Streamlining the Fiber Build Process

In this year's fiber broadband race, the winners will focus on pragmatic, incremental gains, not future promises.

By Wade Anderson / *IQGeo*

The telecom industry experienced incredible growth during the last decade. The internet is essential to all major sectors, and recently the demand for superfast broadband soared because more people work in decentralized teams, a trend that accelerated because of the pandemic. The U.S. government stresses the importance of accessibility, especially given its direct correlation to economic prosperity. President Biden's infrastructure bill aims to ensure every American has access to reliable, high-speed internet, and there are similar initiatives worldwide.

Consequently, many operators are focused on meeting these demands quickly and ensuring their fiber build efforts are as streamlined and efficient as possible. They are racing against their competitors to reach customers first with excellent service and to increase revenues with expanded networks.

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND TACTICAL SUCCESS

Telecom companies' approach to this effort will be essential to whether they are in pole position or back in the pack as the race accelerates in 2022. Many are investing heavily in innovative, next-generation technology to reach their goals. This approach makes sense. McKinsey found that "bolder, at-scale investments in technology are significantly more likely to support a successful transformation than those that are smaller in scope."

To be successful, companies should create long-term innovation plans consisting of incremental gains rather than view innovation as a big-bang investment.

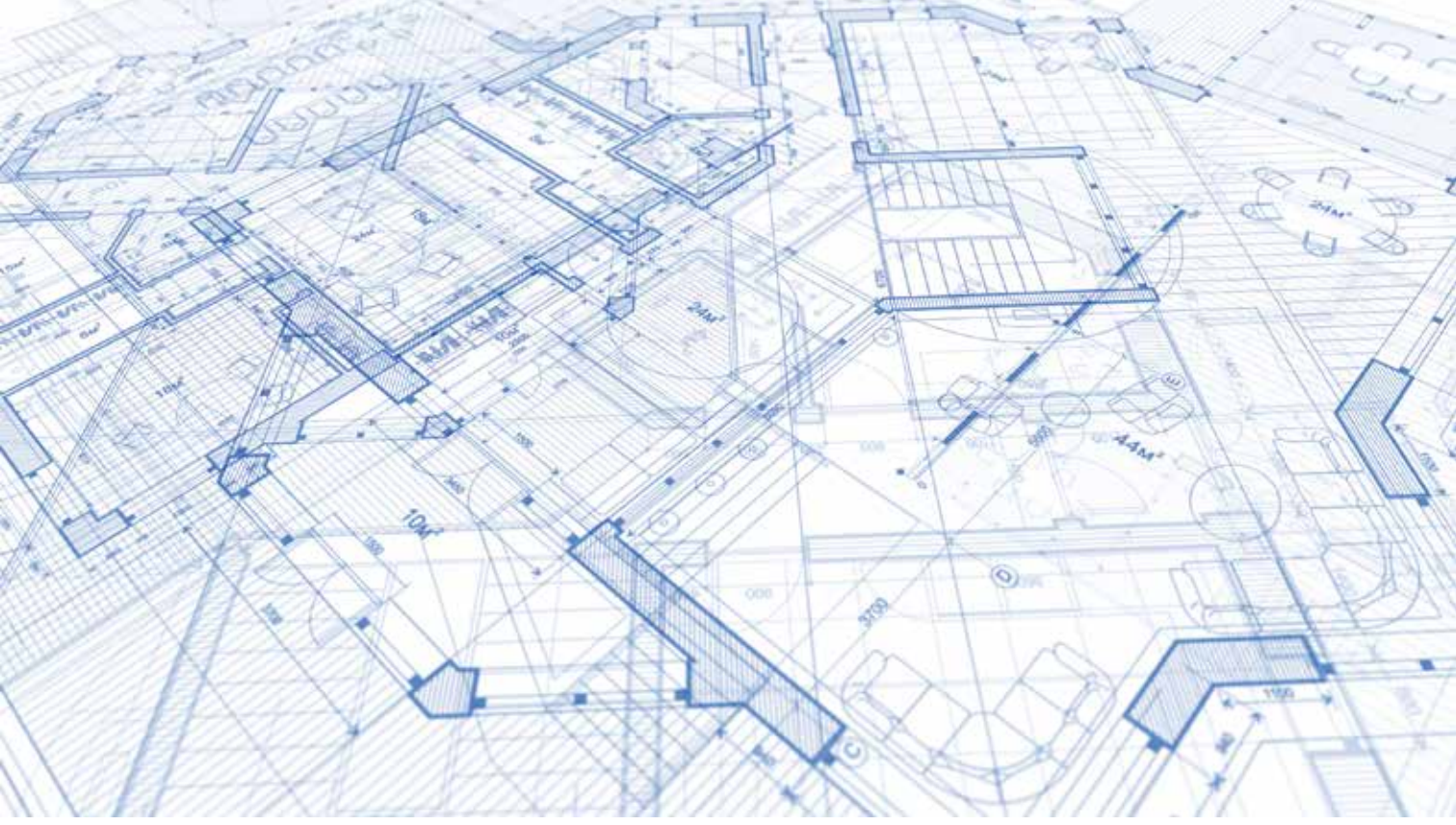
Creating a fiber and 5G network is no easy feat; how many other established industries have rapidly pivoted their strategies to meet such fast-growing demands? The key to reducing time-to-revenue is to take on this challenge with a series of small goals that consistently deliver impact and value throughout the journey.

CREATING AN INNOVATION BLUEPRINT

Businesses should see their approach to fiber builds as a rolling deployment of technology. The helpful starting point is to consider an area of a company that's currently the most significant pain point. For example, suppose the problem is inefficiencies with field crews and contractors. In that case, the company can start by deploying a new mobile solution for construction and, when successful, can apply the same infrastructure and lessons learned to maintenance. It's disaster response, followed by ticket management and beyond.

Businesses that start at one vertical point and demonstrate the performance of that solution and then expand across the life cycle benefit from the exponential impact of a collection of small, incremental gains.

By creating a culture of constant innovation, a company can use the first steps to refine the approach for the next steps and create a repeatable blueprint appropriate for its business. The whole life cycle process is interconnected, so it's essential to ensure that the foundations



can be used across different business operation areas. This flexible, agile strategy supports the other priorities of individual departments and draws together the entire network life cycle.

Adopting an approach that delivers constant, incremental benefits also means deployers can rapidly assess the value suppliers and partners provide by measuring output and impact throughout an engagement. This is difficult to judge if the gains are promised 12 or 18 months later; by then, a significant investment has already been made. If the approach isn't suitable for a particular business, it can't avoid substantial negative consequences.

DEMONSTRATING PROGRESS AND ROI

Given the speed at which the market evolves, operators can't stand still. They must demonstrate the delivery of constant value to businesses.

Those championing a constant innovation approach within businesses can use ongoing ROI as evidence to justify past and future investments. It's far less risky than expensive, resource-hungry, big-bang projects.

A network operator must be able to look back in a few months to see its progress and the impact it has already had on customers and revenue.

One organization that took an incremental approach to innovation is TELUS. To ensure it met the evolving needs of its customers, TELUS incrementally integrated a wide range of data sources into its geospatial network view, from weather and disaster information to intelligent sensors analytics. This strategy gave its team a greater understanding of actual-time network status, leading to much greater process efficiency and better customer service. Over time, field-sourcing geospatial network data enables companies to significantly reduce the number of updates that require a GIS specialist, boosting accessibility across the field and operational teams and streamlining repairs. This approach allows operators to scale up network data processes to match their growth ambitions.

Technologically progressive operators are eliminating paper maps in favor of digital solutions that can run online or offline so they are always available. Rather than being splintered into siloed applications, data should be integrated from across the enterprise to create a holistic overview of increasingly complex network assets. This means network changes can be clearly visualized and effectively managed. Companies can continue to build on each success by constantly innovating in other areas of their organizations as customer and business needs evolve.

Telecom organizations that dynamically respond to increasing demand for their broadband services in the same way TELUS did will set themselves apart from the competition. This year, a more competitive telecom market will emerge as a result of this fiber build race. To win, telecom organizations need to demonstrate incremental and tangible progress throughout 2022 and beyond. ❖

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