

# Branching Out: Growth with Purpose



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**A purpose-led strategy is critical for any company's sustainability and growth, regardless of service, sector or location, and contributes to long-term value for a broad range of stakeholders. Rob Miller, CEO of PRT Growing Services, and Byron Cantrall, CEO of LS Networks, joined Instar's Annual Meeting to discuss best practices, trends and plans for the future.**

## Branching Out: Growth with Purpose

**How are you seeing the conversation around sustainability and growth evolve in your respective sectors, especially as we emerge from the pandemic? Where are the biggest opportunities?**

**Rob Miller:** The conversation around sustainability has really evolved in the last few years. At PRT Growing Services, we've always had a diverse customer base traditionally, but we are seeing a lot of ESG-driven interest with non-governmental organizations and corporate sponsors beginning to emerge as a customer class. The common goal is for many is to establish healthy forests especially as more initiatives are being launched to address the effects of climate change.

For us, sustainability and growth go together since our business plays a key role rehabilitating natural environments. The reforestation supply chain is complex, and adding on to that the geographic spread of our business, we really distill our processes down to what works versus what doesn't. Through our own internally developed systems, we are constantly making improvements to our operations so that we can effectively manage a process from beginning to end to deliver quality results.



**Byron Cantrall:** The digital divide is an issue that is top of mind for many in the telecom sector especially considering the events from the past year where even the most mundane daily interactions shifted online. Sustainability for us is mostly a social issue that translates to achieving equal access to reliable digital infrastructure for all.

Another growing trend we are noticing is the issue of cyber security due to number of high-profile incidents that have recently occurred. Our opportunity comes from our service philosophy at LS Networks, which includes building strong partnerships. We are nimble enough to engage, respond and build partnerships that large corporates aren't flexible enough for – especially with communities that

have grown frustrated with the pace of their local fiber roll-out. It's important to get those communities the digital infrastructure they need so that collectively, we can all succeed.

**Earlier this year, Canada and the United States announced updated targets around greenhouse gas emissions. Canada, plans to reduce its greenhouse emissions by 40 to 45 per cent of 2005 levels by 2030. The United States has announced a reduction target of 50 to 52 per cent of emissions from 2005 levels in 2030. With these ambitious policy goals in mind, what are your companies doing to engage?**

**BC:** In the fiber sector, there are now so many more considerations we need to track and address, including environmental issues. We recently had an interesting conversation with a substantial company as part of a qualification process to determine if we would be engaged to act as their service provider. One of the reasons they were considering LS Networks was because of our primary focus on fiber optics, which produce fewer emissions since we require fewer electronics on our network. From consumer



expectations to the importance of internal corporate culture and approach, we remain engaged and aware of our environmental and community impact since it is playing an increasingly important role in service provider selection.

**RM:** As the largest producer of container-grown forest seedlings in North America helping to meet reforestation needs, sustainability is at the core of our business. Where we see PRT Growing Services making the most impact for climate goals is first and foremost within the supply chain as we are well connected in the supply chain of a diverse nursery network. Additionally, both Canada and the U.S. have committed themselves to aggressive tree planting goals with tricky project implementation components.

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As an industry leader, we can participate in silviculture industry associations to advise governments on how to best develop policies and lay the foundation for success. We are looking to influence policies so that they are efficient and help spur overall industry growth.

## What best practices are emerging around local growth and enrichment?

**RM:** I am sure that Byron will agree with me that staying connected to the communities you operate in is incredibly important. For PRT Growing Services, we have a connection to those who reside and work in our many locations across North America. We seek to support local employment first and on top of that, we also encourage career growth in the company. Jobs are made available internally in the hiring process and our employees are owners in the business which creates good alignment around our overall goals and purpose when employees are champions of the company.



**BC:** I agree wholeheartedly with Rob on the idea that you need to stay connected to the communities you serve. This means everything from giving back to local causes, to planting trees or sponsoring youth sports leagues. We must give back to our communities, which not only secures long-term customers but it's just the responsible, right thing to do.

## How are your companies currently working to support the ESG initiatives and sustainable growth?

**BC:** ESG might be a new term, but it's not new to us at LS Networks. In fact, it's already an important part of who we are. Being in the business of fiber means providing options to communities which allow for increased social and economic opportunities as well as an alternative, greener way of doing business – someone being able to host virtual meetings instead of driving to attend a meeting in-person. We also remain engaged and aware of our own environmental and community impact.

On a local government level, there is an opportunity for LS Networks to advocate and provide resources so policymakers from communities of all sizes can understand the importance of our service. Our networks help retain residents and businesses, closing the digital divide one residence at a time. Internally, our growth plan considers everything from engineering to human resources to best provide opportunities for employees to develop right alongside the business. That's what I think is the most exciting thing about growing a business – enriching lives.

**RM:** PRT Growing Services is founded on ethical business practices, good science as well as open and transparent communications. We have a goal to be a leader in health and safety performance and we constantly monitor to improve our environmental stewardship. As a partner for reforestation initiatives, we play a key role in pulling all the pieces together to ensure success whether we are working towards a decarbonization objective with a non-governmental organization, a corporate sponsor or with governments.

Recently and with help from the Instar team, we established green loan financing to support our growth. As one of the first privately backed companies to join the HSBC Canada green loan program, we are excited to expand our services for customers and communities to meet the demand for seedlings as well as other environmentally sustainable initiatives. With each seedling grown at one of our nurseries, we are building towards a greener, more sustainable future for all. ◇

