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Specialised SOLUTIONS

After a bumpy past year or two, Kordia Solutions Australia is back on track as a leading provider of telecommunications, wireless, and broadcast services across the nation.

Images courtesy of Kordia Solutions Australia

“My team works really hard, my senior team works really hard, and our success that we’re beginning to enjoy is every bit theirs as it is mine. It is a team story.”

- Ken Benson

Kordia Solutions knows that teamwork is the key to success in a challenging sector such as communications. The business values the work of its 500-plus employees, whether they are working in the internal support sectors or externally in a customer service capacity. CEO Ken Benson is there to lead them on the right path to ensure Kordia’s strong market position in the years to come.

“Any CEO who tells you that they can do it all on their own is talking nonsense,” Ken says. “My team works really hard, my senior team works really hard, and our success that we’re beginning to enjoy is every bit theirs as it is mine. It is a team story.”

Kordia Solutions Australia is part of the Kordia Group, which was established in 1962 in New Zealand. The business offers a

diverse range of competencies including consulting services, design, engineering solutions, network deployment and upgrades, commissioning and integration, network operations with 24/7 monitoring and network maintenance, ICT services, and logistics and warehousing. It is well known for its expertise in deploying and maintaining critical networks and infrastructure across the country.

Ken joined the company in March 2014. He is a highly successful senior executive with a vast professional portfolio, and has strong experience in building skilled and motivated teams who deliver excellent results. Ken started his career in London with British Telecom, before moving over to Telecom New Zealand and then to Telstra in Australia. He has served as chairman or director of companies in EMEA and Asia-Pacific regions, including Southern Cross Cable, Australia Japan Cable,

Telecom Cook Island, and the Kordia Group.

When he assumed the role of CEO, the first thing he did was look at the situation he had inherited, determine what the challenges were and what needed to be addressed immediately. He quickly recognised cashflow issues, that there were too many staff with not enough work, that there was a lack of commerciality, and that there were gaps in Kordia’s ability to deliver some of its core services.

“When I first agreed to the position, I expected I’d have to change probably one or two senior managers, but in fact we changed everyone bar one,” Ken explains. “That was a combination of taking the initial view of saying, ‘What do I need to do short term?’ because clearly we didn’t have enough revenue coming into the business to support the number of people, and the fact that our cashflow was horrid. So I had to fix those things. >



We did that in the first three months. We lost about 200 people and started to take a slightly different approach within the business and to manage the cash much more tightly.”

From there, things started to evolve. Ken looked at what Kordia was good at, what skills were in the business, and what areas needed more attention. He brought in a couple of people he trusted to make recommendations to the board, and these were subsequently well received.

“The board were impressed with their reports and expertise, so we employed them. Now Tom Pearson is EGM Corporate Services and Gary Racine is EGM of Major Projects,” Ken says. “I think that was only six weeks after I came in. Then we took a look at the business a little more strategically. We were under pressure to change some things, and we had to decide very quickly what we were going to do differently.

“One of the different things we decided to do was to change our focus in the company to be customer or sales led, rather than wait for tenders to come out or wait for work to come our way. We actually formed a small sales team, with six or so people, and we employed Dr Chris Stephenson to be the EGM of sales and marketing. That meant that at that stage I had only five people reporting directly to me covering operations, major projects, corporate services including logistics and procurement, finance, and sales.

“So the big change was to introduce a proactive component of going out to our customers, trying to win work, and building customer relationships. One of the things we talked about very early on was about wanting to become a trusted partner of our customers, and part of that was to get really good relationships going, even if we weren’t doing business with them.

“We wanted to take our internal values of honesty, openness,



respect, and effective communications, and those things that really matter in business, and then apply them to how we deal with our customers. Probably about four months into that journey, some of our customers actually started coming back and saying that they’d seen a major change for the better—and that was great news.”

Ken has been delighted with the progress so far and says it has been possible thanks to having a supportive board, a great team of senior executives, and people in the business who want to succeed. “We went from people being nervous about whether they had a

job next week to a position now where they know their futures are secure,” he notes. “There will always be change, but there’s not going to be the massive change that they experienced before.

“I think there’s a trust between the senior management team and the majority of employees. There’s tons more communication going on in the business, and we’re keeping the whole team informed about what’s happening. We’ve gone from a situation where there was little respect for much of senior management in the business to one now where there’s a lot of respect; from one where there was a lack of communication and probably a lot

of silos to one now where we are certainly one company and one team. We know the direction we’re going, and there’s a tremendous amount of conversation going on.

“This is about everyone wanting to achieve the same goal, having the same vision, and then driving towards it. The nicest thing with this team is that we don’t need to look over our shoulders and worry about whether or not we are all on the same path. We are absolutely as one and we are working towards the same goal together.”

This open approach to communication and business is then reflected in relationships Kordia has developed with suppliers and other business partners. These include the likes of Broadcast Australia, Optus, Telstra, NBN, Australian Maritime Safety Authority, and APLNG. Based on those values of honesty, clarity, and understanding, Ken says, the company is always upfront and transparent. He adds that it’s also

about not standing still in the market but about being adaptable to change.

“It’s about finding new, different, and better ways to do things which you can then pass on to your customers—things that can add an innovation or something extra to what you do for your customers or even your partners. That is a really important part of sustaining and growing the business.”

Over the next three to five years, Ken says, Kordia will continue its drive to secure regular work contracts while focusing on excellent customer relations and a high-quality delivery of its products and services.

“We used to be a project business where we lived day by day in terms of what work we won and how many people we had. None of that project work was for much longer than a year or 18 months. We started every year with only 20 to 25 per cent of the work that we

needed to sustain the workforce and make a profit. What we’ve done this year, which we’ll continue to do, is to change the mix of that work so we get longer-term contracts which have annuity of revenue year on year on year.

“This means that we’ll go into next year with something like eight times more work than we started this year with. We’ve got long-term contracts that go for three to five years, although the longest at the moment runs for seven, so the business just repeats every year.

“This brings assurance to our people, our customers, our suppliers, and our partners, which has fundamentally changed the whole dynamic of how we operate. We now have something like 50 per cent of our work secured for the year ahead, whereas at one stage it was only at about 20 to 25 per cent. That’s been a really big fundamental change for us.” •

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- Ken Benson



We’re the market leader when it comes to designing, building and operating communication infrastructure and services and we operate here in Australia and in cities around the world.

Our Australian businesses include Broadcast Australia, Airwave Solutions Australia and Hostworks and our international businesses include RFE in Hong Kong, BAI Canada in Toronto and Transit Wireless in New York.



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