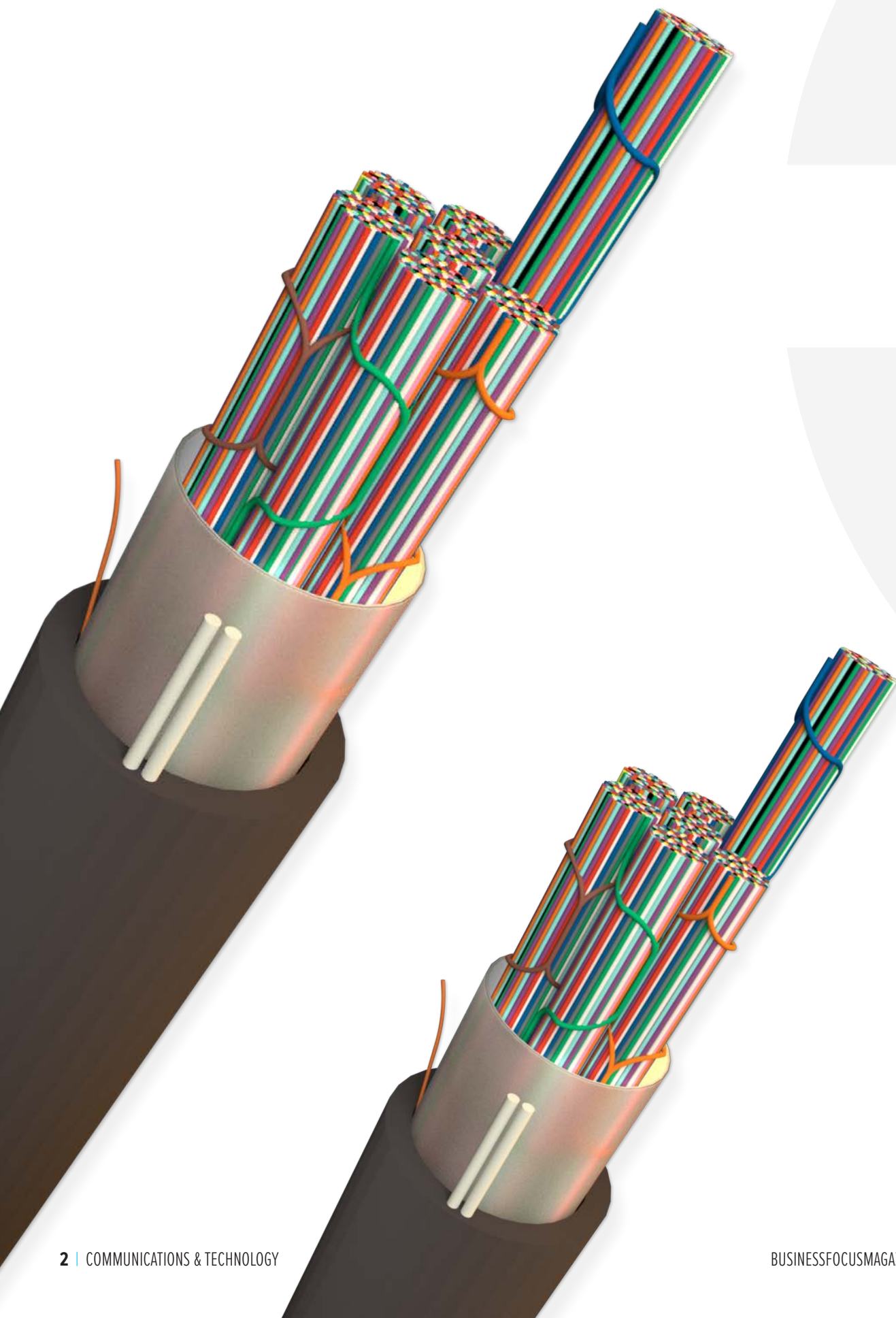


# AFL A FIBRE SOLUTION





THIS CABLE MANUFACTURER HAS INVESTED TO SUPPORT THE TELECOMS INDUSTRY.

# A FIBRE SOLUTION

PROJECT MANAGED BY: DEAN BROWN

**AFL's origins lie in North America, where it began as a joint venture between Alcoa, and the Japanese company, Fujikura Ltd, to manufacture fibre optic cables for power lines.**

The joint venture, originally named Alcoa Fujikura Ltd, has grown a lot since then. Today the company is a global fibre optic cable manufacturing firm with 11 manufacturing locations and is wholly owned by the \$7 billion Fujikura Group. Providing a full turnkey service from technical design and manufacturing to installation services, AFL serves the energy, enterprise, hyperscale, service provider and industrial sectors.

The Swindon branch of AFL was founded to manufacture SkyWrap®, a solution for installing fibre optic cables onto existing ground wires or phase conductors. Even today it remains a unique supplier of this product to global markets, but this branch of the company recently relocated to larger premises to meet the needs of its evolving role and diversified offering.

"Last year, following investment from our Japanese parent company, we moved to larger premises," Paul Bennett is the General Manager for AFL's arm of the business in Swindon. "Existing cable production lines were moved to the new location whilst installing a new production line. The move took place during the pandemic and was a huge challenge."

## HARD WORK AND DETERMINATION

Achieving this move was the result of "Sheer hard work and determination," according to Bennett.

"We planned it as much as we could, but you will always have challenges and barriers," he says.

To carry out the change in premises without halting the company's day-to-day operations, employees each took on a second role associated with the move. As well as requiring

a huge effort from its staff, AFL also needed to ensure it had the necessary expertise in place, and so where necessary, training was given to reinforce the skills of its staff. While some skills could be contracted, skills also needed to be developed in-house so that they could oversee those contractors.

"If you're moving production lines, which we hadn't done in 30 years, you can bring in a contractor to move the equipment, but you need to ensure they do that properly," Bennett says.

AFL's new location is near Swindon's old Honda manufacturing plant. Until recently, the plant had been a large employer in Swindon, so by relocating within the town, AFL was able to provide opportunities to people with technical skills who had been left unemployed by the plant's closure.

## NURTURING AMBITION

This was fortunate for the people AFL hired, but it was also a valuable opportunity for AFL to source skills in a >>



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## IT SUPPORT 365 LTD

### SERVING AFL GLOBALLY FROM SWINDON TO SHENZHEN

As one of the World's longest-running manufacturers of fibre-optic cables, AFL is a veritable force in the fibre optic cable industry. Providing high-scale networking solutions for multiple industries, including power utilities, telecoms operators, military, medical and mining, the company commands a Worldwide presence, a storied legacy and multiple industry awards – not to mention contracts with leading international providers.

AFL Telecommunications Europe Ltd is the company's UK cable manufacturing arm of fibre optic cable, operating within Swindon's resilient industrial hub. Due to modernisation and the increase in demand for fibre optic cabling specifically from the Internet Service Providers AFL decided to relocate its factory.

Having been the company's dedicated managed IT provider for over 10 years and working with AFL within the UK for 20 years, IT Support 365 were more than familiar with AFL Telecommunications' IT estate, and on hand to make the move manageable. Nonetheless, a migration of this scale would require planning, strategy and a keen eye for business continuity.

As consultancy experts, IT Support 365 were involved at every level – from planning to implementation. This included a full logistical breakdown of the existing infrastructure, vital technologies, sensitive business data and potential progress inhibitors. This would lay the groundwork for a steady, sequential migration in the 12 months leading up to their relocation to a new office while maintaining production from across the business.

A full itinerary of technologies was compiled, detailing software, hardware and server considerations. It wasn't only the technical infrastructure that required such diligent planning, but the premises too; with IT Support 365 providing an overview of the cabling and communications, everything had to connect logically within the boundaries of the new premises.

Over the 12-month migration period, IT Support 365 successfully migrated AFL's existing IT services – including a migration to Microsoft Teams VoIP telephony, Cisco infrastructure, Servers and workstation hardware.

"Relocating a factory whilst maintaining production is a significant challenge under normal circumstances, and we did this during a pandemic. Maintaining communications across the existing site, whilst installing infrastructure in the new facility to provide a common ERP platform environment was crucial in allowing us to operate effectively as each process line was transferred and brought online. The adoption of creative solutions to avoid duplication of expensive (and as it turned out unavailable) rack mounted equipment was also crucial to the success of the project. All this was possible due to IT365 working as a trusted partner with our Corporate IT department to deliver these solutions." - *Mark Turner, Operations Director, AFL Telecommunications Europe Ltd*

The combined success of AFL Telecommunications, IT Support 365 and Swindon's robust manufacturing industry have not gone unnoticed.

AFL Telecommunications is now a dedicated investor in the town, with their Swindon plant the first in Europe to manufacture these new ultra high density, high fibre count easy to install fibre optic cables. This milestone achievement was marked by a visit from the Japanese Ambassador to the UK.

As the UK continues its drive towards a fibre-connected future – and as internet providers battle for contracts over city-wide fibre installation – AFL Telecommunications delivers an unprecedented boost to the Worldwide fibre industry. IT Support 365 since securing contracts with AFL for multiple locations in the UK is now expanding the Global Support Services internationally, specifically the Americas and Asia Pacific regions.

IT Support 365's expansion into the Americas and APAC regions has allowed for the development and implementation of a 'follow the sun' 24 x 7 manned support service. The 24 x 7 service is lead from the UK supported closely by its strategically placed site in Australia.

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**Paul Bennett, <sup>^</sup>  
General Manager,  
AFL Swindon.**

challenging and competitive employment market. Following the pandemic, many companies have seen rapid growth, leading to a jobseekers' market.

"We make sure we take time to hire the right people, going through many interview cycles looking for people who are the right fit," Bennett tells us. "We are a small company and are looking for people with a 'can do' attitude. We can offer a variety of roles and teamwork goes a long way here!"

Once people become part of AFL, the company takes a personalised approach to developing each employee's ambitions, competencies, and aptitudes to offer them career development which matches their own, and the company's needs. While some employees are extremely ambitious from the start and want a career path with lots of mobility, others are happy to find job satisfaction in a role they can work in long term.

"We have some people with 20 years' experience looking for security and job satisfaction; not just a financial reward," Bennett points out. >>





AFL is undergoing a significant growth cycle at the moment, opening up many new roles within the company and allowing it to offer progression. Throughout the business, there is a real sense that the company's journey is also the journey of its people.

"Every employee participates in and can contribute to the overall success of the company," Bennett says.

### SPREADING THE KNOWLEDGE

The latest cycle of growth is fuelled by ongoing advancements in the utility market.

"With the ongoing expansion of offshore wind power and the electrical vehicles roll out, we will see huge requirements for flexibility in the power network," Bennett observes.

As this demand rises, the electrical network in the UK and around Europe will need to be modified, adapting to changing inputs and outputs alongside the ongoing implementation of the "smart grid" concept. For AFL, however, the most immediate area of growth, as well as the company's reason for relocating in Swindon, is the booming telecoms market.



AFL's new facility has been built with enough capacity to accommodate the business's new production line, which has two unique features. The facility produces a very high-density fibre optic cable for telecoms customers such as Openreach, which allows them to maximise their existing networks. As well as being of high quality in and of themselves, they can also help providers avoid the expensive and slow work of digging up the street for installation. Instead, these cables can be installed by blowing in through existing ducts.

Traditionally, in the industry the rule is that the higher the fibre count of a cable, the longer

it takes to install. For example, it can take up to 20 hours to join two cables, but AFL's approach can take jointing time from 20 hours to just three.

AFL now runs the first European facility to manufacture this new cable, 'Air-Blown Wrapping Tube Cable with SpiderWeb Ribbon®'. AFL has gone on to serve many UK customers, following the market. "With energy markets becoming 'smart' and the telecoms operators rolling out more gigabit broadband, we are very excited to be in our new premises to better serve these demands," Bennett concludes. ☺

**"WITH THE ONGOING EXPANSION OF OFFSHORE WIND POWER AND THE ELECTRICAL VEHICLES ROLL OUT, WE WILL SEE HUGE REQUIREMENTS FOR FLEXIBILITY IN THE POWER NETWORK."**







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