

# Start planning now

**Never has the UK's connectivity landscape been more in the spotlight than now, and CityFibre's £4 billion full fibre investment plan serves as a beacon to all resellers with a keen interest in their business's future direction, according to CityFibre's Head of Wholesale Andrew Wilson.**

**T**he clear message of the digital revolution is that, like CityFibre's infrastructure build, it is relentless. "We've kept building during Covid-19," stated Wilson. "That is our game plan. We launched a new city to the channel during lockdown – Plymouth – and have not been held back by the challenges. During lockdown we worked closely with local authorities, DCMS and central Government to make sure we are on track."

With 67 cities already announced, CityFibre has build projects underway across 31. Meanwhile, channel partners have access to 28 cities on its business footprint. "It's build, build, build, and we've awarded a contract to Bechtel, one of the world's largest engineering and project management firms," added Wilson. "We'll be giving jobs to about 10,000 people directly and indirectly through this build programme, and we are learning all the time. Therefore our build out will continue to get better, more efficient and faster. We are building above our budgeted plan and Bechtel adds to our resource."

CityFibre's routes to market are carrier and national (the larger providers) and a regional play to build cities and presence around the UK. "It's about working with

local partners and enabling local communities," added Wilson. "We look at how we can build and promote a partner's business locally; and in each city we have a City Manager who runs the relationship with the council and works with industry forums within their region. We work collaboratively with partners in their areas, giving them marketing support and access to data on all of the businesses that are addressable by our infrastructure. This provides a clear strategic focus on who they should be contacting. We help with contact plans and demand generation programmes, all geared to nurture the regional opportunity."

Wilson noted that CityFibre will be available to eight million homes and businesses by the end of 2025. An impressive footprint, but clearly the infrastructure builder will not deliver ubiquitous full fibre across the UK on its own, so any national play would entail aggregating all services. "To access as close to 100 per cent penetration as possible you're going to have to work with other altnets," he said. "As long as we are all clear about where and how we are building with the support of DCMS across the UK, then we have a rosy future for full fibre and the channel – a brand new product set across a brand new infrastructure."



**Andrew Wilson**

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CityFibre is helping partners to evolve the way they market this opportunity, taking a more social engagement lead, for example. "There is no change in sales strategy in how you position the products and solutions," said Wilson.

"But the way you promote the services and get the message across has changed. Embracing social media, developing an online presence and being more intelligent around analysing data on buying behaviours is key. Partners are introducing new sales and marketing methodologies to attract the right customers through different mediums."

CityFibre has created a number of initiatives, promotions and ways to support its channel during the pandemic. "We engaged one-to-one with most partners, conducted surveys, looked at feedback and held online events," said Wilson.

### Tactical response

"We also looked at what Covid has done to our market and viewed it in analogous terms as a sports injury: You're performing well and suddenly you are hit, how do you cope? We worked with sports scientists and coaches and presented initiatives to deal with problems and challenges back to the channel. We

are now in the second wave and know how to work around some of the challenges we are facing."

This might involve looking at different ways to give customers access to full fibre, commercials, different ways of migrating customers, and ways to bundle hosted and cloud services into the fibre connection. "As a wholesale-only provider we can offer partners different ways to procure our network, whether locally, nationally or as a managed service," stated Wilson. "The channel can add innovation to our product."

Wilson believes that the industry will get a clearer view of where everybody is building very shortly. Then, it will become more obvious to many that CityFibre is also addressing smaller towns as well as the big city conurbations, and could potentially bring rural areas into its programme.

"Poor connectivity is exceptionally frustrating and from a business perspective potentially damaging," he added. "The opportunity that Covid-19 has driven home is the need for decent bandwidth. The use case has become more apparent and is accelerating. And we have a big job to fully fibre-enable the UK, improve applications and services and deliver a positive impact on GDP." ■