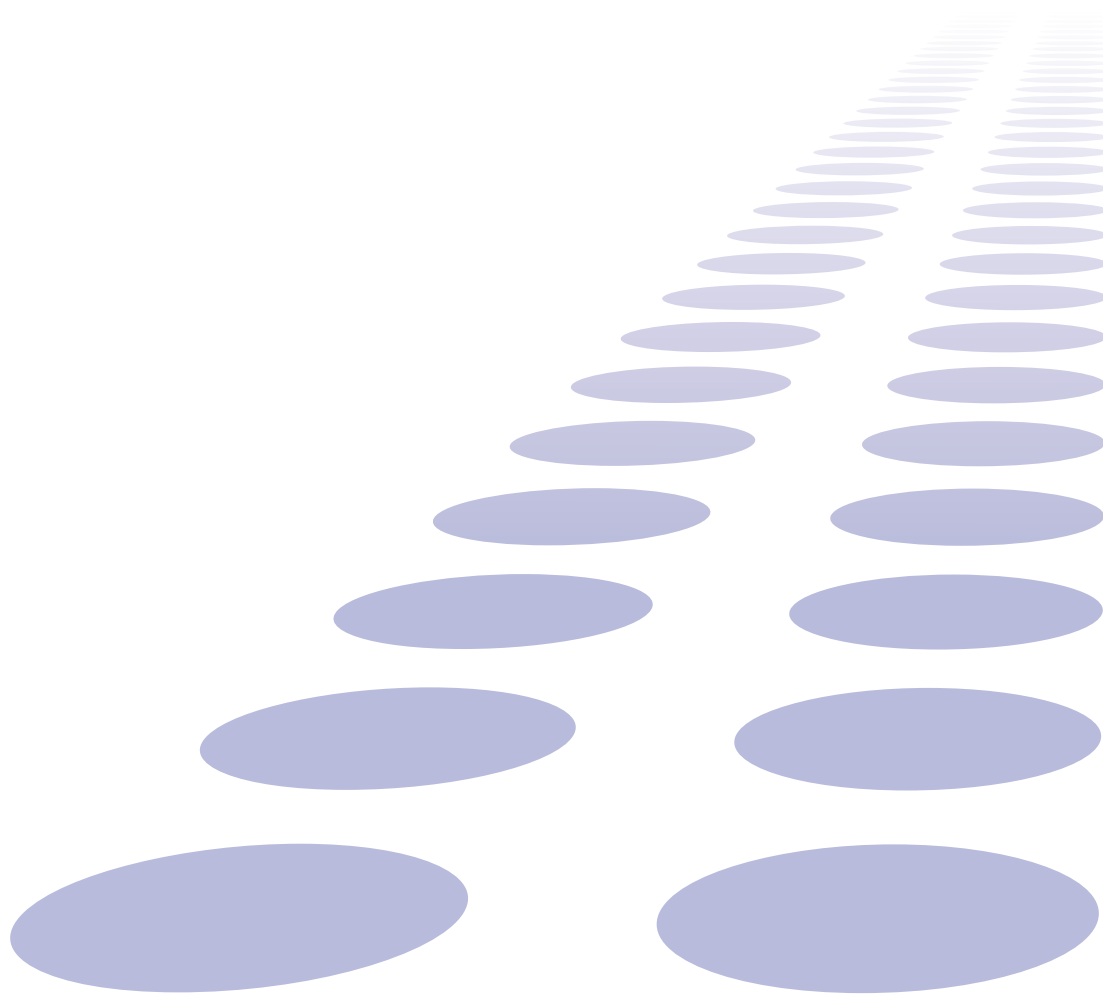


Telecom's capability: the heartbeat of business



The requirements that organisations have of their telecoms provider are changing. Whereas until now they have been based on physical connectivity - to make phone calls, use email, share files and the like - commercial pressures and the advent of new technologies have changed the game. Organisations now want to be able to make use of Next Generation Networks (NGNs) and sophisticated, tailored applications, rather than just settling for a 'one size fits all' approach. However, this is about more than just the network: the location of customer focused delivery teams has become critical, and the ability to offer increasingly sophisticated applications is rising up the buying agenda. A new age of telecoms capability has arrived to answer the call.

Information has become the most valuable currency for most modern organisations, and the ability to transport it quickly, reliably and without unnecessary complications is critical. This means that the networks carrying data traffic not only have to be fit for purpose, but must be able to cope with sudden or phased increases in traffic, depending on the needs of those using them.

As we enter the age of Telecoms 2.0, the capability to deliver on the promises of a new generation of telco provider depends on the power, sophistication and accessibility of the network.

What is a NGN?

A NGN uses packet switched technologies - as opposed to a conventional network's circuit switching - to transport media for carrying information. This is markedly different from legacy networks, which were born out of the need for transporting voice traffic. As networks developed, they were adapted - as far as possible - to carry data and later, internet traffic. NGNs are predominantly built using high-speed fibre-optics, specifically designed for the types of sophisticated communications services that organisations are demanding today, whereas legacy copper networks are struggling to handle a higher volume and variety of traffic that they were never originally designed for.

Next generation services are a fundamentally different purchase for the business customer. The underlying technology powering modern data networks has evolved, embracing voice and video traffic too, so that all traffic can be carried over the same flexible, resilient and scalable network infrastructure. This makes network management far more straightforward. Moreover, operational and capital costs are lowered both through the ability to just run one network and because NGN bandwidth can be purchased at lower overall cost, on more flexible terms.

Goodbye Telecoms jigsaw

The advent of Telecoms 2.0 brings with it networks that are a step change in functionality from that legacy approach. Being purpose-built for an age of far more demanding, content-driven applications, these networks are able to handle significantly greater volumes of traffic.

Moreover, their architectural design means that they offer far greater operational flexibility than legacy circuits. Rather than pulling together a network like pieces of a complex jigsaw, NGNs enable organisations to create their own high-bandwidth, resilient and secure communications platform within a local, regional or national network environment. When telecoms requirements were less sophisticated, voice was the primary driver of the need for a national network. Today, voice traffic is just one of many types of data travelling over networks.

With today's expanding organisations, the volume and variety of data is experiencing explosive growth. NGNs not only give businesses the bandwidth they need, but enable them to concentrate all of their communications resources and services on one giant network. By doing so they gain levels of service flexibility, fault management and service personalisation that buyers of legacy network services can only dream of.

Applications and availability

These advanced networks deliver the capability to support cutting-edge services like video and IP CCTV, as well as conventional applications like telephony and inter-site data connectivity. The question in many customers' minds is 'where is this type of network available, and how can I make best use of it?' The best way to exploit the power of the network depends on an organisation's specific requirements and circumstances, so the answer will be different in each case.

Availability of network services across the UK is also a straightforward question to answer. There are just two nationwide networks in the UK today and only one is a NGN - the £13 billion ntl:Telewest Business network. Other telcos do have pockets of NGNs built on a regional level, but they are far less extensive than the ntl:Telewest Business capability, which spans the entire country. This network is highly advanced and connecting is straightforward: it has been built using fibre optic cables, was designed from the ground up to support advanced services, and is continuously being enhanced to keep ahead of technological and capacity requirements.

The advanced core and local metropolitan access network is built from more than 186,000 kilometres of fibre optic cable, reaching more than 38,000 street cabinets. This means that these capabilities are closer and therefore more accessible to our customers across the country. Other telcos do have national networks but only ntl:Telewest Business has both a core and access network that is next generation and delivers connectivity across the country.

Will any NGN do?

With these networks now available across the UK, should organisations simply be trawling the market for the best deal? Well of course they should look for a partnership that is commercially attractive, but also be aware that not all networks are created equal.

The ntl:Telewest Business network has a distinct operational advantage over many providers in the UK in that it is wholly owned. Rather than having to rely on network partnership arrangements to deliver next generation services, ntl:Telewest Business owns its network end to end, right across the UK. This gives complete operational control and therefore, greater assurance to the customer.

This single ownership and responsibility is an extremely important part of delivering on the promise of Telecoms 2.0. Whereas many telcos assure customers of continuity with Service Level Agreements (SLAs), they are ultimately relying on third parties to service their customers, and are therefore one important step removed. There is no substitute for a telco owning its own infrastructure and being able to take rapid action in order to meet customer requirements or restore service.

Service in focus

As the pace of change accelerates, businesses are responding to increasingly varied methods of communication. This means they need to ensure their network platforms and provider can react quickly to their demands. In order for the telco to align itself with evolving customer requirements, it is important that they have a sustained working relationship and are physically nearby so that they can be highly responsive.

ntl:Telewest Business is extremely close to its customers. Its service, technical support, accounts and project management teams are located in 40 locations across the UK. Rather than expertise being centralised to a single office, its personnel are within touching distance of customer organisations. This concept of being 'local everywhere' means that the ntl:Telewest Business teams not only understand local issues and deliver close face to face relationships but also have the capability to respond more quickly to localised fault scenarios than organisations managed on a centralised basis.

Technology on your terms

Telecoms 2.0 is predicated upon wholly positive changes in the relationship between the telco and customer. The ntl:Telewest Business NGN capabilities and customer-centric mindset mean that organisations are in control of how they use the network, rather than being faced with limited choices due to network restrictions.

By tapping into the sophistication and power of the ntl:Telewest Business network, customers can use the very latest demanding applications, such as video and presence-based messaging, and do so on their terms. This means that every element of their telecoms investment is aligned to their specific operational requirements and the type of organisations they are.

By establishing how they want to exploit the network capability, organisations can turn communications from a commercial necessity into the robust heartbeat of their operations. They can support today's flexible and dynamic working patterns - ensuring that staff are not hampered by legacy communications technology and can do their jobs equally well, regardless of location. They can increase the level of collaboration within their team through unified voice and data applications, video-based tools and converged services, bringing the right information to their people faster.

Through Telecoms 2.0, the new age of telecom capability is ready to meet the individual requirements of organisations regardless of their location, their operational focus or their current telecoms services.

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