

Staying Ahead of Telecommunications Compliance

Lisa Singh -
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As chief regulatory counsel of the Americas for BT Global Services, Sheba Chacko closely watches regulations that could have far-reaching implications for the international division of British Telecommunications. She shares her insights on how she helps the world's oldest communications company stay competitive against a backdrop that often feels like "ever-increasing barriers."

What new regulations in the Americas are you watching most closely?

The regulations that are relevant to BT as a provider of information and communications technology services to global companies are those that affect the deployment and security of communications infrastructure and services, and the use, location, storage, handling, retention, and disclosure of customers' communications.

I pay particular attention to regulations that impact cost, design, architecture, location, and security of network infrastructure because these could impinge on BT's ability to innovate with respect to the networking, cloud, and security services it provides to its multinational customers.

Data localization is one example of newish regulations that could affect deployment of services. Some countries have laws requiring users' personal data be stored in-country. This affects the costs and architecture of communications services platforms that can be deployed compliantly. That's because a service provider would not be allowed to store all users' data in one single location outside countries having data localization rules and would have to incur costs and add complexity to systems and processes to ensure local users' data are stored locally.

Likewise, new foreign investment rules are being considered in a number of countries that impact communications infrastructure and services that could add to costs of deployment and affect the architecture of service platforms.

What resources help you stay informed of such communications regulations?

Leverage resources within your own organization. There are likely many other talented people working within your organization. Use social media, collaboration tools, office chats, or a plain old telephone call to catch up, ask questions, and flow useful information to others.

Ensure stakeholders understand the trends you are interested in. Do the same with external resources, be they law firms, trade associations, think tanks, government contacts, or professional colleagues. Take the time to have conversations, build trust, and be generous in sharing information and insights while making them aware of your interests.

In addition, set up news alerts on the internet and in trade databases. Also read trade papers and attend webinars and briefings.

Regulators such as the Federal Communications Commission in the United States and Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission have excellent websites that contain all relevant decisions and policy announcements.

Trade associations like INCOMPAS [the internet and competitive networks association] and the Computer and Communications Industry Association in the United States, TelComp in Brazil, and CABASE in Argentina can help service providers stay abreast of important developments. They also play an important role in bringing concerns of members to the attention of governments and policymakers.

What best practices have you implemented to help BT in the Americas stay ahead of industry developments — and what are you most excited about tackling next?

We encourage use of social media and collaboration tools to disseminate information and learning, and offer opportunities for team members to expand and diversify their areas of expertise via online courses, webinars, and/or speaking engagements, so they can develop subject matter areas of expertise. We also encourage them to share learnings via presentations and knowledge calls.

Looking ahead, I am paying particular attention to national security and trade to determine how these areas may impact telecommunications operations in the Americas.

I am excited about helping BT provide simple solutions to customers against a backdrop of what feels like ever-increasing barriers to the provision of services.