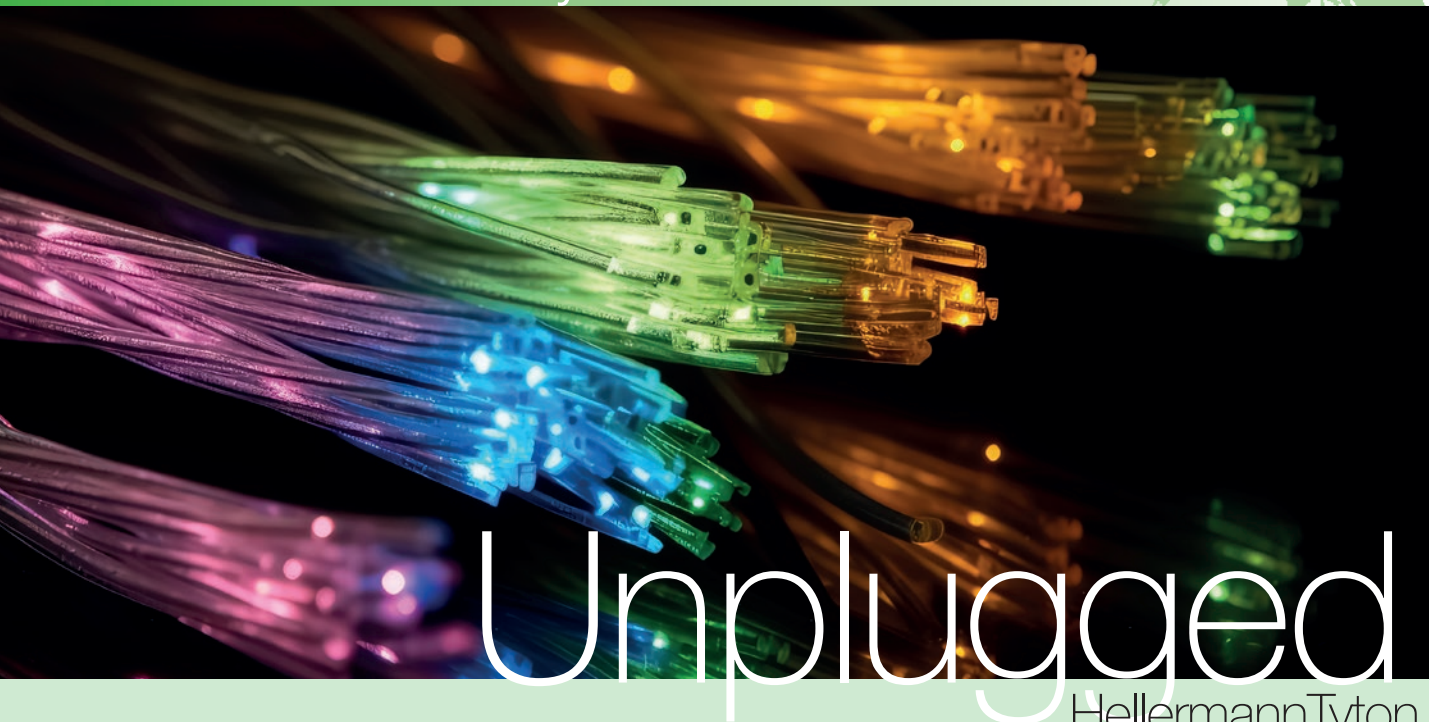




Unplugged

HellermannTyton

By Melissa Cogavin, Managing Editor, SCTE

Market leader HellermannTyton recently joined the SCTE and Rob Hickford, Marketing Manager, took time out to tell us a bit about the company, philosophy, product lines and what the future holds



Rob Hickford,
Marketing Manager,
HellermannTyton

How is business going - what is HellermannTyton up to currently? You made a huge splash at Connected Britain - you must have been delighted.

Rob Hickford: It was a great show. Along with our main stand, our demo trailer was a big hit, we were glad to get it out on site and

show it off. At HellermannTyton there is always a constant flow of new products in development so Connected Britain is an increasingly important event for us. The Toby Box for Openreach was launched recently and we announced it at the show. It's a solution that means there's less furniture on the front of a house, which then paves the way for future technologies, such as car charging points and that sort of thing.

We've also been developing some products for 5G applications that are more compact that fit in with those smaller spaces. With all of these products, we tend to develop them with a customer in mind. Assuming there's no exclusivity with it, we then roll them out for the wider market.

Striking that you work quite closely with certain companies, developing bespoke products just for them.

Increasingly you have to do that. We've a huge portfolio of good products for the FTTH and FTTx markets. Every customer wants that product, but they all want to do something slightly different with it.

Our in-house design team are very proactive; they can work pretty quickly to make that change, present it to the customer and say, this is what it looks like, this is how it works. We're very responsive and adaptive to market needs. While we have maybe say 30 core products, there could be two or three versions of certain products because of this process.

HellermannTyton offers a huge range of products, catering for a lot of industries. How much of your business is taken up with broadband?

The business has evolved over the last 10 years. FTTx has exploded in that time. We've had to change our product set to meet the slowing down of the LAN network infrastructure industry and the rapid growth in the fibre broadband. In around 2008, it was probably 5-10% of our business. It's now closer to 80%.

As the industry gradually moves toward fibre how is HellermannTyton managing that adoption?

Back in the '90s and 2000s, people installed Cat5e and Cat6 networks within buildings and there is upgrading from Cat5e to Cat6 and Cat6A going on now. CAT 6 is still a good solution for an office network. The data centre market is where we did very well with our RapidNet pre-terminated product. However, because more recently the focus has been with the growth of the FTTx industry, RapidNet as a solution hasn't seen too much development and there have been other competitors that have taken a bigger foothold in the data centre arena.

But we've got new products coming out Q1 next year, it's RapidNet 3.0, which is more compact, it's a higher density, and that'll be rolled out and we'll establish ourselves once again in the data centre market.

We can promote our new RapidNet version 3.0 with a new fibre raceway system as we have serious solutions. Data centres are being built everywhere because of the demand on broadband and internet networks and streaming services. That's just going to get bigger and bigger and the data centres need to be in place to accommodate that.

You have an enormous footprint worldwide - how closely do you work together with your international offices?

HellermannTyton is a global company and connectivity is a smaller arm of that business. Our products are very different. HellermannTyton's core product range is predominantly cable management solutions, cable ties, cable clips, that sort of thing. Whereas we're very much fibre and copper connectivity solutions.

There is crossover in that we sell HellermannTyton cable management products within our own range, because obviously you need cable ties, Velcro ties, heatshrink products and so on. We have a small international team who work closely and support Connectivity sales in our sister company's countries across Europe and beyond.

Historically, HellermannTyton Connectivity was a company called RW Data, Acquired by HellermannTyton and became HellermannTyton Data or HT Data. That's our website and email address suffix. HellermannTyton Data is a bit vague, and in today's market doesn't really describe what we do. We are slowly but surely migrating to HellermannTyton Connectivity, because that's what we do. HellermannTyton is a lengthy logo,

add the word Connectivity and it can prove a mouthful from a marketing point of view. We sometimes have to be creative to ensure our marketing is effective, impactful and memorable.

It's got a nice ring to it though. What are you finding is the biggest challenge the business faces at the moment?

There can be a reliance in this industry on a handful of large clients and big projects to keep our heads above water. As a business we do have a lot of our eggs in big baskets. I guess a big challenge would be if anything happened to one of our big customers. But we are constantly developing business on the smaller altnet side to ensure a stable flow of productivity and orders. We've grown our production capabilities in line with the demand. This includes a new facility across town that increases our manufacturing capacity.

It's the nature of the beast. Everyone is exposed to risk in these uncertain times, especially in manufacturing.

In this business it's always a case of getting the name out there, the brand out there, the new solutions. We're constantly trying to come up with something new to fit whatever the new technology is. There's always new products coming out to tie in with something new that's happening within the industry, or a new way of deploying fibre. In addition to stiff competition and limited customers, the industry also feels quite incestuous at times.

Everyone's been in the industry for years and moved around a lot. It's a strange industry. Everyone's friends, but everyone's chasing the same business.

What will AI do to HellermannTyton over time?

AI feeds off information that's available all over the place. It can work in our favour in terms of learning about new technologies without having to trawl everywhere. AI might be able to give us the answers without us having to look too hard. In terms of displacing resources and people at the moment, we're not going to be having robots making our products. We're not going to have a computer doing our marketing campaigns because there's the human side of business, which is knowing your customers, building those relationships. In my opinion, no computer or AI is going to do that.



What do you see the connectivity landscape looking like in 5 years?

It's a case of maintenance. I am not immediately worried – we are very international; many countries are a long way behind the UK, but at some stage we'll reach a point where we will have connected everyone, and then what? I think where it's going to kick on is utilising existing infrastructure to squeeze more out of it.

As technology evolves, you'll be able to do more with the fibre that's already in the ground in terms of the amount of light and data you can put down one bit of glass. I think that's going to change. There are ultimately going to be new products that we will have to develop that will need to support this.

As a marketing manager how do you manage to make HellermannTyton products stand out against its competitors?

For me, it comes down to quality, sustainability, staff training, customer care and technical support.

One of our key selling points is our quality, UK manufactured. That's always a big selling point in the UK markets. Bespoke solutions is one of our USPs. We will work with you to deliver what you need. Sustainability is a key marketing message that we use, in terms of our packaging; we have reduced single use plastic and completely eliminated it on some products.

We have some really good technical guys here who can show people how to actually install the products and how to get the most out of them. We've developed a new training academy over at our new facility. It's set up to provide training on multiple products in a mock-up environment with street cabinets, closures in pits and wall boxes on poles.

There are several stations where you can have multiple engineers all learning at the same time. We recently launched a five day, City & Guilds fibre course, with an aim to help get more skilled engineers out into the field.

As a business, we're not unique in our products, but we're unique in terms of how we sell them to our customers and the full after-sales customer support is excellent. We've got technical guys who will be available to help customers if they've got a problem on-site.

Being in the middle of the country, we can send one of our internal guys out and support with a problem; that's where we're unique to some of our competitors.

Life is constantly changing in this industry and the future is never certain, but HellermannTyton seem well placed to roll with the punches. Wishing you all the best Rob.



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