

## Signal in the sky: Tower 42 gets itself connected

Are tall-building developers missing a trick when it comes to 4G mobile connectivity? Allister Hayman reports

The UK may have notoriously patchy mobile coverage - at least in comparison with other advanced economies - but you wouldn't expect that to be the case in the beating heart of the nation's financial district.

However, those working in or visiting many of the tall buildings in the City of London and Canary Wharf are increasingly finding that 4G reception is weak or non-existent - and gets worse the higher up the buildings you go.

To address this issue, the owners of Tower 42, the City's original skyscraper, have just installed 4G connectivity throughout the tower. Kirsh Group, which bought the 183-metre-tall tower in 2012, says the building is now the tallest in the UK to boast full 4G coverage.

Speaking to *Property Week*, Philip Lewis, head of real estate at Kirsh Group, says that despite fast-advancing technology in all other business areas, the basic requirement of decent mobile phone and data signals seems to have been forgotten in the development of London's skyscrapers, which could put the capital's competitiveness as a global business location at risk.

"Data is what everyone wants," says Lewis. "We don't go anywhere without our phones, and to come up in a building like this in the centre of the City and find you can't use your phone - or visitors are grappling for a wifi code - just seemed to be absolutely ridiculous."

### Connectivity crucial

Lewis says the new technology, which was retrofitted into the building in partnership with Vodafone, was vital to keep tenants satisfied. The service now provides 2G, 3G and 4G coverage across every floor of the tower - which is the eighth tallest in the UK - serving around 50 companies across its 324,000 sq ft of offices, including 2,500 workers as well as the 1,200 daily customers and visitors.

"It was absolutely crucial that people had proper phone and data signals throughout the tower, which don't exist in many other tall buildings," Lewis says.

**It was absolutely crucial people had proper phone and data signals in the tower**

Philip Lewis,  
Kirsh Group



The tower with the power: Tower 42 is the tallest building in the UK with 4G connectivity

"What any landlord is trying to do is keep tenants happy. Happy tenants pay the rent and pay the service charge and renew their leases, and one of the biggest factors in keeping tenants happy these days, other than cycle facilities, is data connection.

"We are now the tallest building in the UK with 4G. But what's most important is that even though the building has been here since 1981, it has leading-edge technology; it is a 'smart' building, and has everything tenants want."

Retrofitting the technology was not an easy task and required 2,000 metres of cabling. Fortunately, the original design of Tower 42 gave it an "extraordinary" gross-to-net ratio, meaning there was plenty of space for Vodafone to install the necessary kit, says Lewis. "But in many of the new buildings coming forward, people are not necessarily planning to do this, and retrofitting the

technology might be tricky," he adds.

Vodafone UK's head of network Kye Prigg says other skyscrapers are fitted with 2G or 3G coverage - the previous slower-speed generations of mobile internet - but few are currently being designed to feature 4G.

"With many of London's skyscrapers now towering above our mobile network, our engineers have to head for the heights in order to provide customers with a strong 4G signal," he adds. "Increasingly, we are providing bespoke 4G systems to achieve this, as well as working out new ways to overcome modern designs, such as reflective glass, which can divert radio waves."

The steel-and-glass towers rising in London may be the height of modern engineering, but it seems many developers are still missing a trick when it comes to ensuring occupants are able to enjoy fast connections on their mobile phones. When research shows the average UK person checks their mobile at least 50 times a day, that is clearly a problem. ■