



## TOOL OF THE TRADE

WHY IS THERE SO MUCH CONFUSION ABOUT DCIM?



## THINKING OUT OF THE BOX

BUILDING ENERGY EFFICIENCY INTO DATA CENTRES

## TWIST AND SHOUT

DEVELOPMENTS IN COPPER CABLING STANDARDISATION

# Northern light

After leaving school at the age of 16, **Scott McEwan** quickly recognised the important role that structured cabling would play in modern buildings and is now head of one of Scotland's leading network infrastructure design and installation companies. Rob Shepherd spoke to him about his career, the secrets of his managerial success and what it takes to stay ahead of the curve in a fiercely competitive sector

**► RS: Tell us a bit about yourself – who are you and what do you do?**

**SM:** I am Scott McEwan, chief executive at Boston Networks, where I am responsible for the overall management of the business and the planning and delivery of our strategic business plan.

**RS: What motivated you to join the IT industry and how did you arrive in your current role?**

**SM:** I left school at 16 to start an electrical apprenticeship and thereafter worked in the building services industry in various commercial and industrial environments.

I was working on a project that involved the installation and commissioning of fibre optic cabling and a new solution called Category 3 structured cabling. I was already fascinated with the evolution of technology and was intrigued to understand how these new leading edge systems were going to replace legacy cabling solutions.

I also became interested in networks, the

devices cabling systems connect, and the faster speeds and feeds they provide. In addition to my interest in technology, I had a desire to manage people and quickly worked my way through a number of roles and disciplines to broaden my experience, including project management, estimating and design, sales management, and operations.

When I was 22, I applied for the position of operations manager at the company where I worked. I didn't expect to get the position but I wanted to make sure the directors knew how serious I was about my career development. From then onwards, I focused on progressing, taking on a number of challenging opportunities including a stint in London where I gained invaluable experience of a tough, but fast evolving IT market.

Keith Anderson, our chairman, and I

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started Boston Networks back in 2000. At the time we felt there was a gap in the market for a company to provide both cabling and wireless solutions to connect people and systems within buildings, but also importantly, between buildings to allow the client to own their network asset from end to end. This quickly evolved and focus shifted to the connected device in addition to the wired and wireless infrastructure.

We were profitable from day one and the recession endured during the very early days made us realise that we were more than capable of delivering our business plans, even in the toughest of markets.

**RS: What differentiates a good installation company from a not so good one?**

SM: Good question. I think it has to be a combination of adopting a customer first approach and offering quality solutions and a professional and open service. That is, always putting the customer first and never compromising on quality – right from the very initial enquiry through to the installation and post-project maintenance and support. Understanding and listening to customers is pivotal to our success – we are a very customer focused business and pride ourselves on getting to know our clients, their challenges and requirements.

It is perfectly normal for some companies to lead with a specific technology or solution in mind. Since the very early days, we have taken a vendor agnostic approach. As a business we feel this increases the value we offer to the customer, as the technology decision is always made based on their specific requirements, rather than which vendor offers the best discount or margin.

**RS: What is the biggest issue facing the installation and integration side of the industry at the moment?**

SM: The biggest challenge has to be the slow adoption and use of new technologies. For example, the UK still remains relatively far behind Scandinavia and the Middle East, which have fully embraced new technologies such as IP video surveillance.

Yes, this is partly due to the UK being early adopters of the first CCTV systems and ICT technologies, however, given the advances in technology over the past decade, the

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performance of many legacy systems, and the adoption of cloud based systems, this will have to be addressed if businesses are to compete competitively on a global scale.

According to research conducted by the Centre for Economic and Business Research (CEBR), medium sized businesses in the UK are not only lagging behind larger enterprises in terms of ICT adoption, but this has now also been linked to a slowdown in productivity within those businesses.

Another example is in the security market, where legacy analogue cameras still represent the majority. Even although the derived benefits of IP camera technology and video monitoring are substantial, many still choose to upgrade system elements to provide short-term solutions, rather than adopting new technologies and reaping the rewards.

**RS: Does winning a contract still come down to who can do the quickest job at the lowest price?**

SM: No, I don't believe it does. When it comes to network infrastructure, I believe decisions are based around a company's capacity, capability, credibility, and the confidence the decision maker has on its ability to deliver the project.

I am a firm believer that quality and cost are inextricably linked, and that cost is only ever an issue when the value is questionable. Anyone can lower their price to win a contract, but this can often result in low

cost inferior solutions being installed, often by unqualified personnel.

Low cost solutions can, for many, seem like an easy and cost efficient option but, given the importance of a reliable and resilient network infrastructure to business operations, quality is not an area that should be compromised.

Walking away from a contract bid is never easy, but to risk losing your reputation as a result of compromising on quality is not a decision we have or would ever take.

**RS: Is training and skills development given enough consideration by installation companies and what more should be done to enhance the professionalism of those doing this type of work?**

SM: Sadly, I don't think it is. The quality of an installation is vitally important to how a network will perform from day one and throughout its lifetime. Using only qualified engineers who have experience of network infrastructure installations will improve professionalism, but it is ultimately the responsibility of the installer themselves to employ and utilise trained personnel and to make the right decision for their customer.

Ensuring on-site engineers have relevant on the ground experience and manufacturer specific training is essential to ensure solutions are deployed using best practice guidelines. All our installation engineers are fully employed by the business and undergo



regular training, such as NVQs, and hold Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards.

Apprenticeships are also a great way of supporting local social enterprise and building a strong engineering base. About a quarter of our engineers began life as apprentices, learning skills both on the job and in the classroom.

**RS: Do you agree with the term ‘intelligent building’ and are we anywhere near meeting the potential of what could be achieved in the modern workplace?**

SM: Yes – wholeheartedly! We’ve been promoting the concept for many years and have designed and deployed countless intelligent building solutions across multiple verticals, most recently for the UK’s latest super hospitals, the new South Glasgow University Hospital and the Royal Hospital for Sick Children.

In the UK, we are still relatively early in the intelligent building technology adoption lifecycle. As the demand for more efficient and cost effective buildings increases as a result of economic and environmental pressures, the multiple benefits intelligent buildings deliver such as cost efficiencies and enhanced security will be realised.

**RS: What’s the best piece of advice you’ve been given and how has it helped you during your career?**

SM: You won’t know until you try. We encourage our team to be brave, to make their own decisions, and not to be afraid of making mistakes. It not only empowers the team and gives them valuable commercial and career experience, but it gives them the confidence to make important business

decisions.

In addition it is important not to try to be everything to everyone – we absolutely embrace individuality and focus our efforts on providing the best technology to fit our clients’ needs, rather than bidding for every opportunity and leading with cost.

**RS: How do you predict the network infrastructure industry will develop over the next five years?**

SM: During the next five years it’s estimated the amount of digital data produced will exceed 40 zettabytes (ZB), the equivalent of 5,200GB of data for every person on earth. IT spending is also forecast to increase by 4.25 per cent this year, however, this will have a lesser impact on network infrastructure as the majority will be software based as businesses continue to focus on scaling up mobility, cloud services and big data analytics.

Increasing local and national government funding to support partnerships and initiatives like the UK government’s Broadband Delivery programme is essential to expand the reach of high speed fibre and wireless networks. This will help close the gap in the adoption of leading-edge network, wireless and intelligent building technologies.

Access to high speed infrastructure will give businesses the platform they need to adopt new intelligent building, security and ICT technologies, and to realise the competitive advantages and efficiencies these can bring, such as centralised monitoring, instant access to cloud services, augmented video conferencing, and flexible working. □