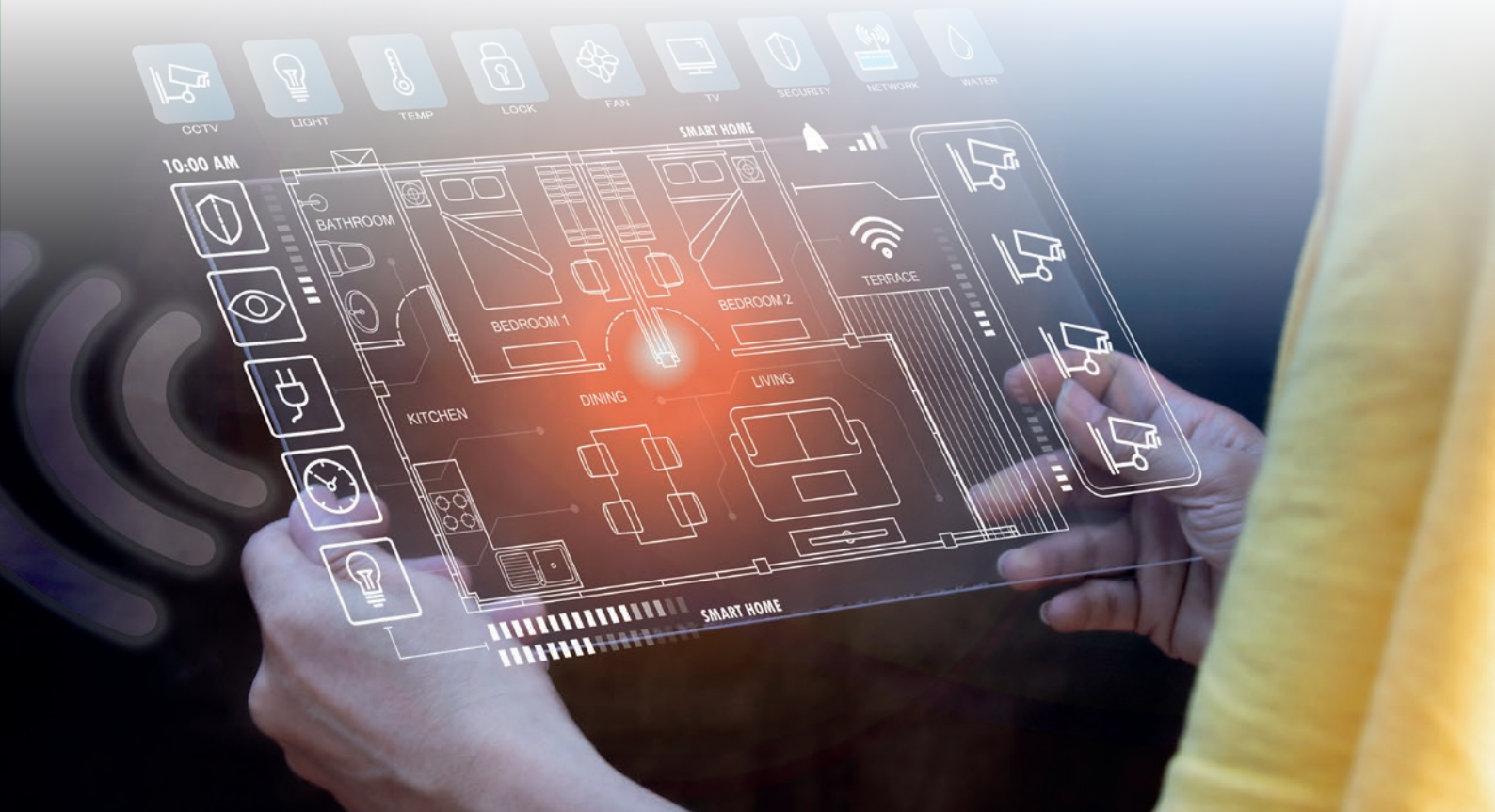


How better supporting contractors

CAN BE KEY TO HIGH-SPEED
INTERNET ROLLOUT

BY DEVA KUMAR, SENIOR CONSULTANT, IQGEO

CONTRACTORS WORKING IN THE FIELD PLAY A KEY PART IN THE ROAD TOWARDS BRINGING HIGH-SPEED INTERNET TO MORE RURAL AND UNDERSERVED AREAS AND THEY FACE NUMEROUS CHALLENGES - FROM MANAGING NETWORK DESIGNED TO NAVIGATING DIFFICULT WORKING ENVIRONMENTS. SUPPORTING CONTRACTORS EFFECTIVELY LEADS TO HAPPIER CONTRACTORS AND HAPPIER CUSTOMERS.



In an increasingly interconnected world, access to high-speed internet has become essential for economic development, education, healthcare, and quality of life. However, many rural and underserved areas globally still lack adequate broadband infrastructure, creating a digital divide that hampers opportunities for residents and businesses. To address this disparity, various governments and institutions across the world are initiating programs to deploy fibre to the home (FTTH). For example, in Europe, the EU's Digital Decade connectivity goals say that European households should have access to high-speed internet coverage by 2025 and gigabit connectivity by 2030, while in the UK, the government's Unleashing Rural Connectivity fund aims to provide rural areas with better access to wireless networks.

Because of the scale of the task at hand, so many network deployments depend on third-party work. Contractors working in the field play a key part in the road towards bringing high-speed internet to more rural and underserved areas, but only if they are supported correctly. These contractors face numerous challenges, including managing complex

network designs, navigating diverse work environments, and coordinating with multiple stakeholders. As such, it is vitally important to have a contractor field operations strategy that delivers efficient field operations, to meet customer demands, complete projects on time, and ensure the reliability of network infrastructure. In this article I outline three key areas that I feel require particular attention:

1. Enabling better network field design documentation
2. Creating more efficient task management execution
3. Enhanced reporting and analytics

ENABLING BETTER NETWORK FIELD DESIGN DOCUMENTATION

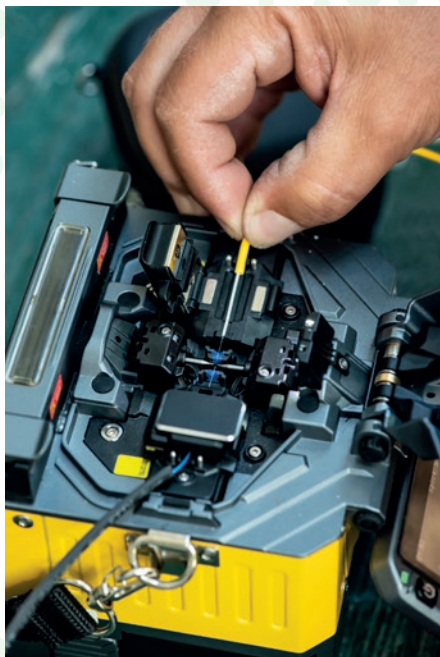
To do their jobs properly and provide full visibility to the network operator, contractors need to be able to import data from various sources into the network model and for creating, editing, and documenting network designs in the field. In the past, many contractors have worked with just the data and resources they are given which could be incomplete

or outdated, and can lead to a lower quality deliverable that can damage the relationship with the network operator.

Contractors must be able to easily access detailed network schematics, asset information, and geographic data on their mobile devices, enabling them to accurately assess project requirements and plan their work efficiently.

Contractors working in the field play a key part in the road towards bringing high-speed internet to more rural and underserved areas.

FROM THE INDUSTRY



It's important to ensure that any software contractors select are easy-to-use with intuitive design features and near real-time synchronisation capabilities so they are able collaborate seamlessly with engineering teams, make on-the-fly adjustments, and ensure that network designs align with customer specifications and regulatory standards.

Having the ability to use mobile devices, to record asset attributes, perform inspections, and document changes to network infrastructure with ease, ensures the accuracy and completeness of asset records, reduces the risk of errors or discrepancies, and enhances the overall reliability of network documentation. By maintaining up-to-date asset information, contractors can support informed decision-making, facilitate regulatory compliance, and improve asset lifecycle management practices.

CREATING MORE EFFICIENT TASK MANAGEMENT EXECUTION

For network builds, contractors must be empowered to execute work orders and tasks with precision and efficiency. This means that they should be able to receive assignments directly on their mobile devices, along with detailed instructions, location information, and asset data. Being able to navigate to job sites, view underground infrastructure, and identify potential hazards or conflicts before beginning work means that contractors can prepare more much more thoroughly.

When contractors are out in the field, it's crucial to enable communication in real-time by providing tools that enable integrated messaging and that have collaboration features to share updates, progress reports, and photos directly from the field. This enhances transparency and enables quick resolution of issues or challenges that may arise during project execution. Being able to leverage location-based data from mobile devices enables better coordinate with other teams to optimise resource allocation for maximum efficiency. Additionally, having access to an offline functionality is critical so they can continue working in areas with limited connectivity, ensuring uninterrupted productivity in any environment. All of these factors combined make a big difference to finish the project on time and within the budget. The effective task management can also enable contractors to clearly document work completion and receive payment more promptly, benefitting them, and the

business by enabling a more efficient cash flow process.

ENHANCED REPORTING AND ANALYTICS

Finally, powerful reporting and analytics capabilities are vital to both the contractor and network operator to track project progress, measure performance, and identify areas for improvement. Poor reporting can often lead to conflicts or confusion between teams, which can slow down sign-off for completion of project phases. This can even create conflict with customer and slow the contract and payment process. Contractors should be able to generate customisable reports on work completed, materials used, time spent, and other key metrics, enabling them to demonstrate compliance with project requirements and provide detailed documentation for invoicing or auditing purposes. Enhanced reporting can also be a benefit to the network operator in the hand-off process. They know exactly what there are getting and are in a better position to support the network long-term. Advanced analytics tools allow contractors to analyse trends, identify bottlenecks, and optimise workflows for increased efficiency and cost savings.

SUCCESS DRIVEN FROM THE FIELD

As broadband services moved from a "nice to have" to an essential resource over the last few years, there is a growing imperative to deliver high-speed fibre infrastructure to everyone. For fibre operators, large and small, third-party contractors are a key part of the journey to make this happen, and optimising contractor field operations is critical to the overall success of their business. Network operators that provide the means to enable real-time collaboration, execute work orders efficiently and maintain accurate documentation for reporting will be the ones to see a notable difference in their field process efficiency and emerge as market leaders with the most compelling service and support offerings for years to come.

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