



Interview

with Rahul Puri, VP Business Head, Europe, STL Technologies

By Melissa Cogavin, Managing Editor, SCTE



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SCTE's Melissa Cogavin caught up with their VP and Business Head Rahul Puri, to hear more about their plans.

Can you tell us more about your initiatives and how you plan to reach your goal of becoming carbon neutral?

Sustainability is a very, very important thing for us. Today, most of the customers we see in Europe, even in the US markets, are looking at sustainable sourcing. So it's not just

their operations that needs to be sustainable. Their supplies need to be compliant as well. And these are things that cannot be done overnight. You can't just flip a button and say, "Okay, we are now sustainable." We as a company, have been working on this for the past few years; we started by getting a plant certified for zero waste landfill- which means that our manufacturing processes are diverting nearly 99% of the waste away from the landfills by following the principles of a 'circular economy'. For the industry we are in, we were the first ones to do this.

That's really impressive.

Secondly, our manufacturing processes produce gases and scrap. We are committed to recycling everything so that nothing goes in the garbage. All our new plants, whether it's our upcoming plant in US today, or plants in Europe, are going to have sustainability ethos at the core. That is something that we have committed to as a company.

Again, that's impressive, but it won't be easy. How have you found the buy-in from your other partners along the supply chain? Has that been difficult to persuade them?

Rahul Puri: Yes and no. STL sources globally. We source from Europe, we source from America. Some of our suppliers

already understand the importance of being eco-friendly or being sustainable in their practices. Whoever is not, we are helping them. We have a dedicated team which actually goes out and helps our business partners to turn around their position in the most efficient way. Because we've done it, we take pride in actually sharing that knowledge with these guys as well.

I thought you were going to say, "If they don't want to play ball, then we go find another supplier."

That's a last resort. But again, the way the industry is poised, you need to take your suppliers along, you need to take your partners along and help them out.

Your timing is perfect. A few years ago you would have met with a lot of resistance and your partner companies may not have wanted to bother with any of this. You're bang on trend. Now it's a good thing to be associated with.

That's right. And if you help them be more efficient in their business, improve their business processes, the relationship becomes much stronger as well. That's what we are doing as an organization.

Presumably, you are having an influence across the industry doing this?

Yes, of course, because it's always a domino effect. One company sets the pace, and then everyone else has to follow. And we were happy to be at the forefront of this and clearly, as I said, today, all the orders we receive, almost every customer strongly appreciates our ESG focus. And it's not just talking about it, they're sharing what they've already done or started to do. That's very inspiring.

Good to see some tangible evidence of this, because it does seem to be an awful lot of talk and not a lot of action, at government level anyway.

Yes, but I strongly believe that businesses have a great potential to bring about these changes in societies. Governments can set guidelines or mandate, but eventually the businesses have to bring it around.

Not that long ago if you had a sustainability goal, you were kind of labeled as a bit of a crank, it was

a gimmick. They didn't take you very seriously. Therefore it is remarkable that in a very short time, maybe 10 or 12 years that you are now leading the way and inspiring others.

Everyone has to do it. I look at the next generation coming up, like my teenage daughters. They are very sensitive to this issue. They have founded their own eco club in their school. They go out cleaning beaches and they make sure that everything in the house that comes in is sustainable and eco-friendly, no plastics coming in, no plastic bags coming into the house.

It's again, a change which probably, eventually will be driven by the consumer at the end because consumers have started demanding it. And that's when businesses have to change, and governments will have to change if they want to stay in power.

I think our generation probably were the worst offenders for plastic bags and plastic waste. We've got a lot to apologize for to our kids.

Yes, I agree. Because we saw this sudden revolution and the change and we probably never realized the after-effects of such consumerism.

And what's the attitude in India towards this? I imagine every country's different.

Obviously India is a big country, it's hugely densely populated. 1.4 billion people. It's driven at a very grassroots level today in India, again, starting from educating school children. The government is putting a lot of focus on this one as well. All the countries have signed up their pledge for being carbon neutral by a certain time, like Europe in 2050. So, I'm hopeful it happens in my lifetime. Indian customers have been given sustainability goals very clearly from top down, so they have to adhere to that. My sense is this isn't just another bandwagon governments are jumping on. Not this time.

Training is a hot topic – we could all be doing more. Could you tell me about your training procedures?

The industry at large can't get enough fibre and then if they can get fibre, they can't get enough people to deploy that fibre. Fibre to the home or fibre to the premises is becoming a fundamental necessity. So we need people.



We manage the design, deployment and manage the training of engineers in India. We've brought them to the UK now. We are helping many of the leading operators in the UK to deploy a network. We are bringing our technical know-how to make sure that it is done right, the first time. We are producing solutions which are easier to deploy.

For example, splicing a cable can be time consuming and need training. But providing solutions that are plug and play, pre-connectorized solutions - anybody can do it, even a trainee or intern can do it. Also we have developed intelligently bonded ribbon cables which help upgrading existing networks by deploying up to 4x of fibre in existing ducts and also help faster and more cost efficient deployment of high fibre count.

With our network services business, we are able to bring in specially trained resources from India who are certified in our academy. These trained resources help cover the shortfall on trained fibre engineers in the UK. Once successful, we will be

looking to replicate this model in other European markets as well. We are using the strength of the STL Academy in India to help network deployments in Europe. To date, STL academy has trained more than 100,000 in the areas of 5G and fibre network deployment. And female upskilling and empowerment is something that is very, very important to STL.

What an inspiring company this is. What's it like to be a female employer in India?

Upskilling is just one bit of it because deployment is not only happening in cities and densely populated areas. It's happening in remotely and rural areas, so women's safety and their needs have to be taken care of. So the teams which we have on the ground help them enable all those services for them. It is not about sustaining them, but creating a solution around making sure they are taken care of end to end. It is very empowering for women because if there is deployment happening close to their village, they can actually just make

some extra money, support the family, and more importantly, it's a boost to their self-confidence, their careers and their independence.

Finally can you update us on STL's latest optical activities?

STL has a global, multi-national approach. We have a very strong manufacturing base, uniquely for Europe, not only for optical cables but also for optical interconnect. We're setting up a 5G manufacturing and R&D centre in the US today. As we speak, we are commissioning probably the largest overseas plant in the US.

Secondly, as I said, there is the collaborative approach which differentiates STL. We just don't go in and say, "Hey, that's my catalogue, pick out what you want." What we provide is a bespoke solution for customers, where we go out and say,

"Okay, what is the challenge you are facing in your business and how can we help you with that."

STL have some admirable working practices and an ambitious sustainability target; their vision and collaborative methodology is admirable and obviously paying dividends both in the UK and in India. We look forward to seeing how their plans evolve.



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