

Connecting northern Britain's media powerhouse

The Customer

If Manchester truly is Britain's much-vaunted northern powerhouse - and most would agree that it is - then its engine room must be the Sharp Project and the Space Project, two innovative city council owned enterprise centres born out of empty industrial sites in formerly run down areas ripe for regeneration. Home to digital/creative businesses and purpose built TV production stages respectively, they have brought much needed new jobs and prosperity to the city and stimulated a lot of new business, the Sharp Project alone adding more than £21M to the regional economy in just 18 months.

“The Loop team got exactly what we are about the first time we met them and they've been great ever since. It's very much a one to one relationship and not an anonymous corporate approach. We don't have to go through layers of management to get things done and the customer service and speed of response are fantastic. They also share our vision for making Manchester one of the world's top digital cities. The Loop really is Manchester's hidden gem.”

Sue Woodward, OBE and founder,
The Sharp Project and The Space Project

Both centres are spearheaded by businesswoman Sue Woodward OBE, previously a Granada TV managing director and now seen as creative and digital champion of the North West. It is testament to the success of the Sharp and Space projects that they will soon be joined by a third scheme. Where once stood one of the region's emblematic cotton mills will be Outer Space, a new site adding another 140,000 square feet of production area to the existing 360,000 square feet of the adjacent Space project. And it can't come soon enough.



The Sharp Project Photo - Amy Marshall / PRP

Having already hosted the making of primetime shows like Cradle to Grave, Mount Pleasant, No Offence and Houdini and Doyle, the Space Project is also the new home of BBC's Dragons' Den. A decision no doubt helped by the BBC's northward move to the burgeoning Media City at Manchester's Salford Quays.

The challenge

The Sharp Project, like the Space Project that followed, needed three things before it could open for business: square footage to accommodate tenants, electricity to power computers and machinery, and high speed connectivity to link to the outside world. The first two were a given, the legacy of an industrial past. Connectivity though was a different matter. What was already there was little more than phone lines. To attract digital and creative businesses meant offering something orders of magnitude better. And right there was the problem: nearing launch, connectivity was proving a tough challenge. The city's incumbent providers wanted too much to connect the facility onto the information super-highway.

Dark Fibre Case Study

The Sharp Project • The Space Project



The Space Project Photo: Any Marshall / PRP

Weighing up available options, Woodward and her colleagues at the Sharp Project even considered laying their own fibre to get the building online, such was the importance and urgency. And then suddenly the stars aligned. At exactly that moment Gamma Communications plc - parent company of The Loop – came calling. Years earlier it had acquired the network assets of the former Atlantic Telecom, including many miles of fibre network under the roads and streets of Manchester. Even better, it passed directly by the Sharp Project in the city's Newton Heath district.

The solution

With The Loop running just metres from the front door we were able to very quickly connect The Sharp project into our high speed fibre network, giving the building and its growing number of tenants resilient access to the Internet at speeds of up to 800Mbps, with more available if required in the future. And better meeting the needs of the digital businesses at the the Sharp Project, The Loop is a symmetric service – 800Mbps download and upload – allowing users to very quickly exchange bandwidth hungry media files and broadcast content. At the same time it helped establish the Sharp Project on the Manchester and European creative scene.

Having more than proven ourselves at the Sharp Project, we were the provider of choice when the time came to connect The Space project at Gorton. Here a 200Mbps symmetric service was provided for the five production stage complexes together with a supporting cast of service companies including lighting, rigging,

costumes, wigs and props. With all five stages in almost continuous production there was a clear need for yet more space and this is now being added at the adjacent Outer Space. This too will be served by The Loop via another direct connection to its fibre network. Adding some £9.4M to the regional economy already, the Space Project aims to grow this still further - supported by fibre networking - as it works to support Manchester's growing film, TV and drama capabilities.

The benefits

- Much lower cost than other options
- True no-compromise, symmetric service for best performance
- No fighting for bandwidth – more than enough for everyone
- The Loop 'understands' clearly the Sharp and Space project's requirements
- Easy to work with – a one-to-one relationship
- First class customer service and responsiveness
- Shares the vision for making Manchester a world digital city

Interested? To find out more information on The Loop,

call 0333 004 4222



Manchester's Metropolitan Fibre Network

www.theloopmanchester.co.uk