

The Right Deal at The Right Time – Part 2

Rise of the Enterprise Network Operator



[Sam Colley, CEO of Pod Group, a Giesecke + Devrient Company](#)

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Interview by Abraham Joseph, Editorial Director, IoT Insights

14 September 2021

Congratulations on your deal with G+D. How did the acquisition come about?

Over the last year and a half, we worked with a broker to explore growth opportunities. This led to discussions with G+D over an eight-month period and culminated in G+D acquiring Pod Group in July. For us, it was very important to find the right partner. G+D was well placed to help us accelerate our product ideas, and we were in a good position to help them accelerate some of their ambitions. So it was a very good fit.

In which specific areas does the deal enable you to grow?

It helps us accelerate our eSIM ambitions: the idea of a true global single offering for IoT. G+D is the market leader in eSIM and has a lot of pre-existing relationships with carriers, multinational enterprises and hardware manufacturers. This gives us a different starting position and more credibility to accelerate our Enterprise Network Operator (ENO) strategy. G+D brings best in class eSIM security and management, and Pod Group brings the cellular

network elements and the platform to manage the overall solution at enterprise scale. There are considerable product synergies and this enables the combined group to accelerate deployment of ENO solutions which are designed to help enterprises own and control their IoT connectivity, for example, private networks, including those based on 5G.

What is an Enterprise Network Operator?

It is a relatively new concept, developed by Pod Group. It has been out in the ether for about a year and has received a good reception. People are familiar with the mobile network operator (MNO) and mobile virtual network operator (MVNO) concepts. We believe that going forward, a new type of operator is needed to enable enterprises to own and control their IoT networks so they can maximise the potential benefits of IoT. An Operator that is focused on delivering the infrastructure and tools enterprises need to deploy and scale IoT easily to extract maximum operational efficiency. Your readers can learn more about the ENO concept at www.whatisaneno.com.

How do enterprises respond to the concept of the ENO?

What we are saying resonates with them. They agree with the need for the decentralisation of network ownership and the incorporation of private networks. Also, the idea of ultra-flexible networking infrastructure as a service, enabling them to adopt and scale IoT is very appealing.

How does the Pod Group/G+D offering help enterprises with their networking challenges?

At the moment, there is a lot of focus on building campus networks. However, we see the real value in the future as the hybrid model of campus to public to campus, so that you can track things all the way through supply chains. One of our USPs is that we can enable that seamless roaming from private networks to public networks, and then back into private networks again. Campus networks, including private 5G networks, are a big focus for us. Delivering out-of-the-box solutions for this market is one of our key objectives.

You mentioned security earlier. Given G+Ds security heritage, what security opportunities does this partnership open for you?

Security has always been a huge focus for us and this partnership helps us boost our capabilities in this area considerably. Prior to the acquisition, we were investigating creating higher levels of security from the SIM card itself, but in early discussions with G+D, it became clear that they were exploring similar concepts, with greater resources.

For private networking, a lot of the focus is on security and that's obviously a natural fit for G+D. The company already works with large enterprises to deliver services based on SIM cards, eSIMs and other platforms. These applications offer tremendous opportunities for the combined G+D-Pod Group offering.

Does the new partnership give rise to conflicts of interest in certain segments or with certain customer groups? If so, how do you plan to resolve these conflicts?

Potentially it could, however, the overriding objective for both G+D and Pod is to create long term partnerships. Therefore, one of our top priorities is ensuring that previous relationships are strengthened or remain unaffected. For example, G+D has many existing carrier

relationships and part of Pod's ENO strategy is to help carriers deal with the long tail of opportunities for eSIM and eSIM management. Pod Group already works with carriers that use its platform to provide value-added services for specific enterprise segments, and we anticipate that there will be many more opportunities to work with G+D's carrier partners as we move forward. Our aim is to become a more integrated partner focused on delivering additional value to them, rather than a competitor.

What about the big guys like Amazon, Microsoft, etc? Where do you see them positioned vs G+D and large industrial players looking to build their own solutions?

To some extent, it is good that we have some level of standardisation in large, well-adopted environments. However, this can be bad if you are limited in what your application can do or the technologies and solutions you can adopt.

Given that both Amazon and Microsoft have very significant incubator programmes and partnership communities – usually a precursor to them figuring out what works and what doesn't, I expect they'll play an important role in the development of IoT. Nevertheless, we believe that the market needs choice and flexibility, otherwise, innovation will suffer.

Tell me about the team and the brand. Will the name Pod Group disappear?

In the short term, we will remain as Pod Group. G+D wants to hang on to the Pod team. We're small, nimble and flexible. Also, they like our culture. We plan to continue running the business as before, but additionally to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves through G+D. We have a major focus on product integration because that's where the most value can be derived in the short term. In the future, we plan to evolve as a joint proposition to our various markets.

What about changes to the overall mission of Pod Group?

The mission of becoming an Enterprise Network Operator has not changed. The vision of taking it from a concept that we're starting to deliver today to delivering the full flexibility of network ownership remains exactly the same. Medium term, this extends in scope to encompass other G+D-led initiatives focused on positive real-world contributions, such as measuring and monitoring environmental impact throughout supply chains.

Both you and Carsten Ahrens (whom I interviewed in Part 1 of this series) mentioned that G+D liked the Pod culture, did you build this culture based on a specific philosophy or did it develop accidentally?

Pod was part of a cultural experiment by its founder Charles Tower-Clark, the philosophy promotes transparency, decentralisation of decision making, autonomy and creativity. We have learnt a lot along the way and I think we have found the right balance between very little structure and control to encourage initiative and creative ideas throughout the team, and just enough to ensure that we are all focused on delivering on the business objectives.

What role do you see IoT playing in sustainability or other ESG challenges around the world?

IoT helps us monitor and control our impact on the environment. It enables us to track things throughout their life cycles, extract useful data and assess impact, e.g., carbon footprint. We

need to exploit IoT more aggressively to make better progress with ESG goals. Also, IoT must be made much more accessible. In addition to government and corporate initiatives, we need real-time tools such as apps on phones that show people exactly what each purchase or decision means for both them and the world.

Do you have an interest in Africa?

Our business development team is currently focused on connectivity in that market but we're seeing a lot of additional demand. Much of this demand is for traditional applications like asset tracking and vehicle tracking. Part of our ENO strategy is to enable MNOs and resellers with turnkey solutions. Today, many carriers in emerging markets are not set up to provide IoT services. We are developing solutions to help them sell IoT applications and connect IoT devices. From a sustainability perspective, there's a lot of interest coming from Africa. We see Africa as one of the larger markets for investment, beyond Latin America and Southeast Asia.

What would you like the world to know about your new vision and capabilities?

Simply this. If you've run into problems delivering connectivity or infrastructure for your IoT application, there is now an end-to-end solution from the very bottom of the connectivity stack to the very top as well as within the connectivity stack itself. Now, you have an array of new technologies and tools to solve problems easily and deliver solutions for what was previously a very challenging environment. For enterprises, our key message is enterprise-grade connectivity is here.

Should all enterprises beat a path to your door, or are you focused on specific segments?

Although the ENO model appeals to enterprises of all sizes and across all sectors, the major benefits of IoT network ownership are likely to be of greatest interest to companies needing better control and security of their networks. For example, utilities, mining companies and oil and gas companies. Another important group is large organisations that are deploying applications that require a uniform approach across different territories. For them, the ENO model resolves many problems, including those previously associated with roaming.

Which of your hobbies have the least to do with technology?

Almost all of them have nothing to do with technology. With home-working, the lines between work time and non-work time are already very blurred. When I'm not working, I like to disconnect completely and enjoy hobbies that give me time to process what I've learnt. I love history. Also, I like to read. Currently, I'm reading [Entangled Life](#), a book about how fungi have shaped and continues to shape our world. It is blowing my mind. The last book I finished was [Breathe](#). It gave me a whole new perspective on how to breathe and how breath can be used to improve well-being and manage anxiety.

What advice do you have for budding entrepreneurs?

I believe that an individual is only as strong as the team around them and so my advice is to always remember this and not be afraid of not being the smartest person in the room. You will do better if you surround yourself with smarter people than you. Teamwork really does make the dream work!