

HanseNet

Telsis Customer Experience

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Oliver Schnau,
Head of Operations, HanseNet



The rise of HanseNet from a newly-licensed regional start-up to nationwide top-table telco with more than 2.3m customers is a story of astute and sometimes visionary commercial risk-taking underpinned by sound technology choices - among them a ten-year relationship with infrastructure vendor Telsis.

HanseNet was created in 1995 as a regional operator delivering services to business in the Hamburg area. One of more than 40 regionals granted licenses following the liberalisation of Germany's telecoms market it swiftly gained a reputation for innovation and reliability

In 2000 HanseNet became one of the first among its peers to support non-geographic numbers when after extensive research and benchmarking it deployed its first Intelligent Network (IN) service node – sourcing the technology from Telsis. The move was a crucial one for HanseNet in two senses. Not only did it put in place a highly flexible network platform that was to be the foundation for a wider range of new services, but it began a commercial partnership with Telsis that has grown progressively stronger over time and contributed directly to the telco's remarkable growth.

HanseNet's first installation of Telsis technology an Ocean fastSSP switch and an Ocean fastSCP service control point, a formidable combination of high volume carrier grade programmable intelligent switching with high capacity transaction routing and interactive service creation capabilities. The Telsis platforms are recognised by mobile and fixed operators around the world for their easy programmability and HanseNet's own engineers found it quick and simple to create, test and roll out their own non-geographic numbering application. It was an advance that won HanseNet with new classes of business and set it on the path of rapid growth.

That original node – regularly upgraded to the latest specification – is still in use today and carries the simultaneous load of multiple applications. It acts as a gateway supporting sophisticated custom call flows for call centres, a value-added services platform handling toll free, shared cost and premium numbers, a specialist service platform for mission critical communications in the nuclear power industry and as the platform that enables HanseNet to meet particular regulatory requirements.

~ HanseNet serve over 2 million subscribers

~ First among its peers to support non-geographic numbers

~ Launched ground-breaking Alice 0137, giving customers full control of their mass calling events

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By 2003 when HanseNet was bought by Telecom Italia it had grown to serve some 2m subscribers. HanseNet swiftly used its new-found strength to successfully apply for a country-wide operator license, within a year expanding out from Hamburg to serve more than 60 other German cities. It was a remarkably successful move that in just 12 months led to a doubling of subscriber numbers and growth in revenues and EBITDA.

So cost effective and flexible had the original Telsis IN node proved that HanseNet decided to deploy a second node to impose centralised control over its rapidly expanding network of Italtel iMSS switches and to support number portability.

Number portability is a must-have application for any German telco with an aggressive programme of expansion and a wish to clamp down on extraneous costs. The highly competitive market means phone users have a rich choice of potential providers. When they move suppliers they invariably want to take their old familiar number with them and this has led to a situation where phone numbers are no longer a reliable indicator of home network. Routing calls quickly and efficiently in such an environment requires either that a telco maintains its own database linking numbers to current home networks, or each time the problem surfaces using the services of former incumbent Deutsche Telekom to route the call – a service for which they incur significant charges that undermine profitability.

HanseNet's engineers used the graphical programming environment embedded in the new Telsis IN node to create and deploy their own number portability application. Now the node automatically queries a regularly updated database, determines the current home network for a number and directs the appropriate Italtel switch where to route the call. It sounds a deceptively simple process, and for HanseNet it was, but it's an ability that on other vendors' IN nodes is typically very costly and difficult to achieve with the consequence that many German telcos still choose to pay Deutsche Telekom its redirection fees.

"We are not talking about trivial amounts," says HanseNet's head of operations Oliver Schnau. "Our implementation of number portability saves us a relevant part in redirection fees and yet thanks to the flexibility of the Telsis IN node it was very quick and inexpensive to achieve. We broke even on the project in less than a year and now the savings go straight to our bottom line."

In 2006, with the national expansion of the network in full swing and number portability in the process of being rolled out, HanseNet simultaneously unveiled Alice 0137, an advanced mass-calling service

powered by Telsis platforms. It was a further direct challenge to Deutsche Telekom which until then had enjoyed a monopoly on mass calling.

HanseNet's model for Alice 0137 was a service in Sweden called MegaCall which had been running on Telsis platforms for nearly 10 years and had set a number of world records for call volume. Telsis IVR platforms, switches and controllers were deployed throughout HanseNet's network in a distributed architecture that, as in Sweden, ensured massive volumes of calls could be handled without degrading regular person-to-person voice traffic and data. HanseNet's target customer base for Alice 0137 also followed the Swedish model, concentrating not just on TV and radio shows, but print media and major brands.

Oliver Schnau said at the launch of Alice 0137 that the contract marked a new phase in the relationship with Telsis. "Telsis IN service nodes have enabled us to generate strong revenues from non-geographic numbers since 2000, but the mass calling system promises even more. We know we are working in partnership with a supplier that understands the business dynamics and human psychology of mass calling as well as the technical issues. Telsis' track record in this specialist field is very strong."

Not only did Alice 0137 create the first clear commercial alternative to the country's only existing mass calling service, but it broke new ground technically too, giving customers full control of their mass calling events without the need for dedicated hardware or software.

By the first quarter of 2009 HanseNet was able to announce that it had brought all 20 of its Italtel switches deployed throughout Germany under full IN control. The project was bought to a successful conclusion through a combination of Telsis expertise in protocols and signalling, and the fundamental easy programmability of the Telsis IN node. Explains Schnau: "The switches and the ETSI standard for INAP were at odds in a number of ways, but we used the expertise of signalling experts at Telsis to support our own programmers in solving the problem. The result is highly significant for us commercially because it means we can roll out the same menu of advanced services to each one of our 2.3 million customers while controlling our entire estate of distributed switches using less bandwidth and fewer ports."

"It has also been a further test of the relationship we have developed over the last decade with Telsis and has proved once again that we are working with a true partner with a real understanding of our business model as well as some very clever technology."

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