

Malcolm H. Ross – Principal, Merlin Consulting Ltd.

Malcolm H. Ross is an independent consultant with **45 years' experience** in critiquing and enhancing strategies to monetise new products, services and enterprises, particularly those enabled by new **mobile communications, high-speed data and media**. Based in Malta, he advises, challenges and coaches C-Level executives and investors across Europe and South-East Asia. Until July 1999 he **was Vice-President in Arthur D. Little's world-wide Electronics, IT and Telecoms Practice**, including terms in Paris, Wiesbaden, San Francisco and Munich offices.



His experience spans every generation of mobile communications, from exploring demand in 1979 for the AMPS and ARTS analogue first generation, through helping both new entrants and incumbents win 2G and 3G operating licenses (20 of 26 bid-books were highest scoring), to winning for operator clients better spectrum packages at lower prices in the 4G, most recently the game-changing 5G auctions as well as exploring the emergence of 6G concepts. He has then helped the winners to design strategies to build the business and to explore and satisfy consumer demand. Traffic has consistently grown faster than Moore's Law, and consumers are extraordinarily receptive to innovative services, as shown by the recent move to remote working with fast adoption of Zoom/Meet/Teams and most recently the Metaverse.

Experience includes:

- **Strategic advisor/challenger to C-Level executives responsible for auction bid teams in both SMRA (simultaneous multiple-round) and CCA (Combinatorial clock) and other auctions for 5G, 4G and 3G spectrum** in Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Kuwait, Netherlands, Portugal, Switzerland, Taiwan, USA and South Africa. All acquired preferred spectrum, **at prices below the client's threshold**. In several cases he demonstrated over-valuations and persuaded clients to withdraw from bids, where the eventual winners clearly then suffered the "winners curse" of over-bidding.
- In these assignments, Malcolm was a **member of the Bid Strategy Team**, the core team that determines the bid to be made in each round. The role is **"Quality Manager", in the sense "to ensure we are doing the right things"**. The elements of this role include:
 - strive to get the appropriate C-Levels engaged at the earliest possible stage (preferably before the Regulator starts planning auction structure, format and rules)
 - prepare advocacy arguments, reports and presentations, supported by expert witnesses
 - ensure the applications to participate in the auction is part of the auction strategy
 - ensure all internal and external communications (not just on auction matters) take the auction strategy into account
 - get the best available internal and external resources committed to the preparations, even to the extent of "over-engineering"; build and keep the team highly motivated for peak-performance during the auction

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- encourage challenging of assumptions, views and analysis so as to reduce the chance of missing important elements in preparations and during the auction
- to keep the bid strategy team calm, focussed and to the process during bidding
- Systematised the bidding process used to prepare the **highest-scoring bid-books on 20 out of 26 applications** for national fixed and mobile operating licenses in the USA, UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Canada, Indonesia and Taiwan, and ensuring their technical, market and business plans were realistic, hence generating **shareholder value exceeding USD 50 billion**.
- **Personal advisor** to the leading executives of the Taiwan Telecom Group, in critiquing their technical, market and business plans as they **built the daughter TCC into the leading national cellular operator** and in setting the build-out and **market entry strategy for TFN** (the new entrant fixed operator), including the **audacious “future-proof” strategy** to provide fibre-based service to every work-place and every urban household nation-wide.
- He performed a similar role in the building of Orange in the UK; KPN Mobile in Netherlands; E-Plus in Germany, Bouygues in France; DiaX (now Sunrise) in Switzerland, Retevision (now ONO) in Spain, Omnitel (now Vodafone) in Italy
- Joint manager of the due-diligence teams for multiple-billion Euro project-financing of E-Plus and of Orange.
- Industry specialist advisor to the team valuing each separate operating unit in preparations for **privatisation of Telebras – at that time, the largest ever telecom privatisation**.
- Steering committee member validating the marketing plans for the **new product launch** team of European mobile operators. Mentor to **targeted-marketing** teams in several mobile operators. Ensured over-optimistic projections for new services demand were scaled back, and contingencies were included, so investments still paid back despite the poor development of demand.
- **Assisted four European telcos to turn round marketing, sales, distribution and customer service cultures to be ready for competition**.
- Mentor to **targeted-marketing** teams in several mobile operators. Ensured over-optimistic projections for broadband data demand and willingness-to-pay were scaled back, and contingencies were included, so investments still paid back despite tariff-wars.

In parallel to this continuing activity in telecoms, Malcolm is leveraging this experience to improve the success rate of new products, services and enterprises. The telecom industry is the oft-overlooked substrate that enables, fuels and stimulates the emergence of the much more heralded Tech Giants. Globally, hundreds of mobile operators were created - both new entrants and inside incumbents. None failed, unlike the mere 0.1% success rate of Silicon Valley. All have become “Unicorns”, collectively generating over \$2T revenue (over 5% GDP.) with EBITDAs of 40%.

From 45 years immersed in this unheralded successful incubator environment, Malcolm takes the lessons learned. He applies to new enterprises over a much broader range of sectors in systemising creation of intrinsically viable and valuable new businesses for both corporates

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and new ventures. Processes includes deep-diving into the psychology of target consumers, brainstorming products/services that delight these consumers, quick-PoC, critique of business plans, market entry strategies, boosting competitive position, acquisition/auctions and transactions/M&A. This experience includes:

- Advisor on VC funding of start-ups in Transaction TV, VoIP, WLAN, business and social network communities.
- Advisor on building capacity to evaluate the market acceptance of new concepts, then proof-of concept (PoC) for T-Labs; Orange Vallée; E-Plus
- Advisor on several transactions in the telecom equipment industry, including due-diligence for acquirers and “dressing the bride” for sellers
- Strategic/industry advisor during transactions including: 1977 on the EG&G acquisition of Reticon; acquisition of Leica Camera AG; the privatisation of Telebras (in 1998, at \$22B, the world’s largest to date); refinancing of Krone Group Berlin; launch of Pacific Iridium; UK IPO of Orange; private placement of iWorld Group; evaluation of Skype for seed financing.
- Scenario-thinking “Knowledge leader” in **stretching senior executives’ perspectives** to create the “future-proof” strategies of: a European incumbent fixed-line operator; a South African mobile operator; the Open University (UK); a leading US bank and a leading international mobile communications vendor.
- One of nearly 100 senior participants in Match-Maker Ventures (<https://www.match-maker.ventures/>), which provides corporate-account-management as a service to new enterprises that have proven successful both product and financially, so are scaling-up their market reach. MMV screens suitable start-ups and prepares them and their much bigger corporate clients so that they can form effective partnerships
- Senior advisor to Viva Investment Partners which is pioneering in Europe the Ecosystem Economics approach to VC investments in digitally-enabled sectors, and to FollowTheEntrepreneur (<https://globalftenetwork.com/>)
- Advisor to Fvtura, creating a community and eco-system for incubating new enterprises, each aimed at addressing at least one of the UN’s 16 Sustainability Goals
- Advisor to a new digital exchange, specialised in Blockchain tokens issued to support sustainability ventures
- Advisor to the foundation of a new proof-of-stake Blockchain token, establishing strong community-regulated using innovative on-chain Governance

On a scholarship and from a council estate amongst more privileged, Malcolm gained A levels in Physics and double-Maths at Haberdashers Aske’s School in Elstree. Weekends he cycled 45 minutes caddying at a golf club, speculating his earnings successfully on Australian gold-mining shares and unsuccessfully on British engineering companies. Malcolm passed a gap 9 months in the Neutron Division of Elliott Automation. With late-night access to a floor full of Elliot 4100s (world’s first transistorised computer – with the computing power of a today dish-washer) he learned Algol, Fortran and machine code. His assignment was to model a radiation-shield for a cancer-therapy application of the neutron tubes.

A Physics graduate from Manchester University, Malcolm joined Arthur. D. Little’s R&D facility Cambridge Consultants Limited in The UK in 1972, working on innovations including ink-jet

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technology which became the spin-off Domino Printing Systems, underwater warfare search-algorithms, telecom market and technology feasibility studies for the European Space Agency. In 1977 he became a founder member of the Arthur D. Little's Telecommunications practice in the Paris office. From 1982 he was based in Arthur D. Little's German operation, before moving to the San Francisco office in 1988. He returned to Arthur D. Little's Munich office in January 1991. Since December 1996 he is an independent advisor, based in Malta.

His workshops help top executives of leading operators, vendors and financiers/investors to develop unexpected perspectives on the telecom industry and so create additional options for addressing the challenges they face. This applies a set of systematic moderating, creativity and logic tools and processes that “work like magic”, often leading to “out-of-the-box” elements to strategic planning and business development that are good business, while surprising, elegant and fun. These skills have been proven in building, motivating, conflict-resolution and in coaching critical-mission mixed internal/external project teams to top performance.

Another vital component of this has been helping telecom industry executives to create strategies that are robust even in deeply uncertain futures, applying since 1993 the scenario-planning methodology developed by Shell during the first oil crisis that boosted them from 8th to 2nd ranking oil company. Rather than trying to predict the future, we develop a set of very different, challenging but plausible possible futures and develop a strategy that is robust in all futures.

Malcolm was a co-founder of the e-mobile business incubator iWORLD Group founded in 2000.

Learning from the demise of iWG, Malcolm has evolved the SmarterStart process. This is a systematic process for creating new businesses that is low risk and low capital to prove. Our goal is to turn starting new enterprises into a safe career choice: 8 out 10 will succeed. This is many times the success rate of conventional VCs – less than 1% of seed-funded start-ups survive; less than 10% of VC-funded start-ups give investors a fair return. SmarterStart's goal is for its start-ups to self-funding without needing any substantial start-up capital until reaching the scale-up phase, when the goal is to grow to more than €100M NPV within 5 years.

SmarterStart matches a compelling innovative concept to a driving market need and ensures it develops into an investment-grade business plan. Malcolm is coach and sparring partner for entrepreneurs and in some cases co-founder of eight start-up companies “beta-testing” this process.

The early experience with launching some small niche new enterprises is encouraging us that our aim is achievable. We are now preparing to move forward with the next phase of commercialising the SmarterStart process.

Weltklassik.de is one of the early examples. It is a profitable operator of dozens of classical piano concerts each month. This is launching the careers of next-generation star performers. It is delighting patrons to an extraordinary degree - several have bequeathed substantial sums (and a concert grand piano) to the company. It is unprecedented for customers to spontaneously and unsolicited leave money in their wills to a profit-making corporation, not a foundation of not-for-profit! It demonstrates the power of the SmarterStart process to identify the deep psychological needs of the targeted customer, and to build a business model that not just satisfies these needs, but delights the customer.

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Malcolm, age 71, born in London is fluent in English, German and French, and has learnt and forgotten Italian several times. He regularly advised and was session chairman for the annual World Congress, for the annual Financial Times Mobile Conference in London and for TEN.

He has published both business and humorous articles, is seriously addicted to adventurous travel experiences and confesses to a passionate addiction to the world's finest chocolate. He is a PADI Master Dive Instructor, and almost-professional underwater photographer, with over 6,000 dives. Malcolm is a certified Neuro-Linguistic-Programming (NLP) trainer, as well as a Freeman of the Goldsmith's Company and a Freeman of the City of London.