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Next generation IT Infrastructures

IT'S TIME TO TAKE ADVANTAGE by Mike Gilmore, FIA Technical Director for Networking+ (March 2009)

One thing that is guaranteed in a recession - there will be winners and losers. During recessions some organisations adapt and survive, others die and yet others are created from the embers of those that die. Unfortunately, skills are often lost. In organisations that do survive, the initial adaptation involves reducing headcount to re-define the "core business". Although this process is sometimes an opportunity to get rid of "dead wood", it can also remove the most skilled and experienced personnel in favour of lower cost, young and dynamic types. Similarly, newly created businesses tend to follow their Pied Pipers who again tend to be those with ideas and visions rather than those with their feet firmly fixed in the comparatively dull concepts of such as quality assurance.

It is probable that many new enterprises fail early in their development because ideas and vision take over from skills and experience. So it is with recession, which accelerates the production of new start-ups but also watches them burn and die. If the recession is short-lived, no one notices the second phase but if the recession is extended the fundamental problem of reducing levels of skills and experience is compounded.

The skills being referred to are not just technical but also cross over into the field of basic business administration. If your business model does not allow for the cost of employing skills and experience, how can it be obtained? One obvious source is the various industry bodies ranging from the Institute of Directors through to trade associations such as the Fibreoptic Industry Association and its co-hosted cousin, the Telecommunication Infrastructure Advisory Board.

One question often asked is if the services offered by such organisations are fully used or even recognised by their members?

What we do know is that the hits on the FIA web-site at www.fia-online.co.uk have increased by 21% since the start of the year. We also know that the majority of those hits come from non-members, seeking advice from the many free sources of information such as White Papers and Newsletters. Of course, a large number are looking at our membership lists in order to find suppliers in their local area or in their sphere of activity. On the members-only side of the web-site, the activity and the activity areas are more restricted - this indicates that, for many, simply being a member of an organisation (and getting "the badge") is an important market differentiator in itself with any additional benefits of membership being ignored.

The "badge of merit" concept associated with having paid ones annual membership fees is perhaps only natural. The additional differentiators of membership such as being an "approved" supplier of services as opposed to being a general member certainly attract some members but once again this is treated as one more badge. Such philosophies do not change during a recession. Indeed FIA membership is continuing at a steady state since as some companies unfortunately cease trading, others come along behind them to fill the gap.

However, members who simply see membership as badge and do not use the services offered by organisations like the FIA are really failing to benefit in two significant ways. Firstly they do not benefit from the body of knowledge that already exists and secondly they do not identify where those services could be improved to meet their specific needs. This is clearly a double-whammy.

It is job of the FIA to effectively market the services they offer – but as the saying goes "...you can take a horse to water.....".

If you would like to have your say on this topic and would like to join the FIA in order to do so, e-mail jane@fiasec.demon.co.uk or, alternatively, you can contact the FIA Secretariat in 01763 273039.

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Biography

As the Technical and Standards Director of the UK Fibreoptic Industry Association, Mike is heavily involved in the development of training and competence standards for the fibre installation industry and sets down policy in this area. In addition he chairs the audit and arbitration committees for the FIA. His book "Fibre optic cabling; theory design and installation practice" published in 1991 remains a reference for both experts and entrants into this field.

Mike also initiated the establishment of the Telecommunications Infrastructure Advisory Board (TIA-B) along with the relevant directors of its other host organisations CMA and ECA-ITEC.

In the UK, Mike is Chairman of TCT7, the BSI Technical Committee responsible for the three panels on telecommunication cabling. He also chairs two of these panels (TCT7/-/1 and TCT7/-/3) and is Secretary of TCT7/-/2. TCT7/-/1 and TCT7/-/2 act to assist development of European and international standards for the design and installation of telecommunications cabling respectively. TCT7/-/2 also manages the implementation of these standards in the UK, where necessary producing supporting national standards.

Mike is involved in CENELEC TC215 - as Convenor of Working Group 1 and Secretary of Working Group 2. These committees are responsible for the development of an integrated series of standards for the design and installation of telecommunications cabling in a range of premises. In 2008 he led the ETSI STF362 on energy efficiency in broadband deployment resulting in the ETSI TS 105174 series documents, allowing Mike to assist in a new TC215 activity covering data centre facilities and infrastructures (monitored in the UK by BSI TCT7/-/3).

At international level, Mike is Convenor of the Cabling Implementation Task Group (CITG) within ISO/IEC JTC1 SC25 WG3. This group is responsible for the strategic management of the international standards covering the specification, QA, installation, administration, operation, maintenance and repair of generic cabling. This work supports all the cabling design standards produced by ISO/IEC JTC1 SC25 WG3 including ISO/IEC 11801, ISO/IEC 15018, ISO/IEC 24764 and ISO/IEC 24702 for industrial premises produced by ISO/IEC JTC1 SC25 WG3 IPTG (also convened by Mike Gilmore).

Mike is a regular speaker at seminars and conferences in all five continents. He has provided the keynote address and opening presentation in many conferences in the UK, Germany and the Netherlands. His seminars, providing regular updates on the progression of cabling standards are particularly well attended and are operating in the UK and continental Europe.



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