

INTERVIEW

FTTH Council gears up for business

Why do you believe that Europe needs more fibre to the home?

We need more fibre to the home (FTTH) in Europe to secure our economic security in the worldwide market and to enable the citizens of Europe to compete better with North America and Asia. Also, FTTH is increasingly an issue related to improving the quality of people's lives; enabling technologies such as e-medicine.

Another interesting factor is the advantage of increased FTTH with respect to the environment. Some studies have shown that the level of commuting can decrease when there is a good broadband service to a particular community.

How will the council achieve its goal of a tenfold increase in FTTH deployment?

One of the major issues is to address the financial world. We need to better answer their questions. Secondly, we need to clarify the associated regulatory and policy issues. There is further to go into the next stage of supplying our stakeholders with more information. We are considering the development of an FTTH deployment handbook to present information about key issues like capex and opex.

The coincidental issue of the copper price pushing the telcos towards fibre will also help in pushing these companies' FTTH plans; the imperative to cut capex is of course a no-brainer.

How can you overcome the problem of resistance to FTTH by incumbents?

It's true that Europe's incumbent telecoms companies have not yet been that active in deploying FTTH. However, some companies are taking it more seriously. In

It's all change at the FTTH Council Europe as a more 'business-focused' president, Joeri van Bogaert, is elected while previous incumbent Hartwig Tauber becomes its first director-general. Van Bogaert tells Matthew Peach about his new role and the next phase of Europe's FTTH development.



Business focus: Joeri van Bogaert has become the president of the FTTH Council Europe.

2000 there were some early adopters such as Fastweb in Italy and Breddas Bolaget (acquired last year by Telenor).

In 2002 the community and utility companies started to take on this issue in various ways in the Netherlands. By 2006 some of Europe's major cities had started to install FTTH, including Vienna, Amsterdam and Paris. That's what we see now – to move FTTH further into the mass market, so we all need the European incumbents to take action.

France Telecom is the first incumbent telecom operator to roll out a commercial FTTH network – in France and Slovakia.

Is FTTH simply a technical choice or is there a real business justification?

Increasingly FTTH makes sense as the best way to provision new installations and it should be regarded more and more as a serious investment opportunity.

At the council, we will be discussing these financial issues with potential investment companies. At the same time we are receiving a lot of requests from various parts of the financial community. My background is in sales and marketing [in contrast to Tauber's economics background], so I will certainly be pushing for more business involvement in this area.

Where do you see FTTH making significant inroads in Europe?

Consider two examples. France Telecom [FT] has recently started projects in the Paris region and in Bratislava, which together cover around 180 000 customers. Ultimately, FT has the wider aim of passing one million homes by 2009. The French government has also set a target for 10 million French homes to be passed by fibre and 4 million subscribers by 2012.

Meanwhile, in the UK, there has been an announcement by BT Openreach, concerning the Ebbsfleet Valley (in the "Thames gateway", to the east of London) in which they will install FTTH on a greenfield site reaching at least 10 000 homes by 2010. ●

● The FTTH Council Europe's 5th Annual Congress will take place at the Palais de Congress, Paris on 27–28 February 2008.

FTTH COUNCIL EUROPE APPOINTS FIRST DIRECTOR-GENERAL

The FTTH Council Europe has appointed its first director-general. Hartwig Tauber, an Austrian academic and former president of the council, took up this new, full-time position in July.

"The goal of mass-market fibre penetration in Europe is closer than ever and it's a great time to be involved in meeting



Hartwig Tauber, the new DG.

the challenge," said Tauber. "I will oversee the management and administration of council activities, as well as promoting our aims and messages externally."

Joeri van Bogaert, new president of the Council Europe welcomed Tauber, saying: "At the end of his last official presentation, Hartwig

echoed the words of his movie-star countryman when he said 'I'll be back!' – and here he is."

Tauber and van Bogaert have their work cut out: at the same time as these management changes occurred, the FTTH Council Europe publicly demanded a tenfold increase in FTTH penetration across the continent by 2012.