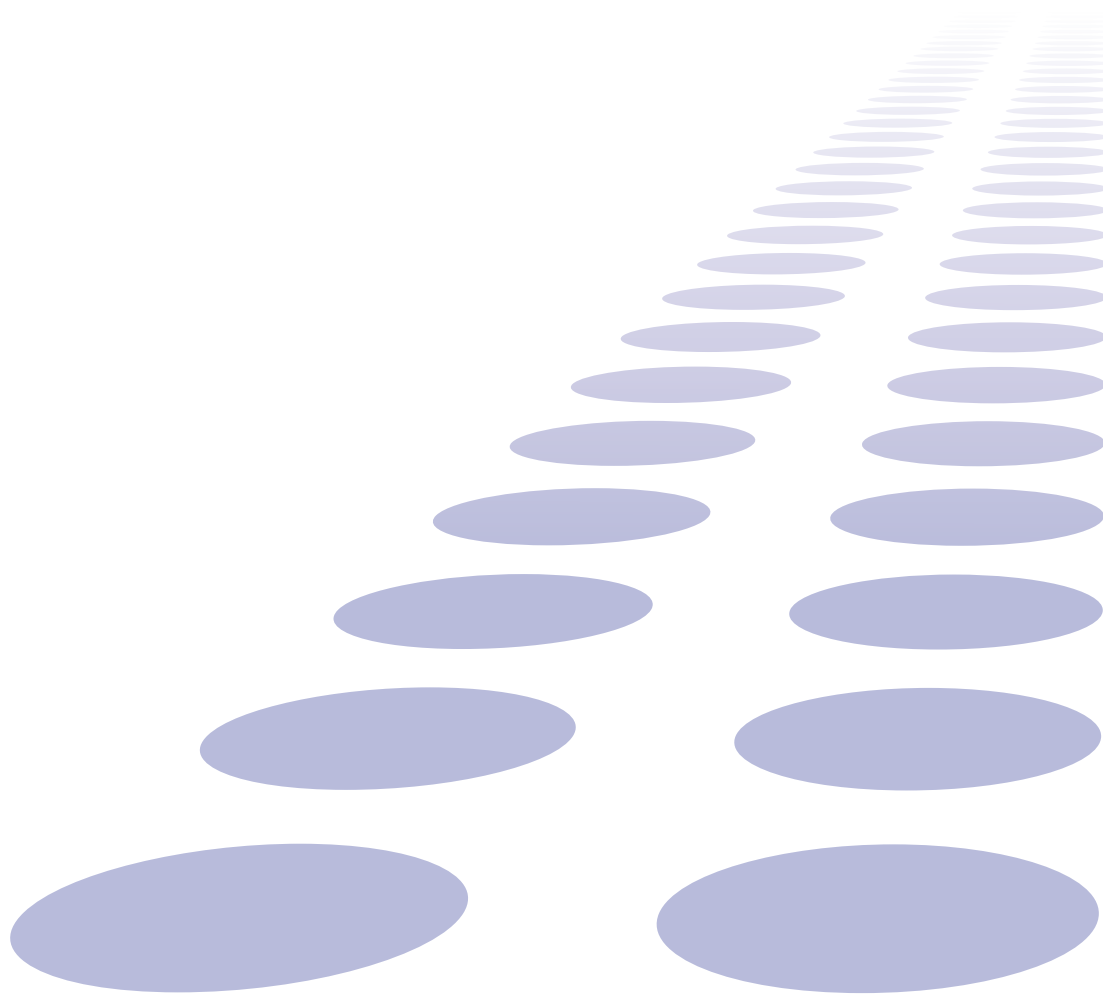


Mind – the gap



Progressive attitude, service-centric mindset and a collaborative ethos - these are not the sort of terms that have historically been associated with telecommunications companies (telcos), but things are changing rapidly.

Legacy fixed circuits have generally not warranted the frequent involvement or intervention of the telco provider. However, today's complex and critical communications requirements and the evolution of Next Generation Networks (NGNs) mean that it is essential to maintain close customer relationships. Telcos must not only have the capability to deliver next generation services, but staff must also apply the right service-centric mindset – this is a concept that ntl:Telewest Business calls Telecoms 2.0.

For most UK telcos, there is disparity between the way their people currently work with customers, and the collaborative approach they need to adopt. In order to be able to develop and sustain the mindset needed to be a true operational partner rather than a distanced supplier, telcos must ensure that their service teams are focused on what customers want, and are empowered to deliver it each day.

Organisations can no longer review their communications requirements every three years and make a contractual commitment, feeling safe in the knowledge that they will get value from their investment. Instead, services need to be flexible enough to adapt in line with operating requirements, accommodate new technology and organisational change, and be tailored to the individual needs of the organisation. The days of off-the-shelf telecoms solutions are numbered.

Only by combining the right mindset with the capability to provide advanced communications services, will telcos be able to deliver on customer expectations and unlock the full potential of next generation telecommunications.

Time for a two-way street

Business telecoms in the UK has seen marked changes in recent years. Twenty years ago there was just one provider; BT. Market deregulation in the 1990s saw a string of alternative telcos emerge. Many of them began to build their own regional or local networks, but largely still used BT's legacy network infrastructure to provide services. However, this increased competition did little to alter the nature of the relationship between telco and customer. The long-standing habits of telcos and the relative simplicity of customer requirements compared to those of today did not prompt a requirement for change.

But as the 1990s progressed, use of the internet grew and with that the organisations' reliance on communications increased rapidly. ntl:Telewest Business has its roots in a localised customer-centric service approach and continues to build on this in the national arena. Whereas other alternative

telcos attempted to compete with BT on several levels to gain market share, ntl:Telewest Business has always had a first-rate service ethos and superior network capability at the heart of its proposition.

Having invested £13 billion into a vast and highly sophisticated network that spans the UK, ntl:Telewest Business owns the most advanced of the two national networks. This enables the company to offer compelling and competitive services, given the long-term investments it has made in the future of telecoms. As customers embrace next generation services and establish how they can best use new technologies to enhance their competitive advantage in business, a collaborative relationship with their telco is expected. ntl:Telewest Business invests in its people and structures its teams to provide the approach, systems and attitude required to meet these heightened customer expectations.

The pace of change is a particularly important factor – for most modern organisations, communications services must be agile and responsive to evolving priorities. Only a two-way relationship with the telco can meet these expectations.

Continued support, not 'fit and forget'

Telcos have not been perceived as particularly consultative, so there is still a challenge to assure business customers that they can work as partners to help them gain greater value and advantage from communications.

ntl:Telewest Business has transformed its operations and evolved culturally to ensure that its entire team is consultative by nature. From the outset of any customer assignment, the focus is to engage with customers on how a network can help them innovate, compete and win.

That same spirit drives working practices. ntl:Telewest Business works to deliver unprecedented transparency across all customer-facing processes. The aim is to ensure that there are no surprises and, departing again from legacy practices, project management services are delivered at no extra cost.

This expertise and strong support for its customers' daily requirements and long-term aspirations needs to be continuous. There are two elements here, firstly telcos must make technical expertise readily accessible and applied to each customer in the way they need it. And secondly, the collaborative engagement of the telco team with the customer team must be clear, consistent and highly professional. This is exactly the way that ntl:Telewest Business has structured its customer support, account management and technical teams which are based across 40 sites around the UK - so that they are closer to their customers. ntl:Telewest Business is delivering the level of flexibility and tailored problem-solving to mid-sized and enterprise customers, that have traditionally been reserved for the larger multinationals and central government departments.

Teams are highly qualified to perform this role with accreditations from APM Training Institute, Cisco Networking Academy, Information Technology Infrastructure Library, Institute of Sales and Marketing Management and PRINCE2.

Customer in control

ntl:Telewest Business solutions can be tailored to individual organisation requirements to a far greater extent than legacy circuit-based telecoms services. For example, the integrated IP Multimedia service offers a range of tools that can be adopted and structured according to the organisations' needs. So whereas a mobile sales team may need every element of the service, an accounts department may simply want voice and presence indicators so that colleagues can be located quickly.

Equally, Service Level Agreements (SLAs) have been structured to suit the customer's requirements. Clauses can include greater network availability assurances at times of particularly critical demand, or switching to less rigid stipulations when there is less uptime pressure, such as overnight.

This is all well and good, but one typical issue that customers have had with legacy telco provision is insufficient visibility of orders, service delivery, invoicing and change planning. The concept of Telecoms 2.0 promises to deliver full transparency over how customers buy, run and are charged for their telecoms services. This is a bold commitment that ntl:Telewest Business has invested in and made central to its operations.

Our Billing Portal, Customer Portal and Performance Management Service are examples of tools designed to enhance and improve customers' visibility of our services, through secure online environments. Through the Billing Portal, customers can view and download invoices and statements in a variety of file formats. The Customer Portal has the functionality to generate written quotes within seconds, and allows the customer to move on and place orders online. Various products are supported by a Performance Management tool, enabling the customer to view the health of their service and plan growth through both Network and Class of Service performance reports.

This degree of customer influence means they can benefit from the telco's collaborate mindset, as they plan a transition towards more sophisticated and powerful telecoms. Moreover, it gives them greater scope to ensure that telecoms usage and planning are directly aligned with their commercial strategy.

Move any mountain

Mindset is about having the right structure, partnership ethos, training and continuity in the telco team. It's also about having a can-do attitude.

To deliver on the promise of Telecoms 2.0, telcos need to be far more flexible than they have been in the past. Whereas in the days of legacy networks, there were severe restrictions over the amount of flexibility they could offer, next generation services now make it far more practical to align offerings directly with the requirements of individual customer organisations.

The difficulty for many telcos is that their businesses and customer-facing processes were built for a different era. They are going to have to make extensive transitions to meet the demands of the modern UK telecoms market, and those that have had the ability to invest in that transition are already at a distinct advantage.

With the right mindset and attitude, and the tools in place to put them to work, ntl:Telewest Business is ideally placed to help customers address their communications challenges and deliver commercial advantage, now and for the future.

To find out more call **0800 052 0845** or
visit **www.ntltelewestbusiness.co.uk**

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