

GCCM MAGAZINE

 Carrier
Community
GLOBAL TELECOM CLUB

ISSUE 30, MAY/JUNE 2021

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TOWARDS REVIVAL AND LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL!



Interview with **Alexandre Pébereau**

CEO and Founder at Tofane Global
February 2021

Florence Sébastien

Three years ago, you started to write the story of a very beautiful adventure! I was proud to announce Altice International Carrier Services and iBASIS acquisitions just before ITW 2018. At that time, you initiated a new way of thinking about the wholesale voice business. History continues to be written with brilliance.

First of all, I would like you to tell me what you take away from these 3 incredible years. What would be your regrets if any? But above all, what are you particularly proud of?

Alexandre Pébereau

In these 3 incredible years we felt we were doing quite good! Actually, we did much faster than we thought and in such a swift way.

We were able to create one global sales team, with all accounts re-assigned in less than 6 months. One team, one company culture, one platform and unified processes. Indeed, we successfully integrated, in a record speed, 4 companies together, comprised of 20 regional and local offices on all continents.

This is the best way to realize how fast it was.

Fortunately, everybody immediately understood how to integrate a global team, a global company and how to contribute individually to the success of a collective project.

We learned from our first 4 acquisitions so we completed the 5th one in 2020, NOS International Carrier Services during the pandemic, diversifying the portfolio to messaging services.

I have no regret when compared to the pandemic and its consequences. Everything else looks un-significant. I'm very proud of being able to keep everyone and to see how people quickly adjust to face the new working environment.

Florence Sébastien

I remember that 3 years ago I mentioned the fact that because of the merger you could reduce the number of employees. It seems on the contrary that you are in a hiring process!

Alexandre Pébereau

We have kept everybody since the beginning. Moreover, we added new people because we added new services. Indeed, we have enriched our product portfolio by launching new value-added services, expanded our roaming offering adding critical cloud-

based solutions such as our recent launch of signaling security solution, and we are going full speed with our new P2P/A2P messaging business.

Florence Sébastien

I know that your energy is immeasurable and I presume that you still have great plan for the future. Would you like to share some of them with me?

Alexandre Pébereau

We want to consolidate our leadership position and to cement this leadership position as the top independent international carrier in the world. That is what we have built during these past 3 years.

You are not going to be surprised that we believe the consolidation will continue and of course we will be part of that consolidation if we can. We believe that the consolidation of voice services is not over. Indeed, we will keep enabling carriers to focus on their domestic operations by carving out and outsourcing to us the complexity of managing their international business.

Our model is very strong not only because it has been very commercially successful but also financially. Indeed, we are debt free, which is essential to remain independent – it is like for your home, until you reimburse the mortgage the bank is the owner. Our model of independence has been reproduced partly when Telia sold Telia Carriers with Infrastructure, Voice and Messaging services to 2 pension funds at 18 times the annual profit.

It gives us the ability to quickly move with our shareholders to make much larger acquisitions than before. And it gives the freedom to apply our model and have access to new opportunities in the Mobile and Messaging industry.

Florence Sébastien

Would you like to share some of your feelings after this so particular year which has just brought the whole world to its knees?

Alexandre Pébereau

We are not able to travel anymore: we miss our customers, we miss our partners. Since we are a global company with 20 locations, we miss our teams. We miss all the warmth of all this world.

So this has impacted the way we collaborate and innovate with our customers and partners. We took the opportunity to organize workshops with them and invite them to webinars, etc. We innovated in the way we negotiate

and interact with customers. We also changed the way we approach them with proven customized solutions and services. What has been our motto with the pandemic and the absence of face-to-face meetings is to always be seen as the most trusted partner and for that, focusing on delivering the quality, the flexibility, the security and be extremely responsive.

Just one example: in 2020, we significantly expanded the capabilities of our antifraud platform, technology wise but also adding experts, data scientists and we were able to launch the first SLA based system to protect our customers' international traffic.

Florence Sébastien

In your opinion, what have been the main consequences of the pandemic on our industry and in particular on mobile services and voice termination?

Alexandre Pébereau

There is a massive shift in how people need to work and serve customers (remotely, etc.). Organizations need to adapt to the new norms and need to innovate. That is particularly true for SMS and its usage. During the COVID-19 crisis, SMS has proven to be a reliable, simple way to relay information or alerts to everyone. SMS/A2P traffic types have changed. However, traffic grew in multiple areas such as transaction confirmation, authentication, one-time password use, notifications and alerts. Governments, health authorities and agencies are also relying on SMS/A2P for time-critical communications.

The main consequences on iBASIS services could be that during the first lock down, we had to close our offices from East to West. Then we saw the decline of the roaming activities. Messaging at the same time went up. The paradox is that after a first burst in voice calls at the end of March, in all the world but mainly in Europe and North America, then it came back to normal. While roaming disappeared but not completely because of IoT, M2M or permanent roaming.

Florence Sébastien

You told me you got the possibility to innovate and to launch new services, right?

Alexandre Pébereau

Of course, our customers are our top priority nationally and internationally. They may not look for innovation in the international part of the business but they look for greater efficiency, cost, scale and competitiveness which

is for us where we apply the most innovation.

Nevertheless, we also launched new services.

The first one is Internet of Things. We kept investing in innovative steering platforms and building strategic partnerships enabling IoT service providers to cost-effectively expand and manage their connected devices or machines globally.

We strengthened our Messaging offering, and made it one of the key pillars of our strategy.

Earlier this year, we launched our new Fraud and Security iQ360 portfolio. We invested in technologies, people and partnerships to build high performance strategies and policies for our customers to prevent, identify and block a high variety of fraud patterns.

Last, we announced a few days ago the launch of iBASIS Carrier Voice for Teamwork™, enabling carriers such as China Telecom Europe to serve Enterprise customers with much needed cloud-based PBX functionality for their collaboration platforms.

Florence Sébastien

Congratulations! I knew you will announce a great news!

Another question Alexandre: How did you manage the iBASIS's restructuring in this Covid-19 context? What has been the impact on your teams worldwide?

Alexandre Pébereau

We were really impressed by the team resiliency. In our case, it is essential to be HERE on the 24/7 operations. It is really important because our customers do not want to know if we are tired or if we are not able to work remotely... They expect from us that the network, the connectivity, are there and are there permanently. We have a very strong team in operations and they were able to work remotely to guarantee our customers service 24/7.

In March 2020, we started working remotely globally and then from March on we continued not being permanently in our premises.

From an organizational point of view, our teams are internationally dispersed so they adapted quickly to the remote working environment. Moreover, we decided to keep everyone on board, notably to make sure not to add more worries to the anxiety of the situation.

We wanted also to show some perspective to our people. That is why,

because we did not have any visibility on the exit of the pandemic, we kept organizing projects for the next 3 months rather than each month. Managing quarter by quarter was easier to address the situation.

Florence Sébastien

Do you go to the office every day?

Alexandre Pébereau

We globally all work remotely and re-organize the company. Most of our meetings now are just like this one, virtual. We know that it is really difficult to have people in the same room. Now we have been used to work with video-conference. We have the discipline to perform on video.

Florence Sébastien

Finally, what are your biggest wish and challenges for the year to come?

Alexandre Pébereau

The biggest wish is to be jet-lagged again! We are all dying for that! It is coming with the vaccine but it is not so sure...

Beside this jet lag wish, I see 3 big challenges.

The first one will be to be able to see when the international travelers will be coming back. We know that forecasting or planning when and how the return to normal will happen. It is extremely difficult at this stage. However, we are expecting for 2021 to see some international travelers back but really more growth is expected in 2022. Also, to launch the 5G internationally is a big challenge.

The second challenge for the industry is fraud. Indeed, we need to continuously innovate to be ahead of the hackers and fraudster as we also observed the continuous growth of frauds, smishing, and security attacks on multiple fronts. In 2020, we initiated the expansion of our anti-fraud platform that we continue to strengthen in 2021, as we are now marketing a complete offering to fully protect customer's outbound and inbound traffic.

Our priority in fraud and security is to help our customers to get ahead of the fraudsters and quickly and cost-effectively have the right tools and expertise in place.

Last challenge is the digitization. Because of the pandemic, all the digital tools grow at a tremendous rhythm. Indeed, we observed in 2020 some key growth trends that are here to stay: the acceleration of digitalization, the strong growth of collaborative tools

and apps. The usage of digital has grown significantly! I'm very confident that SMS/A2P will continue to get the growth we have observed last year, as they are unique for being – universal, competitive and reliable.

Last, I wish we will celebrate 2021 big time! The re-opening! We have to celebrate the Roaring Twenties! We will make sure that iBASIS and the team of iBASIS will celebrate! You can count on us... Big time!

Florence Sébastien

Thank you for your enthusiasm Alexandre! We all hope to see the light at the end of the tunnel at last



Florence SEBASTIEN, FSE Consulting CEO

Based in Paris, France, Florence is an experienced New Business Development Professional and Relationship Broker with deep expertise in the telecommunication industry. After a Master in International Trade (Paris II Pantheon Assas), she joined Telecom Italia during 10 years. She founded FSE Consulting in 2009 to help companies to build market positions by locating, developing, defining, negotiating, and closing impactful business relationships.

Identify and interpret market trends, as well as track individual contributors and their accomplishments to seek business deals. Contact potential partners, discover and explore opportunities to help companies to close new business. Develop negotiating strategies and positions by studying integration of new venture with company strategies and operations, examining risks and opportunities, and estimating partners' needs and goals.