

TeliaSonera International Carrier has one of the top internet backbones in the Americas. George Stenitzer continues his Marketing Upside series by interviewing CMO Rickard Bäcklin

TSIC transforms its network, customer service and marketing to unleash global growth

Rickard Bäcklin: You used to connect to the internet, but now you expect the internet to always connect to you, following you wherever you go



Imagine vividly the demands that future users will place on the internet. That's what TeliaSonera International Carrier did in launching its bold transformation, focused on becoming the world's best wholesale provider.

TSIC's video, "A message from your future end user", which anchored its major US network expansion in 2013, exemplifies marketing at its best. The video highlights future applications such as 3D printing of clothes, gaming with smells, and real-time translation. The video inspired employees, increased customer awareness in the Americas and helped TSIC grow US market share.

"To redefine customer demands in the wholesale space, we looked beyond the internal club of network people, focusing on the real user," says Rickard Bäcklin, TSIC vice president of brand and marketing. "With this film and supporting activities, we managed to double the unique visitors on our homepage and increase tenfold the monthly views of all films on our YouTube channel."

Users' expectations about the internet have changed radically, Bäcklin notes. "Back in the day, you used to connect to the internet. But now you expect the internet to always connect to you, following you wherever you go. We call that 'anywhereisation'. I don't think it's about technologies and devices; it's more about a seamless and immersed experience of always being in sync with life.

"The internet is actually a human right. Internet is knowledge, education, new business ideas and power to the individual."

With a good grasp of its future users' needs, TSIC next envisioned what operators need to do to meet future users' expectations. The telecoms industry needed a new mindset. "We realised that the internet had gone from being best effort to being business-

and even life-critical," Bäcklin says. "And that we didn't only provide IP connectivity, but actually we carry the big ideas of tomorrow, enabling innovation throughout society at the speed of fibre."

Principles into practice

The TSIC leadership team defined 10 declarations for every operator to live by. Now the company is putting these principles into practice:

1. **Enough is not enough** — Build a nuclear-bomb-proof network operating centre (NOC) that is self-sustainable for weeks.
2. **Choose your allies carefully** — Since a network is only as strong as its weakest link, work with only the best technology partners.
3. **3600/24/7** — Invest in customer support people rather than automation to solve customer problems, every second, every hour, every day. No robots!
4. **Size up** — As every connected user strengthens networks (Metcalf's Law), so does connected content. Continuously extend network reach, even up Mount Everest.
5. **Own your own** — Become one of the first operators to build its own global network. Control the infrastructure. Build two networks for redundancy.
6. **Local, local, local** — The internet brings the world together, but understanding local differences is the key to understanding customers.
7. **Understanding is king** — Strive to understand customers, not push products. Sales people must become customers' problem-solving experts.
8. **More is more** — Future networks must meet diverse, evolving customer needs by supporting the convergence of many services.
9. **Challenge everything** — Question the status quo and push the boundaries of what's possible. TSIC pushed all the way to the world's first terabit-per-second optical transmission.
10. **Power to the user!** — Keep users in mind with customer-driven product development and pay-as-you-grow models.

TSIC is driven by these 10 principles with a laser-focus on being the best wholesale provider. Since the start of its transformation in 2012, TSIC has vaulted from an also-ran to become one of the top two global operators, as ranked by internet performance analysts DYN. Today TSIC's backbone ranks number two in the US and number one in South America.

"We used to be perceived as a mainly European player," Bäcklin says. "But thanks to our great people, expansions in the Americas, and new bold messaging, we have become a leader on the global internet back-

bone. In this journey we have focused on being the best wholesale provider, not diverting into other areas where other expertise is needed.” Focusing solely on its global internet backbone, TSIC partners with local experts as needed to deliver enterprise and other services.

Bäcklin brings a smörgåsbord of experience into his marketing role at TeliaSonera. His career path extends from serving in the Swedish navy, to working as an engineer at Philips, to leading the branding agency Hillanders, to heading up TSIC marketing. Each experience contributes to his viewpoint.

Military strategy

He brings a military sense of strategy, an engineer’s technical understanding, and a global marketer’s branding and conceptualising skills from working on brands such as Canon and TeliaSonera.

Bäcklin continues to transform TSIC’s marketing function. “B2B marketing used to be a lot about sales support, helping sales with collateral to support messaging in sales meetings,” Bäcklin notes.

“But marketing is much more than that. You have to look at the whole customer journey, starting even before the customer is aware of a need, and going all the way to the customer becoming an advocate and promoter of your brand. You have to understand the bigger trends and the customers’ buying and use journey — to provide the customer with information relevant to the stage they’re currently in.

“Rather than spending months on planning, we focused on a few visible big initiatives and loud execution — to break through the level of indifference. For us it was very much about showing the value of marketing and changing its perception from an office supply function to a market and revenue driver that’s connected to the corporate strategy,” he says.

Customer experience

Bäcklin added two new marketing functions — thought leadership and customer experience, or CX. Thought leadership creates content that gives customers a peek into the future of the internet. This content is designed to be keenly aware of what customers need throughout their buying and use journeys, employing the best practices of content marketing.

The CX function is responsible for customers’ experience at all touch points, from strategy and customer understanding to design and follow-up. “We have thrown out all of our rigid legacy internal IT systems and replaced them with one master data cloud that’s still in development. The cloud enables us to supply a transparent and synchronised face to our customers across all customer touch points,” Bäcklin says.

CX surveys customers, probes their experiences, finds out how likely they are to recommend TSIC to others and calculates net promoter scores. “In the end, it’s all about people and long-term relationships, using our work force to feed back information from all the different customer touch points. Our customers should always expect a can-do attitude, with real people genuinely interested in their situation and finding ways to make customers’ lives a bit easier.”

Marketers need to get out into the field with sales, customer service and customers to gain a better

Marketing insights from TeliaSonera International Carrier

TSIC marketing offers a wealth of actionable insights for marketers:

- Make sure customers and employees understand your purpose.
- Focus on the future and what users need.
- Put customer and user needs before products and benefits.
- Dissect and understand customers’ buying and use journeys.
- Manage the customer experience at all touch points.
- Win customers’ attention with relevant content and thought leadership.
- Stress big visible initiatives rather than months of planning.

understanding of customers and users. “There’s no demographics anymore, it’s personal graphics,” Bäcklin recently tweeted.

He explains, “You used to segment by gender, age and geography. But in the connected online world, that’s not relevant anymore. The gaming community, for instance, shows no geographical, age or gender boundaries. You have to segment in a completely different way — understanding the person by their online behaviour, thus becoming much more personal.”

Bäcklin’s guidance for marketers: “Go beyond the product pushing and TLAs (three-letter abbreviations), focus on the user and find a bigger purpose for your company, supporting real needs. When you have the big why, everything else falls into place.

“And of course, get to understand your customers’ journey and pain points, and how to help make life easier for them. It’s all about the people and sharing our bigger purpose and why, and connecting that to the best possible customer experience in all situations, both good and bad. Know what you’re supposed to be best at and put the focus there.”

Lego blocks for innovators

Bäcklin describes the internet as a giant set of Lego blocks for innovators. “This idea actually came from the music industry, looking at the new stars — DJs like Avicii, sampling different sounds into a new masterpiece. And that is actually valid for everything on the internet, using crowd sourcing and sharing ideas to build fantastic new solutions.

“Innovation used to be about technology. Now it’s about how technology can be used. So now you just have to find a need and then turn to the internet to find the building blocks for the solution.” For example, when Spotify needed a premium operator to deliver a premium music experience to users anywhere in the world, it turned to TSIC.

What’s the next step for TSIC marketing? Bäcklin was recently in Toronto shooting a new video, to be released early this year. But he only hints at what’s to come. “With the film ‘A message from your end users’, we redefined customer demands in the operator wholesale industry. In our upcoming film, we will redefine IRL: in real life.” ■