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Fiber Corp looks to fill NBN gap



Fiber Corp group general manager Abdul Helou, left, managing director Sam Scoutas and chief information officer Joel Clarke. Picture: Hollie Adams

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The tortured politics surrounding the National Broadband Network has opened the doors for a number of independent broadband infrastructure providers to step into the breach.

One of these operators, Sydney-based Fiber Corp, is targeting new apartment buildings to bring them superfast broadband before NBN Co comes to their neck of the woods.

Backed by veteran food industry businessman Nicholas Moraitis, Fiber Corp is looking to deploy fibre infrastructure that it says can deliver speeds ranging from 200Mbps up to 10Gbps using equipment provided by its technology partner Calix.

The Fiber Corp idea started taking shape three years ago and company managing director Sam Scoutas told *The Australian* the key catalyst was frustration within the business community about getting access to high-quality broadband.

“We identified there was a significant gap with infrastructure in the country. Some of our business customers (were) waiting up to six months for fibre installs and were unable to use the best technology,” he said.

One factor that compounded the delay was the less than ideal pace of the NBN rollout. The inception of the project and its role as a wholesale access monopoly disincentivised existing operators to launch new wholesale offers while the slower than expected network rollout left many customers in the metro areas underserved.

“What the government of the day neglected (to say) was that 78 per cent of metro areas in Australia already had fibre infrastructure on the ground. Telstra had the Velocity program, which did exactly what NBN Co is doing but when they signed over the copper, they also signed away the ability to compete with NBN Co,” Mr Scoutas said.

“NBN has a fantastic role to play in this country in rural and regional areas that need better connectivity ... but the government should allow private operators like us, like Opticomm, to target high-rise greenfields areas in the metros.”

With taxpayer exposure to the NBN now up to \$50 billion, the complicated financial engineering that keeps the NBN off the budget is underpinned by NBN Co facing as little competition as possible in the wholesale space but Mr Scoutas says the emphasis needs to be on getting customers connected.

“I have developers that have built 200 apartment complexes but are waiting for up to six months before the NBN comes and activate services. We are there the day the building is completed with our network ready to go,” he said. “The NBN has done a fantastic job in marketing something that they can’t sell.”

Unsurprisingly, pure fibre, which is taken into every premises, is at the heart of the Fiber Corp.

The company has secured a deal with US access vendor Calix, which will provide the standards-based GPON and NG-PON2 gear to power its services.

“They have given us the entire arsenal of their technology and guaranteed that the products that we are taking into the buildings can achieve speeds hundreds of times faster than what NBN Co can deliver,” Mr Scoutas said.

“This is not pie in the sky stuff; this doesn’t need stars and planets to align.”

The secret, Mr Scoutas says, is the fibre optic backbone to which individual building networks will be overlaid. With no contention between the buildings, the fibre network can be optimised for speed and function. It’s a luxury that NBN Co doesn’t have under its current mixed technology mandate and it’s a weakness outfits like Fiber Corp are seeking to exploit.

In a way, Fiber Corp has benefited from the deficiencies of both NBN models. While the glacial rollout speed of the Labor NBN created discontent and demand in the market, the Coalition government’s decision to ditch full fibre has given operators like Fiber Corp a technological advantage.

The company hopes to leverage its advantage to carve out a handy niche in the greenfields market with a product squarely aimed at developers.

Mr Scoutas says fibre opens up a number of additional opportunities as developers explore the potential of the emergent trends of smart home and building automation, as well as services such as high-quality IP CCTV, intercom and access control.

“We are an ACMA approved carrier and we are not here to just line up a few multi-dwelling buildings,” he said.

“We are looking to generate technology improvements for our core customers and that means keeping a close eye on the evolving technology.”



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