

## **CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME SPEECH AGM 2017**

### **Salutations**

#### **Introduction**

It is my pleasure to welcome everyone to CANTO's 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual General meeting here in the beautiful Island of Curacao. Firstly, I would like to thank our joint hosts United Telecommunication Services UTS and the Bureau Telecommunicatie en Post (BT&P) which is a multi-sectoral independent Regulator here in Curacao. This is another historic event for CANTO. Why? Because, it's the first time that a network operator and regulator have hosted a CANTO AGM. This perhaps shows how far we have come in working with all ICT stakeholders, and in building relations for the common good of our Caribbean region.

This AGM has broken the record for the best attended AGM with so far 139 delegates registered.

For me, it has indeed been a great honour and a privilege to have served you as Chairman of regional organizations for the past two years. As Chair, I sincerely thank you, the members, for the opportunity to serve.

The year 2016 presented some very interesting events and quite dramatic results that most pollsters did not predict. We in the telecommunications business certainly are familiar with the disruption that is sometimes brought on as a result of the introduction of new technology. However, its "people" who may be guilty of having disrupted the world as we know it.

First there was BREXIT, when the people of Great Britain voted to leave the European Union. Most did not see it coming and many remained stunned for several days after. Then came the election of Donald Trump as the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America. Again, it certainly disrupted the conventional politics to which we had grown accustomed

in the U.S.A. A total political outsider upstaged all of the seasoned political contenders, practically destroying some careers in the process.

Donald Trump's election as President of the United States could have significant impact on the Caribbean particularly from a regulatory perspective. The new President's team, which is oversee the transition at the FCC, appears to be staunchly opposed to Net Neutrality rules as currently applied. All members of the Trump team have been quite vocal in their criticism of the Net Neutrality rules adopted by the FCC under the Obama administration.

ECTEL, the Regulator for 5 Caribbean states, have stated that they intend to forge ahead with Net Neutrality. Meanwhile, a few days ago the President named FCC Commissioner Ajit Pai to Chair the FCC. Ajit Pai is a fierce critic of Net Neutrality. Certainly, the new American President has indicated a preference for far less regulation going forward.

Then there are also some major acquisitions in the pipeline: the proposed ATT takeover of Time Warner and Twenty-First Century Fox's bid for Sky. This demonstrates how much **content** is valued in today's market.

Ladies and Gentlemen as Chairman, I have been keen to focus on achievements; my main concern and focus has been for members to see the value of belonging to this organization. So let's take a quick look back at what has been achieved over the last year.

## **2016 achievements**

### 1. Visiting more stakeholders

In 2016 we were more proactive in visiting our member countries meeting with Ministers, Regulators and Operators. So far we have visited Antigua, Jamaica, Montserrat, Anguilla and Curacao.

This is an exercise which will continue throughout 2017. We want to meet all of our member countries one on one to discuss the issues affecting your local organization on the ground and to determine how CANTO can assist.

2) Four (4) new full members joined CANTO;

The growth of full members has been fairly stagnant over the last few years. However, in the new financial year which began in October 2016 we have 4 new members who have joined: Digicel Grenada, Aliv Limited formally NewCo in the Bahamas, Cable & Wireless Turks and Caicos Islands and Digicel St. Lucia. I congratulate the Secretary General and her team for this outstanding effort. I believe we are experiencing this increase in membership since operators understand and appreciate the value of CANTO.

3) Code of Practice for Safeguarding the Open Internet

Within this Code, Network Operators have agreed not to block Over the Top operators. This was another historic event as more than 30 operators signed the Code of Practice, including C & W and Digicel. This is an example of Industry led regulation.

At a recent regulators conference in Montego Bay, Jamaica, the Honourable Prime Minister of Jamaica, Andrew Holness in his feature address, encouraged the local Utility providers to be *proactive in 'self-regulation'*. He applauded the Jamaican Electricity company in their self-regulation efforts. Indeed, the PM holds the view that self-regulation actually **helps** the regulator. In my brief meeting with the Prime Minister I mentioned that CANTO supports his theory that providers should be more proactive in self-regulation, and I further advised that the telecoms industry was already being proactive in this regard.

4) Introduced leaders of the industry at the CANTO conference

We transformed our Annual Conference by featuring leaders in the industry, providing senior level speakers on key topics, including John Reid Chief Executive Officer of C&W Communications and Denis O'Brien Chairman of Digicel group.

5) Improved focus on CANTO publicity; more press releases;

6) New CANTO Connect Newsletter

We introduced a newsletter with a 6 week frequency thereby keeping members up to date on a regular basis. This includes news about our members, board directors; updates on CANTO country visits and when CANTO speaks at conferences etc. This is one of our success stories in the ongoing effort to improve communication with our members.

Ladies and Gentlemen we certainly recognize the value of enhanced communication with our members!

CANTO presentations at major Caribbean conferences – focusing on our advocacy role – we recently presented at the OOCUR regulatory conference and Caricom conference speaking on management of universal funds and the Code of Practice for Safeguarding the Open Internet.

7) Election to Vice Chair of Caribbean ICT Collaboration Committee

This was a significant development. CANTO's Chairman was elected as Vice Chair of the newly formed Caribbean ICT Collaboration Committee. My nomination by 2 permanent Secretaries, one from Dominica and the other from St. Lucia demonstrates a degree of trust placed in CANTO by Government Officials. Trust is important if we are speaking of collaboration. The ICT Collaboration Committee was born out of a declaration from a Caribbean Telecoms Union Ministerial meeting and was further initiated when the Board of Directors met with a number of Ministers at the CANTO conference last year. This was a major

achievement since CANTO will now have considerable input on a high level regional governmental committee that has a mandate to make recommendations to Governments on key ICT topics including Net Neutrality, Over the Top players.

Our Vision: speaks to 'CANTO becoming the leading authority in shaping information and communication in the Caribbean'. I think we are well on the way to achieving that vision particularly with CANTO's involvement on this new Caribbean ICT Collaboration Committee.

Our theme for this year is – **Reimagining ICT as a tool for national growth and development**. I want to thank our Marketing Committee for producing such a very creative theme – reimagining. This theme says a lot about our organisation in our efforts to lead and include all stakeholders in our conference.

Reimagining ICT is high on CANTO's agenda and focuses on ICT connectivity. The onus is on us - all the stakeholders to encourage creators, developers and consumers to take advantage of the dynamism of ICT and expand their thought processes to create the possibilities. This dynamism will require a paradigm shift, fostering an environment which stimulates the creativity so necessary for the development of our national and regional markets. This is where we look to our Governments and regulators to create the right regulatory environment to incentivize investment in the Caribbean region.

This ever-changing field of technology has made the world more accessible as information is easily and rapidly exchanged. CANTO is at the vanguard of this movement and will encourage discourse amongst its membership to reimagine ICT in all its different spheres thereby reaping benefits to further promote national growth and development.

#### More focus on disaster preparedness

This is about ensuring the safety of the people that we serve, particularly

when threatened by a disaster. Hence the work of our disaster risk management committee is extremely important if we are to achieve this objective. The recent Hurricane simulation exercise with CDEMA is an example of what we need to focus on. In fact I recently received a very encouraging email from a longstanding participant at our CANTO conference and I quote 'congratulations on the disaster management exercise executed. It is wonderful that the CANTO Secretariat is supporting these types of activities with buy-in from all related organizations and carriers. This is a life-saving initiative' end of quote.

The information gathered for this exercise will assist members and its partners to initiate, implement and respond to disaster and recovery activities in the event of a disaster.

### **The Conference and Exhibition**

With over 500 delegates at the 2016 Conference and Exhibition in Puerto Rico, our status as the number one ICT/Telecoms event in the Caribbean has once again been confirmed. This year our conference will be held from the 16-19<sup>th</sup> July at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic and promises to be as action packed as last year's conference.

### **What we plan to deliver in the future**

I must mention the new strategic direction that is being charted and the three distinct areas of focus being pursued.

The Board is currently engaging external consultants to re-vamp our strategic direction and create a work plan that aims to develop 3 main goals 1) Engage 2) Lead and 3) Advocate.

We want to **Engage** with members' value proposition. Let me use a Facebook analogy here. Many people get caught up in Facebook thinking 'likes' are what's important, so they run after likes, they use all sorts of schemes to increase the number of likes on their pages, but then they

eventually realize that the likes are not converting to business. At that point many say Facebook is a waste of time because they don't realise its **engagement** that matters. The people who stop to share and comment and tell their friends about what's on your page are the ones you want because only engagement has the possibility of getting someone to become a customer. As a result, some may walk away from Facebook saying it doesn't work because they do not understand that difference.

In CANTO, we don't just want to be acknowledged as the best organization for representing this area of the industry, we want to engage with you, discuss with you, even to argue with you at times as we work towards the best solutions for all of us. So engage with us, tell us your concerns and let's work together in addressing them.

Secondly, we want to **Lead** and improve Governance. There is no point in being a regional organization if we do not assume the mantle of leadership. Our industry is in a state of flux at the moment and there is absolutely no indication that this would change anytime soon. It's in these times of upheaval that people need guidance most. It is therefore incumbent on us to get ahead of the trends, understand them ourselves and give the required guidance in this increasingly chaotic time when the rules seem to be ever changing.

And thirdly, we want to **Advocate** and increase CANTO's visibility and influence at all levels in the ICT arena. Other businesses might have customers but we have clients. Don't Lawyers call us clients and not customers? With a customer the transaction often ends the sale, but with a client you have to be there for them – to advocate for them at every opportunity. An advocate is someone who speaks in support or defense of someone else. At CANTO we want to speak on behalf of our members because this eventually translates into speaking for and in defense of consumers. We aim to take common positions of CANTO members and make these positions visible within the Caribbean as we aim to promote industry led regulation.

I would like to **Acknowledge** my Directors who, throughout the past two years, have given their support and commitment. I am truly grateful to you for your efforts in ensuring the Organisation's continued success.

I would like to recognize my Directors:

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|------------------------|--|
| Leon Williams          | - Vice Chair, BTC, Bahamas             |
| Mrs. Helma Etnel       | - Treasurer, Telem, St. Maarten        |
| Ms. Melesia Sutherland | - C&W Antigua                          |
| Ms. Opal Neil          | - Cable and Wireless<br>Communications |
| Mr. Charles Carter     | - TSTT, Trinidad and Tobago            |
| Mrs. Corrine Philip    | - Digicel Turks and Caicos             |
| Mr. Lyrio Gomez        | - UTS, Curacao                         |
| Ms. Rochelle Cameron   | - C&W, Grenada Ltd.                    |

In the face of increasing competition and convergence in an uncertain environment CANTO's overall performance would not have been possible without the commitment, teamwork and dedication of the CANTO Secretariat Management and Staff. Your commitment has been outstanding.

Finally, to all our full and affiliate members and indeed all stakeholders, I express my sincere thanks for your continued support to the CANTO organisation. We will continue to support you in 2017 and well into the future.

The call today is for active ENGAGEMENT, committed LEADERSHIP and fervent ADVOCACY. Let's do this together for the betterment of our Caribbean region.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I thank you all for your support. I wish you all a successful CANTO AGM.

Thank you and God Bless.

Julian Wilkins

CANTO Chairman