

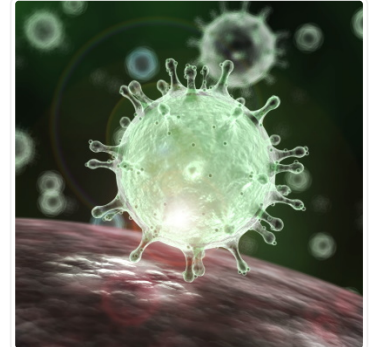
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# COVID-19 pandemic highlights submarine cables as critical infrastructure

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Wednesday 03 June 20

**“Submarine cables are crucial infrastructure and have been vital in helping us get through this pandemic together,” said Keith Schofield, General Manager, International Cable Protection Committee, as he introduced the latest Total Telecom webinar**

For many years now, the submarine cable industry has been at the heart of international connectivity, providing data avenues that span continents and unrivalled capacity. Despite this, the industry’s fundamental contribution to the telecoms sphere is often overlooked.



But now, during the coronavirus pandemic, the critical nature of the subsea cable industry has come to the fore, proving once and for all that they are undeniably critical infrastructure all over the world. But responding to the demands of the crisis has not been easy.

“The biggest challenges we found were around delivering the amount of capacity that, in a very short period of time, became critical to not just some but almost all of our customer base,” said **Andy Bax, COO of Seaborn Networks**.

Delivering the required capacity was just one of many potential challenges, with business continuity itself a difficult task in the short term. As always, having the right team and right processes in place was the key to ensuring the smoothest transition to the remote working that has become normality during the crisis.

“The plans [for business continuity] were already in place, but what was more important was the mindset of the people working through the crisis,” said **Taneli Vuorinen, EVP, Cinia**.

These many restrictions imposed by the pandemic were potentially even more severe when it comes to the physical management of the cables themselves, with crew at sea, isolated from medical help and confined to a small space, presenting a unique challenge.

“Being at sea, a long way from a hospital, during a global pandemic is, of course, very dangerous,” explained **Didier Dillard, CEO, Orange Marine**. “So, we had to take strict measures to ensure that the safety of our staff was assured.”

Now, as some countries begin to ease their lockdown restrictions, the industry can begin to consider their future in a post-pandemic world. Financially, the situation looks promising, said **Stuart Blythe**, a partner at international law firm **Baker Botts**.

“In the short term at least, we’re seeing significant disruption on the financial markets,” Blythe explained. “But one of the things to come out of this crisis is that people have underscored the critical nature of connectivity [...] hopefully that will mean a new priority for investment in this sector.”

The Total Telecom webinar was fully interactive, with one audience member asking exactly how the pandemic would impact timelines for the deployment of new cables and delivering those already in progress. The answer provided by **Aqua Comms CEO Nigel Bayliff** was distinctly nuanced.

“It really depends where you are in the cable development,” explained Bayliff. “If you are already deploying the cable, then the ships are largely able to continue their work. But if you are still in the early stages of planning a new cable, then you must factor in numerous delays caused by travel restrictions and disruptions to the supply chain.”

The coronavirus pandemic is far from over and its effects will be felt by economies and industries around the world for many years to come. For the submarine cable industry, agile business management has ensured continuity and a renewed focus on connectivity has left its players feeling optimistic about their future.

*Total Telecom's webinar **What is the impact of coronavirus on the subsea cable industry?***

*(<https://register.gotowebinar.com/recording/3438524011587138049>) is available to watch in full for free. Check it out here*

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