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Smart Telecom is repurposed and ready for business

27.07.2007 - Smart Telecom has told *siliconrepublic.com* that it is investing in its IPTV platform and is preparing to offer triple play services to its customers across 37 unbundled exchanges nationwide, which gives it a potential target market of 550,000 customers.



Last year Smart Telecom hit the headlines for all the wrong reasons when Eircom pulled the plug on its services, affecting 45,000 voice customers, over the issue of an unpaid €4m bill.

After posting disappointing results, founder and CEO Oisín Fanning stepped down. Major investor Brendan Murtagh acquired the business, assets and liabilities of the company for a single €1.

The company had the added misfortune of having its 3G license revoked by ComReg. The license was subsequently awarded to Eircom.

Resisting calls to wind down the company Murtagh opted to relaunch it, making use of its base of network assets, including access to 37 unbundled exchanges, a fibre loop around Dublin and access to 11 metropolitan area networks through E-Net.

Added to this was a customer base of around 15,000 broadband customers and a well performing corporate customer base.

In June, it emerged that the company attracted €50m in investment from a group of US and European investors, a further €15m in preference shares and Murtagh decided to merge his T50 fibre network in Dublin into the Smart asset base.

Smart Telecom's chief operations officer Pío Murtagh (*pictured*) told *siliconrepublic.com* that the company has been restructured and an emphasis has been placed on customer support and continued investment in new products.

He said the plan is to grow the company in a steady, measured fashion, focusing on residential, SME and corporate opportunities.

"We'll have to be honest about what happened in the past. There are lessons there for ComReg and the Government. Unfortunately it was the consumer that got the poor deal out of what happened.

"Being honest we've learnt a lot and going forward customers are going to be at the forefront. We'll do everything we'll say we'll do and meet people's expectations."

Asked the difference between the present management team and the previous one he said: "The previous team were no doubt entrepreneurially-driven and very aggressive. But they possibly underestimated the difficulties and challenges they faced from a

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regulatory and broadband perspective. They couldn't have foreseen the difficulties they encountered and given the aggressive business plan they were following they were in a difficult situation.

"We are not focusing on an aggressive residential expansion. The market has changed, the incumbent is now facilitating migration and this will greatly increase competition in the marketplace. The particular situation whereby local loop unbundling (LLU) hasn't been successful in Ireland as elsewhere is set to change.

"Our strategy is to focus on a steady acquisition of customers and make sure the products are correct and we can provide quality customer care," Murtagh added.

Murtagh said that the company is continuing with its LLU rollout and in recent weeks unbundled exchanges in Cabra, Blanchardstown and Sligo. The company currently has 15,000 paying broadband customers.

He added that the company's corporate business remains strong and was largely insulated from what occurred in the Autumn. "For our corporate offerings we weren't dependant on a third party to deliver services. As a result we were able to remain in the corporate space and kept growing and that will be the key to the business going forward."

At present 1,200 customers are paying for Smart's digital television service and Murtagh says the plan is invest in moving from MPEG2 technology to MPEG4 technology, which offers better compression and enables the company to provide quality IPTV over 5MB to 7MB broadband connections.

"At the end of the year we will introduce new IPTV services and content in a triple play bundle. The products will be very competitive in price and functionality," he said.

In recent weeks the company launched a new corporate Ethernet over the First Mile (EFM) 10Mbps download/2Mb upload bonded pairs product with a service level agreement. The company also introduced a 2MB symmetrical product targeting the SME space.

Murtagh concluded: "We still see ourselves as pioneers. Smart were very good at bringing competition to the marketplace and that's something we will continue to do. The overall message is, we're back!"

By John Kennedy



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