

How Providers Can Capture and Keep Deep Knowledge

Recording network data on a software-based system of record enables providers to capture and disseminate knowledge before it escapes the business.

By Wade Anderson / *OSPInsight at IQGeo*

Knowledge developed and retained within the minds of key employees is one of the most valuable parts of an organization. After all, employees are the greatest asset of any business. The problem is that organizations often don't realize how valuable deep knowledge is until it's gone. When employees leave for greener pastures, they take their insights with them, forcing others to fill in gaps that employers didn't even know existed.

In the fiber optic network management world, field technicians often possess a huge amount of knowledge about a network. They know the nuances of splice enclosures, how cables connect, the best way to access specific cabinets, and much more. Through their experiences, field technicians build up a wealth of knowledge about the best way to manage and maintain active networks. When they retire or move on, essential business knowledge leaves with them.

PROTECTING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Some companies tackle this problem by recording network data to a software-based system of record (SoR) so they can capture and disseminate deep knowledge before it escapes the business. This stops them from losing precious information about their operations and enhances the overall value of the network. As a result, information such as utilization by fiber strand, termination points, cabinet locations,

active subscribers, geographic coordinates and more is all available instantly to anyone who needs it within the business.

To ensure data remains accurate and current, companies combine this strategy with dedicated mobile applications that fiber technicians can use to upload notes and as-builts in real time. This creates a central "hub" that anyone can leverage or update on the go, which is when so much of field workers' crucial work happens.

This approach is also integral to keeping office-based operations teams in the loop and capturing site-specific knowledge before it's lost. It also means companies can get the most out of field data collection and avoid having to track down information after the fact. So, when a company's longest-tenured field technician retires or joins another company, it won't lose all the employee's valuable wisdom overnight.

If employees are encouraged to log network data regularly, the business will retain that important information, and the technicians who are still with the company can pick up right where others left off. They can easily access the information they need to troubleshoot problems, perform new splices, investigate concerns, and more.

RETAINING NETWORK CONTROL

Another reason companies are moving toward a new SoR is the control they can retain over a network, even as it expands and grows more complex. The result is a more resilient system

due to the elimination of single points of failure and over dependence on the deep knowledge of key individuals.

For example, CTS Telecommunications was able to minimize its dependence on a third-party contractor that previously handled all field fiber operations by deploying a new SoR. The field technicians at the outsourced engineering firm had all the information about how the CTS Telecommunications network functioned, which meant the contractor controlled the network rather than the company itself.

In the past, CTS operators had to get approval from the contractor before they could assign new cables, expand the network and make other important decisions. After switching to a software-based SoR and deploying network data in the cloud, the operators finally had an accurate and current view of all field operations conducted by the contractor, which gave them full control.

When organizations use paper-based records, spreadsheets and hand-drawn maps to manage fiber networks, operations and engineering teams often find themselves in an internal power struggle over who controls information. The engineers have the deep knowledge, making them the gatekeepers of operational decisions. But with a shared SoR, businesses align operations and engineering teams around a single source of truth, eliminating damaging information conflicts.

ENHANCING NETWORK VALUE

Some companies use an SoR to enhance the economic value of their teams and physical networks. An SoR enables employees to do their jobs more effectively, making them more valuable to the business. In addition, it creates an organized repository of information about a network's components (cables, cabinets, end points, etc.) that adds tremendous value to the organization when speaking with decision-makers and outside investors.

The more information a provider can encapsulate about its network, the more valuable it is to external stakeholders who may want to buy or invest in the network down the road. All the information anyone could ever want is in one place. In other words, the provider has a "digital twin" that carries real financial weight.

As individual members of a workforce retire or move on, businesses need to ensure that they capture the deep knowledge that has been cultivated within the business and use it to empower new generations. Establishing a new SoR, supported by readily available applications and technology, is a simple and effective way to keep expertise within a business instead of letting it evaporate overnight. ♦

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