

## “A ROLLING STONE GATHERS NO MOSS”

Jean Devos

Email: jean.devos@aqest.eu

AQEST, Paris Head Office, 4 rue des Chaudrons, 60810 Montépilloy, France.

**Abstract:** The paper is an attempt to demonstrate the necessity to bring changes to the concept and format of SubOptic. The launching of SubOptic goes back to the year 1985 i.e. before the “big bang” of the optical technology and the deregulation process.

The governments have now realized the criticality of the Global Network. A new SubOptic would be the body helping our industry to fulfil its new responsibility.

### THE TOOL OF A TIME.

The SubOptic concept was thought through in 1985, 28 years ago. SubOptic was a kind of French answer to a technical conference organized by “*les Anglais*” in London in 1979!

One needs to remind what the environment was at that time.

It was before the optical era and before the deregulation, two key factors of change in our industry! The last analog, coaxial system, Sea-Me-We 1 entered into service in 1986. Some words of our today language didn't exist, such as “*Global*”, “*Market*”, “*Product*”, “*Business*”, “*Investor*”, “*Entrepreneur*”.

The first real “*optical system*”, TAT-8, entered in service in 1988; it was still the fruit of a cooperation between AT&T, BT and FT. Each of these 3 administrations paid their shares of the project through the contribution of their national industry. AT&T and KDD followed the same scheme for TPC-3 in 1989. In each of these 4 countries the submarine activity was the subject of a tight cooperation between the national operator and the local industry. Each of these 4 players had their zone of influence. As a consequence the “open market” represented nothing more than 10% of the total activity. The competition was limited to the technical development!

In each of these 4 countries the submarine cable community was living in a sort of bubble with very limited communication and interaction with others. Everyone was engaged in a very challenging development of the “*optical system*”: fibre design, new cable, optoelectronic components and repeaters.

SubOptic 1986 has been the right response to a deep but untold need! A tribune was offered for the first time to suppliers, operators, installers and subcontractors, the opportunity to exchange, compare solutions, share experiences and discover the others. A real event, a university, a kind of festival, a jamboree!! Plenary sessions only, giving a strong impression of “mass type” gathering, religious atmosphere, with all the top managers sitting in the first row and some presenting papers or giving keynote speeches. Most of the papers were presented by the key R&D managers, all of a very academic nature.

The same event was reproduced in 1993, still dominated by the optical systems development, following the first implementation.

San Francisco 1997 was also an event with the arrival of the new post deregulation players the main one being “Global Crossing”. Everybody was keen to exchange views on a drastic change in the market

## **THE CURRENT SUBOPTIC: THE INDUSTRY SPEAKS TO THE INDUSTRY**

But deregulation has created a completely different environment, a much more open world, with much more competition, quicker communication, all this at the global level.

Many new players have emerged on the operators' side but also on the suppliers' sides.

Many other conferences are organized by professional organizations. Several publications are available on the Internet.

The SubOptic of Kyoto, Baltimore, Monaco and Yokohama have been nice opportunities for social networking but they were a conference among others.

Many people, especially the top managers are attending without showing up at any of the sessions: side meetings of all sort attracted people more than the conferences. One is there to *"do business"*.

The conference papers do not carry anymore a significant and valuable content in fear of seeing it flowing to the competition. The "call for papers" process does not provide the "best possible" papers. The selection is actually done at their source.

The three main suppliers are bringing the bulk of the funding for the event. They are now questioning this, wondering why they bear such costs with no real return. They also realize that their customers are not really there. Most of the buyers are now using the services of consultants. They start to feel that the new comers are the one who take advantage. The stone does not move and is now covered with moss.

In other words, the format is obsolete not responding anymore to a real and well-defined need.

## **A NEW SUBOPTIC: THE INDUSTRY SPEAKS TO THE WORLD**

In reality there is a clear emerging need to which a renewed SubOptic could bring an answer.

The submarine systems have become a key infrastructure. Good and competitive access to the Internet is as vital as water and electricity supply.

Our industry has the duty to build the best possible global network, an infrastructure accessible to each and everyone in the same conditions.

This is a huge responsibility, a collective one.

Above his own interest and the one of his company, each person of this industry has to participate to the collective effort.

The Global Network is the project of this industry and this project is under scrutiny by the highest public authority that has now realized the criticality of it and the risks associated.

The 12 recommendations of the Rogucci 2010 report should have been a wakeup call. The reports says among others things: *"The private sector should establish a new governance framework"* [1] and the industry *"should actively promote the deployment of geographically separated cable paths to avoid current single points of failure"* [2].

Our industry cannot live in the shadow anymore. We need to behave at the level of our responsibility. We need a dialog with others institutions and organizations involved such as ICPC (International Cable Protection Committee) and the WOC (World Ocean Council). Seas and oceans

are becoming very busy areas! (more details in the Note <sup>1</sup> below).

Two years ago, in the name of 6 seniors and independent representatives of this industry, I gave a presentation to the SubOptic Executive Committee with our recommendations, which needed urgent implementation. As of today, we have not heard from them neither perceived any changes. The Executive Committee is working behind closed doors with no transparency. It is the group's opinion that unless SubOptic starts playing a new role through a new method, not only SubOptic will fade out, but some form of regulation will come from the authorities!

Here are the basic principles of the proposal:

1. establish SubOptic as the “*Submarine cables Industry association*”: “*collective life*” and “*voice of the industry*”, and
2. organize an annual convention to review the state of the network and elaborate recommendations.

The convention format (more details in the Note <sup>2</sup> below) would allow the

<sup>1</sup> Here are some examples of areas or problems that needs more coordination, more “auto-regulation”: (i) The arctic route is a collective need and then requires a collective investment; (ii) Egypt crossing requires a collective approach; (iii) Cable congestion in some areas (Red Sea; South Chinese Sea; Luzon Straits); (iv) Promotion of some “terrestrial crossings” so as to bypass some critical straits (Thailand, Panama, Chile); (v) Promotion of some “ Straits crossing” safe solution (Gibraltar); (vi) Development of difficult to finance “ Transversal routes” (South America to Asia, Brazil-Europe, Asia-South-Africa); (vii) Standardization of international permits; (viii) Utilization of our cables for scientific purposes

<sup>2</sup> Convention format:

- The annual convention should be the “Global Network World forum”.
- The content of the convention would be the SubOptic committee decision and responsibility.
- The convention would review and analyze all projects under construction and planned and would allow the gathering of all the owners, developers, investors.

organization to monitor the subjects to be reviewed and analysed, also to select the best possible speakers from inside or outside our industry. And there will still be nice social events for our family to celebrate. The website would be a permanent tool for access to information, guidelines and for debate.

## CONCLUSION

Any organization that wants to survive needs to evolve together with the changes of its environment. And nothing has changed more than our submarine cable “*market*”.

***“Those who do not move on move back”.***

## REFERENCES

- [1] K.F. Rauscher for the IEEE, ROGUCCI The Report (Issue 1 – 2010), publication, “Recommendation” section, (page 27)
- [2] K.F. Rauscher for the IEEE, ROGUCCI The Report (Issue 1 – 2010), publication, “Recommendation” section, (page 24) and in “Recommendation 1” (page 103)

- This would be done through half day “regional” sessions.
- The convention would also review the “events of the past year” such as cable breaks (earth-quake, ships anchor).
- The suppliers would be invited to present their solutions, their products.
- The convention would take into account the trans-continental terrestrials route so as to draw an extensive picture of the network (Trans-USA, Trans-Canada, Trans-Siberian Europe-China).
- The question of merging SubOptic and ICPC needs to be addressed.