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CommScope's global reach

By Richard Gould



CommScope has changed with the times throughout its nearly 50-year history.

It began in 1964 as a type of cable produced by Superior Cable Corporation. A few years later, it became its own division and eventually its own company.

The Carlyle Group bought CommScope on Jan. 14, 2011 for \$3.9 billion.

In 2000, 75 percent of the company's business was producing coaxial and fiber optic cable for the cable TV market. About 75 percent of the products it made were sold in North American markets.

Not any more.

With a massive cutting-edge product line and facilities on five continents, CommScope is poised to continue its success for years to come.

After more than a decade of innovation and purchasing new companies, about half of what CommScope builds is sold outside of the US. The company's focus has also broadened to include wireless communications and data centers.

"We're the leading manufacturer and provider for communication infrastructure," said CommScope's President and Chief Executive Officer Eddie Edwards. "Wireless, broadband, enterprise – we're the leader of each of these globally."

CommScope sells equipment and components to every cable operator in the world, every wireless carrier in the world and most data centers and more than 75 percent of the companies on the Fortune 500 list.

“Less than 40 percent of CommScope’s sales are metallic cable now,” said Senior Vice President of Corporate Finance Philip M. Armstrong Jr. “This company’s not standing still. It’s night and day because of our capabilities. We’ve invested over \$10 billion in research and development and it’s taking us beyond cable.”

Though expansion and growth are ongoing, CommScope is still producing the products it became known for.

The company has what it takes to move TV signals from any cable company’s video distribution center to the cable box in the consumer’s home.

“We build every component and piece – from the cables to everything else,” said Senior Vice President of the Broadband Business Unit Ric Johnsen.

Facebook and Youtube, texting and phone-shot videos are driving CommScope’s broadband business because of the demand for ever-expanding bandwidth to carry all of the information consumers need.

“We enable bandwidth around the globe,” Armstrong said.

South America is CommScope’s biggest growth region in the world. India and China, along with other parts of Asia, are growing strong too, Johnsen said.

“India has added as many wireless subscribers in the last four years as the entire population of the US,” Armstrong said.

Though CommScope has extended its global presence in recent years, it’s still committed to local manufacturing. The company provides more than 1,700 jobs in the Catawba Valley area, said Edwards.

“What we do in Catawba County is important – it’s where we got started,” he said.

CommScope has three area manufacturing plants. They’re in Claremont, Catawba and Statesville.

“These factories support the western hemisphere with a lot of products,” Johnsen said. “We will ship tens of millions of dollars worth of products to Brazil out of Catawba this year.”

Brazil is building up its data infrastructure in preparation to host the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016.

“There are very few companies able to do what we do,” Armstrong said.

One way CommScope plans to keep growing is by buying companies that make products and provide services that mesh with its specialties.

CommScope bought the Andrew Corporation in 2007. Now a division of CommScope, Andrew specializes in wireless towers, equipment and antennas. Any cell phone tower emblazoned with a red lightning bolt is a CommScope tower. The company makes everything on the tower from the antenna arrays atop the towers to the drum-shaped microwave antennas and the cables connecting it all, to the junction boxes and cabinets on the ground.

“We make all the things you don’t think about, but your provider does,” Edwards said.

A close look reveals that many of the cell towers in the Hickory area are affiliated with CommScope, but they’re not the company’s most instantly-recognizable facility.

That honor belongs to Cowboys Stadium in Arlington, Texas, Johnsen said.

It took CommScope nine months to install the five million feet of SYSTIMAX cabling and the 2.7 million feet of SYSTIMAX X10D cabling needed to support the building’s 40,000 data ports and the stadium’s data center.

It also connected the stadium’s 3,000 televisions, making it the world’s largest internet-connected TV installation. To allow some 100,000 fans to make phone calls and check their emails, CommScope outfitted the stadium with one of the

world's most complex indoor cellular systems found in any stadium in the world.

On game day, the Dallas Cowboys and their opponents rely on CommScope's products for radio communications between players, the coaches on the field and the coaches in the box.

When CommScope was done, the Hickory-based company had outfitted Cowboys Stadium with a world-class communications system.

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