

Interview with Jan Ariesen

By Melissa Cogavin, Managing Editor, SCTE

Market leader Technetix has carved out a significant niche for itself in the HFC market and its CTO, Jan Ariesen has worked his way up within the organisation over a proud 39 year period. Ahead of ANGA COM, Broadband Journal caught up with Jan to hear about their recent acquisitions, their groundbreaking DNN technology, their sustainability targets and his own hobby 'making things, as I'm an engineer at heart and I miss getting my hands dirty'.



**Jan Ariesen, CTO
Technetix**

You've been at Technetix 39 years – that's a very impressive commitment. When you joined as an R&D engineer in 1983 what were your aspirations then?

Ha! It was nothing like that. I initially came here for just three months. They had a big project which they'd like to see if I could

help with, and my plan at the time was to start my own business. I started in '83 and I never left.

Well, they say life is what happens to you when you're busy making other plans.

I had no ambitions to get into management. I'm an engineer. I never wanted to be a manager. I am still an engineer. The good thing is I come from a sporting family, so we know a lot about coaching and working as a team and that a team can

do much more than one person or a group of people. So, I think that background helped me a lot in my position.

That's good. Especially when you're managing people, that outlook must be extremely useful.

It really is. I started as an R&D engineer making satellite receivers and stuff for the cable. Then I started to do more video tech systems. Back then you didn't have the computers like you have now, when you had video techs on TV where you could read the newspapers and things like that. So, I was doing that for Europe for a couple of years, later on heading up the R&D, and then when we merged to Technetix, I moved on from R&D.

I've noticed a lot of senior execs start out life as R&D engineers. I wonder whether you think there's anything in that, that prepares them for life in management?

I think to be honest, it's also part of the generation we are I guess. However, Technetix gives you the opportunity to grow.

That's how we always work. We don't hire the engineers. I don't hire the managers. We try to train them and grow them into those functions. We always have and we still do. We are always working on successors so we can make the next step and they can step in.

So, train and promote from within.

It benefits me a lot in the position I'm in now that I was once an engineer. I cannot develop amplifiers anymore. But I do know how they work. And if something goes wrong, I do know why it goes wrong. And that's the benefit when you have meetings with the big guys in the industry and you can say, oh, we have this issue. And most of the time you do know a solution for it because you know how things are happening in the network.

Plus you can relate to people at all levels.

That's very useful, yes. I have to be honest, I am still jealous if I walk into the R&D and see all the guys building things. It would be really nice to build something. As a hobby, I just want to make things.

What do you make?

I make wooden furniture. I also recently bought a very old motorcycle that hadn't run for 10-15 years; I stripped it down completely, rebuilt it and got it back on the road and sold it again. Just doing things, getting dirty, and doing things with your hands is better than all the talking.

How is the acquisition of Lindsay Broadband and your growth in Europe and the Asia-Pacific area going?

Acquiring Lindsay Broadband strengthens our position in the other side of the Atlantic. Everyone knows it's difficult to 'break America', but we managed, and we want to build on that success.

We have a very solid base in the US, and we just want to grow that business further on. The customers are mainly the same, what they have, but they have different products. They do a lot with power. They do a lot with Wi-Fi and with small cells as well, while we are much more in the RF and optical area.



Will we see the creation of 'Technetix America'?

Not this year. Lindsay is a strong brand and it would just be ridiculous to throw it away. We have a marketing plan that slowly we will move Lindsay into Technetix. In fact, the same as what it did with ECAD. Before this, we bought ECAD in 2020 in Germany, a fibre company. ECAD as a brand remained for about 18 months, and then we slowly started to merge into Technetix. There may be some things that remain as 'Lindsay'. It's a strong brand. When Tratec and Technetix merged, we kept Tratec alive for six or seven years.

I understand there's a trial underway with some major operators concerning DNN technology. How is that going?

We've tested DNN with four operators across Europe and in the US and Canada, which are pending, we have installed it in the field. It's all up and running. The big final test is in early May.

There is a lot of excitement in the industry about it.

It's a brand-new technology and people are very enthusiastic. In the same way when the first electric cars came out, it is really, really something different. Most engineers say, "Sorry, but this is impossible. You cannot do this. You cannot build a highway without a metal fence. You will have car crashes. So, how can you remove that stuff and still everything keeps on working?" But we've proven it works.

How did the idea come about?

About eight years ago, we had a brainwave and said, ok let's try it. Discussions ensued with the engineers. I said, "This should work." They said "No, it can't." And it failed. But we didn't give up. Sometimes we got fed up trying and put it to one side for a year. And then new ideas percolated and we picked it up again. And then one day inspiration struck, an idea that finally worked.

And with these game changer ideas, often there's a bit of resistance to changing the status quo, because it has an impact on everything else. Has that happened?

Yes there has been resistance of course. As you know, unfortunately, HFC is in the grey man area. They say, "If it ain't broke..."

But on the other hand, if this new system is better, why not? And that's then the discussions we have. Technetix is an innovative company.

It seems as if sometimes technology goes at one pace, but it takes people's appetites for change time to catch up. Sometimes appetites are ahead of the technology.

That's true. That's why, with all the technology, what I like about it is that we just make it easier for the future. It's not for now. We know now, we go for high split, we have 204 to 58 split. But that means that in four or five year's time, we must go back to the network to change it again. And if you just can avoid that step, you just drop your OpEx and you make yourself more competitive for the fibre industry.

So, that's why we are trying to be low on power and sustainability, because if we can achieve that, then the OpEx is lower. If the OpEx is lower, then at the end, you just get a healthier business. And the healthier our customers are, the healthier we are.

Exactly. And the longer we all survive. Can you fill me in on what's happening with Remote OLT?

It's our bridge between fibre and cable, and coax. You have your coax networks, where you have your RPDs in the field where you go from digital to electrical signals, and then you go into the homes and so on. And we want to make a bridge to fibre customers. So, we use the same platform in the beginning to come to those DA notes for instance. And then on that part, we turn over into coax for the coax customers and we go to fibre for the fibre customers. And that's our bridge between the coax and the fibre to the home customers.

We create a solution that is very flexible, very modular, because often you'll have 25, 50 homes together. So, you think that will grow in this area, because there will be more space, people will build more houses and so on. But the only thing you can do is just build a big box there and to be ready for 500 homes. But you never know if it will be 500. So, what we have is, you start with this, you can do 32 homes for instance, and if it grows, you can just grow on it and you can just extend it to 500 homes. You don't need to invest everything at the beginning. And that whole rural areas approach seems to stick very good with customers.



What's your view on the lifespan of coax?

The majority of our business is still coax. But you can see that the fibre is growing. If you look into the future, 50 years from now, it will be fibre everywhere. But in 1995, I was on a panel and was asked, when do you think we will have fibre to the home everywhere? I said, "Oh, it's five years away. In 2000, we will all have fibre." And again in 2000, we said it would take about 5 years. It was always five years ahead, then we all would have fibre to the home.

In fact, nobody believes now that we all will be fibre to the home in five year's time. It's even further away. But we're heading that way. But now we have DNN technology. We offer a pipe of 19Gb. And so, that will give us time to 2040 before we need to do something.

It's good thinking that you're future-proofing the business in that way.

So, that's probably our fourth pillar that we built our company on. That's where we are focusing on. So, we will maintain the HFC, the coax part. But we will grow the wireless and the fibre business, not to reduce the other ones, but to add on top of it.

It's great you are working so hard on your diversity agenda. We celebrated International Women's Day at Broadband Journal last month. On your advisory board I notice however, it seems to be almost exclusive male. I wondered if that balance is something you're looking to redress.

On the exec board we have a few women. But in the advisory board, yes, that's true. Not for any reason. The four I hired in R&D are all women. Also, the quality team that I have here is 50% female. In the R&D, I think 30% is female. The thing is, they're often quite young females. Maybe that's also the

reason why the advisory board is that way, because often there are people that are retired or are on the way to retirement and are on the advisory board to help us with... So, maybe this was more a problem 30 years ago than it is now. But because the advisory board is built out of the business as it was, 30 years ago.

What is your long-term vision at Technetix? With those new board appointments, are you taking the company in any particular direction, or are you focusing on one area?

No, we are growing. We are already in the US and Canada and we also will expand in South America. It's true that we have some changes in the exec team also because we want to prepare ourself more for the future. And every year we grow, we need to train the successors. And that's why we bring younger people also in the exec team to be ready to make the next step. We are hiring more young people. We get them from everywhere. I think we have about 70 people and we have 14 different nationalities.

That's awesome.

And that's just because we just get young people from everywhere, talented people and so on used to work for us. And yeah, that's great. It really helps. We are a stable, growing company. 39 years for me!

Congratulations again Jan!

