

Project Freedom

An Interview with Michael Boustridge,
President, BT Americas Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE Michael Boustridge joined BT Americas Inc., part of the BT Global Services division, in April 2007, assuming responsibility for all aspects of BT's operations and performance in the United States and Canada. He also manages BT Professional Services globally and has a coordinating role within BT's Asia Pacific region. Prior to this appointment, Boustridge was Vice President, Sales and Marketing, at EDS where, when he left, he held the record for achieving the company's highest total contract value for new business signings in five years. Concurrently, Boustridge ran EDS's Agility Alliance program to align partners with EDS's strategic road map for competitive advantage. A native New Zealander, Boustridge joined EDS in 1996 from Hitachi Data Systems and worked at IBM earlier in his career.



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in California. This was to ensure that we remained more nimble than our competitors and that our value proposition actually resonated with what the market wanted, and what the market could afford to pay.

By nature, people can be averse to change. How quickly did your employees come on board, and how focused were you on engaging them in the process?

Engaging our employees was critical. Project Freedom was our internal name for the transformation. We made it very clear that we needed to transform not only the business, but also the culture, the mind-set, and the behavior of the business. We asked employees to become a part of Project Freedom, because while we can set the tone at the top and write out a strategy, without employee input, we will never transform. After all, transformation doesn't occur at the top – transformation occurs within the organization. So Project Freedom was all about enabling the organization to transform the business around seven very clearly defined pillars. Our aim was to become a \$4 billion business in two years, and we outlined what it would take to get there.

So the buy-in from employees was extremely important, but it took a good six months for that buy-in to occur. Could it have happened more quickly? Probably not. Would I have liked it to? Absolutely. Over the first 12 months, we drove revenue up by 26 percent. We did everything we said we would do, and we wanted the employees to feel a sense of pride. Now we have a lot of buy-in, and we're asking for ideas about where the transformation should go from here. This phase of the transformation is called Freedom 2.0.

The important thing about Project Freedom was that the destination statement was very clearly laid out and agreed on. BT Americas grew very suddenly, and people started to believe in it. As soon as you have believability, it's amazing what a turnaround you get.

How have you incorporated your customers' feedback into this transformation?

Customers are at the heart of everything we do, and we listen intently to what they say. We all need to think about the customer's customer, because if we understand the value proposition our clients are trying to deliver to

their customers, then we understand why it's important for us to deliver what we promise as well.

Will acquisitions continue to be a focus for BT Americas?

Yes, I think we'll continue to acquire. Ribbit [acquired by BT in July 2008] was our first acquisition in the past 12 to 14 months, so most of our actual revenue growth has been organic. We grew the base business from the acquisition revenue.

Have things progressed as you had hoped they would since you took over this role? Are you where you thought you'd be?

Yes, I am where I thought I'd be. We have had a great year. We continue to grow at a pace that significantly outstrips the market. We're growing at about 24 percent, while everyone else is worried about the market. Would I like to see more rapid growth? Always. But it's important to focus on pace, because change can happen only at the same pace that people can absorb what it means to them and what it means to their jobs. When you have everybody rowing in the same direction, you can ramp up or ramp down the pace, depending on what you need. We're at the stage now where we're all rowing forward, so to dial up or dial back is a much simpler proposition.

In your role, how important is direct customer interaction?

It's my number one priority. I'll rearrange just about anything on my schedule to see a customer. You don't really understand anything until you talk to customers – and it's not about trying to sell. When we carry out customer reviews, I listen. I may not have any input, but I listen, because it's remarkable what they tell you. So if I have to fly all night because a client wants me to go visit with a customer, and then I have to fly back all night, I'll do it, because nothing is more important.

Have you been able to find a work/life balance that works for you?

BT recognizes the importance of work/life balance. When I was in the middle of the transformation, bringing together the assets, the balance was weighted in favor of work. My first year with the company was pretty much written off. But I have a good balance between work and personal life now. By utilizing the technology we sell to work more efficiently, we can ensure that everyone in the company finds the right work/life balance. ●

COMPANY BRIEF BT Group (www.btplc.com) is one of the world's leading providers of communications solutions and services. One of four BT business units, BT Global Services employs around 30,000 people in 70 countries and delivers services in 170 countries, helping multinational, multisite organizations to master the complexity of business communication. In the United States, where the company has had a presence since 1988, BT employs more than 4,300 people and provides a range of solutions for multinational enterprises, including convergence, security, mobility, contact center services, and IT outsourcing and transformation.

BT Americas has undergone a major transformation over the past 18 months. How has the transformation progressed, and why did you feel it was necessary?

BT is a global telecommunications company, and to be competitive and to provide a global solution, we have to have a very robust U.S. business. BT has been in the U.S. for about 20 years, but the operations had not been integrated into a single entity until this transformation. We took all the assets of all of the disparate business units and started to integrate them. We've spent about \$1.5 billion acquiring multiple companies, and we put all those companies together through restructuring, which meant five separate BT entities moving into the same city