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BY BUSINESS

WIRRAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE MAGAZINE

Tom Cullen

Managing Director, Digitel Europe Ltd.

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ISSUE 03

Interview with

Tom Cullen



Tom Cullen factfile:

Distinguished telecoms career, starting in Canada in the 1970s.

Held senior positions with ITT, IBM and Trillium Telephone Systems.

Returned to England in the 1990s, established Digitel Europe in 1992.

How did your experiences in Canada prepare you for running your own business?

It helped tremendously. North American business methods were totally different to those in the UK and markets were so much more competitive – almost like a sport at times. Competition is encouraged at all levels of society, starting in schools, so there's a very overt will to win.

Related to this, I always found that people were quicker to celebrate success in North America, something that we're only now beginning to embrace this side of the pond. Americans are brought up believing that anyone can become President of the USA and this creates a personal drive, commitment and dedication that I found infectious. I like to think that I brought at least a little bit of this attitude back with me.

digitel

Business Communications

Why did you set up in Wirral?

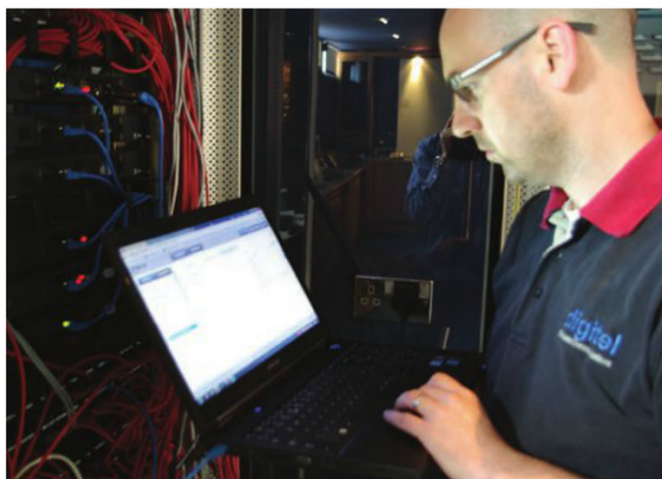
I've always had a nice feeling about Wirral. Growing up in Gateacre, I associated Wirral with family days out in New Brighton, holidays to Wales and later my wife's parents had sailing boats on the Dee. We moved here in 1992 and loved it.

We found our first premises in Whetstone Lane, a sandstone building that was formerly owned by a ships captain. We later acquired our current premises on the Priory Industrial Estate and settled here.

It's really pleasing that Wirral's reputation as a place to do business is improving – I think Wirral Chamber of Commerce has played a big part in that. I'm so pleased that a high profile organisation is shouting about the positive things that are happening in Wirral. I'm delighted to see the recent developments at Wirral Waters, Pacific Road and on our own doorstep with the Lightbox and Turbine Park developments. I hope these initiatives are the start of a real step-change for Wirral.

Digitel is described as a business communications company. What does this mean?

Business communications encompasses a complete range of services that businesses need to function effectively. At Digitel we provide a range of telecommunications systems, business lines, mobile services, broadband, inbound services and cloud-based solutions including related peripheral products.



Tell us a bit more about your market

We're passionate about supporting small businesses. They are the lifeblood of our economy and represent 99% of all businesses in the UK. Our range of products are targeted at the SME market segments, which for us is up to 1,000 ports.

Our primary geographic focus is within 100 mile radius of Birkenhead, but we also market outside of this area for strategic customers.



How important is a robust business communication system to a business?

Generally the telecommunications system is the front door to most businesses, every time the phone rings is an opportunity for business people to sell products, to take orders or reinforce a relationship with a client. How businesses choose to handle these interactions can be different from one business to another so the communications system must be designed to meet the individual business requirements.

What are the most common faults business make in utilising a business communication system?

The most common fault I encounter is "if it's not broken it doesn't need updating." I simply don't believe you can run a successful business on a 10-year-old communications system and expect the business to be competitive. The pace of change in all areas of technology is incredible and communications is possibly the fastest changing of all.

You mention changes, what are the most significant developments in business communication systems in the past 5 years or so?

The most significant changes are in unified communications. This is where the business telephone system integrates with a full range of other communications equipment and technologies. Our mobile phone systems can now be an extension of your office system, allowing businesses to make calls over Wi-Fi at no charge wherever you are in the world.

I like the clever integration of systems. Companies can link voice systems with CRM databases to "screen pop" customer database details immediately as calls come into the business.



Technology is constantly driving down the cost of business lines and the way calls are made. Businesses that trade nationally can have a London number for both inbound and outbound calls, while sitting in their offices in Birkenhead.

And the great thing is that modern systems will help a business to reduce their communications costs, increase their operating efficiency and enhance customer service levels and, in most cases, can cost justify the investment against existing costs. That's my sales bit over!

Tell me about something in the world of digital business communications that has impressed you recently.

I love how websites can now be integrated into communications systems. This allows your website clients to communicate directly with your telephone based staff at the click of the mouse. This functionality will significantly improve website effectiveness and enhance sales volumes for any business involved in e-commerce.

This functionality transitions the website from being a flat one-dimensional provider of information into a multimedia store where web site clients can communicate directly with experts who can provide real-time advice, guidance and instant video demonstrations.

How do you stay competitive?

The one constant in our business is change. How we handle those changes can make the difference between our business participating profitably in new technology and failing. A key element in this equation is training and looking outward for solutions. We invest in skills and have found Wirral Chamber of Commerce Training Hub really valuable for both management and staff training. Staff come back with fresh ideas and an enthusiasm that genuinely keeps us all on our toes.

What's the scariest technical error you have ever encountered and how did you fix it?

The scariest technical error that I ever witnessed was in Ontario where we were installing a new network for Levi Strauss across North America. After the install the whole system would go down every day at approximately 10:15 a.m. and approximately 3:00pm. The major site would be completely inoperable.

By the time we dispatched an engineer the system would come back up again working. This happened for several days until in frustration we sent an engineer out at eight o'clock in the morning with all of the necessary test equipment to define where the problem was.

At 10:10 a.m. the janitor arrived, unplugged the system, plugged in his kettle and made his morning coffee. Needless to say neither our engineer nor the Levi Strauss executive team were impressed!

You work with some of the world's biggest companies such as Microsoft, Eriksson, LG, Panasonic, Samsung and Vodaphone - where do you see the next big growth in business communications taking place?

The Internet of things (IOT) will drive major innovation and have a significant impact over the next five years in all areas in both the residential and business markets.

PayPal, Google and others will surely transition into the financial markets through soft phone applications. This will have major impacts, potentially creating global online banks.

The opportunities are boundless, and Wirral based companies have just as much opportunity as anyone else to thrive where technology is concerned.

For more information about Digitel Europe visit:

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