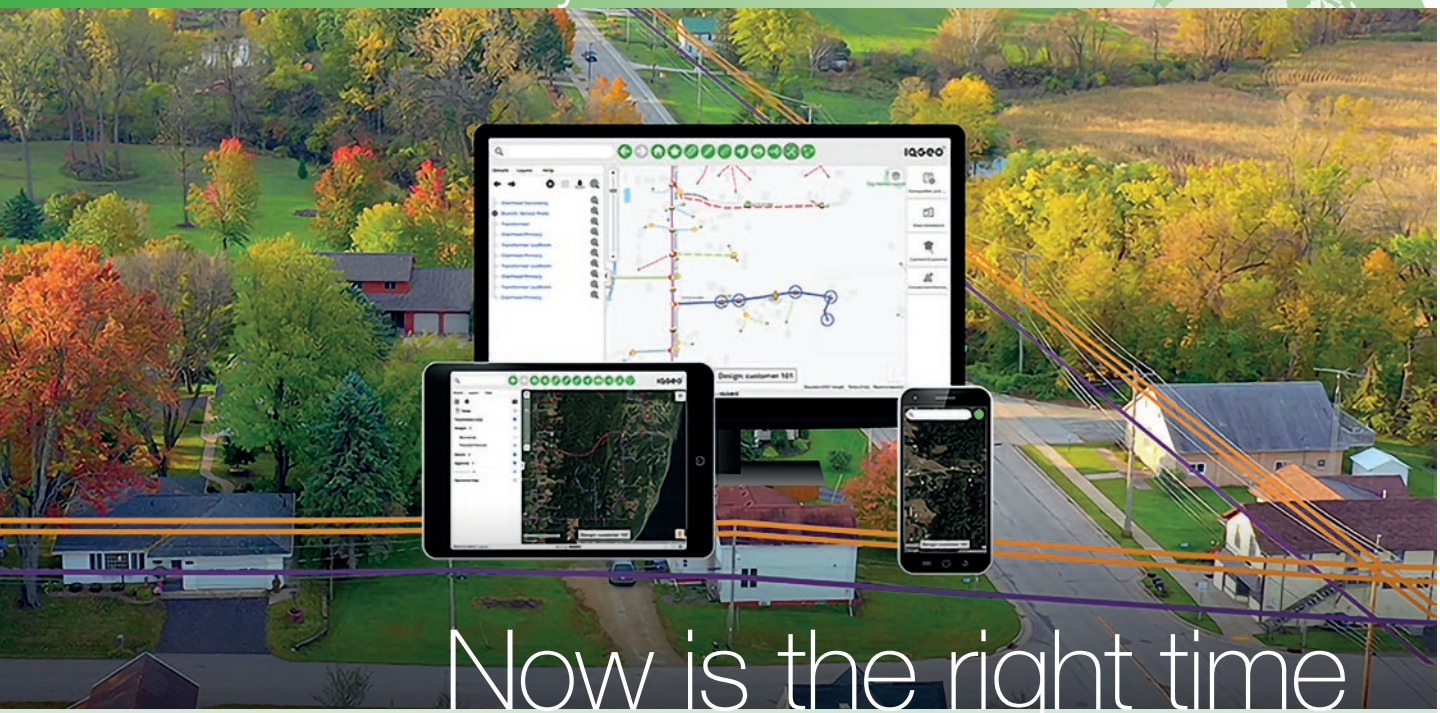

# Now is the right time

## to accelerate fibre rollout

By Raf Meersman, EMEA General Manager, IQGeo

**Gone are the days of waiting for a website to load, staring at various content blocks as they start to take shape as images resolve a few pixels at a time. In today's digitally-driven world, where consumer demand and technology evolution have ramped up quickly, users expect high-speed connectivity in their homes, offices and on-the-go.**

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Super-fast fibre broadband brings the promise of high-speed internet that ensures efficient work activities, streaming, gaming, video calling and seamless application access. Similarly, 5G networks allow these activities to take place anywhere and on-the-go.

The telecom industry has made huge leaps in creating the operational infrastructure that is necessary for the delivery of universal broadband. Some broadband operators are beginning to create digital maps that office and field teams can collaboratively use to integrate data from across the business, building a complete asset library that is a functional, network digital twin.

Access to fast internet has not only become integral to everyday life, it has become a standard, and operators are rapidly innovating to meet new demands and seize the opportunity to increase revenue and market share.

While telecom operators are innovating and embracing this period of rapid change, the key driver is the acceleration of fibre rollout. In the US, for instance, fibre broadband is only accessible to 43% of households. For cellular coverage, the picture is much the same with only 53% of the US enjoying 5G coverage, depending on the provider. Improving technology and developing new technology is crucial for productivity, so businesses can focus on the rapid deployment of fibre to capture market share and maximise their revenue. It's all about velocity.

This is equally true for innovative improvements to customer services that support business operations, especially with the surge of remote and hybrid working models. As an increasing number of weather-related disasters disrupt infrastructure and daily life, operators also face pressure to introduce new technology that ensures the resilience of their networks across commercial and residentials sectors. Without such resilience, the ability of communities to respond to disasters rapidly and efficiently is compromised, and businesses are paralysed until service can be restored. In turn, this greater dependability and faster outage response reduces customer

turnover and leads to more secure long-term revenue targets. Velocity is a driver in these examples as well. Operators must have the technology and processes in place to respond quickly to any number of network management and response scenarios if they are to remain competitive.

There is good news to be found in the face of these realities. The market landscape is ripe with opportunities that broadband operators can seize. The COVID-19 pandemic created entirely new markets and demands for telecom services. While adjusting to life in the ongoing lockdowns and work-from-home norms, many industries found new strength in their remote working policies. This created high demand for reliable, high-speed internet access within the home, rather than just in offices.

As many workers moved out of cities in favour of a more rural lifestyle, good internet service went from a luxury to a necessity. Not only does this mean there are new locations for operators to service, but the desire for more widespread high-speed internet has attracted the attention of governments.

In the US, $45 billion has been budgeted for the 'Internet for All' Initiative, set up to provide digital equity and ensure that every US household has access to reliable, high-speed internet. In a similar fashion, Europe is investing in reducing the cost to provide internet services to rural areas of the continent.

With high demand and the backing of policy-makers, rapid execution is both achievable and necessary. But how can operators move quickly from planning to execution?

## Solve the problem at hand and implement the solution

There's little doubt that recent events have brought on a period of great innovation and forward-thinking for the industry. But this innovation is only one piece of the puzzle. Operators who focus on active problem solving will be able to bring real solutions to current and future challenges more quickly.

Moving from innovation to implementation is not always easy, and knowing where to begin can leave some organisations frozen with indecision. Below are three ways that telecom operators can get the ball rolling on this phase change.

### Invest in your people

It is often said that a business is only as good as its employees and this is particularly true for the telecom industry, given the diversity of roles and operational responsibilities. To be successful, it is important not only to think about innovation of new products to meet customer demand, but also to bring employees, both old and new, along on the digital transformation journey to ensure that they are vested in technology and processes. They must become champions for the business.

When moving into an implementation phase, companies can benefit from a renewed focus on their workforce. No employee wants new technology thrust upon them. Organisations that consult with their employees on software decisions will create a more engaged and committed employee community and deliver a better technical solution.

In addition to this, businesses should focus on hiring and retaining talent that supports their implementation objectives and increases the wealth of talent possessed by your workforce.

According to a study by McKinsey, 87% of organisations are either currently experiencing skills gaps, or anticipate that they will face one in the next five years. The study also revealed that this is especially important for the telecom sector. On top of this, the wider tech industry is also facing challenges with hiring new talent. An organisation that attracts the best talent with exciting technology creates a more resilient, future-proof workforce.

The newest Gen Z workforce has many skills that can benefit a business. Engaging their capabilities as digital-natives, and leveraging and enhancing their competencies can unlock immense potential that brings business-wide benefits. For example, integrating business data into one digital location, where the entire workforce can access it (whether on the road, out in the field, or in the office) caters to the strength of Gen Z and Millenials, while helping to break down organisational silos. Democratising knowledge and empowering teams with modern tools and processes ensures that the next generation of workers can rapidly meet critical business objectives.

### Incremental improvement, not sweeping change

All too often network operators are enticed into major software system upgrades from legacy vendors that promise

amazing future capabilities. This can be a costly, high risk strategy that compromises business speed and agility. Operators can wait years for technology implementation, delivering on old requirements that are obsolete before they are even deployed. It's a high risk and costly approach that can strangle business potential.

To reduce this risk and avoid losing market share to more nimble competitors, operators should instead implement technology swiftly and incrementally. A focus on solving many small problems delivers short-term results with more agility and accountability, reducing the risk inherent in large projects. Rapid, incremental implementations create a continuous return of investment, allowing teams to quickly demonstrate success to customers and their leadership. This process creates greater customer satisfaction, delivers faster success, and encourages future innovation.

To get started on this journey, identify one specific area of the business in need of improvement, and implement a targeted technological solution.

For example, if there are inefficiencies with field crew and contractors that are slowing down rollout, operators could develop a new mobile solution for construction and field walkouts. If this proves effective, the approach can be expanded to areas of the business experiencing similar inefficiencies, and help to quickly improve business operations team-by-team.

Operators who take a holistic approach, one that lays a strong foundation of successful incremental change across all operational areas will transform their business with a faster, low-risk strategy.

### Learn from the success of Brightspeed

A great example of an operator successfully implementing novel solutions is US internet provider Brightspeed. They have accelerated the planning and construction of their fibre optics network buildout, taking a constant innovation approach.

To accelerate network deployment, Brightspeed is rolling out a suite of fibre-based Optical Distribution Network technologies and integrated software architecture that leverages the distributed tap product solution to increase efficiency and accelerate the deployment process. Taking this approach has allowed Brightspeed to expand its fibre optics network far more quickly than a traditional centralised split design.

This agile approach is helping Brightspeed reach the ambitious target of delivering broadband to 3 million homes and businesses in the next five years. This includes areas where fibre has not yet been deployed, expanding their geographic reach and revenue potential.

By identifying a pain point within their business model and mobilising a motivated workforce to quickly implement a new solution, allows them to seize new markets created by the work-from-anywhere culture. With the window of opportunity wide open, other broadband operators who follow this path will accelerate their rollout and realise similar competitive and technology benefits.

**For more information, visit www.iqgeo.com**