A Nightmare on Beak Street

Wayleave issues put business at risk

For all businesses today, digitalisation of business processes is critical to the battle for competitive advantage and employee productivity. To achieve this, modern communication and collaboration systems are reliant on the agile and responsive performance delivered by high performance fibre connectivity. As they say, the system is only as good as the network it uses.

All too often, though, the criticality of super-fast network availability is matched by an equal and opposite super-slow installation process. Accessing new fibre networks, brought about by office moves, new system installations, company mergers or rapid business growth, can be fraught with delays. The consequences can be disastrous, as discovered by Keko London, the Soho-based advertising and marketing agency.

As with other digital and creative agencies, Keko London generates lots of network traffic - big graphics files, bigger video files, an array of cloud apps, bandwidth-hungry collaboration tools. All consume network capacity at a rate of gigabits per second and fibre connectivity is a must.

So, when Keko London signed up to a lease with 'fibre in the building', it was a shock to find out that 'fibre to the building' didn't exist. It was at this point that, like so many businesses, Keko London embarked on the painful journey through the legalities of accessing a nearby fibre connection into the office building.

Typically, this involves digging under the pavement or road adjacent to the building, outside the boundary of the office building and, therefore, demanding permission to traverse private land and undertake construction work.

" Keko London

Based in the heart of London's Soho, Keko is a team of forty talented creatives using cuttingedge marketing skills to 'find, influence and sell' to affluent consumers.

This three-part formula has been successful in winning clients that include Bentley Motors, Triumph Motorcycles and Forevermark's 'Exceptional Diamond Collection'. Naturally, winning brands of this quality places exacting demands on client interaction, marketing systems and deadlines promised. On reaching five years, Keko's consistent success is explained by Ben Whattam, Managing Partner:

"Five is a significant milestone for Keko London, and I'm proud that we continue to grow and evolve in an ever changing and competitive market place. We've focused on culture and philosophy over aggressive growth since day one, and I'm confident this is the right strategy for our next five years also."

Openreach networks, out of reach

This permission, or 'wayleave', is the consent required by the network provider to carry out work on the neighbour's privately-owned land. The wayleave also grants access to install, maintain or repair associated equipment. Wayleaves are controlled by the Electronic Communications Code published in December 2017 under the Communications Act 2003 and governed by Ofcom. In principle, wayleaves are a common-sense set of regulations. In practice, they are notorious for being complex and time-consuming to enforce.

In the City of London, for example, the 'Fibre First' initiative from BT Openreach plans to connect FTTP high speed broadband to 12,000 properties across the City. However, this has been hindered by the difficulties of contacting and agreeing permissions from landlords to give access to their buildings. As highlighted by the CEO of BT Openreach, the difficulty centres on identifying and contacting international building owners scattered across the world. Consequent delays can take years.

The barriers to fibre connection don't stop there. Even after the wayleaves and permissions are agreed, organising construction work in a busy city centre presents additional challenges. Council approvals for road works have to take into account a host of issues, from safety to traffic management, and that takes time.

On top of that, there's the network carriers. It's widely known that these big, multi-national organisations, struggle to provide the agility, responsiveness and personal service necessary to deal with network provisioning that is, so often, urgent and business critical.

Sadly, for Keko London all of these issues came together in a project that was expected to be a simple deployment of fibre broadband but actually resulted in a catalogue of errors and delays that damaged business operations and threatened business continuity.

Business not as usual

In the absence of fibre into the building, Keko London instructed installation of a high-speed, 50Mbps Ethernet connection from a 100Mbps BT Openreach bearer. In the meantime, anticipating the usual lead time, Keko's service provider installed an immediate, sticking-plaster solution of eight, bonded ADSL lines. These were far from adequate for business purposes. With asynchronous upload and download speeds, performance was variable and unreliable, but acceptable for the short wait anticipated. Little did Keko know that this 'short wait' would turn into an extraordinary sequence of delays, errors and sluggish service.

Over the following period of nine long months, issues concerning inconclusive site surveys, wayleave approvals and traffic management conspired to leave Keko no closer to being connected (see timeline opposite).

At this point, Ben Whattam, Keko Managing Partner, took action and sent letters of complaint to local MPs, the head of BT Openreach and Ofcom. Frustratingly, little progress was made and, with no other alternatives, Ben cancelled the BT contract to enlist the help of Virgin Media. Having consulted fibre network maps, Virgin was optimistic that an access point next to the Keko office could be connected within 60 days. This good news was short- lived, though, when a survey established that the nearest fibre was 80 metres away and the work required would cost over thirty thousand pounds.

By this time, some twelve months since placing the original order, Ben estimated that financial damage to Keko's business, resulting from lost projects and reduced productivity, amounted to £450,000. For a small business of twenty employees, this posed a real threat to business continuity. With no further options, the future looked bleak.

The slow journey to high speed fibre

Keko's 12-month timeline summarises some of the typical difficulties hindering network access in city centres today

2015

MAY Keko signed Ethernet Circuit Agreement

JUN First BT site survey BT– no outcome

JUL Second BT site survey– inconclusive

AUG BT request Wayleave

SEP BT sends Wayleave to Landlord

OCT Landlord signs wayleave after BT delays:

NOV Completion of duct work estimated 15/12/15

DEC Duct work completion revised to 04/01/16

2016

JAN Highway authorities receive request

JAN Approval of road closure necessitates delay till 15/03/16

JAN SP fails to escalate response from BT

JAN SP advises new escalation but with potential legal fees

FEB Keko complains to local MP, boss of SP, Ofcom, etc

FEB Local MP complains to boss of BT who cannot help

MAR Council traffic restrictions delay duct installation 3 months

MAR BT advises additional time for install and testing

MAR Keko cancels BT contract.

MAR Keko takes on Virgin Media to install within 60 days.

APR Virgin discovers fibre connection 80 metres from office

APR Virgin provide installation estimate of £32,000

A solution just in time

Enter Kerv Collaborate. Acting on recommendation, Keko London contacted Kerv Collaborate. Within 5 weeks, Kerv Collaborate had a 15Mb EFM connection up, running and boosting the productivity of the Keko team. Whilst not perfect, the quick-fix solution "Transformed the agency", in the words of Ben Whattam.

Within a few months, though, Keko London had acquired a major new customer that was expected to increase workload significantly and render the EFM inadequate. Renewed efforts were needed to access a high-speed fibre network.

Kerv Collaborate again kicked into action, working with authorities and Openreach to manage wayleaves, fast-tracking plans for road closures and working directly with contractors to accelerate construction work. By simply getting involved personally and getting hands dirty, Kerv Collaborate was able to cut through red tape and get things done without circumventing the regulations. Ultimately, proactivity and persistence paid off. Within just 4 months, Kerv Collaborate had facilitated the installation of a 1Gb circuit, giving Keko the 300Mbps they needed, plus capacity to expand in the future.

Relieved at the result, Ben Whattam summed up his opinion:

"

Kerv Collaborate literally saved our Agency. Broadband is now as essential as water or electricity to the running of our operations and yet my business lost money and was put at risk because of archaic infrastructure, bureaucratic processes and poor customer service on the part of network service providers."

Kerv Collaborate is an exception, in every sense. Their creative approach to solving problems and their belief in people-driven customer service are qualities that resonate closely with our own business. It's a refreshing change from the blinkered, process-driven service offered by their counterparts."

Whilst many businesses continue to get caught in the red tape and delays surrounding network access, there is some light at the end of the tunnel. Most recently the Government's Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review (FTIR) has proposed a number of related changes to help tackle the damaging delays incurred by the bureaucracy surrounding fibre connectivity in city centres.

In the meantime, implementation of these changes will take time and Kerv Collaborate will continue to help businesses like Keko London navigate the network provisioning minefield in the quest for digitalisation.

Voice

Data

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Consultancy

Service Excellence

We believe that proactive, knowledgeable support from people who really care is at the heart of delivering performance improvement

That's the difference with Kerv Collaborate

Get in touch with us

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