

FTTH Council Europe

INTERVIEW WITH ROSHENE MCCOOL, PRESIDENT

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ROSHENE MCCOOL,
PRESIDENT
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ROSHENE MCCOOL'S APPOINTMENT AS PRESIDENT OF THE FTTH COUNCIL EUROPE SEEMS THE NATURAL NEXT STEP FOR SOMEONE WHOSE VISION FOR CONNECTIVITY FOR ALL, TECHNICAL EXPERTISE AND INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE ARE MATCHED ONLY BY HER COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY AND GENDER EQUALITY. BROADBAND JOURNAL FINDS OUT WHAT SHE PLANS TO ACHIEVE IN HER NEW ROLE.

CONGRATULATIONS ROSHENE, YOU MUST BE DELIGHTED. YOU HAVE BEEN QUITE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE PRIORITISING AS PRESIDENT, ONE OF WHICH IS INCENTIVISING INVESTORS. HOW DO YOU PLAN TO DO THAT?

We look very closely at the health of the markets in order to finance the Fibre to the Home rollout plans. Regulation helps with that, so we are making sure that the barriers to rollout are reduced. Copper switch off is a way of accelerating adoption, especially in locations where we may have fibre to the cabinet, but we haven't got quite got fibre to the home yet.

FTTH Council can really help in advocating for this; the copper switch off offers a lot of advantages, especially on carbon footprint. Fibre to the home networks are more energy efficient than copper networks.

THERE'S STILL CONFUSION AMONGST THE GENERAL PUBLIC; PEOPLE THINK THEY HAVE FIBRE TO THE HOME WHEN THEY HAVEN'T.

Obviously, it's not been legislated for, but for many years FTTH Council has been providing education on what does fibre to the home actually mean, and it's not fibre to the cabinet.

HOW DO YOU SEE THINGS PROGRESSING IN THE NEXT 12, 24 MONTHS?

We publish a market panorama every year. It's a hotly anticipated piece of collateral. People are waiting for the panorama to come out so they can see where we're at. It's really helpful. 70% of Europe is covered with high-speed, fibre to the home broadband; on average, there's about a 50% take-up rate of those services.

THAT VARIES A LOT ACROSS THE CONTINENT THOUGH.

Of course, it's not the same everywhere. Spain is the poster child: 92% fibre to the home and the take-up rate is 86%. For those countries with high coverage of fibre to the home, they actually also have high take-up rates. So if you look at Spain, France, some of the Nordic countries, their take-up rates are in the 70s and 80%.

THAT SHOULD BE ENCOURAGING TO INVESTORS — EVIDENTLY ONCE PEOPLE HAVE FIBRE TO THEIR HOME, THEY WILL START TO USE IT.

True, but there are pockets of places where the rollout is at a lower rate, if you like. Somewhere like the UK or Germany have lower rates, not because they have no broadband but because they only have fibre to the cabinet. However, in the UK, 4.7 million homes were passed in 2020 between 2022 and '23.

AND GERMANY?

Germany doesn't have that much fibre to the home, but 4.4 million homes passed between '22 and '23. These are pretty large numbers, so I think what I would say is the outlook is pretty positive, because it says people want fibre to their home, that even places that don't have strong rollouts, large coverage today, are actually doing rollouts at a pretty impressive rate. Once people have fibre to the home, they are adopting.

TELL ME ABOUT WHERE THE FTTH COUNCIL IS ON RURAL BROADBAND.

What do we do with that kind of last 10%, that last hard to reach community? Connecting those more isolated communities can bring real, tangible benefits to families in those areas in terms of education, entertainment and health. There are real drivers to get this fibre into rural communities, but it is going to take government initiatives and regulatory support in order to get them there, because the business case doesn't always stack up in these harder to reach places.



FROM THE INDUSTRY

WHAT CAN THE FTTH COUNCIL DO TO IMPROVE MATTERS? THERE ARE ALL SORTS OF REASONS FOR THE LACK OF SUCCESS IN THIS AREA.

Firstly data. The FTTH Council is a membership organisation and our members come from predominantly vendors and operators. We provide data: the market panorama and the work that is done by the Market Intelligence Committee to provide numbers on coverage, take-up, penetration in each company, in each country. Those numbers help because they provide a data point for advocacy within local countries and at a European level.

Secondly - sustainability. We have a platform for members to report their carbon footprint, in line with new regulations. This places requirements on their suppliers to be able to tell operators about the materials going into their networks. Often the suppliers are small to medium businesses who may not have the resources to be on top of every European regulation, so the council brought out a new platform to support members in that.

Finally, our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee ensure talent is harnessed for the success of the industry. We have the Deployment and Operations committee who look at best practice for deploying networks. So, there's an absolute myriad of support that's coming from the council.

EVERY TIME YOU TURN THE NEWS ON SOMETHING MORE AWFUL AND UNPREDICTABLE HAS HAPPENED; HOW DOES THE FTTH COUNCIL EUROPE HANDLE GEOPOLITICAL UNCERTAINTY? HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR MANDATE?

I like to focus on the positives. Let's be clear; the media landscape does not necessarily reflect a balanced view. In a worldwide context, EMEA is a very attractive place to live, work and invest in. Europe shouldn't be considered as a sort of blob. European territories vary immensely, it's hard to generalise. The roll out is increasing productivity across the continent, allowing access to the digital world the digital economy and enhancing well-being, connecting more isolated locations in order to access education, health and others.

AGREED, BUT IN TERMS OF YOUR MANDATE - ?

More positives. The council is advocating for the lowering of barriers; a membership organisation can engage at a European and governmental level. This enables sharing of legacy, passive infrastructures, establishing in-building wiring regimes. The EU has recently passed the Gigabit Infrastructure Act, (which ensures faster, cheaper, and simpler rollout of Gigabit networks installation, addressing the main hurdles like expensive and complex procedures for network deployment. The act is also instrumental to achieve

the 2030 Digital Decade target on connectivity: ensuring cross-EU access to fast Gigabit connectivity and fast mobile data by 2030). We are very hopeful that all of what is going to happen as that Act takes effect. We're trying to make the fibre industry an attractive place to work. We recently did a video campaign about women in fibre, which is high quality collateral for schools and individual member companies to help bring people in.

AND CLOSER TO HOME WITH THE NEW LABOUR GOVERNMENT?

The FTTH Council Europe objective is 100% fast fibre broadband across Europe which aligns with governments in Europe, because it contributes to the health of the economy, it contributes to the health of communities. The UK is no different in that regard, it's a healthy market, there is great opportunity for growth. As I said, 4.7 million homes passed last year. We would expect the same again. You can clearly see, Melissa, I'm a glass half full person.

THERE ARE ALWAYS REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL.

The UK government has been very clear about is this desire for more homes built, which is more homes connected with fibre. Hopefully the duct infrastructure to those homes is included in that home build so that the fibre operators already have the infrastructure to connect those homes to fibre. That means that roads don't have to be dug up again.



WHY IS YOUR TERM AS PRESIDENT ONLY A YEAR?

In order to be elected to president, one has to be elected to the board first. Those board places last two years, and it's possible to be on the board for two terms, which means a board member can be on the board for four years. The presidency is elected every year, but if you're on the board for four years, it's possible to be the president for four years. It's important to establish the mandate from the members. We are a member-led organisation, and so it's important to have that mandate on a yearly basis. There is nothing stopping me applying again next year!

IT MUST BE DEMANDING ON YOUR TIME.

The council's objectives are so fully aligned with Corning's objectives, ie to connect the unconnected, the FTTH Council wants 100% fast fibre broadband in Europe. There is work to do, but it's building in what I do, anyway. If I don't run again, I won't stop working with the council. Advocating for gender representation in the industry, diversity, equity and inclusion is at the core of my practice; it is for the success of the industry.

ARE YOU ABLE TO LEVERAGE YOUR POSITION AS PRESIDENT TO HELP ADVANCE THAT MISSION?

Being a visible female leader is really important. When I started in the industry, there were very few female leaders, and they tended to stay under the radar; they weren't visible. It is important for emerging talent to see somebody who is a visible advocate, because what matters to the success of our industry is that we harness talent, whatever they look like and wherever they come from.

To feel included, people have got to feel safe, and part of that safety comes from seeing these visible representations of inclusion, which means leading by example.

THE MORE WOMEN THERE ARE DOING ROLES LIKE YOURS, THE MORE IT NORMALISES IT, AND THEN IT'S NOT EXCEPTIONAL TO STRIVE AND TO SEE YOURSELF IN THAT ROLE IN THE FUTURE.

I would go even a step further and say that representation is one thing, but leaders, and not just female leaders, but male leaders, as well, making sure that they are a visible ally is really important for inclusion.

A LOT HAS CHANGED AND FOR THE BETTER. THE ADVICE YOU HEAR NOW IS CLEAR: "GET YOURSELF A SPONSOR. FIND YOURSELF SOME MALE ALLIES. ENSURE THAT YOU'VE GOT A MENTOR FROM EARLY ON." I NEVER HAD THAT ADVICE WHEN I STARTED WORKING. I WAS JUST WINGING IT, AND I WAS WINGING IT ALL THROUGH MY 20S.

I was winging it, too, Melissa. To see a diversity of people succeeding and doing it in a way that's authentic to themselves is really important. When I was younger, I had an idea about what a female engineer was, and I wanted to act like that ideal.

WONDER WHERE THAT CAME FROM?

There were so few role models. There were only a few ways of being a successful female leader, and so you wanted to be like that. One of the things that I try and do is to be very visible, but also simultaneously be very much myself so that people feel empowered to be successful in the way that they are in how they are. That's what diversity and equity inclusion in practice looks like. It means that people can be successful and can contribute successfully to companies whilst maintaining their own authenticity, what is authentic to themselves.

THAT'S A RECENT BREAKTHROUGH AND A WELCOME ONE FOR ANYONE IN THE WORKPLACE.

We recently did a workshop at the FTTH Conference in Berlin. I was so delighted by it; various companies talked about their diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. Ultimately it boiled down to reducing barriers, enabling people to bring their full selves to work, to contribute to their maximum.

REDUCING BARRIERS IN WHAT WAY?

Companies are now saying, if you've got children, okay, we recognise that's significant. We're going to try and reduce barriers so that you don't have to reduce your hours in order to be able to work for us. You don't have to be a certain way in order to work for us. You can contribute to your maximum. That was the message of optimism for me.

TIMES HAVE REALLY CHANGED AND FOR THE BETTER IN THAT RESPECT AND YOU ARE CHAMPIONING THIS VERY EFFECTIVELY. BEST OF LUCK AS PRESIDENT OF THE FTTH COUNCIL EUROPE ROSHENE!

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