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## AscendTek's Local Authority & National Strength to Capitalize on 5G's Future



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"The second half of this year is going to be wide open with opportunities. Materials are going to be flowing, the wrinkles in the supply chain are being worked out. We have the really exciting challenge of continuing our growth to meet market needs and opportunities, we are all looking forward to exceeding expectations and having a ball building a world class company." Rick Ploeckelmann

**CEOCFO:** *Mr. Ploeckelmann, one of the first things on the AscendTek site is "Building tomorrow today." How are you doing that at AscendTek?*

**Mr. Ploeckelmann:** Our philosophy is to embrace the opportunity that has been made available through the roll out of 5G technology. Our culture has become addicted to mobile technology, cell phones have enabled us to cannibalize 100 or more devices into a singular portable device to stay connected with our family, friends, and work 24 hours a day anywhere we go. 5G becoming a reality in the coming years has presented an opportunity for companies that build, upgrade and maintain cell towers in the United States to deliver a tremendous amount of value to the process of how these networks are built, and how they will continuously be upgraded as technology continuously rolls out to empower the transformative impact 5G will have on our lives and economy.

This industry is serviced by over 450 contractors in the US, largely made up of small businesses that have been borne from people that are really great at building great projects, and the nature of business today has made it really difficult for independent operators to sustainably run their companies because of the administrative burden that has been inherently in place. AscendTek is empowering our local operations to focus in on what really matters and creates value to our customers by focusing on delivering excellent projects and building client relationships. Centralizing the administrative requirements of the business and looking after those critical business functions outside of operations that can distract local operational excellence when it comes to construction and project delivery.

**CEO CFO: *Did you realize that early on? When did you recognize this was the right strategy that made the most sense for you and your clients?***

**Mr. Ploeckelmann:** About three years ago, through a number of management meetings with strong regional players, it became clear to us that there was a great opportunity to build an organization that empowered really strong regional players with an environment where they could collaborate with their peers, gain access to best practices while still affording them the local authority to execute the work in their local markets. The local authority is key, that is where the business gets done, where the decisions need to be made, where the projects get built, where the relationships are held, and where the local expertise and man-power resides. Local authority with national strength.

This philosophy of local authority and national strength has proven to be a really strong model. Fostering our environment of really great experienced peers to take the best of what every one of our operations does, has done and has learned over the history of their organization and implementing that into all of our operations has generated significant benefits; both for our team and our customers.

**CEO CFO: *Did it take a while for people to understand, embrace the concept and believe you really meant it, not just paying lip service to local authorities?***

**Mr. Ploeckelmann:** That conversation comes up every time an organization joins AscendTek and there is always a bit of apprehension and it is a wait and see. Our cultural review is so important prior to making a selection in who is going to be the next organization to be welcomed to the family, to ensure that the mindset, expectations and motivations are all in alignment so that we are all expecting and motivated to move in the same direction and we are all trying to get to the same end goal and target. That is to really build something that is truly special.

We are all builders at heart and recognize that we are all stronger together than we ever could be independently, it is our responsibility to prove to each one of our partners that joins the AscendTek that they really do have the local authority and someone else is not going to come in and start running their organization and change how their business is fundamentally being run. It does take some time and change is difficult for everybody. We really work hard to mitigate and manage what change is being felt at the operational level to make it a smoothest and easiest process as possible to join the AscendTek family.

**CEO CFO: *What is involved in tower construction, maintenance and the services you perform?***

**Mr. Ploeckelmann:** Our business is entirely centered around our people. We do not have a product in the conventional sense. We do not manufacture something you can go to a store and buy off a shelf or purchase from a catalogue or a website. Our deliverable is what our people produce. Our people are our deliverable. They go out to our customers' jobs sites and make something beautiful and functional that empowers our population to stay connected. It is a dangerous business. By and large, what we do requires a tremendous respect and attention

to safety. Whether we are working on the ground and clearing the field to dig a hole and set a foundation to erect a tower in a location when one has never existed before, and following that up with the installation of all the technology up top of that tower with the antennas, radios and the cabling required to power and transmit the services that power our telephones and computers that work at heights as inherently dangerous.

There is a tremendous amount of training and ongoing certifications required to ensure that all of our team members are not only trained and certified but have a deep respect that is woven into the fabric of the organization. It only takes a brief second for something very dangerous to happen from an accident standpoint, a great deal of respect and attention is paid to working safely while still delivering a very high-quality product to our client.

**CEOCFO: *Is it difficult to get people, let alone qualified people, for the work that you do at AscendTek?***

**Mr. Ploeckelmann:** I think everyone in our business would agree that finding good people is the most significant challenge in our industry. There is not a lot of visibility for careers in our industry. I think we can do a better job of making it known that there is a great career here available to men and women that are interested in working with their hands, working outdoors and all that is needed to succeed in this industry is an open mind, some attention to detail and a keen eye and awareness to safety.

Your employer will train you to be successful and there is a very good living to be made in wireless communication and construction. There is certainly a lot of work to be done and the market is rapidly moving to a point where there is going to be more demand for work to be completed than there are resources to get it done.

**CEOCFO: *What has changed in terms of safety?***

**Mr. Ploeckelmann:** Safety is always in a process in continuous improvement. I think one of the most powerful things about safety is communication. Identifying what potential hazards are and reviewing what has resulted in a negative event has become standard practice for everyone in construction. After action reviews are completed to understand what the root cause of that situation and incident were, digging into if it was human error, an equipment failure, or some other driver. Identifying the the cause of a particular incident is critical. As a result, there are continuously new products and procedures that are being brought to market and communicated to the participants in the marketplace so that we can continuously improve how we are outfitting and training our team to make our workplace safer than it was the day before. Safety is definitely not a static challenge and it never should be.

It is not just the business that should be striving for continuous improvement. Safety can always improve. It is not just the incidents that need to be reviewed, it is also the near misses, because every opportunity to learn is something that needs to be embraced and understood so that we can avoid as many of those missteps as possible on a go forward basis.

**CEOCFO: *What is your geographic range today and how do you bring people into the fold?***

**Mr. Ploeckelmann:** Our geographic reach is nearly full coverage east of the Mississippi River. We have significant coverage on the West Coast as well in the state of Washington, Arizona, and Hawaii. We recognize that there is great value to the market in continuing to expand our reach, we intend to do so both through organic growth and acquisition.

With regard to how to onboard or how to be considered for positions within AscendTek, depending on a candidate's appetite for travel, more than likely we can find a position for a motivated candidate within our organization regardless of their experience level whether they have had five or ten years of experience working on a tower, working as an electrician or as a civil tech, or if they have never worked in the tower industry before but they know that it is something they are motivated to do, we would definitely like to talk to them.

**CEOCFO: *Would you give me an example of something that one crew member or one team learns somewhere that you were able to pass along?***

**Mr. Ploeckelmann:** It's a continuous process to share best practices, not just among each of our crews but also throughout the organization. Right after SRU joined AscendTek and during your first phone call to me, I was learning from the SRU team who was in the process of shipping three fully build out sector frames to a project site. One of their employees who is no longer able to climb but is tremendously skilled and experienced, now works in the warehouse and builds out entire sectors for field crews to be shipped and delivered by a tractor trailer to the job site.

The crane lifts those sectors in place and the crew is now more efficiently able to install that technology on the top side of the tower. This process removed two full days of working out in the elements and transitions that work into a controlled environment. That is a best practice that has already been communicated throughout the entire organization. Our company leaderships will be meeting at SRU's shop in early June to learn exactly how they set up and manage that because it is a significant improvement in overall quality as well so that we can all benefit from that particular work method to improve our quality and deliverable to the market.

**CEOCFO: *What has been the effect of COVID for you?***

**Mr. Ploeckelmann:** COVID has been a significant challenge for our organization and industry. We've had the good fortune to be categorized as essential from the minute COVID started. Our objective through COVID has been to keep our team intact to the best of our ability.

There has been a lot of challenges with supply chain. Materials access has been a challenge, the downstream impact of manufacturing environments being shut down intermittently for periods of time. There have been significant challenges associated with permitting in various geographies and municipalities because people just not been working in those environments. I think it has forced everybody to take a holistic look at how we are going to operate and how we can better collaborate

to be successful in the context of these challenges that none of us have ever been through before.

It really pulled our team together to work very closely and ensure that if there was an opportunity to help each other, whether it be through sharing resources, sharing relationships, making introductions or just solving a problem, it really drew our leadership team very closely together and motivated us and helped us become ever stronger together in the context of some very challenging times. I feel very fortunate to have the team that we do that works so hard for all of our employees and team members. Our objective to this entire environment was to keep our team intact knowing that eventually we would get on the other side of this and that the industry would need us.

**CEOCFO: *What is next for AscendTek?***

**Mr. Ploeckelmann:** We are really pleased with the progress that we have made, what's most exciting is what's to come. 5G is still in what I would call spring training. There is so long to go in the journey to deliver 5G to the United States and we are really excited about our ability to make a meaningful contribution to deployment of the network. There is a lot of opportunity for organic growth and for welcoming new operations to the AscendTek family.

The second half of this year is going to be wide open with opportunities. Materials are going to be flowing, the wrinkles in the supply chain are being worked out. We have the really exciting challenge of continuing our growth to meet market needs and opportunities, we are all looking forward to exceeding expectations and having a ball building a world class company.

