analytics to track foot traffic and improve personal experiences for customers.

You can only build innovative applications and services on a strong networking infrastructure. Great networks are the bedrock of the organisation. The network delivers innovation and enhanced customer experiences but also supports overlayed services that excite users. Use proof of concepts at a small scale to demonstrate the benefits of new services. It's much easier to secure a widescale investment once your business sees what good looks like.

Flexibility to innovate, test and trial different scenarios as part of the stress testing of the implementation is critical. Your partner should have automation and workflow solutions focused on your sector.

Remember that meeting user requirements is a critical success factor. You will encounter a broad range of users. One size does not fit all – some people will have basic requirements while others will have complex demands. The services you build on your network must be personalised and easy to use.

Once the project aims are confirmed, bring to life the future state with authentic real-life scenarios – not just a network diagram. Step into the worlds of the different divisions of the company – front of house, ticket sales, concession sellers – and play the vision back to the business in their words and worlds. Reassure them that their concerns and perspectives are baked into the new design.

How can we build secure and future-proof networks?

By enabling identity-based access to environments, you free the user to consume the network in a way that facilitates the best outcomes for the individual and the business.

Different profiles within the business should have the right reporting metrics at their fingertips, enabling holistic and strategic decision-making. Technology leaders should aim for a point where people access the services they need securely, regardless of device or location.

An upgraded wireless network is the foundation of future innovation and user experiences. Internet of Things-connected devices, robots, and virtual and mixed-reality environments should all be enabled as part of the future roadmap.

Think about how you might build a user interface to demonstrate how investments in networks and innovative data-led services will deliver tangible results. These data-rich dashboards will prove the value of an updated network to senior stakeholders.

Conclusion: Next steps

Roger concluded the event and thanked the speakers and delegated for their contributions. Several key points emerged from the discussion:

- Align with the business stakeholders – Organisations span different business functions with contrasting needs. Focus on ensuring that the experiences you develop are tightly matched to business objectives.

- Walk in the shoes of your stakeholders so you can genuinely appreciate the challenges and business drives in their world.

- Identify how your organisation can enhance the user experience to drive greater innovation, productivity, access, and information to generate the maximum business potential and outcomes.

- Run specialised workshops – Work with a technology partner like Telstra to consider today's limitations and tomorrow's infrastructure possibilities in a workshop that brings business stakeholders together.

Authors

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A pioneer of today's Internet as an ARPA research fellow at MIT in the seventies, Roger has spent over fifty years helping corporations harness the power of new technologies such as AI, cloud, mobile communications, e-commerce, voice recognition and satellite. He was a partner at EY responsible for e-commerce during the dot.com boom. He is a Cambridge University and MIT graduate and a visiting professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

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Mark is a business writer and editor, with extensive experience of the way technology is used and adopted by CIOs. His experience has been gained through senior editorships, investigative journalism and postgraduate research. Editorial clients include the Guardian, The Times, the Sunday Times and the Economist Intelligence Unit. Mark has written content for a range of IT companies and marketing agencies. He has a PhD from the University of Sheffield, and master's and undergraduate degrees in geography from the University of Birmingham.

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