



# All change for cabling

Computacenter's Neal Silverstein and Andrew Stevens, UK chairman of IT standards and training association BICSI, explain why cabling in the public sector should no longer be viewed as a necessary evil but an enabler worthy of long-term investment.

**Andrew:** Cabling is the hidden hero of public sector ICT. While new technologies take the credit for enabling flexible working, collaboration and e-government, cabling is dismissed as an expense that must be pruned back whenever possible. Yet none of these initiatives would be possible without a robust cabling backbone.

**Neal:** Viewing cabling as an expense rather than an investment means public sector organisations often skimp on both products and professional services when scoping new projects. This, however, is a false economy. For without the right cabling foundations, public sector organisations will be unable to leverage new technologies that decrease costs and increase efficiency.

**Andrew:** There needs to be a change in culture – and legislation. Cabling is the fourth utility underpinning all digital communication. Yet, unlike gas, electricity or water, it is not regulated. That means anyone can deploy a cabling infrastructure – and often that anyone has no formal qualifications. Given the over-riding focus on cost, public sector organisations are particularly susceptible to employing unqualified cabling professionals. A low price invariably equates to low quality.

**Neal:** Although vendor accreditations can provide some degree of reassurance, this is not enough. Public sector organisations need to be working with cabling professionals that have a broad set of expertise not just vendor related skills. Without any governance or control over who works on cabling infrastructures, there can be no governance or control over the outcome.

**Andrew:** BICSI has tried to fill the accreditation gap with its independent credential programmes, which cover a range of cabling skills from project management and design to implementation. The value of these accreditations has been widely recognised in the US, with 70 per cent of government cabling bids now specifying the use of BICSI certified personnel. The UK, however, has been much slower to adopt the standards.

**Neal:** This is partly due to the 'short-term' attitude that now exists within the public sector. The government's austerity measures means that organisations and their consultants have, quite understandably, become fixated on achieving today's cost-cutting goals rather than delivering value for tomorrow. Unlike many ICT investments, however, cabling has to be seen in the long-term: an installation will often last up to 20 years. But it will only last this long if it is implemented well in the first place. Otherwise public sector organisations will need to constantly patch up their infrastructure, which will cost a lot more than paying for a quality installation at the outset.

**Andrew:** To guarantee quality, public sector organisations should consider including BICSI accreditations as a condition when issuing cabling tenders. There are three key certifications: Registered Communications Distribution Designer for design; Registered Telecommunication Project Manager for project management; and ITS Technician for testing and installation. With these three bases covered, public sector organisations will be able to ensure their cabling infrastructure meets not only their current and future needs but also industry standards.

**Neal:** Unless the public sector – both IT and facilities – start to focus more on quality and less on expenditure, system outages due to cabling performance will become a regular occurrence. And that means disruption to public sector services and citizens – whether it's a nurse trying to access a patient's records during surgery or a teacher trying to find the contact details of a parent of a missing child.

**Andrew:** Cabling might be viewed as a backend technology but it is increasingly at the frontline of public services. And, as such, demands prioritisation and investment not neglect and a sparing budget.

### Further Information

Find out how Computacenter can decrease your cabling costs and increase performance:

[http://www.computacenter.com/services/solutions/structured\\_cabling/](http://www.computacenter.com/services/solutions/structured_cabling/)

#### Footnotes

\* BICSI is a professional association supporting the information technology systems (ITS) industry. It provides information, education and knowledge assessments for individuals and companies, and has 23,000 + members in nearly 100 countries. Find out more at [www.bicsi.org](http://www.bicsi.org)

\* Neal Silverstein heads up Computacenter's Cabling division, which includes eight Registered Communications Distribution Designers, 25 Registered Telecommunication Project Managers and 4 ITS Technicians