ISE EXPO
ICT SOLUTIONS & EDUCATION

2021 Executive Roundtable Highlights

With Corning, Dura-Line, Hexatronic, PLP, And Vitruvi

By Janice Oliva, *ISE*

This invitation-only event, held at ISE EXPO 2021, and moderated by Janice Oliva, President and Publisher of ISE magazine, brought these 5 leading vendors together for a content-rich discussion exploring industry challenges and opportunities for the future.

ROUNDTABLE EXECUTIVES:

(PICTURED ON PAGE 24 FROM LEFT TO RIGHT)

Tim Grimsley, Vice President of Global Customer Engagement, Dura-Line

Dan Levac, National Sales Manager, Communications Markets, PLP

Kevin Baker, Market Development Manager, Corning

Bryan McIver, CEO, Vitruvi

Beni Blell, Vice President of Sales, Hexatronic

ISE: Share the 3 best practices you've learned in 2020-21 that you will use going forward.

Baker, Corning: I learned to become a better listener when talking to my customers. I tried to understand what I was hearing from my customers; to see what the true underlying needs might be, and to ask better questions that allow me to help them meet their targets.

While it is an important part of any project, the Day 1 Budget cannot be the #1 priority for any build. When the initial cost is the main driver for a project, then corners will be cut, intuition will be curbed, and the planning process for creating a connected future will begin to be trimmed down.

Assume that your original timeline will change.

Grimsley, Dura-Line:

1. Plan, plan, plan.
2. Listen to our customers (then go back to #1).
3. People have always been key and very important to our company. But unlike any other time in our industry's history, now we need to invest even more in training, support, and well-being.

Blell, Hexatronic:

1. Subscribers will not wait 2-3 weeks for a broadband connection if one is available within 1-2 days -- even if it's not fiber. Build a fiber system with which you can light up your customer in the shortest time.
2. Plan for additional pathways for your feeder networks so you can scale with time without the need to place all the fiber in the ground on Day One.
3. Choose a system supply partner, not based only on component price, but on total system value and support levels including site support, training, and backed by system warranties.

Levac, PLP:

1. Don't cut corners. Take the time to understand the end goals and the best way to achieve them. Then try to look beyond your current needs and technology and plan for additional devices, uses, and advancements.
2. When you think technology has advanced as much as it can, think again. Multicore fiber, advances in network slicing, and even manufacturing technologies continue to evolve and bring additional capabilities to the broadband field.
3. Listen and learn. Listen to your material suppliers and understand the limitations of raw materials, the sheer volume of orders, and delivery

issues. There are a lot of happenings in the field of broadband with many resources to provide insight, understanding, and techniques, to developing and deploying the best network possible. Take your time making those critical decisions.

McIver, Vitruvi:

1. Start all planning and deployment with a digital, GIS-based design, that can be shared directly with build partners and, in so doing, can be used to enable automated/digital workflows during construction.
2. Record and collect build data as close to the source of the data as possible. Eliminate unnecessary hand-offs between multiple people and systems; record it accurately the first time, from the field.
3. Collaborate with contractors, subcontractors, and other build partners, on a single platform -- much like other industries have collaborated across the value chain -- to drive increased quality and efficiency.

ISE: How do we build and maintain a modern communications infrastructure to support a connected future?

Baker, Corning: The key to a connected future is making sure that the infrastructure's backbone is built properly the first time. Only with a future-proofed fiber backbone and knowledgeable workers can our connected future properly flourish.

Grimsley, Dura-Line: The fiber you are installing today is not enough. No matter how much you are installing, we can almost guarantee with certainty that it's not enough. Leverage detailed records of the networks: where cables are located and if there are any empty ducts along the route. Maintaining a modern network depends on accurate mapping.

Blell, Hexatronic: Regardless of the range of considerations that must be taken into account before deciding how to build a modern network, I am sure we can agree on some fundamentals:

1. Build it once.
2. Build it with fiber.
3. Ensure that your system design passes all homes and businesses within the service area, and that connections can be made quickly.
4. Contractors are selected based on efficiency and quality of workmanship.
5. Operations personnel are trained on all aspects of the system.
6. Monitor your system performance and customer satisfaction routinely, and address accordingly.

Levac, PLP: Understand that the products you select for your infrastructure must be adaptable. Technology is advancing at such a rapid pace; your deployment methodology must be scalable. Don't settle. The longevity of your infrastructure depends on quality, both in the deployment and the products you select.

McIver, Vitruvi: Move towards digital record-keeping. Design, build, and record, all aspects of deployment digitally on a GIS-based platform.

ISE: *Inefficiencies in construction contribute to an overall 30% increase in the cost of capital investments in utility infrastructure. Solving this one issue allows asset owners (and ultimately all rate payers) to lower CapEx by a significant margin, thereby increasing the size of the footprint that can be built. This helps stretch government grant dollars farther, frees up investment dollars for R&D and other supporting investments, etc.*

What does it mean to future-proof your network, and how can you attempt to do it the right way?

Baker, Corning: As you develop your initial strategy for building a connected future, the incremental cost of upsizing the fiber sheath is minimal compared to the other pieces within the

project. A strong strategy includes looking at all potential areas for growth out in the field: residences and businesses, known and possible upcoming developments, strategic placement of infrastructure access points -- all in service of building your backbone once.

Grimsley, Dura-Line: The only thing we can predict about the future is that it will depend on connectivity. Having additional conduits or pathways installed is the answer to planning for the future. While you still can't predict where the demand will take place, your network system design needs to be flexible to accommodate growth in every direction.

Blell, Hexatronic: Even with an all-fiber network, there are varying levels of future-proofing. PON vs. active systems, available optical power, available fibers and/or pathways to install additional fibers, must all be considered at the time of network design. Consider and evaluate microduct technology as a viable option for maximum system flexibility and scalability.

Levac, PLP: Fiber enables the network owner to scale and deliver higher speeds and lower latency. The products must have the capacity to scale up to add additional fiber for laterals while using the same equipment in the OSP.

McIver, Vitruvi: Collaborate on a digital platform with build partners. Share GIS and as-built data with your build and deployment partners. Don't keep this data siloed; rather, collaborate up and down the value chain, ensuring that critical data captured during the build phase is available for all parts of the operation long into the future.

ISE: Is slicing network and automation being used now or in the near future? Can it help providers increase capacity?

Baker, Corning: Slicing and automation are both being used now, and allow for more specialized dedicated services and product offerings as well as better utilization of the network.

Blell, Hexatronic: Municipalities planning for future-proof smart city applications are designing multi-pathway fiber deployment which can easily be accessed at a wide range of access points. Point-to-point systems, and multi-carrier connectivity, seem to be preferred for such designs to maximize bandwidth and range of active devices used by different service providers.

Levac, PLP: With a strong fiber backbone, slicing becomes more possible since it is primarily a software-driven technology. The farther into the network fiber goes, the easier to slice the network end-to-end.

ISE: Which is coming first to a neighborhood near you: 5G or WiFi6?

Baker, Corning: This depends on the region where your project is being built. 5G and WiFi6 will be available to a majority of people in the near future, but at differing levels.

Grimsley, Dura-Line: In reality, both. The larger cities are moving to 5G and we are seeing a trend of rural areas looking at WiFi6. Both can, and do, work well together.

Blell, Hexatronic: It doesn't matter; make sure you have bandwidth in place to support it.

Levac, PLP: From a cost perspective, WiFi6 would most likely come first; however, the 2 services complement each other, so having access to both would greatly benefit the end user. WiFi6 will be more widely available. ■

Visit www.isemag.com for more information about each 2021 Executive Roundtable participant and the companies they represent.