



Powerful NETWORKS



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Benelux is an important region for the multinational technology and communications business Verizon.

Images by Bram Belloni

Verizon is one of the world's largest companies in the IT and communications sector, connecting people, companies, and communities with its powerful technology solutions. Its innovations have the ability to change the world and it is constantly making investments into superior wireless, fibre optic, and global IP networks.

In 2013, Verizon appointed Pieter Holst as area vice president of enterprise sales (Verizon Enterprise Solutions) for the company's operations across the Benelux region—Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. With extensive regional experience, an understanding of the local customer base, and a background in IT and communications, Pieter was well equipped to succeed in the role. *The CEO Magazine* sat down with Pieter to talk about the company's plans for growth, how technology can empower

individuals, and Verizon's strategic supplier relationships.

***The CEO Magazine:* You have been with Verizon since 2011 and have a solid background within the IT sector. What opportunities did you see for yourself and the company when you took on the position of area vice president for Benelux?**

Pieter: My aim upon joining Verizon was to continue to develop my own sales and management skills, and heading up Verizon's local Benelux operations was the perfect platform to enable me to do this. Working with such a prominent global brand in the communications industry, I was eager to help grow its presence in the Benelux region and contribute to its overall global financial success. Since I took on my position, I have been able to mature and grow our market position here, and I have the pleasure of working with some tremendous customers—helping them deliver on their local and global strategies.

What sorts of changes did you implement when you first took on the role to really mature and grow the Benelux market?

Verizon already had foundations within the Benelux market, and my aim was to strengthen these even further. I was keen to refocus the sales team and implemented a more aligned and targeted operating model. This is completely focused around our customers with the emphasis on delivering the highest level of service for them. This has enabled us to be more focused on our customers' needs than ever before and has been instrumental in developing stronger, more strategic relationships across the customer ecosystem. We want to build ongoing strategic relationships which help and benefit our customers instead of merely being a point-to-point transactional company that only interacts with its customers on an ad hoc basis. >



What have been the benefits to your customers since rolling out this strategy?

We have established stronger and closer working relationships with our customers and this has increased customer loyalty and, ultimately, sales. We are seen as a strategic adviser by many of our customers and not just a supplier of technology.

We are truly a global company with a proven track record of delivering and managing global, regional and local networks for enterprises and governments, across a multitude of vertical markets. Our customers—local or global—are looking to deploy technology solutions that will help them re-engineer the workplace, leverage cost

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efficiencies, power more effective customer service models, and seize business opportunities. And our comprehensive solution portfolio, global reach, and expansive professional service support teams mean that we can help them achieve these goals. Combine this global expertise and reach with the knowledge and passion of our local team and you have a winning formula.

What are the plans for the company's growth and expansion over the next three to five years?

Verizon will continue to invest in technology that aims to help our customers to innovate and achieve business success. Simply put, our focus is on the assets that help power the digital world—networks, security, Internet of Things, cloud, and much more. Our aim is to

leverage the power of technology to unite communities—globally and locally.

The cloud is still relatively unknown in many industries and some customers are a bit nervous to switch over from their old technology infrastructure. What sort of feedback have you had?

To be honest, we are seeing less resistance and concerns to adopting cloud technology, especially when it comes to security.

Most of a business's concerns over the security of the cloud come from moving sensitive information outside the company firewall. These concerns are entirely understandable and it is the responsibility of service providers to address them. However, Verizon's Data Breach Investigations Report (DBIR) has shown there is no link between virtualisation technology and an organisation being more likely to be breached. The risk comes from handing over sensitive information to a cloud provider without conducting due diligence. As such, those looking to use the cloud must be confident that their prospective provider has the right security measures in place.

Organisations are now more focused on reaping the rewards of cloud-based solutions. We conducted our own research at the end of 2014, which saw that 65 per cent of enterprises were already using cloud services as part of their IT delivery portfolio. Since then, momentum has accelerated, and we saw an increase within our own cloud customer base of 10 per cent in the first three months of 2015.

Verizon launched Verizon Cloud and Storage to the marketplace back in 2013 and was one of the first providers to shake up preconceived perceptions of what cloud solutions should be, and what they could deliver. Since then, we have reinforced our commitment to customers by investing in our global footprint and capacity. For example, we've

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expanded our offering in Europe—Verizon Storage is now available in Amsterdam, Frankfurt, and London, plus Verizon Cloud is readily available out of Amsterdam and London—providing greater resilience and regional delivery capabilities.

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How has Verizon worked with its suppliers and partners over the years to form stable partnerships?

We work with a number of preferred suppliers and channel partners; regularly investing time and money into these relationships; for example, through our award-winning Verizon Partner Program. We don't believe in simply having transactional relationships with these companies; establishing trust, sharing knowledge, and inspiring innovation are key aspects of the Verizon partner strategy—not to mention aligning ourselves and specific solutions with the best partners in the market.

Technology is evolving at a tremendous pace and this has, and will continue to have, a defining impact on the supplier/channel marketplace. By working closely with our partners during this evolution we can help ensure the longevity of our relationships and the continued delivery of a successful purchasing ecosystem for the customer.

One of Verizon's mottos is: 'When individuals are empowered by technology they can change the world'. How important is it for people to have the right technology on hand at all times?

We truly believe this statement and the power that technology has on the individual. We see our technology powering the digital world now and well into the future.

Technology is now intertwined with every part of our daily lives—personally and professionally. So much so that we demand the same level of accessibility, convenience, ease and speed that we get from our own personal devices in the business world—it is simply unacceptable to expect anything less. Technology is uniting communities, changing lives, reinventing business and much more; we are proud to be at the forefront of this digital age. •

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