

# Shaping the tech landscape through unrivalled leadership

Joe Scattareggia talks of his journey at Windstream and how the company is leading the way in tech

## Can you tell me a bit about your history at Windstream and what's taken you to your current position as president of the wholesale division?

With over three decades in the industry, my passion remains. My journey with Windstream spans slightly over 10 years, in which I initially oversaw wholesale voice operations before leading our transition into a next-generation wholesale provider with a VoIP-based network. Later, my focus shifted to the optical-transport segment of our business.

I was named president of Windstream Wholesale last year, and I continue to be excited about the possibilities we have in front of us. We have an incredible team of individuals who have been working together for many years, fostering strong collaboration and genuine passion for their work. Our wholesale division has achieved extraordinary success in recent years and we're full steam ahead with our Fast & Flexible culture.

## What's the secret behind the team's cohesion and success?

We've cultivated an exceptional culture that encourages creativity and fosters communication across teams. It's within this collaborative environment that all our ideas flourish. It's the old cliché that Windstream Wholesale feels like a family, and it really does.

In the team, everyone has a voice and they witness the tangible results of their work – whether it's a major sale, an expansion of a data centre or enhancements to our iconnect customer portal.

A significant aspect of our success stems from seamlessly integrating the commercial and technical aspects of our business, with everyone sharing common objectives. In my experience, I've never witnessed such a strong alignment



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among individuals within a company. Additionally, our team is highly focused, guided by a three-pillar strategy that has been instrumental in our recent achievements. These pillars encompass network expansion, strategic partnerships and technological leadership.

## What does innovative leadership look like in the modern wholesale industry?

We are a pioneering company in both technology and software, and we like to stay ahead of market trends. We were among the earliest players in the US to introduce 400G technology when we

began marketing it three and a half years ago. This early adoption has given us valuable experience with the technology, allowing us to effectively collaborate with customers and identify potential gaps or issues, whether they pertain to technology, software, operations or other aspects.

We work hard to be flexible and creative to shape our solutions to truly fit our customers' needs. Additionally, we prioritise prompt responses to customer enquiries. No matter if it's delivering quotes quickly or resolving trouble tickets efficiently, we aim to provide proactive support.

Our iconnect portal, meanwhile, serves as an industry-leading platform for customers. It enables them to obtain quotes, streamline service delivery, track performance analytics and facilitate route planning – all in one convenient hub. This is just another example of our 'fast and flexible' culture.

## What else allows Windstream Wholesale to be ahead of the game on technology?

In addition to close collaboration with equipment manufacturers, our company possesses an ideal size for testing and incubating technology. We boast a robust network and nationwide presence, including extensive dark-fibre infrastructure and numerous points-of-presence. Despite our considerable scale, we maintain agility and responsiveness, allowing us to be that fast and flexible provider. As a result, vendors often approach us, knowing we are open to exploring and evaluating new technologies and can act quickly.

A few years ago, we also embraced equipment-agnostic principles and re-architected our Intelligent Converged Optical Network [ICON] to support that. Our goal is to engage with all vendors and foster interoperability among different technologies. Our strategic focus in the marketplace involves identifying the most suitable technologies for our organisation and customers, ensuring seamless integration and optimal performance.

## How does the future look in terms of continuing this leadership?

We recently achieved a significant milestone by successfully transmitting a 1Tbps wavelength across a 1,100km link spanning multiple routes. While 400G technology is still currently gaining traction, we foresee progressing towards higher capacities in due course.

Conducting these tests not only establishes our expertise in current technologies like 400G, but also positions us as leaders in future advancements such as 800G and beyond. We recently proved the feasibility of an 800GE service by demonstrating the capability of long-haul

transport at speeds of 800Gbps over a single wavelength.

With 400G, we began observing increased quoting activity approximately 18 to 24 months ago, and this continued to escalate throughout 2023. Consequently, it became a significant portion of our sales, culminating in one of our best-selling months for the technology in December. The evolution of 400G has been remarkable over the past 18 months.

## What did it mean for Windstream Wholesale to take home the award for Best North American Carrier at last year's Global Carrier Awards?

For us, receiving that award represents the pinnacle of team achievement and

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serves as the perfect culmination of an outstanding year. We believe we made significant strides in the marketplace in 2023, so being acknowledged as the best among formidable competitors with remarkable assets is truly meaningful.

Our success is deeply rooted in our exceptional team, vibrant culture and the camaraderie among our colleagues. That's why this recognition is especially rewarding: it validates our steadfast focus on nurturing a strong team ethos and a positive work environment.

## What do you expect to be the big focuses and discussions at this year's Metro Connect?

As the event takes place in February, it offers us an early opportunity to connect with many of our customers. Given our focus on the US market, it serves as a

gathering point for numerous providers within our ecosystem, making it an ideal venue for networking with industry peers. Consequently, we plan to have a substantial presence at the event. Our new CEO, Paul Sunu, will be on a panel about broadband equity, access and deployment [BEAD], and we will be co-hosting the main Metro Connect reception with bankstreet.

I anticipate that discussions will revolve around several key themes, including fibre-to-the-home and long-haul fibre initiatives, developments in AI and data centres, and strategies to address power-consumption concerns. With such diverse topics on the agenda, we anticipate a packed schedule and several busy days ahead.

## How do you plan to take Windstream Wholesale forward this year and beyond?

In 2024, Windstream Wholesale's primary focus revolves around monetising our assets and previous network investments. This includes selling additional wavelengths and IP services, as well as capitalising on dark-fibre projects initiated in recent years.

These construction projects, some of which are already ready for service, involve offering high-count fibre from Tulsa, Oklahoma, to Little Rock, Arkansas, and Memphis, Tennessee; rolling out the Beach Route connecting Raleigh, North Carolina, to cable landing stations in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and Jacksonville, Florida; and deploying the high-fibre-count route from New York to Montreal in Canada.

Each endeavour is built on cutting-edge high-count-fibre technology, and our infrastructure team has been diligently working to deliver them within budget and on schedule. I'm pleased to report that we have successfully handed over several thousand fibre miles to our customers already.

As the year progresses, we anticipate making announcements regarding new technologies and potentially unveiling details of additional fibre builds or network-expansion projects. With all that, we expect a successful 2024. 🌟

“Windstream Wholesale's journey as a tech leader in the industry has been defined by our unwavering commitment to excellence, our resilience in the face of challenges and our relentless pursuit of innovation. With a proven track record of success, we stand tall as a trusted provider, known for our expertise and commitment to innovation”

Paul Sunu, chairman and CEO, Windstream