



## Five frustrations and challenges for data cable installers in 2017

What's your problem? That was the question posed to a wide range of data cable installers during extensive research conducted over the past 18-months by TREND Networks.

Interestingly, despite many differences in organisation size and infrastructure, as well as the scope of work undertaken, the interviews showed that data cable installers are facing many common frustrations and challenges. Sometimes answers were as expected, but the research also provided new clarity around some of the key issues facing the industry.

So, what's making work difficult for data cable installers in 2017? And what steps can data cable installation and testing companies take to try and overcome some of these issues?

### 1. Cable certifiers cripple cash flow

Anyone working within data cable installation knows that cable certifiers are one of the most expensive pieces of equipment in the kit bag. In fact, most cable installers feel that they are a necessary and unavoidable capital expense.

However, it is clear that for many, purchasing a number of cable certifiers makes cash flow difficult and, on occasion, occupies budget that may have been better spent on other projects or equipment. This challenge to cash flow can have a knock-on effect, reducing flexibility to spend within the business as other needs arise.

The research found that investment in equipment often delivers seemingly poor ROI. This was particularly true in businesses with a lower level of certifier usage. In these cases, the fixed purchase cost of a certifier can be an almost crippling capital expense.

Furthermore, in some operations different test equipment is being purchased for copper and fibre. As well as increasing the burden of equipment in an already full kit bag or on the van, this increases expenditure and reduces ROI still further.

### 2. Sharing testers doesn't work

To try and reduce the quantity of certifiers that need to be purchased, the research found that many businesses attempt to share them between their workforce. So, rather than equipping each van with a certifier, as and when a certifier is needed, it is couriered out to a particular installer at the job site, usually from a central office location.

While on the surface this may seem to offer a commercial benefit, our research shows that, in actual fact, the costs and administration involved in shipping certifiers to different locations can amount to a considerable expense. This is especially true where installers are working across a large geographical area.

Another problem with this approach that the research uncovered is that it can cause



delays in carrying out and completing jobs. Jobs that require a warranty simply cannot be completed without a certifier. However, sometimes all available certifiers are in use elsewhere, or it takes time for the unit to reach the installer on site. This can prevent installers from being able to carry out billable work. It can also cause jobs to run for longer than planned, preventing installers from moving onto other jobs, which may potentially be more profitable.

### **3. Data sharing is a disaster**

Even if an installer gets their hands on a certifier, goes on site and conducts the required tests within the desired time frame, there are still challenges to overcome in order to complete the job. The research discovered that in some cases, installers conduct the necessary tests for certification, but then have to send the certifier back to the office for the data to be transferred. It is only once this has been done that a customer can be given a warranty.

Data cable installers going from job to job on the road are facing similar issues, sometimes waiting for days before reaching a hotel where the internet connection is sufficient for uploading the test data. Only after this has been received can the necessary reporting be done at the office and the job completed and billed.

The research showed that the time to complete this process from testing with a certifier to invoicing the customer can be up to two weeks. These delays inevitably hurt cash flow.

In addition, both of these data sharing scenarios risk the loss of test data. In the event that test data is lost the site will need to be visited again for re-testing, resulting in reduced margins for the job and delaying invoicing further still. Likewise, neither process enables Technical Managers to check the job has been done correctly until after the technician has left the site, which may mean an installer has to take the time revisiting the site.

### **4. Unfair upgrades, unexpected costs**

During the course of the research, some interviewees revealed their frustration that support was being discontinued for certifiers that they had only recently purchased. With certifiers being such a significant capital outlay, many of the businesses spoken to were simply not in a position to upgrade their certifier, despite this seeming like the only option available.

In addition, unexpected costs associated with repairs and maintenance were identified as a difficulty for some businesses. Even those happy with their certifier product, and its price, suggested that budgeting for annual calibrations, repair costs, replacement parts, shipping costs, technical support and training was extremely difficult. In a worst-case



scenario, these unforeseen costs can prove prohibitively expensive and lead to a lack of equipment availability, impacting productivity and risking extended customer downtime. To avoid these issues while minimising costs and providing protection from unplanned expenditure, many data cable installers suggested they would prefer to opt for a fairly-priced care plan.

## 5. More testers are needed...or are they?

When specifically asked what would make their life easier, often installers stated that they wished they could have more testers. Despite the challenge that investment in certifiers can potentially pose to cash flow, many specified that they would like more certifiers within their fleet.

This response is particularly interesting, as analysis of the work carried out by the data cable installers within the research showed that cable certifiers are actually needed far less than one might assume. In reality, it is only in 25 per cent of jobs that clients and building specifications typically require cable manufacturer warranties, and therefore require use of a certifier.

The research suggests that many data cable installers do not realise that they could in fact use a cable and network transmission tester on the majority of jobs. 75 per cent of the time, where a warranty is not needed, the proof of performance reports produced by this type of tester can be shared with clients. Importantly, these testers are far more affordable and, in most organisations, it would be feasible for all installers to have their own.

## So, what can be done?

The feedback from the data cable installers interviewed clearly shows that selecting the right type and quantity of equipment is vitally important for ensuring profitable, flexible data cable installation operations. With the support of equipment suppliers, companies need to closely interrogate the work they carry out and match their certifier and tester needs to this to make cost savings. For example, TREND Networks recently worked with a customer in the US on selecting a smarter mix of testing equipment, saving \$1 million as a result.

In addition, the research demonstrates how data cable installation businesses are changing. Far from being an added bonus, mobile data sharing is becoming a must-have to ensure productive and profitable operations. Also, nowadays, up-front investment in large quantities of certifiers is just not always feasible, especially on a large scale. As businesses try





increasingly to move their investment in test equipment from a capital expenditure to operational expenditure, it is crucial for test and measurement equipment suppliers to respond effectively to these changes.

In response to the recent research, TREND Networks has launched Test4Less, a new suite of solutions to help reduce capital expenditure, increase productivity and improve cashflow. This can be achieved by combining the right quantities of the right testers, choosing the best care plan for the needs of the installer, and switching to Pay As You Test, thereby making testers an operational, rather than a capital, expense.

To learn more, visit [www.trend-networks.com](http://www.trend-networks.com)

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## TEST4LESS

