

Member FOCUS

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AT THE SCTE WE TAKE GREAT PRIDE IN OUR INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS, WHO HAVE MADE SUCH A CONTRIBUTION TO THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF OUR INDUSTRY. THIS SECTION OF BROADBAND JOURNAL SHINES AN OVERDUE LIGHT ON YOU WONDERFUL PEOPLE IN EVERY ISSUE GOING FORWARD, AS WELL AS REGULARLY ONLINE.

WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN A CAREER IN THE INDUSTRY WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED?

It was accidental really; in the mid 90s with an ex-military RF based background I was contracting on various projects which eventually led me to NTL's advanced products division in Winchester, hand building and testing RF modulators for the new-fangled Digital TV concept. I was issued with a significant test and measurement budget, buying HP, Tektronix and Rohde & Schwarz high performance equipment. One day I got a rather cryptic call from Rohde & Schwarz in Fleet saying they had something at their office I should see.

When I got there, I was asked if I would meet their CEO, Wolfgang. He put 3 brown A4 envelopes in front of me to review the contents as he nipped off to make coffee. One envelope contained a job description for a pre-sales engineer, one a JD for an installation engineer, the knockout was a job as a sales engineer for the UK Telco segment as the fledgling HFC roll out had just begun.

The offer was twice my previous income, plus sales commission and a fully expensed company car, decision made on the spot, and I went back to NTL to give them the happy news. They understood when I showed them my new offer. I had not even gone for a job that day, especially changing to a sales focused role; it felt like winning the lottery. With a partially disabled wife and a new

baby to provide for I could afford to buy a house instead of rent. The rest is as they say history!

YOU'VE HAD A VARIED CAREER AND HAVE A LOT OF STRINGS TO YOUR BOW. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE WHAT YOU DO, AND WHAT DO YOU ENJOY BEST?

I would love to say it was all planned, but I just tend to accept any positive sounding opportunity that comes along, some winners and some losers, of course bracketed within my skill set: that's to say, I am a very inquisitive geek that excelled at maths and physics and repaired old radios as a kid but failed miserably at field sports, so a career in football was out of the question.

WHAT MEMORIES REALLY STAND OUT FOR YOU OVER THE YEARS YOU'VE BEEN INVOLVED IN THIS INDUSTRY?

Growing up in a village in the Pennines where life was black and white, full of smoky chimneys, to travelling the world, experiencing so many different cultures, some good and some challenging, some hot and some freezing cold, but always pinching myself to see if it is true. I never thought in a million years I would be the guest of the Prince of Tonga being driven around in his personal London taxi on a South Pacific island paradise, having



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installed a network there where they had nothing before. But every positive has a negative, some memories are not so great, missing my son grow as I was away so much, punishing my health, not knowing what time zone I was in from one day to another. Success at a price for sure.

THE SECTOR HAS CHANGED A LOT OVER THE YEARS; WHAT FOR YOU IS THE BIGGEST SHIFT?

The network side of things has become simpler. With the move to full fibre, it's basically a big ethernet network, it is what hangs off either end that is becoming more complex, and as always, the easier you make it for the customer, the more complicated things get behind the scenes.

WHAT DO YOU GET OUT OF BEING A MEMBER OF THE SCTE? WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE MORE OF?

As well as my company MAUS being a corporate member, personally being a Fellow of the SCTE is an honour and of course brings an excellent reputation with it. I like the “no sales pitch” lectures, a chance to understand more without pressure being applied. It would be good to have more interaction somehow, maybe more regular sessions and something hands-on at times.

WHAT'S THE SINGLE BIGGEST IMPACT THAT AI WILL HAVE ON OUR INDUSTRY?

I describe AI as being 2 different things, Passive AI and Active AI.

Think of Passive AI as being chatbots, photo editing, help desks, where you go to find answers from a central large database, something that waits to be prodded, and latency is a non-issue. Any service provider can be a part of this kind of data transfer.

Active AI includes such things as robots, autonomous vehicles and traffic control; it's where my company MAUS positions itself. This is interesting to telecoms operators in their quest to become tech-co's. The “real time thinking and reaction” is done on the edge with live information from local sensors, but also links back to traditional data centres for historical data such as maps for directions, so for this type of application very agile comms are required with a focus on ultra-low latency (even milliseconds matter when you are trying to avoid running over a pedestrian). This is where investment is heading and technical challenges still exist.

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HOW DO YOU SEE THE SECTOR DEVELOPING OVER THE NEXT 5 YEARS?

The statement “Data is the new oil” is kind of true, but data will inevitably devalue itself, I foresee the pendulum swinging back from where content providers divested of networks some years ago, to coming back to the party and buying into networks to provide their subscription-based services and assure QoS. Think Google Fibre providing Google Services, all under one roof.

And of course the 5G mobile hype; in truth mobile accounts for less than 2% of all data that moves – it’s mostly your smart phone is using Wi-Fi connected to broadband - so fibre is here to stay.

HAVE YOU HAD ANY MENTORS OVER THE COURSE OF YOUR CAREER AND HOW DID THEY HELP YOU?

At Rhode & Schwarz, the sales manager, Paul Harfoot, made sure to call me every day as I started my sales career, and if I was having a tough time instead of beating me up, he always found a way to keep me motivated, provide support and suggest ways forward which led to a very

successful career with them. I wish I had half his leadership abilities in that way.

WHAT WOULD YOU TELL A YOUNG ENTRANT JUST ABOUT TO GET STARTED IN THIS INDUSTRY?

Be prepared to listen and learn! This is a very hands-on occupation, and no amount of paper certificates earned in a class will fully prepare you. It is an occupation with opportunity to rise in your career if you put in the effort, and we really do need new entrants.

WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT THIS SECTOR?

Telecoms is an unsung hero, it really is the 4th utility and is changing the world all the time, not that most people realise it. The advertisements you see on TV for remote medical operations on people at a different location to the surgeon and such like is only possible with good communications. Just remember at parties if you get asked what you do for a living, say you are an actor or pilot or something like that, otherwise if you say “I’m in telecoms” it does rather kill conversation...

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