

West Midlands Growth Company commercial partner event:
Engaging with your customers through innovation in digital tech

Business leaders from across the West Midlands came together to discuss the impact of digitalisation at the West Midlands Growth Company's January partner event.

A key focus for the event concerned the deployment of 5G technology – and how it will make the West Midlands make its mark nationally and globally as a centre for tech innovation. The event opened with Dave Maclean, Chair of the West Midlands Combined Authority Digital Board, outlining what it means for the region to become the home of the UK's first multi-city 5G testbed.

Maclean commented:

“By building the 5G strand into the West Midlands, we hope it will create leverage and a programme that will have a genuine impact of global scale. The region has the natural strengths, coupled with a targeted market orchestration strategy, which we believe will bring a critical mass that actually counts at the global level.”

Maclean concluded:

“Our networks will be able to cope better with many high-demand applications all at once – from connected cars and Internet of Things devices, to virtual reality experiences and simultaneous HD video streaming. The impact on both the city's established and emerging sectors will therefore be significant”.

A panel discussion followed comprising Maclean, Charlotte Walker-Osborn, Partner and International Head of Technology Sector at Eversheds; Kathryn Malloch, Group Head of Customer Experience at Hammerson; and Pardeep Heer, Business Director at MediaCom.

The West Midlands' ability to innovate was a key area of focus among the experts, who highlighted how the region has topped the list as the UK's most entrepreneurial area outside London for five consecutive years. The panel explained that with the region becoming [the UK's first 5G technology testbed](#), this growth is set to continue, with businesses already eyeing new opportunities for expansion and new product creation.

Malloch commented:

“Digitalisation needs to be embraced, and the retail sector has been very good at doing this. With retail increasingly moving into the online realm, it's important for us to consider how we can drive people into physical locations by creating personalised, unique experiences – data is key to this. And 5G will enhance this leisure experience, helping us to personalise the retail service.”

Heer added:

“The connectivity of devices and information sharing between them, will be increasingly important moving forward. Improvement in the alignment of data is already transforming the media landscape – once dominated by broadcast, we now have to consider platforms like Amazon and Netflix for serving customers. For MediaCom, the deployment of 5G, will help make the advertising process more seamless and personalised.”

The panel raised that with the many advantages that comes with an enhanced digital realm, comes the issue of cyber security.

Maclean commented:

“The online realm and social media can sometimes expose the existing problems in society, but we can't have knee jerk reactions to tackling these issues. It will take time. There needs to be a mature way, as a free democracy, to address this and change it in a realistic way. GDPR is a very good thing in helping us achieve this, as there will be increasing amounts of legislation moving forward and

companies will need to consider platform content liability – currently, internet platforms are not legally liable for their content.”

Walker-Osborn added:

“The importance of cyber security is often forgot about, when really it needs to be brought up first thing on a contract. Experience has shown me that laws around privacy are very difficult for companies to navigate around. My advice would be, we have to be careful about what suppliers we use – and suppliers have to also take caution.”

The panel concluded by discussing how 5G – a network 100 times faster than 4G – could actually benefit local businesses and how they could get involved.

Maclean concluded:

“There’s a huge role for local innovators and companies, and agile SMEs. There’s a great opportunity to help local companies compete and develop their services in this new ecosystem – and central government is very committed to supporting. With 5G consumer technology launching in the middle of 2019, the West Midlands is a strategic location for mobile operators. Everybody should be thinking about the opportunities it unlocks for customers and local businesses.”

To learn more about the benefits of the West Midlands multi-city 5G testbed, [click here](#).