



INTERVIEW

“ We had a cracking record month and we see that continuing ”

PETER TITMUS, MD, NETWORKS FIRST

West Midlands-based Networks First posted record figures for the year end March 2008, including a 77 per cent increase in operating profits. According to Titmus, Peter Titmus, Managing Director, the company is on course to grow turnover by another 15-20 per cent this year to around £9.5 million. "Things are going exceptionally well. We had a cracking record month and we see that continuing. Our people are working flat out. We've already taken on another nine engineers in the last six months and we're constantly recruiting. Later this year we'll be looking at more acquisitions too," he said.

Networks First's breakthrough was identifying a niche created by convergence early on. Its core business is supplying maintenance for voice and data networks in the upper end of the SME market, enabling resellers with a background in telephony to rapidly design, deploy and support networks with data solutions and vice versa. "When we first started down this path a lot of the manufacturers didn't understand our business model," explains Titmus. "They couldn't understand why anyone would do it. But most people are stretched to provide enough investment for sales, marketing and technology for a single vendor portfolio. The reality of life is that end users have got multi-manufacturer, multi-technology infrastructures, so resellers come to us to provide a complete service solution."

Networks First's team of engineers boasts accreditation with all the major manufacturers, and Titmus argues that they're often better equipped to deal with problems than an in-house technician. "You can put an engineer on a training course," he explains. "But unless they're using that experience very quickly and in some depth, the skills are lost and they have to be retrained in six months. Our guys are always using the skills that they're acquiring."

Another reason for the firm's solid growth, says Titmus, is because vendors now recognise that recommending a ready skilled service partner to new resellers is a quick way to increase market share. Looking to the future, Titmus also thinks that many end users have finally latched on to the fact that converged technologies can help them trade through rough patches by delivering efficiencies, and that means more demand for qualified specialists. "There is going to be more consolidation," he explains. "But so far we haven't seen any market slowdown despite the wider financial problems." ■