



## *The Interview*

*Bob Bissell is the Partnership Manager for BT Business. He is one of the most entrepreneurial people we have ever met at a large corporate.*

We got to know Bob at the back end of 2006 and he immediately shared our passion for improving the lives of entrepreneurs and their investors, hence BT joining us as a Preferred Partner. BT has big ambitions to help SMEs and what they are doing is joined up.

**Q. So, getting straight down to it, how have you kept your entrepreneurial spirit alive, whilst spending so much of your career at one global corporate?**

A. In 33 years I have had many roles across BT and seen many company changes. I have a superb work life balance and a real passion for the company. BT has enabled me to flourish, and think creatively, by allowing me the freedom to try and test new initiatives, in support of SMEs across the UK.

**Q. How did you get to be the Partnerships Manager and why did you take the job?**

A. That was through my experience as a PR manager and my time as a regional corporate relations manager in the East Midlands. My role there was to build relationships at a senior level with key influencers and opinion formers. I have emulated my role in the region in to a national one.

**Q. Who is your hero and why?**

A. I have two, my late daughter for her battle against cancer and my younger daughter for coping so well when her sister passed away.

**Q. How hard do you really work?**

A. I work hard, but my drive and passion for BT makes it enjoyable and I can flex between working from home and meetings in the City. The enthusiasm I have for BT means it has become part of my life. I am proud to say that I wear my heart on my sleeve when it comes to BT.

**Q. How do you unwind?**

A. Easy!!! Golf! My wife and I took it up 18 months ago and we are out on the course at every opportunity

**Q. What did you learn from your first great boss?**

You are now making me smile. I have had some really good bosses, but my first really great boss was Anna Thompson who taught me that if it feels right, just do it.

What I mean is, at junior management level sometimes there is an inbuilt fear of “am I doing the right thing?” She instilled into me the confidence that if you feel it is right just do it because more often than not you will be right. And this was 20 years ago - long before the Nike ad.

**Q. You must have millions of customers at BT, how do you keep them all happy?**

A. There are many, many reasons but customer service is our number 1 priority - lots of improvements have been made already, but we won't be happy until every last customer is.

**Q. What is it about BT that has enabled it to be so innovative and entrepreneurial in the last 12-18 months?**

A. This is all down to having a focused board with Ben Verwaayen's management and leadership style cascading down through the company. Innovation and change are encouraged throughout the business and this has empowered BT people to be innovative and entrepreneurial. It has had a transforming effect and enabled more to happen, quicker.

**Q. Why is BT moving towards offering an entire IT and communications solutions package for businesses?**

A. We research our customers and ask them what issues they have and what we can do to help their business.

The main response indicated that they want total IT & comms solutions managed and hosted by ourselves - leaving them to do what they do best.

**Q. Tell us a bit about the products BT can offer and why they will make a difference to AngelNews companies**

A. Our portfolio is huge, so we can meet the needs of any size business. But in a nutshell we are converging voice, data, and mobile into simple solutions that offer our customers great value, piece of mind and tools that can help their business to grow and prosper.

**Q. We have many companies that would love to have BT as a customer. How do you suggest they should get that crucial sales meeting with a decision-maker?**

A. BT is a massive company, but it is always looking at new propositions and partnership working. The best place to look is on [www.bt.com](http://www.bt.com) and identify areas in BT that fit with the product/service they wish to sell and then to get in touch.

**Q. Some of our companies may see BT's new strategy as a bit of a threat as they are providing IT support to SMEs. How do you think they should deal with this - or perhaps you do not think it is a threat?**

A. I don't see why BT's strategy should be a threat to other IT providers, as we are focusing on what our customers want from us and not trying to undermine what other IT companies are offering their customers.

**Q. How can you value the worth of IT and communications support?**

A. I bounce the question back to you. How would a fault to the AngelNews system affect your customers?

Exactly - your business depends on IT and comms.

**Q. When are the crucial moments in a firm's life that it should focus on IT and communications??**

A. Right from the off. Your IT and comms should grow as your business grows.

**Q. You can spend a fortune on IT and communications, but is there ever a time when you definitely should not spend too much money?**

A. I think you are absolutely right - everywhere you look these days, adverts for IT and comms are in so many places and there are so many different offerings. Every business needs reliable advice on just what is necessary for their business.

Our offering in terms of general advice is to supply it online through [www.bt.com](http://www.bt.com) which has been designed to help you get answers to many questions and which offers the full picture. We also have specific BT Business websites which may be helpful such as <http://businessclub.bt.com>.

But I still think personal contact is invaluable - talk to the experts who advise businesses on a regular basis. Why not give one of our BT Local Business Advisors a call on **0800 389 3364** There are 76 BT Local Businesses across the UK, and this special link line number will automatically divert your call through to the nearest office. Our advisors are trustworthy and experienced, and will be looking to build a long lasting relationship, offering cost effective solutions that grow with your business.

**Q. Are the needs of BT's big customers different from the needs of its small customers?**

A. Not really - they are just on a bigger scale. Interestingly lots of solutions that we have developed for our smaller customers, have been developed from the solutions we use here in BT, which is an enormous company.

**Q. Are the needs of your overseas customers different from the needs of your UK based customers?**

A. I would not think so. At the end of the day the World Wide Web has opened the markets to every business.

**Q. How important is it to co-ordinate you IT with your telephony needs?**

A. It is really important! Technologies are converging, costs are tumbling, and new solutions are offering businesses so many new benefits. Using Internet protocol (IP) is going to be the way forward. If you're not sure, seek advice, as a shot in the dark may be costly in the long term.

**Q. Do you think products or people are more important in a company providing communications support to the B2B market?**

A. It's a blend of the two, the products are there to build and get the most out of your IT & comms infrastructure, but people are needed to advice, reassure and offer support when needed.

**Q. How important is the SME market to BT?**

A. Extremely important. We have 1.2m business customers across the UK all needing IT& Comms infrastructures that fit with their business needs. We take this size of audience very seriously indeed.

**Q. What are the typical mistakes companies make when they do start an IT project, particularly in terms of implementing their office phone and pc systems?**

A. Not looking through the business mirror. How does your company look from the outside? How do your customers and suppliers perceive you? First impressions count for a lot in business and so a quality IT & comms infrastructure should be an essential, not a nice to have.

**Q. What tips would you offer an entrepreneur starting out in IT and communications?**

A. Customer knowledge! Know what your customer needs are and focus in on the business benefits not the technological features.

**Q. How close should you be to your IT and communications manager at BT?**

A. I would encourage any business to build a relationship with the local BT Local Business. They will only be too pleased, at any time, to understand more about your business and advise on what is right for you. [www.btlocalbusiness.co.uk](http://www.btlocalbusiness.co.uk)

**Q. IT and communications and media are very popular from an investment perspective. BT is now doing all three. Please tell us a bit more about BT's ambitions in internet TV etc.**

A. Again, it's that "convergence" word and the power of broadband. Broadband offers high speed internet access, converged voice and mobile (BT Fusion) and now Vision. Bringing all of these technologies together on broadband, we are making things a lot better and simpler for our customers, and above all offering choice.

Our ambitions for all our business services are quite simple, let us take care of your IT & Comms and you get on with what you do best.

**Q. What lessons can people learn from BT's great recovery in the last few years?**

A. Customer focus - you have to move with your customer needs, where would we be now if we were still just a telephone company.