

MAKING ORDINARY PEOPLE DO THE EXTRAORDINARY

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Mardia is Senior Vice President of Deutsche Telekom's International Carrier Sales & Solutions (ICSS) unit. She is a rousing leader with the guts to challenge and empower people to transform the business. With an extensive background in IT, having led T-Systems South Africa as CEO for many years, she brings a fresh perspective to an industry in need of a new vision.

I had the opportunity to discuss with her not only her views on the current trends shaping our industry, but more importantly how wholesalers should go about shifting their mindsets to adapt to their fluid environment.

Under her guidance, ICSS' strategy now places greater and more concentrated focus on connectivity, innovation, adaptability and customer centricity.





RESHAPING OUR INDUSTRY

We are going through multiple changes in the telecom world, but in your view, which are the main trends reshaping the wholesale industry?

We can look at the current telecom evolution from two different perspectives. One is from the end-user angle and the other from the technology standpoint.

From the point of view of end-users, one of the most important shifts is the expectation of continued connectivity and all-you-can-eat packages, which in my opinion will possibly translate into free access to services over the long term. People are getting used to consuming as much data as they want. This is a major shift from what we have known and it is definitely shaping our world.

To that, add the current changes in roaming regulations in Europe, such as introducing the concept of roam-like-home. This will not only further boost mobile consumption while travelling, but it will also challenge the current business model and will force us to adapt to this new mobile environment.

From the technology perspective, we see the acceleration of data shifting to cloud, which brings concerns around security, as the public internet was not built to support security-sensitive applications.

Next, there is the internet of things, which drives the need for connectivity and again, security. Finally, network virtualization has grown, which impacts how we interwork and interconnect.

These are all challenges that are not only reshaping our industry, but are also bringing new opportunities for those who embrace them.

ENABLING 360° SECURITY

How is Deutsche Telekom addressing all these challenges?

For the industry as a whole, it is difficult to precisely calculate where the wholesale business is headed. We have, however, undertaken our own investigations and are choosing the areas we will focus on in the future. One of them is definitely security.

We realize that because of who we are, a trusted brand with a strong network, we have the capabilities to pull together a powerful security offering for the market. We are therefore delivering our 360° defense strategy to become the secure global gateway for our customers across all services, from mobile to voice and data. This is unquestionably something we will focus on in 2017.

Deutsche Telekom has also embarked on a strategy to deploy a Pan-European network to interconnect all of our national operators with high-quality, secure connectivity. This has enabled us to move from our legacy operations to a virtual environment, which is based on IP, SDN and NFV.

This evolution not only enables us to reduce time-to-market for our European operations, but also allows us to reduce cost and complexity.

Retail-based carriers like Deutsche Telekom are in a prime position because they can ensure

close cooperation with retail units. This secures their role in the value chain and contributes toward accelerating profitable solutions for everyone, today and into the future.

CHANGING THE WHOLESALE MINDSET

What steps do you think wholesalers need to take to make the necessary changes to remain relevant?

It is clear to me that we need to transform our business in order to stay in the game and remain profitable. This encompasses not only launching innovative services, but also optimizing the way we trade between each other to create more efficiency.

For example, last year my team put a lot of effort into making our business more simple, more streamlined and more effectual. From there, we have tried to change our mindset in the way we drive our business, to focus on becoming an interconnection enabler and a facilitator of innovative services.

In general, wholesalers need to shift their emphasis into expanding portfolios and moving business to the next level. One avenue may be to address embedded connectivity and devices, as it may open a brand-new wholesale market that was not addressed before. Wholesalers may also need to find a place in the IoT space.

However, I am not seeing many embarking on those journeys yet. If they are, it is in the very early days of the transformation. Everyone is talking about the fact that we have to change, but no one is taking concrete steps. Many wholesalers have a false sense of security, but that cannot last.

In the future, there will always be wholesale connectivity, but only a few key players will dominate the market - and we intend to be one of them.

So we are working on connecting the world, more particularly where it is related to our footprint. We are also making sure we maintain a close relationship with our retail customers and content providers, which will improve our position across the value chain.

UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

What do you think is most challenging and exciting as a business leader in the current environment?

For me, what is most exciting is to find a way to challenge people to think in a new way and to foster a culture that enables creativity. The challenge lies in how to unlock people's potential to embrace change.

Considering where we are at present in the wholesale industry, all of us as leaders need to find a way to enable ordinary people to push their boundaries and do the extraordinary.

We need to create an environment which empowers people. We need to enable people to become more creative, agile and brave enough to transform the old into the new.

To achieve this, I lead with my actions, as one of my responsibilities is to have hope in the future and to give hope to my team.

Truly believing in people is very powerful.