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The acquisition gives GCI a cloud platform that supports UC, Skype for Business and other Microsoft apps, and the deal strengthens existing relationships with Vodafone, Microsoft and Virgin Media. GCI's CEO Adrian Thirkill (pictured) stated: "Outsourcing has great underlying characteristics, talented people, a strong Skype for Business capability, an impressive customer base, well engineered platforms and lots of potential. GCI sees this as a nice fit." **Cont' on page 8**

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This month's movers and shakers



GCI takes hold of failed Outsourcery

BUSINESS Growth Fund (BGF)-backed GCI has acquired various assets from failed AIM-listed Outsourcery in a pre-pack administration process.

SPECIAL REPORT

Outsourcery was co-founded by former Dragon's Den star Piers Linney who floated his tech firm on AIM in May 2013 with a market capitalisation of £34.6m, but the company's market value slumped and last month Outsourcery suspended trading on AIM and appointed EY as administrators.

Joint Administrator and Restructuring Partner at EY, Sam Woodward, said: "Outsourcery had invested significantly in its

IT infrastructure and cost base in anticipation of strong revenue growth from its O-Cloud platform. In practice, growth was below expectations resulting in trading losses and cash flow pressure. The sale preserves approximately 100 jobs and provides continuity of service for its customers."

Philip Carse, industry analyst at Megabyte.com, said: "This could be an astute strategic move for GCI, gaining an asset and customers for a fraction of Outsourcery's investment."

The acquisition gives GCI a cloud platform that supports UC, Skype for Business and other Microsoft apps, and the deal strengthens existing relationships with Vodafone, Microsoft and Virgin Media.

GCI's CEO Adrian Thirkill (pictured) stated: "Outsourcery has great underlying characteristics, talented people, a strong Skype for Business capability, an impressive customer base, well engineered platforms and lots of potential. GCI sees this as a nice fit." **Cont' on page 8**

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

CLOUD trailblazer Outsourcery crashed and burned last month. Even as it nosedived into a terminal tailspin the company was pumping out well-spun press releases and forging new channel partnerships. It was business as usual, and few shareholders had an inkling about how badly their fingers would be burnt.

Some people didn't see Outsourcery's demise

coming while others continue to question why it took so long for the inevitable to happen. Profit was no friend to Outsourcery but the company nonetheless enjoyed a loyal band of supporters. How can this be? It's simple – they put their trust in hype and hot air. If nothing else, this episode proves the power of all types of media and the gullibility of those susceptible to its potentially distorting influence.

Outsourcery's leaders have come in for some stick. But flawed strategy, clouded judgement and questionable leadership aside, we must credit the role Outsourcery played in helping to raise awareness about the cloud and its market potential. Driven by opportunism, Outsourcery paved the way for others to follow with more certain footsteps. This pioneer conducted a strategic experiment that involved betting the farm on outcomes that were not guaranteed and largely unpredictable. It was an experiment that attracted investors right up to the end. Some investors shared the risk because they shared the vision, others simply believed the hype.

So while we hold Outsourcery to account for its strategic failings, we can also doff our cap to a venture that caught the imagination of so many for so long, and helped to put an early spotlight on cloud communications. Ultimately, Outsourcery's acquisition is a positive ending to strategic folly. Its full potential will no doubt be realised under GCI's wing. See page 26 for analysis and comment.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Excell Group scores £60m-plus contract

AMBITIOUS Excell Group has snaffled up an eight year IT managed services deal worth over £60m.

The new contract with Workspace Group builds on an existing relationship and has the potential to yield significantly more revenue as Workspace expands its portfolio.

Workspace owns and manages circa 70 properties across the capital and is home to around 4,000 fledgling and growing businesses including a number of companies that feature in Bloomberg's Business Innovator List 2016.

The partnership with Excell Group offers these businesses access to secure high speed networks as well as managed connectivity, cloud and communication services.

Excell Group and Workspace will continue to invest in upgrades to connectivity in Workspace properties, including the installation of what is said to be one of the UK's first 10Gb fibre connections and 1.3Gbs community Wi-Fi into a commercial multi-let building.

The building-wide Wi-Fi network is designed from the ground up to avoid wireless signal interference, and a security



Darren Strowger

management system ensures the resilience of the network and aligns with each customer's internal network security.

"Speed, flexibility and secure connectivity are top of Workspace's agenda as its customers look for smart ways to connect people, processes and data," commented Excell Group Chairman Darren Strowger.

The partnership provides bespoke packages backed-up by tech support from the outset and offers customers flexible contracts that match the break clause in their Workspace lease, which gives them the freedom to develop and grow.

Workspace Group Operations Director Chris Pieroni commented: "The provision of business-class connected services is fundamental to our base of new and growing companies.

"They see high specification connectivity as a basic requirement in their office space, and are looking for location, location, technology."

Strowger said: "Workspace is at the vanguard of changing working practices across London. With approximately 4,000 businesses already on board, Workspace needs to provide an agile service that its customers can rely on."

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COMMENT: WORLD GOES VIRTUAL



Richard Carter

TODAY'S technology continues to move at a rapid rate with Virtual Reality now tipped to be the next big thing. Not so long ago wearables were being hailed as the latest must-have gadgets but momentum has taken a while to build as much of it is technology awaiting an application.

Certainly, VR is here to stay. Having recently sampled it for the first time I was impressed. Sure, there's a few rough edges

to be ironed out but the overall experience was believable and quite an eye opener. Devices that encompass standard mobile phones can be picked up relatively cheaply for less than £20, while at the other end of the spectrum top end units are over £600.

You really do feel you are in another world, whether game playing, viewing a video, photos or taking a trip down any street in the world. Putting on a pair of goggles can hardly be described as cool but they really can transport you to mesmerising places and the applications seem almost limitless.

So what will the impact be on the comms arena? At this stage it's difficult to say but the potential is huge, not just in the consumer world but for businesses too. We already have Virtual Private Networks VPN, virtual desktops and virtual offices – more virtual environments are destined to follow.

Games are where much of the emphasis currently lies but some observers believe VR will have a bigger impact in other areas, revolutionising the education sector for example. Having watched a big screen movie in a virtual cinema it's clear that as the technology and devices continue to develop, its impact is 'virtually' guaranteed.

Richard Carter, Group Sales and Business Development Director, Nimans

Southern on target for big shot status

SOUTHERN Communications has secured new investment from PE firm Livingbridge (which has taken a minority stake in the company) along with a £36m loan facility from Santander and HSBC in support of its expansion strategy.

The Basingstoke-based company has boosted revenues from £10m to £32m in five years driven by organic growth and acquisitions and plans to double revenues within 3-5 years now it has the acquisition fire power to match its ambitions.

In related news, industry big gun David Goldie has joined the board as Group Chairman. The appointment reunites Goldie with Southern's Commercial Director Mat Kirk. They worked together previously at Carphone Warehouse/TalkTalk where Goldie was CEO. They acquired 40-plus businesses over a five year period.

Southern CEO Paul Bradford commented: "With the investment from Livingbridge and the appointment of David we have secured the perfect team to drive our growth."

So far Southern Communications has made eight acquisitions and has recurring revenues of more than 90%.



Paul Bradford



David Goldie

Matthew Caffrey, a Director at Livingbridge, said: "Southern Communications has a strong and consistent track record of both organic and acquisitive growth, and a well positioned product portfolio to service the

IT and telecommunications needs of SMEs."

Southern Communications has 6,600 business customers and a workforce of 160-plus employees operating from four locations in the UK.

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Brexit vote hits new IT investment

THE industry can expect a short to medium-term impact on enterprise IT investment following last month's Brexit vote, but the regulatory impact will be minimal, according to Ovum.

"Senior executives will want to prepare their core systems for any implications of revised trading and legislative agreements, and may postpone investment in non-mandatory IT projects like digital transformation until the needs of the business-as-usual environment become clearer," commented Tim Jennings, Chief

Research Officer, Enterprise IT Management, Ovum.

"Conversations with enterprise IT leaders suggest that few have planned or prepared for the changes that might be required as a consequence of Brexit.

"This is understandable given the unprecedented situation in which the UK now finds itself, but is likely to increase the level of caution that is applied to ongoing investments in business improvement and more speculative innovation projects, and may also play out against a

potential downturn in the macro economic environment.

"This IT budget uncertainty will persist for at least the two year EU withdrawal process, but beyond that time frame the level of uncertainty will be dependent on the clarity of the UK's future trading arrangements with Europe and other global partners."

Brexit will have a minimal impact on the UK's regulatory environment, according to Luca Schiavoni, Senior Analyst for Regulation at Ovum.

"It is highly likely that the UK will continue to be part of the European Economic Area (EEA), and the European approach to regulation borrows a great deal from the UK's experience of privatisation and market liberalisation," he said.

"It is unlikely that the UK will adopt a radically different regulatory approach, which will still be characterised by regular market reviews."

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SHORT CALL

Denwa went into celebration mode when it won the Best Employer of the Year gong at last month's Lancashire Business Awards, one week after picking up a Highly Commended rating in the Pendle Business Awards for the Most Outstanding Small Business of the Year category. CEO Rob Scott said: "Our people are our greatest asset, so we look after them and reward staff for their dedication."

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Pulsant picks up Onyx and hires top exec



Neil Stephenson (left) with Mark Howling

IT INFRASTRUCTURE services provider Onyx, which is backed by mid-market private equity firm Livingbridge, has been pocketed by Pulsant.

The acquisition bolsters Pulsant's capabilities as a provider of hybrid IT services, most notably in applications management, remote and on-site managed services, workplace recovery and security.

Onyx has five data centres in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Sheffield and Newcastle, along with additional business continuity centres and offices around the UK. The combined business now has approximately 400 staff, revenues of circa £75m and 4,000-plus customers.

The company's staff, technology platforms and infrastructure will be integrated with Pulsant's operations.

"Bringing Onyx and its capabilities into Pulsant is the latest step in our targeted acquisition strategy," commented Pulsant CEO Mark Howling.

"The acquisition increases the scale of our business and the breadth of services we can offer, which is crucial as multi-cloud environments become more complex and more important."

Neil Stephenson, Onyx CEO, added: "We have known Pulsant for many years and always

felt that combining Onyx and Pulsant would provide a strong UK-wide player.

"Both businesses have complementary capabilities and locations, and this acquisition enables the enlarged organisation to offer a stronger and broader range of services to our joint customers."

The acquisition is Pulsant's first significant buy since Oak Hill and Scottish Equity Partners became Pulsant's major shareholders in July 2014.

In related news the company also announced the appointment of Mike Tobin, OBE, as Chairman. Tobin was previously CEO at Telecity for 13 years, overseeing its growth from a market cap of £6m to £1.6bn, and floating it on the London Stock Exchange in 2007.

Howling commented: "Mike has a broad understanding of the data centre and cloud markets, and experience of growing businesses in the UK and overseas. Becoming Chairman is a significant sign of Pulsant's growth ambitions."

Pieter Knook, Pulsant's existing Chairman, will continue to serve on the board as Deputy Chairman.

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COMMENT: TIME TO TAKE STOCK



Pete Tomlinson

YOU'LL probably have your own perspective on what caused the demise of Outsourcery, and I don't pretend to have the inside track or the right to comment (I'm going to anyway). However, one thing's for sure – it wasn't a lack of market opportunity. As the convergence of software and communications continues apace and our industry

pivots towards subscription-based models, Outsourcery should have been positioned for success. So it does make you pause and reflect on the lessons we can all learn.

Being an early mover looking to establish a business in a fast growing, but still forming market isn't an easy task. They tend to either make it big or ultimately fail. There can be little in between. There is more to it than that though. It also points to the increasing division between being an infrastructure or a services play. The former needs scale, high relative market share and a long-term investment horizon. The latter requires agility, customer centricity and constant evolution. Of course, some businesses do both well, but usually only when they effectively operate as separate entities. This market is a hard place for sub-scale asset owners.

Perhaps even more important is to understand who your real customers are and how you can most effectively reach them. Establishing the right routes to market are key, and while winning a place on a prized framework or securing a scale partner can be transformational, it's where the selling starts, not stops. The same can be true on the other side of the equation, with the big supply partners. Smaller innovators are tempting bedfellows for them in the early stages of testing a new market and refining their offer, but they are often not the eventual winners when it comes to time for mass adoption. For all of us, directly affected or not, it's a good opportunity to take stock.

Pete Tomlinson, Director, KCOM

Kerr blasts into big Openreach debate

THE CWU's Deputy General Secretary (telecoms) Andy Kerr has stormed into the Openreach-BT separation debate urging Ofcom not to split up the BT Group, backing his argument with a 10-point plan for 'union' that rebuts a joint call for separation by a coalition of comms industry leaders.

Kerr has threatened to take political and industrial action if Ofcom does not comply with the CWU's demands.

The coalition is made up of Jeremy Darroch, Group CEO, Sky; Dido Harding, CEO, TalkTalk; Jeroen Hoencamp, CEO, Vodafone UK; Malcolm Corbett, CEO, Independent Networks Cooperative Association; and the Federation of Communication Services (FCS) CEO Chris Pateman.

In May they presented an open letter to Ofcom CEO Sharon White outlining a 10-point plan urging the regulator to recommend the structural splitting up of BT, claiming that separation was 'crucial to the improved digital connectivity Britain needs'.

But according to Kerr any break up of BT would 'restrict broadband coverage and undermine QoS improvements'.



Andy Kerr

"There is no evidence to suggest that Sky, TalkTalk, Vodafone UK, and indeed any other telecoms provider will commit anywhere near the required levels of investment to deliver a world class network across the country," he stated.

Kerr also pointed out that the CWU is prepared to 'push the button' on a national campaign, both politically and industrially, to stop the break up of BT if Ofcom makes such a recommendation. Whether this is a threat to take out industrial action is open to interpretation.

"Although Mr Kerr runs a trade union he appears to be well

informed about BT's investment strategy and a cats-paw in support of BT's corporate aims," said Pateman.

"We believe it's vital that the people who decide what 'good' looks like should be Openreach's customers.

"We are throwing down a challenge, underpinned by sound research and experience.

"A challenge to Ofcom, Openreach and the industry to work together to shape the future for the good of all market players and all customers."

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COMMENT: STRATEGIC TALK



Alex Tempest

POOR access to Ethernet connections is one of the biggest challenges the channel faces. The demand is there, but Openreach has struggled to deliver the connectivity Britain's businesses are crying out for. Recently, Ofcom announced moves to open up so-called dark fibre which has the potential to transform the Ethernet market.

When Ethernet rollout was started, BT-Openreach realised that as traffic would increase exponentially over time it would make sense to lay additional fibre cables to deal with this extra capacity in the years to come. This means that there are unused Ethernet cables lying dormant, or dark, representing an opportunity to quickly expand the UK's business connectivity. However, at the moment Openreach is the only company able to 'light' (connect) this dark fibre, so this forces companies like TalkTalk Business to rent not only the line but also the tech at either end of the cable from Openreach, adding further costs to the end user. We have been lobbying Ofcom to let us, and companies like us, access dark fibre and light it with our own equipment. 0

Being able to access dark fibre would enable us to offer Ethernet connections at a reduced cost to our partners. Today, we are already seeing the adoption of telepresence robots, and with advancements in virtual and augmented reality we know that whatever the next step in video communication is going to be, it is going to require reliable, high-speed data networks.

The future of our digital economy will be heavily reliant on fibre optic cables. Although Ofcom has taken the first steps towards unleashing the power of dark fibre, there is still a way to go. The longer it takes for dark fibre to become accessible, the more UK businesses will be playing catch up with the rest of the world.

Alex Tempest, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

GCI steps up UC ambition

Continued from page 1

Thirkill also emphasised that the deal is not a capability purchase. "We already have expertise in the cloud and UC space, including tens of thousands of Skype for Business seats deployed across the UK and Europe via our direct and indirect sales channels," Thirkill explained.

"The acquisition builds on a strong foundation and raises our profile in a market reported to be growing at five times the rate of traditional voice services. Most importantly, this acquisition also provides assured continuity of service for all of Outsourcery's customers, resellers and partners."

GCI is a Vodafone Platinum Partner (through its London-based Commsxchange operation), a Microsoft Gold Partner and a Virgin Media Business Strategic Partner. "This capable blend positions GCI nicely in the ascending UC market," Thirkill added.

Wayne Martin, GCI's founder and Chairman, stated: "This is another step in GCI's journey which started more than 15 years ago. We now have a nationwide presence from London to Glasgow, a joined up portfolio of fully managed IT services,



Wayne Martin

and customers across multiple sectors, from small businesses to 700 site organisations.

"GCI's raison d'être has always been about building an integrated, disciplined and tech savvy organisation able to take customers on a consultative transformational journey.

"Traditional voice just isn't cutting it any more, UC is the new kid on the block. The benefits in terms of productivity gains and collaboration enhancements is a message that's really starting to hit home. The acquisition primes us to be a leading player in the UC space."

GCI's Chief Strategy Officer Scott Riley will oversee the Outsourcery operation and its integration. He said: "This acquisition gives us the ability to accelerate our penetration of a market forecast for double digit growth to 2020." See p26

SHORT CALLS

Julian Lowrie has been appointed Head of BCH Solutions responsible for the team that manages partner relationships. He joins from TalkTalk and brings over 20 years industry experience with particular expertise in Inbound voice, hosted contact centre, IVR and premium rate markets, and the regulation that governs these areas.

Henry Howard Finance has increased its credit facility with the Hampshire Trust Bank from £5m to £8m, enabling the independent lender to extend its lending to a larger portfolio of SMEs across the UK. Henry Howard Finance recently agreed a £51m asset finance facility with the British Business Bank.

Union Street Technologies has achieved Gold Partner competency in Microsoft's partner network for Application Development and Intelligent Systems, adding to its existing Gold Partner status for Data Platform competency. Tony Cook, Union Street MD, commented: "This expertise is crucial to developing our aBILLity billing platform which heavily utilises Microsoft technology."

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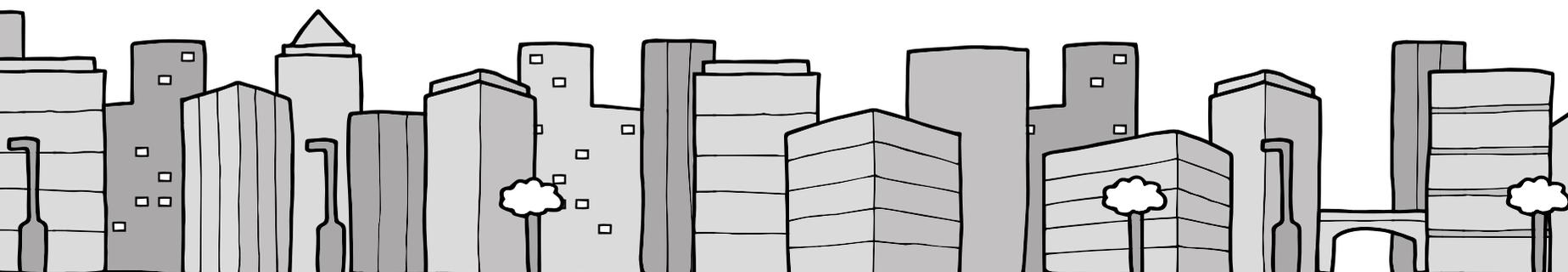
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COMMENT: MARKETING MATTERS



Elvire Gosnold

WE'VE recently grown our team with the addition of two new marketers. During the recruitment process I sifted through a lot of CVs and interviewed candidates from a variety of marketing backgrounds. This got me thinking about the anatomy of a dynamic marketing team able to generate new ideas that are interlinked with the marketing plan and business strategy.

Building and nurturing an effective marketing team is crucial for future growth. With marketing

functions evolving and the growing adoption of online activity, marketing is becoming an area of greater focus and investment. More marketers are now board level than ever before, and new job titles are emerging such as Chief Digital Officer to add gravitas to the marketing function. The success of 'brand' in the long run and the success of shorter term incentives rely on the skill of the marketing function. These achievements derive from effective team building and getting the right set of complementary skills.

Channel businesses often have smaller budgets than large corporates so are less likely to have consultancies advising them on how to harness creative concepts to the benefit of business activities. Creativity can be hard to find in individuals, especially when you are looking for creative ideas that are adaptable and appropriate for a B2B landscape. A marketing team needs to be mindful of the business strategy knitting with marketing activity, not just in a creative sense but also analytical.

Understanding the requirements of the channel is vital, as is the analytical ability to efficiently review marketing activity in order to provide meaningful stats and look at ways to improve Rol.

Elvire Gosnold, Director, Blabbermouth Marketing

Trustmarque goes to Capita for £57m

CAPITA'S acquisition of business partner Trustmarque Solutions, part of the Liberata Group, boosts Capita's overall capabilities and unlocks significant cloud market potential.

Trustmarque has long been an embedded software fulfilment partner within Capita Technology Solutions, Capita's technology reseller and service integration business.

Trustmarque's acquisition from parent company Ardbid for £57m brings specific specialities such as software asset management and strategic cloud consultancy. Its core business is software resale, licensing and technology services. Other service offers include business intelligence, workforce productivity and resourcing.

In its last financial year to 31st December 2015 Trustmarque reported revenues of £191.9m, net revenue of £107m, underlying EBITDA of £7.3m and underlying operating profit of £4.3m.

Post-acquisition – with benefits from cross selling, cost savings and market growth – Trustmarque is expected to achieve Capita's target post-tax return on investment of 15% in 2018.



Andy Parker

The company has over 1,450 private and public sector clients and employs 620 staff based in five offices in York, Coventry, Sheffield, Edinburgh and London.

Trustmarque also has a notable public sector presence in the NHS and in the private sector in accounting and legal services.

The company holds 14 Microsoft Gold Partner competencies and is said to be the largest Microsoft public sector licensing specialist in the UK providing over £100m of licenses each year.

Trustmarque is also a Microsoft Cloud Solutions Provider and is targeting strong growth in

cloud consultancy having identified a £5bn addressable UK market for its cloud services, including MS O365 and Azure.

Andy Parker, Capita's Chief Executive, stated: "This acquisition provides Capita with a set of capabilities and expertise that complement our existing businesses, and the mix of core reseller activity and higher value services is a strong proposition that will sit well with our wider technology offering."

"Trustmarque's 'Enterprise-as-a-Service' model will provide opportunities to build new services and deepen our existing relationships with key partners, in particular with Microsoft. It will particularly enhance our growing Capita Technology Solutions business."

Scott Haddow, Trustmarque's Chief Executive, said: "Capita's long history with Trustmarque means that the two businesses understand each other."

"We are now well positioned for strong organic growth supported by Capita's expertise, experience and scale. There are a number of opportunities for integration, including selling services through G-Cloud, that will help us to lower costs and cross-sell services."



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COMMENT: LEADERSHIP MATTERS



Clifford Norton

AS THE search for a new Prime Minister gets underway we may turn our attention to the characteristics that make a good leader. I believe that everyone has a different approach to leadership. There's no blueprint, no instruction manual, no-one-size-fits-all, but there are certainly attributes that combine to make a successful leader.

What is essential in times of adversity is the

ability to pull together and ensure a united front. As we renegotiate our position in Europe and head towards a period of uncertainty, it is vital that the next leader of either party instills confidence in the electorate. That same logic can be applied to your organisation. Employees are most engaged when they feel valued and secure. Ensure you lead from the front, but don't dictate. Work with your staff rather than have them work for you.

The increasing demand for a work-life balance means that the traditional 9am-5pm desk job is quickly disappearing. Studies show that happiness has a direct impact on productivity as do regular breaks and feeling trusted and valued. It is pivotal for the retention, development and contribution of your staff that you understand them as individuals and not as a collective. This is down to good, personable leadership.

There is always a fear that people will push the limits and abuse your trust, but it's more dangerous not to allow that possibility to ever happen. If we confine our staff to a rigid or mundane structure, we run the risk of losing what creative, energetic spark they may have.

Positivity breeds positivity and it's incredibly infectious, but it must come from the top down. Are you doing all you can to understand your staff, ensure they are happy and engaged with what you are trying and achieve?

Clifford Norton, Managing Director, Channel Telecom

White drives Total refresh



Lorrin White

CHELTENHAM-based Total's rebrand to Bamboo Technology Group signals bigger channel ambitions as it looks to appeal to a growing audience of resellers and implement a streamlined business model.

Total's brand equity will be preserved in the renamed and revamped Total partner programme, formerly known as the Focus programme.

"The values of the Bamboo brand complement the core industry equity associated with the Total banner," explained MD Lorrin White.

"Taking advantage of the brand equity that Total has instilled in its channel programme is pivotal to the long-term success of the group."

The company has stripped down confusing, multiple chan-

nel brands as part of a revitalised philosophy that stands for complete flexibility, strong ethics and team values based on integrity, independence, collaboration and challenge, explained White.

"These all form part of our promise to play the long game with our partners," she added. "We are looking ahead with a clear focus."

The company launched its third party channel in 2010 and 40% of revenues are now derived via partners. In 2015 partner numbers rose by 33% along with a 44% rise in partner mobile connections.

"This trend is likely to increase as we place a greater focus on our channel proposition," noted White.

Full interview on page 44

Top gong for Co-op chief exec

TURNOVER growth of 19% in five years to £10m, a hike in membership numbers to 11,000 and a strong ethical commitment have all combined to secure The Phone Co-op the 2016 Growing Co-operative of the Year Award.

The awards were staged by Co-operatives UK, a national network that supports member owned businesses worth £34.1bn to the UK economy.

Vivian Woodell, Chief Executive of The Phone Co-op, said: "This award is a tribute to everyone involved, including our members. You've given us the encouragement to keep pushing ahead and to take The Phone Co-op and co-operation to the next level."

Ed Mayo, Secretary General of Co-operatives UK, added: "The Phone Co-op has grown quickly in a difficult and fast-paced market while delivering support for co-operative and environmental initiatives."

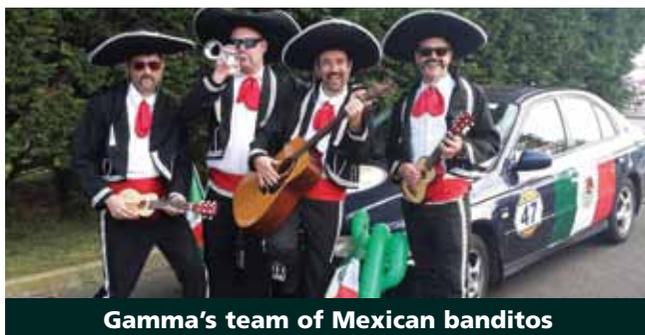


Twin Town Challenge smashes £250k target

HOUSEHOLD names in the comms channel played a key role in the Twin Town Challenge 2016, helping to raise over £250k for charity SpecialEffect.

The event is run by STL Communications and was backed by main sponsors Gamma and Oak with additional support from Pragma, Union Street, Virtual1, Fidelity, Entanet and Samsung.

One hundred cars costing less than £500 departed from Blenheim Palace on Friday 27th May and stopped off at



Gamma's team of Mexican banditos

Silverstone before crossing to France and heading for Le Touquet, Witney's twin town. The event included laps around the Silverstone and Abbeville

circuits, a street party in Le Touquet plus 'fun and games'.

The Twin Town Challenge is the brainchild of STL Communications MD Brendon

Cross and is organised by a team of volunteers who act as marshals, fundraisers, minibus drivers, mechanics, scorers, and generally manage the 500 people taking part in the event.

Cross said: "We thought a target of £250k was ambitious, but with the support of the Twin Town community, the teams and everyone involved we have not only reached this figure, but are likely to smash it."

The money will be used by SpecialEffect to help more young people with disabilities

to play computer games. Dr Mick Donegan, founder and CEO of SpecialEffect, commented: "The success of the Twin Town Challenge 2016 has left the SpecialEffect team stunned and humbled."

Joe Manning, Business Development Exec at Gamma, said: "The Gamma team had a great time driving our £395 car dressed as Mexican banditos. SpecialEffect also benefits from our Gamma Ball Rally, so we were proud to sponsor the Twin Town Challenge."

SCC's results reflect shift into services



James Rigby

SCC's transformation into a managed service and solutions-led business was clearly reflected in its financial results for year ending 31st March 2016 in which the company reported services turnover up 11% to £177m, but overall revenues of £653m were down 1%.

Data centre services revenues were up 67% to £43m, and services now account for 27% of total turnover (versus 17% in 2013). Services margins represent 66% of total margins, up from 63% in the prior year and 52% in 2013. EBITDA increased 29% to £24.9m.

The marginal decline of 1% in overall turnover was attributed to a high-turnover/low-margin product revenue reduction of £35m. The most notable growth came from SCC's Cloud Delivered Managed Services (CDMS) business.

SCC's total investment in CDMS exceeded £60m. The firm made additional investments in hosted voice and UCaaS specialist SIPCOM and mobility business One Point.

The completion of SCC's services portfolio builds on investments made in FY15 in connectivity (Fluidata) and SCC's third Tier 3+ Data Centre in Fareham. These businesses independently generated £26m of revenue in the year, taking combined services revenues past £200m to £203m.

Since its acquisition by SCC in February 2014, M2, a European Managed Print Services firm, notched up its best ever period of growth, closing FY16 on £46m combined turnover, representing 21% turnover growth, and £4.6m combined EBITDA, up 48%.

In the last year, M2 has grown to employ over 230 people and has 24,000 devices under management in the UK.

FY16 also saw the expansion of M2's regional office network to include London, Bracknell, Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, and Scotland, and the creation of a dedicated public sector division.

SCC Chief Executive James Rigby commented: "We've had another strong financial performance. We continued to make investments throughout FY16 in additional capability, improved facilities and skilled people, all geared towards delivering services to our customers.

"Our services business has grown significantly over the past three years and the forecast is for that to continue.

"The opportunity for customers, particularly in the mid-market space, to grow with us has never been so large with the completion of our CDMS proposition in FY16."

Alongside its results SCC also announced a new global delivery centre in Vietnam.

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Barnard rocks up at IT distie in CEO role | Matt Tomon dies aged 38

IT DISTRIBUTOR The Change Organisation is set to undergo a business transformation under the leadership of incoming CEO Adrian Barnard.

The former MD of Modern Communications and Prime Networks (both businesses were founded by Barnard then sold and exited respectively) is a familiar face on media outlets as an industry spokesperson, appearing on BBC News, Sky News and BBC World.

His strategy at the Change Organisation is to strengthen the company's presence in the IT and communications marketplace as well as increase sales margins and reshape the overall sales structure.



Adrian Barnard

The Change Organisation works independently of many manufacturers and in partnership with niche vendors to provide a distribution service for audio visual solutions and data centre colocation.

Ashley Sterland, Communications Director for the dis-

tributor, commented: "Adrian is inspirational and he has the industry credentials to enhance The Change Organisation brand as we enter the next chapter in the company's history."

Got a news story? email: sgilroy@bpl-business.com

IT IS with deep regret that Comms Dealer reports the tragic and sudden death of Fulham-based Green Fields Technology founder and CEO Matt Tomon on 26th May at the young age of 38. A husband, father and brother, he will be sadly missed.

Prior to founding Green Fields, at just 25 years of age Matt took the role of CTO at 1st Contact Group which had three offices in the UK and four offices internationally.

Under his leadership Green Fields Technology became a leading managed support, IaaS, technology and communications provider known for its focus on customer service.

Matt's strategic vision and industry insights ensured that Green Fields was among the early adopters of an IaaS product strategy.

Green Fields has grown in stature in this area of the market and regularly features prominently at industry award events, having won over 11 awards last year alone and the Best Enterprise UC Solution at the 2014 Comms National Awards.

Following one award nomination Matt explained his company ethos: "We have always sought to combine the stability,



Matt Tomon

reliability and expertise of an enterprise IT services provider with the flexibility, passion and personalised service of a boutique consultancy."

Comms Dealer MD, Mike O'Brien, said: "Matt was a good friend of us all at Comms Dealer, a long-standing attendee at Comms Vision, a supporter of the Comms National and IT Europa Excellence Awards, and a member of the Comms Dealer Alpine Society. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his family and friends."

Matt is survived by his wife, Ruby, who commented: "The light in our lives has been taken away, but we will cherish the precious memories and laughter Matt brought to our family in the short time he was given."



AERIAL Business Communications celebrated three decades in business on No Man's Fort in the Solent last month. The 30th anniversary bash included live entertainment, a break dancing flash mob, digital magician, DJs, mermaids and prize giveaways. The company, formerly known as Aerial Telephones, was founded by MD Paul Davis and began life as a mobile and car phone retailer operating from a small shop and employing three sales staff. Aerial has developed into a full UC company with a 50-plus headcount supplying mobiles, telephone systems, IT and Internet connectivity services. "Thirty years is a milestone in any industry, but with ever changing technology I believe it to be even more of a success story," commented Davis. Pictured: Nigel Harris (left), Chairman of Fresh Direct and Paul Davis.

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MSP market strengthens Solar secures key Non-Exec

EUROPEAN MSPs generated revenues of circa 350bn euros last year but with just 36.5% of them offering telecoms and 13% delivering managed print services these two important market segments offer the potential for more growth.

The managed services market in Europe is fast-moving with profitability linked to scale and M&A activity on the up, according to a new database report by Comms Dealer sister company IT Europa that sampled the market across 34 European countries.

The 'Managed Service Providers in Europe – the Top 1,000' report states that the overall market grew 8.5%, with smaller markets registering the fastest growth (Bulgaria 33%, Slovakia 21%, Turkey 18%).

Russia and Norway both grew 14%. France, Netherlands and Germany recorded expansion of just over 10%, while the UK achieved 7% growth. Spain showed a decline.

IT Europa's analysis also separated out a geographically diverse top 20 MSP league table based on the best growth performers. And the study segmented the main growth markets addressed by MSPs: 86.5%



Alan Norman

offer network and infrastructure management; 72.4% server and web management; 71.9% provide security management; 61.2% deliver storage and back-up management; 60.5% provide SaaS solutions and 50% offer applications management.

"We are seeing more and more traditional channel organisations embrace managed services as a delivery model as customer demand continues to rise," commented Alan Norman, MD of IT Europa.

"The factors behind the surge in demand, the changes in customer buying behaviour driving them and the opportunities this presents for MSPs will be a major subject for debate at the Managed Services & Hosting Summit 2016 which takes place in London in September."

www.mshsummit.com

SOLAR Communications has appointed Jeremy Millard, a partner in corporate finance firm Smith Square Partners, as a Non-Executive Director.

Millard has a strong background in providing corporate finance advice to companies in the sector having worked at Rothschild, Hawkpoint Partners, HSBC and Charterhouse.

He has advised on many transactions over the last 17 years, including acquisitions, disposals, public offers, IPOs, refinancings, mergers and demergers. In 2012 he advised Logica on the £1.7bn public cash offer by CGI, as well as Cable&Wireless Worldwide on the £1bn public cash offer by Vodafone, having previously advised on the £4bn demerger of Cable&Wireless in 2010.

Millard is also a Non-Executive Director of AIM-listed software and services company Idox.

Ben Marnham, Chairman of Solar Communications, commented: "The timing couldn't be better to welcome Jeremy to the board.

"His advisory track record and industry specialism will accelerate our progress as we execute our growth strategies."



Jeremy Millard

Millard added: "I have followed Solar Communications with interest over recent years and am joining the board as the company enters the next exciting phase of its growth."

Got a news story? email: sgilroy@bpl-business.com

SHORT CALLS

Tech Data UK is offering 4,000-plus customers additional credit amounting to more than £150m. The firm is also providing extended payment terms to resellers in the education sector for audiovisual solutions.

Virtuall is supporting Restless Development, an international charity that helps people in adversity. The company has set a £20k fundraising target this year as part of a three year partnership, "Whenever I've set my team a challenge, particularly one that involves charity, they throw themselves into it wholeheartedly," stated CEO Tom O'Hagan.



KCOM saw a 50% increase in new faces at its annual Fastest 4 event held at Palmer Sport in Bedford where The Stig put 24 sales incentive winners through their paces, giving each racer a thrilling ride with him at the wheel of the Le

Mans JP-LM Palmer Jaguar at top speeds. The Stig said: "It was as fun as ever putting KCOM's guests through their paces and everybody lived up to the high speed challenge. There were plenty of smiles and white knuckles from my passengers." Henry West, Head of Channel Sales at KCOM, added: "It's great for the team to spend time with new partners and learn how we can serve them better, and to see many familiar channel faces at this event."

SHORT CALL

WatchGuard's purchase of HawkEye G threat detection and response technology from Hexis Cyber Solutions (a division of KEYW) enables it to offer enterprise grade security to smaller firms, according to the company. "This addresses the evolving threat landscape organisations face today by extending visibility from the perimeter to the end point," said Prakash Panjwani, WatchGuard's CEO.

Skyrack renamed Simetric Telecom

LEEDS-based Skyrack Telecom, which began its commercial life in 2009 as a provider of unified telecoms services, is to rebrand as Simetric Telecom.

According to its leaders, John Murray and Gavin Sweet, the revamp reflects their ambition to expand into new markets.

"The time is right for us to take the business forward and bring our voice services and technologies to a new audience," stated Sweet.

As well as kick-starting a campaign to widen the market



John Murray

for converged phone systems the rebrand heralds new developments in mobile convergence



Gavin Sweet

services. "We are positioning our Mobile-X network as a solution to the disconnect between

fixed and mobile," commented Sweet. "In the coming months we will roll out new services that push mobile convergence to new places."

The Mobile-X service works by blending landline and mobile telecoms using a SIM on any unlocked smartphone or standard handset, and is delivered in a channel reseller model.

To simplify hosted comms Simetric provides packaged systems, bespoke solutions and integrated mobile designed for all types of business.



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CIF rolls out cloud eLearning scheme

AN INDEPENDENT eLearning programme introduced by the Cloud Industry Forum (CIF) reflects a lack of cloud computing knowhow in the market and aims to plug that skills gap.

The online courses form part of CIF's membership scheme and is based on its recommended Cloud Adoption Roadmap.

The programme has five key stages and 21 modules.

CEO Alex Hilton commented: "Every business is different and their journey to the cloud is unique. However, a common framework is relevant to almost all cloud adoption projects.

"As a result, CIF has created a cloud adoption guide to help customers through their journey and provide guidance and skills



Alex Hilton

for those embarking on cloud adoption projects.

"Given that online learning courses are regarded as one of the most popular and engaging methods of training and learning, we have commissioned a wholly independent development series of eLearning mod-

ules that focus on the complete cloud adoption journey.

"The eLearning programme is aimed at those who work in IT operations, management and executives, as well as line of business personnel such as legal and procurement and members of the board."

LinkedIn deal for Microsoft

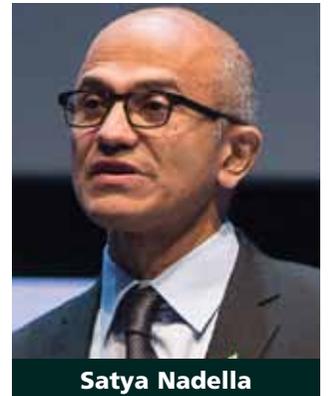
MICROSOFT is to acquire professional networking platform LinkedIn in an all-cash transaction valued at \$26.2bn.

The deal is expected to significantly boost Microsoft's software sales.

Following the acquisition, which is thought to be one of the biggest tech deals ever, LinkedIn will retain its brand and independence. Jeff Weiner will remain CEO of LinkedIn, reporting to Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft.

LinkedIn has generated 19% growth year-on-year to more than 433 million members worldwide with over 105 million unique visiting members per month.

Nadella said: "Together we can accelerate the growth of LinkedIn, as well as Microsoft



Satya Nadella

Office 365 and Dynamics as we seek to empower every person and organisation on the planet."

Weiner added: "Just as we have changed the way the world connects to opportunity, this relationship with Microsoft, and the combination of its cloud and LinkedIn's network, now gives us a chance to also change the way the world works."

TTB aids international businesses

WORLD SIP and International Numbers, launched by TalkTalk Business (TTB), provide voice solutions to businesses that want to increase their international presence or simplify their use of calls between offices in different countries.

International Numbers allows UK companies to take a freephone or local landline

number of over 110 countries, diverting it to any existing fixed line or mobile number.

With the launch of World SIP, TalkTalk Business has added features such as a range of in-country numbers and local breakout. World SIP also provides one international tariff for all countries, billed in one single currency.

Alexandra Tempest, Head of Partners, TalkTalk Business, commented: "We want British businesses to benefit from a cost-efficient and reliable way to make and receive calls, whether they're aspiring to do more business overseas or seeking to provide better customer service to their existing customer base."

INTERNATIONAL new business growth of 140% and a 50%-plus increase in customers ranked as NewVoiceMedia's FY 2016 highlights. Its comms platform allows organisations to deliver a personalised customer service and improve the effectiveness of their sales team. The firm now serves more than 600 customers across 128 countries. NewVoiceMedia also secured \$30m in a round of funding from new investor BGF Venture, joining existing investors BVP, Eden Ventures, Highland Capital Partners Europe, Salesforce Ventures and TCV. CEO Jonathan Gale commented: "We revolutionise the way organisations connect with their customers and prospects worldwide."

SHORT CALL

Vodafone has secured a ten year multi-million pound contract with EDF Energy to update the company's communications and IT infrastructure in all of its UK business facilities including nine offices, three data centres and 11 power stations. The new network will provide four times more bandwidth than currently available and will enable new services such as video conferencing and collaborative working.

Free holiday for stand-out staff

THE Chess annual Summer Conference, staged at Manchester's Comedy Store, welcomed 550 people including those from its latest acquisitions Lanway and Pinnacle.

Speakers at the event included Chess founder and CEO David Pollock and Jodie Benson from the Prince's Trust who explained how Chess has supported the charity.

Pollock commented: "2016 has been an outstanding year for us so far. We've been re-listed as a Sunday Times Best



Hats off to the Gimme 5 prize winners

Company to work for and placed 2nd in the whole of the UK, an achievement I class as

my proudest to date. The success we've achieved over the last few years has been down

to our people and their commitment to our business. I strongly believe that if our people aren't growing we aren't growing."

Chess also handed over three holidays to stand-out staff as part of its Gimme 5 recognition scheme under which employees are awarded a token for good deeds in customer service.

Picking up the prizes were Mel Hoy, Colin Dutton and Dan Savill (pictured with Pollock) who chose to witness the Northern Lights this year as their reward.



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Connectivity fears raised

MANUFACTURING companies have raised concerns about the Government Review of Business Broadband saying its focus on speed could distract policy makers from delivering a reliable, resilient and future proofed infrastructure.

EEF, the manufacturers' industry body, issued its warning in the context of what it calls a fourth industrial revolution (4IR), a new era that will usher in greater integration of physical production with Internet enabled technologies.

According to 80% of manufacturers, 4IR will be a business reality by 2025 and over 60% plan to invest more in Internet connected capital equipment in the next five years.

Analysis by EEF shows that leased lines are the best choice for the sector in the key areas of speed, network availability, quality and reliability.

"This highlights that it's not just about speed, but wider factors to do with reliability and resilience," said Chris Richards, Senior Business Environment Policy Adviser at EEF.

EEF is calling for a stocktake to ensure that reliability, resilience and future requirements are being taken fully

into account, and has called on the Government to provide a framework for improving reliability with milestones, along with plans for remedial action if those milestones are missed.

"Britain has clearly benefited from the move to faster broadband, which has transformed our economy," commented Richards. "But there's still much more to be done. The legacy of focusing on speed has served its purpose and it's now time to do a stocktake on what we need going forward.

"For manufacturers this is clear. We need a more reliable, resilient and future proofed network to match the fundamental importance digital infrastructure plays in our modern economy.

"The UK needs a strategy to improve the reliability of our digital infrastructure through a much more pervasive fibre broadband rollout.

"We also need confidence that the Government will stand behind that strategy to make sure it's delivered.

"The reality is that if we don't do this now, in five years time we won't be arguing about where we are in the international league tables – we won't even be in them."

KCOM in firm push for charity

HATS off to KCOM for raising over £92k in the first year of its charity partnership with Teenage Cancer Trust, more than twice the set target.

Fundraising activities included the London Marathon, the Yorkshire Three Peaks, skydiving, the Rock Solid Endurance Challenge and the Jane Tomlinson Hull 10K run.

Siobhan Dunn, Chief Exec' at Teenage Cancer Trust, said: "KCOM employees and supporters have made a huge effort to raise funds for us, taking on marathons, scrambling up mountains and even falling from the sky to smash their target.

"£92k is an awe inspiring amount of money and will have a real impact on the services we provide, supporting us in our goal to reach every young person with cancer in the UK by 2020."

KCOM CEO Bill Halbert commented: "We are aiming to raise £150k over the course of our relationship to help the Trust provide expert care and support to young people with cancer, and we look forward to smashing that target as well."

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Chess builds IT specialism

CHESS'S capabilities as a technology integrator have been strengthened by its acquisition of Burnley-based Lanway for an undisclosed sum.

Lanway generated £21.8m turnover last year and began commercial life 25 years ago.

The company boasts over 550 active repeat customers including a number of blue chip names. The acquisition pushes Chess's headcount to 550.

Chess CEO David Pollock said: "Lanway shares our passion for delivering technological advantage to customers, and the acquisition is another step on our growth journey, helping to bring our vision to life. Together with Lanway's expertise we have the talent and technology needed



David Pollock

to deliver integrated solutions across enterprise, mobile and cloud environments."

Richard Btsh, Director of Chess, commented: "We're ready and waiting to take advantage of the consolidation of customers and relationships."



PENNINE Telecom has secured a three-year sponsorship deal with East Lancashire Railway that gives the Bury-based comms provider a strong promotional presence locally, with up to 20 poster sites at any one time across the railway's six stations and The Trackside pub at its Bury Bolton Street hub. Pennine's logo will appear on the ELR's main timetable leaflet and website and the firm will also receive benefits such as exclusive use of the railway's 1920s Observation carriage. Pennine's MD Andrew Roberts said: "We've already enjoyed a terrific and rewarding relationship with the East Lancashire Railway, which, like us, is proud of Bury, its heritage and sense of community. The railway thrives only through the support of its many volunteers and commercial partners." Pictured (l-r) East Lancashire Railway Chairman Mike Kelly with Andrew Roberts.

SMART moves to Midwich

SMART Technologies's revamped go-to-market model is taking shape following a link up with distributor Midwich.

The move follows a similar agreement with Westcon and signals a stronger channel push by SMART that enables it to work with the channel directly, offering account management and marketing services to individual partners.

Jane Ashworth, UK MD, SMART Technologies, said: "This is another significant step forward in the re-invigoration



Jane Ashworth

of our UK channel presence. With this new addition, we will be poised to accelerate our new

channel strategy. Working with partners like Midwich is vital to reach organisations looking to capitalise on software and hardware for collaboration."

Richard Bovingdon, Head of Interactive Sales, Midwich, added: "SMART has developed an all-in-one solution for today's classroom, alongside a range of other products that have valuable roles to play in both business and education. SMART is working with us not only on products but also on education and enablement." See page 24



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KCOM



This is Rob's helmet.

Rob was glad to be alive after reaching top speeds in the Ariel Atom at KCOM's Fastest 4 event; but Rob knows that channel incentives are just one way he's supported as a KCOM Partner. There's also loads of white-labelled collateral and campaign material he can use to make sure he hits his number. Leaving Rob more time to work on his racing lines.

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Radio makes Sennheiser in great waves results record

AN UNTAPPED market worth up to £40m could be unlocked by the sale of two-way radios according to Nimans.

The distributor says today's two-way radio solutions offer full integration with telephone systems and can perform seamless functions not available via other devices.

"There's a perception that two-way radios are yesterday's technology and limited to niche markets, but that's not the case," commented Nimans' Radio Communications Category Manager, Gary Redshaw.

"From leisure centres and shopping malls to warehouses, car parks, building sites and schools, demand is on the rise."

Nimans supplies licenced and licence free equipment with both Digital Mobile Radio (DMR) and Private Mobile Radio (PMR) devices available.

"Depending on the model, two-way radios have the ability to integrate with telephone systems and also Wi-Fi," added Redshaw. "They can link the whole communications chain together, offering more than one-to-one communication as they can connect many relevant parties across multiple sites, similar to a conference unit."



Gary Redshaw

"DMR is gaining market traction and represents the next generation in two-way radio services. Some DMR devices can switch back to analogue. Two-way radios are the final piece of the comms puzzle."

Comms resellers have an advantage over traditional radio installers who may perceive telecoms as a 'black art', reckons Redshaw.

"There are no radio dealers treading on the toes of telecoms dealers," he explained. "There's less competition and margin erosion. Incremental business, attractive margins and maintenance contracts for recurring revenue can all be enjoyed."

Got a news story? email: sgilroy@bpl-business.com

SENNHEISER Group's annual results for fiscal year 2015 show a turnover increase of 7.5% to a record 682.2m euros.

The company's turnover developed significantly across all global regions, particularly in the Americas and APAC. Profit before taxes in 2015 amounted to 30.3m euros.

Dr. Andreas Sennheiser, co-CEO, said: "We tapped into new regions and markets, such as Korea and Latin America, while still retaining our focus on existing, large markets."

The Sennheiser Group currently has 19 sales subsidiaries and trading partners in over 50 countries. And investment in research and development increased by 8.5% to 46.9m euros in fiscal year 2015.

Sennheiser added: "The audio sector is on the verge of experiencing a renaissance. For customers, new formats and new ways of producing and consuming music continue to emerge, technologies that we have been researching for many years already."

The development of a 3D immersive audio technology programme that offers a spatial sound experience, called AMBEO, is a key focus area.



Dr. Andreas Sennheiser

"We are developing products in four core areas – recording, mixing, processing and reproduction," said co-CEO Daniel Sennheiser. "Our virtual reality microphone will be the first official AMBEO product. It will have an impact on the future of virtual reality content."

SHORT CALLS

In its first month of operation Pangea's partner programme has on-boarded 43 partners and according to MD Dan Cunliffe the response has been 'overwhelming'. "It's clear the channel is eager to seize the opportunities presented within the IoT market," he stated.

Logicalis UK has unveiled four new Logicalis Optimal Services, creating a wider choice of consumption and operational models for customers in the core areas of infrastructure and business collaboration. The new categories are Data Centre, Networking/Security, Business Video and Collaboration services.



A TRADE fair hosted by Nimans marked the official opening of a new £500k Manchester trade counter facility based in Trafford Park. The event included product demonstrations, prize

draws, warehouse tours and an introduction to a networking zone. The 10,000 sq ft unit is led by Geoff Wilde and Bob Hinder who boast more than 40 years combined data infrastructure industry expertise. "I started Nimans more than 30 years ago by opening a trade counter and repairing radio equipment, it's always been my ambition to develop more," said Chairman Julian Niman. The new facility opens at 8.30am and includes a training room.

SHORT CALL

Exclusive Networks has been appointed by security policy orchestration vendor Tufin as a UK distributor. Graham Jones, Exclusive's MD, said: "With direct support for our vendor solutions, such as Fortinet and Palo Alto Networks, this integrates into our Cyber Attack Remediation and Mitigation strategy, giving partners a complementary sale to solutions their customers are currently deploying."

Daisy feeds talent JDM's new look

DAISY aims to tap into and harvest the latent talent within its graduate workforce via a 12-month development programme designed to offer direction, encouragement and support to maximise their potential.

The first six months will see 20 graduates take part in Million Makers, a Dragons' Den-style fundraising challenge run in partnership with the Prince's Trust charity.

All graduates are allocated a senior business mentor and access to training.

Graduate and Apprenticeship Manager Marcia Turner stated: "The programme is designed to enable our candidates to feel confident about choosing their own career path and gain an understanding of how to achieve those goals."

Daisy's Chief People Officer David Jones commented: "The scheme demonstrates a new and exciting level of commitment to career development. I wish our chosen 20 the best with their Million Makers projects and look forward to them winning."

JDM Software's new owner and CEO Lucas de Clercq has affirmed his strategy to broaden the product portfolio for Cisco and Microsoft, stating that the product ServiceDesk for Cisco will also become available for Skype for Business this year.

He will drive international expansion into Italy, Spain and the United States aiming to replicate the firm's success in the Benelux, France, Germany and UK markets.

De Clercq has held a number of leadership positions in the

ICT arena working for Digital Equipment, Compaq Computers and Microsoft where he was part of the management team in the Netherlands and the Western European HQ OEM team.

de Clercq said: "One of my most significant drivers is innovation and the way organisations can use technology to optimise their communications and ultimately their business."

"I look forward to working with partners to help organisations have meaningful connections with their customers."



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Alternative's revenues dip



Mark Quartermaine

ALTERNATIVE Networks continues to suffer the consequences of challenging market conditions but reported continued growth in recurring revenues in Advanced Solutions with a higher level of non-recurring revenues expected.

That's according to the firm's interim results for the six months ended 31st March 2016 which were described as 'mixed but with encouraging underlying trends'.

Overall revenues were down 4% at £69.3m with adjusted EBITDA of £7.483m, down 27%. Adjusted operating profit was £5.889m, down 35%.

The mobile performance was impacted by tough market conditions and a reduction in roaming tariffs implemented by

the carriers, as announced in February 2016.

According to Alternative Networks there is evidence of an improved performance in mobile following the introduction of new tariffs and arrangements with carriers. The company also reported mobile subscriber growth with a 9% increase in the base compared to the same period last year.

Mark Quartermaine, Chief Executive, commented: "There have been challenges to our mobile business and we have taken measures to mitigate the financial impact of changes to roaming tariffs.

"However, we have remained competitive and continued to improve our offering and win new customers."



BASINGSTOKE-based Southern Communications has scooped the NEC Best EMEA Reseller Award for the third time in the last four years. Paul Bradford, CEO, enthused: "To win three out of the last four years is a fantastic achievement and demonstrates the continued focus, commitment and capability of Southern Communications." Southern Communications is on target to double revenues in the next five years through a programme of acquisitions and product developments. Directors Andrew Robinson and Simon Campbell were presented the award during NEC's annual conference in Venice.

Choice of design for intercoms

HUDDERSFIELD-based VoIP distributor ProVu is offering a bespoke intercom design and build service in partnership with IP intercom vendor Castel. Under the scheme resellers have access to a variety of models and features that are all compliant with disability regulations.

The options available include a choice of materials – brass, bronze, anodised colours and stainless steel, custom finishes, choice of layout and buttons, incorporation of logos and engravings and bespoke mounting options and posts.

ProVu's MD Darren Garland commented: "We know that items off the shelf are not always suitable for every project, but with Castel's value added service resellers are able to meet complex user requirements."

Commenting on the bespoke reseller service Castel's Manji Gami said: "Our ability to offer customised intercom housing that blends with the aesthetics of a building – while still providing full functionality – means that we can meet challenging project specifications."

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SHORT CALL

Plantronics has agreed an out of court settlement with Executive Telecommunications (UK), trading as Incom Telecommunications based in Manchester. The settlement is in connection with claims relating to the sale of non-EU Plantronics products that had counterfeit packaging components. Details of the settlement remain confidential but Plantronics confirmed that Incom cooperated with it in addressing these claims.

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Konftel's Ego hails speaker portability

THE ongoing spread of flexible and remote working patterns has prompted audio conference firm Konftel to launch a company-first portable speaker phone.

Called Ego, this personal collaboration product includes a LCD display with the sound performance and features needed to carry out business-class remote meetings.

"We're seeing a clear change in user behaviour," commented Regional Sales Director Jeff May. "Business professionals are increasingly on the move and need complete flexibility as to where and when they hold remote meetings.

"The Ego device has been designed to enhance and encourage this work style and



Jeff May

reflects the uptake of communication tools such as Skype for Business conferences."

Ego works seamlessly with Skype for Business and has been successfully tested in a Microsoft certified laboratory.

The product works just as well with other conferencing platforms such as Cisco Jabber, Avaya Communicator and the

latest generation of online services, explained May.

In practice, Ego users can set-up meetings in any location by connecting to a mobile phone, tablet or PC. Its design has been recognised with a Red Dot Award and the sound quality is said to be bullet proof, with OmniSound patented audio technology delivering HD quality when making calls and playing music, whether through wireless Bluetooth or wired USB connections.

"Bluetooth can be made easier with NFC support, while a built-in battery enables cordless conversations," added May. "We have taken large volumes of advance orders ahead of the official launch in July."

School sector drives leasing

THE in-house leasing division at distributor Nimans has been rushed off its feet as demand for operational leases continues to flourish, especially in the education sector.

"Funding for local authority schools has changed following instructions from the Department for Education to include an operating lease," stated Tom Maxwell, Head of Dealer Sales.

He also noted that Nimans can lease on software-based technologies as well as hardware, and on big and small items including headsets and mobile phones.

"Sales aid leasing is fast becoming a major factor in any successful selling strategy,"



Tom Maxwell

commented Maxwell. "Adding a lease option to a product with a reputable finance partner can significantly enhance sales and help to overcome a customer's budget restrictions."

Got a news story? email: sgilroy@bpl-business.com

Dedicated video system segment continues to decline with Q1 dip

THE dedicated system segment of the video conferencing market continues to decline, falling 6% in Q1 2016 versus the same period last year.

Although endpoint demand remains steady, infrastructure sales are plunging as alternative approaches such as embedded, virtual and cloud-based multipoint control units (MCUs) gain acceptance, says Matthias Machowinski, Senior Research Director, IHS Technology.

Q1 2016 video conferencing revenue declined 22% quarter-over-quarter to \$701m due to lower seasonal demand.

Overall, video conferencing revenue is also trending down on a year-over-year basis, primarily due to decreases in infrastructure sales, with the shift to cloud services displacing a significant amount of infrastructure equipment revenue.

"PBX-based video is popular because it offers organisations a cost-effective way to enjoy mul-

timedia communication using infrastructure they already have," stated Machowinski.

"PBX-based video took a breather in 2015 due to a video-phone portfolio refresh at Cisco, but as of Q1 2016 the segment is returning to year-over-year

growth, primarily due to a pick-up in software demand."

Immersive telepresence grew for the first time in 2015 since 2011, and the recovery is extending into 2016 with Q1 revenue increasing 19% year-over-year.



A 22% increase in SV9100 sales secured Trust Distribution the NEC Top UNIVERGE SV9100 Distributor award at the vendor's EMEA Partner Conference 2016 staged in Venice. Terry Ambrose, joint Trust MD, commented: "Our growth can be attributed in part to the wrap around resource that we have built into the brand. We have sales account managers, a technical team, two brand managers and regular marketing updates that deliver vital information, along with commercial and technical assistance for our customers. This means that they can confidently sell the platform."

£30m credit facility boosts SMART sales

DISTRIBUTOR Midwich aims to spur channel sales of SMART Technologies products with a credit offer worth up to £30m.

The two companies formed a partnership last month and have identified interactive displays and collaboration as key growth opportunities in the education and enterprise markets, with the distributor aiming to push SMART's interactive flat panels and Learning Suite education collaboration software.

Louise Nevard, Head of Credit at Midwich, stated: "While we are helping to accelerate SMART Technologies' channel strategy, we are also providing partners with ready-made credit facilities.

"For Midwich, the initiative will drive sales, open up new customer relationships and help us further strengthen our existing ones."

Stuart Mizon, Divisional Director at Midwich, commented: "Continuing our support for

the channel and enabling businesses to grow further through their partnership with Midwich is another major aim of our new credit strategy. Our proactive credit strategy will help channel partners sell more SMART Technologies products."

Related news on page 20

SHORT CALL

Winchester-based IT company ProcessFlows has been acquired by Konica Minolta Business Solutions (KMBS) enabling the Japanese firm to offer a hybrid sales model for document solutions backed up by IT services expertise, especially in managed content services. ProcessFlows generated £13.5m in its financial year to June 30th 2015 and has a 168 headcount.

BPL links up with BVE for major event

A COLLABORATION between BPL Broadcast and i2i Events will bring the whole of the UK media and entertainment industry under one roof in Q1 2017.

The convergence of two key industry events is a UK first and will create a holistic platform as BVE 2017, the established broadcast and production technology event, collocates with Connected Media Europe which showcases the underlying connected technologies that enable people to view, discover and interact with content on any device any where.

The event takes place on February 28th to March 2nd at ExCeL London in the capital's Docklands area, and according to BPL Broadcast VP Neil Nixon the full weight of BPL's marketing machine and industry credentials will draw Europe's connected broadcasting community to London.

"This launch represents a positive step for exhibitors and visitors to BVE 2017, extending the reach of this already highly successful event," he said.

The project builds on BPL Broadcast's track record in delivering similar signature destinations, such as organising the Connected Media IP area at



Neil Nixon

the NAB Show in Las Vegas, a runaway success that Nixon is confident he can replicate in London. "Connected Media Europe is perfectly placed within the main BVE 2017 event to demonstrate and discuss IP-focused technologies including IPTV, OTT, mobile, social and cloud," he explained.

"As BVE is the UK's largest event for professionals in creating, managing and distributing video content, it was the obvious partner for us to deliver Connected Media Europe."

Connected Media Europe incorporates a seminar theatre and TV-style interview studio in an exhibition that features 300-plus leading manufacturers, distributors and resellers of professional production and broadcast equipment and systems.

Daniel Sacchelli, Event Manager at BVE, commented: "Co-locating Connected Media Europe alongside BVE will see us continue to create an all-encompassing event for the entire media and entertainment industry. It will benefit exhibitors and visitors by providing them with a more complete and diverse business platform at a single event."



Daniel Sacchelli

SHORT CALLS

Exclusive Group's Non-Executive Board Director Neil Ledger has been awarded the British Empire Medal in the Queen's Birthday Honours List, recognising his efforts in raising more than £300k for over 40 local and national charities over the last 20 years.

James Flitton, Vice President Service Delivery at Level 3 Communications, has joined The Institute of Telecommunications Professionals (ITP) Board of Directors. ITP Chairman Lucy Woods said: "James brings a wealth of knowledge from his telecoms background and we look forward to his input and guidance driving the ITP forward."

Microsoft has set up a venture capital fund designed to pursue early-stage technology investments in areas such as cloud computing and AI. The new fund is called Microsoft Ventures, the same name as an existing entity that has been renamed to Microsoft Accelerator. Microsoft Ventures will sit on a continuum between Microsoft Accelerator and the company's bigger more traditional M&A activity. The unit will open offices in San Francisco, Seattle, New York and Tel Aviv and will be run by Nagraj Kashyap and Peggy Johnson, both veterans of Qualcomm.

NTA has rolled out a hosted telephony platform based on its HVNO model. Justin Blaine, Channel Sales Manager, said: "Our partners have been asking to have their branding, the flexibility to manage every move, add or change via the online portal and the ability to monitor every end point or SIP trunk. This is like the MVNO model."

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Trailblazer burned cash

Outsourcery finally ran out of steam last month, its prospects no longer sustainable by hype, hot air and cash bail outs, according to industry watchers who assess what went wrong.

Outsourcery was co-founded by former Dragon's Den star Piers Linney who in May 2013 floated his tech firm on AIM with a market capitalisation of £34.6 million, but the company's market value slumped. Last month Outsourcery suspended trading on AIM and stated that it was no longer able to present its results for 2015 by the deadline of the end of June. In April the company warned it needed short-term working capital and sought alternatives to raise money, including a fundraising, restructuring and the sale of non-core assets. But this last-ditch strategy failed to save Outsourcery.

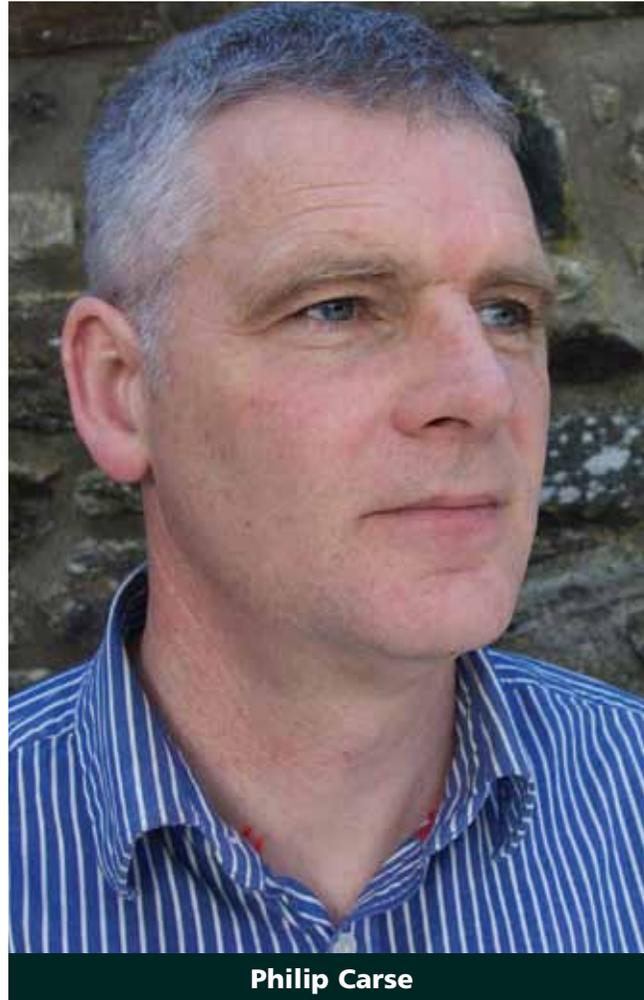
Sam Woodward, Joint Administrator and Restructuring Partner at EY, said: "Outsourcery had invested significantly in its IT infrastructure and cost base in anticipation of strong revenue growth from its O-Cloud platform. In practice, growth was below expectations resulting in Outsourcery suffering trading losses and cash flow pressure. We were able to secure a sale of the majority of the Outsourcery business to GCI Network Solutions immediately following administration, which presents an excellent outcome for the business, preserves approximately 100 jobs and provides continuity of service for its customers."

Recent developments at GCI signalled a predictable step-

change in the company's growth strategy but few could have forecast its swift acquisition of Outsourcery. The firm's demise, however, should come as no surprise. Popped up by hype, the company, once seen as the darling in the cloud, suddenly evaporated. GCI, on the other hand, was founded in 2000 by Wayne Martin who became Chairman in January this year following a boardroom reshuffle that included the appointment of former Easynet Global Services Managing Director Adrian Thirkill as CEO. The move formed part of a three year growth agenda and was followed by the appointment of Mike Constantine as CTO and then Mike Ayres as CCO and Phil Smith as COO in May, all experienced industry leaders.

Philip Carse, analyst at Megabuyte.com, said: "Outsourcery failed because it was overly reliant on its partners as a route to market, it bet the ranch on selling relatively new services in a 'build it and they will come' approach (accompanied by considerable hype), and had established a cost base to support considerably larger revenues. Subject to the price paid, and GCI is not renowned for over-paying, this could turn out to be an astute strategic move for the company, gaining an asset and customers for a fraction of Outsourcery's investment."

Carse also noted that Outsourcery raised money at 'punchy multiples' supported



Philip Carse

The cash ran out and Vodafone triggered a sale to ensure continuity of service

by ambitious broker forecasts which Megabuyte.com judged never likely to be achieved and, inevitably, shareholders grew tired of funding the ongoing cash needs. "The company had to become increasingly inventive, tapping private shareholders such as UKFast founder Lawrence Jones as well as major partner Vodafone," said Carse. "In

the end, the cash ran out and Vodafone triggered a sale to ensure continuity of service."

Platform for growth

According to Carse the story is likely to be 'very different' under GCI which provides an immediate route to market for the Outsourcery platform and is well funded. "GCI stands to gain from cost synergies and the cross

and up-selling of other services," commented Carse. "There will, of course, be an integration challenge, but the company has had plenty of practice with Outsourcery being at least the 11th acquisition since 2010."

Outsourcery's biggest mistake was shifting its channel focus away from SME resellers in favour of large multi-nationals, believes Paul Billingham, Director at Knight Corporate Finance. "Outsourcery had an opportunity to establish itself with fast growing smaller resellers but chose to focus on the big beasts," he stated. "While having blue chip brands like Vodafone and Ingram Micro sounds impressive, sales traction was always going to be difficult. Outsourcery was never going to be able to do enough with these giants to make a material difference to its business."

Along its troubled journey Outsourcery also missed the opportunity to save itself by taking obvious measures, noted Billingham. "The company did not cut costs anywhere near fast enough when it was clear that sales revenues were lagging," he added. "Outsourcery's leaders appeared to be in denial when something positive had to be done. Why move from low cost Bury to high cost Spinningfields in Manchester before a break-even had been achieved?"

One key lesson that can be learnt from Outsourcery's

and fizzled out

demise is that there is nothing wrong with changing strategic direction if the current approach is failing. "Don't sit in denial until it's too late," warned Billingham. "But I'm sure Wayne and his team at GCI will demonstrate that there is a decent business in there somewhere."

Adam Zoldan, Director at Knight Corporate Finance, noted that Outsourcery raised money on its initial public offering at a 'staggering valuation of 12 times revenue'. "It raised £13 million on a value of £35 million when it only had revenues of £3.6 million," he said. "This cash was supposed to be used to see the business through to break-even, but instead Outsourcery set off on a path of building a large business with big overheads, and struggled to grow at the same pace."

Six months later, run rate revenues had only increased to £4.1 million but the firm burnt £5.5 million in cash during that period, almost

£1 million per month. "At the end of the year revenues crept up to £5.2 million with a cash burn in the year of £9.5 million," added Zoldan. "Following further fund raising and cost cutting, in 2014 it cut its cash burn significantly to £3.2 million but the writing was on the wall. The business had unsustainably high overheads and was not selling enough. Leadership failed shareholders with unrealistic projections and the company consistently failed to live within its means."

Points to ponder

Zoldan's key takeaways from this company failure? "Set expectations at a realistic level for the sake of yourself, your investors and your staff," he advised. "Don't let ego influence objective business decisions."

All said and done, the Outsourcery acquisition gives GCI an established cloud platform that supports UC, Skype for Business and other major Microsoft applications, and the deal strengthens existing relationships

with Vodafone and Virgin Media. GCI also acquired a sales pipeline and £8 million in revenues. Carse noted that the financial implications of the deal include an approximate 15 per cent revenue uplift at EBITDA break-even.

"Although Outsourcery recorded a £4 million EBITDA loss on those £8 million revenues in 2015, GCI said the EBITDA impact will be initially neutral," explained Carse. "GCI will not be assuming any Outsourcery debt or other liabilities which are likely to be in excess of £8 million. Over time, GCI intends to cross sell its much broader range of services into the Outsourcery customer base, including connectivity and its new PCIaaS offering etc."

Carse also calculated that GCI will be at a run rate of circa £9.5 million EBITDA on £63 million revenues. "However, GCI has alluded to three pending bank financed acquisitions costing approximately £18 million that will add another £2.5 to £3 million of EBITDA in the fields of telecoms, connectivity and cloud UC," he added. "With Outsourcery's revenues and the planned three acquisitions, GCI's circa £12 million EBITDA run rate moves it firmly into the top 30 UK comms providers and is approaching double the level of 2013 and 2014."

According to Zoldan, GCI has an exciting opportunity to become a leading Microsoft channel partner with the infrastructure in place to make cost reductions in the acquired business. "Expect it to be profitable some time soon," he stated. ■



Adam Zoldan

"Set expectations at a realistic level for the sake of yourself, your investors and your staff. Don't let ego influence objective business decisions."



Paul Billingham

"Outsourcery had an opportunity to establish itself with fast growing smaller resellers but chose to focus on the big beasts."

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The network foundation

We have reached a seminal moment in the comms channel's history and it's time to take your business, and SME organisations, to the next level. That's the upshot of this year's Margin in Voice and Data event that urged delegates to help UK SMEs build their future on an optimised networked foundation.

The SME connectivity opportunity is a gift to comms resellers able to give the market what it wants. And the demographics of this vibrant sector also run in the channel's favour. To understand the market you need to think of the network as the foundation where nothing pre-digital exists. And a high degree of success awaits astute resellers. Not surprisingly, the SME opportunity featured prominently at this year's Margin in Voice and Data event (9th June, Forest of Arden Hotel and Country Club), which urged the channel to help UK SMEs leverage their network to the max.

The size of the opportunity is gargantuan. Paul Cunningham, Content Director, told delegates that SMEs represent 99.9 per cent of the UK's 5.2 million businesses, and they contribute over £1.6 trillion (47 per cent) of private sector turnover to the national economy. Nor is that all: Seven per cent of UK businesses are high growth small enterprises and account for 60 per cent

of new jobs being created. Not surprisingly, SMEs are now considered to be the engines of growth, and communications is critical to these organisations with even the smallest micro-business spending an average £1,000 per annum on comms. Small businesses spend circa £4,000 and medium sized companies invest around £11,500 a year, which all tolled represents a sizeable market opportunity.

Another upside, the SME network experience is improving. In 2014, 56 per cent of SME premises were connected to 30Mbps-plus, rising to 82 per cent in 2017 (Ofcom figures). But 42 per cent of SMEs report Internet connectivity problems and 29 per cent complain of service availability, which, in a growth market, is not ideal. But it's a daily scenario that must be managed.

Glitches aside, the network is the foundation of a growth orientated business model, underlined by SMEs that are categorised as high users of online services. "They grow much faster so there is a clear need for an enhanced network experience," said Cunningham. "You've got



Paul Cunningham

to build value to make the network effective for SMEs."

Amid these converging factors there is much opportunity to grip. More intriguing is that 83 per cent of SMEs in the UK consider communication services to be fundamental to their business (2015 figures cited by Ofcom), so there is a requirement for enhanced network experiences based on availability, service reliability, service guarantees, SLAs, monitoring and reporting.

In the cloud

Cloud applications also have significant value but despite the current focus of many providers only 23 per cent of SMEs report using cloud services (Ofcom 2015). "There is potential for considerable market growth with greater SME awareness and adoption," commented Cunningham. "But a recent study by BCSG found that just under half of SMEs in the UK are willing to purchase cloud services from their telecoms supplier, while 40 per cent said they were willing to buy software and other tools from operators to help grow their business."

Here's the question delegates loved – how to effectively address this shifting market? "Verticalisation into SME markets is an important way of approaching this sector," added Cunningham. "Bundling ICT products and services with price plans and offers that meet the needs of a particular industry can be effective. There is a niche opportunity for smaller channel players that are able to add specialist market knowledge."

Harnessing data is also an important aspect of building a long-term business model and understanding the opportunities at hand. There are various ways to harness data, but these methods are mostly viewed as challenging and complex. That said, smaller businesses can exploit day-to-day data that's being drawn from billing and CRM systems, for example, offering valuable insights into their own business and their customers' operations.

As a shining example Cunningham cited Union Street's Benchmarking service which is based on opted-in data from its customers. The subsequent

reports compare and contrast their performance against peers. "This is an example of how business analytics can be simplified and integrated to serve the needs of customers," stated Cunningham.

But the overall picture can be complicated and a way to break down complexity into simple building blocks must be found. Enter the 'business platform', a foundation slab that underpins the building stones of a future business model. "When breaking aspects of the market down into their component parts not all of them will be relevant to a business, but there will be some elements of each of those business blocks to think about," noted Cunningham. "For instance, adapting to the cloud, and it's crucial to be analytical and think about data, as well as energising sales teams, motivating markets and building value into your business."

The strategic outcome of this year's Margin in Voice and Data event ought to be a grand initiative to elevate the network as the foundation of SME businesses. The immediate job is not to reflect on market possibilities but to get down to work, with the onus on cloud applications, analytics, marketing and sales growth, all building blocks addressed by this year's main sponsors, including keynotes from NFON UK Managing Director Rami Houbby; Mark Curtis-Wood, Nimans' Head of Network Services; and Adam Zoldan, Director, Knight CF. Other speakers included Andy Grant, Managing Director of Bowan Arrow; and John Donohoe, Partner at sales development firm Believe. ■

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Hansford's laser focus

A razor sharp focus on the public sector has given Farnborough-based Skyscape Cloud Services an almighty boost, and that's just the start of a bigger story according to CEO Simon Hansford.

Skyscape's mature and disciplined approach to a rich seam of opportunity has paid off in spades. The company is focused on one product, one market and has no distractions. Immersed in constant innovation Skyscape is prepared to disrupt current products, services and costs at the drop of a hat. Furthermore, Hansford never takes his eye off the ball and brings rare experience to the game plan. Prior to co-founding Skyscape he was the CTO and VP of Service Strategy of Attenda, one of the UK's major MSPs which he also co-founded in 1997. Previous positions include senior technical, sales, product and marketing roles at Novell and Dell Computer Corporation.

It was the Government's ICT strategy to boost efficiency and reduce costs within the public sector that caught the attention of Skyscape's founders in 2011. The G-Cloud Framework fuelled the adoption of cloud-based computing capabilities by easing the ways in which public sector bodies could buy and use ICT services from small and medium-sized businesses. After building and selling a previous business, Hansford set about connecting with a group of

like-minded people to drive forward a new concept. What followed was Skyscape Cloud Services, the brainchild of Jeffrey Thomas, Jeremy Saunders, Phil Dawson and Simon Hansford.

The company's share holders invested approximately £25 million to create a cloud platform specifically to address IT procurement and security issues within the UK public sector. The firm has been on G-Cloud since its first iteration and secured early big wins with organisations such as the Home Office, HMRC and DVLA, earning it recognition from Gartner and Deloitte. "Our cloud services have been designed to be easy to adopt, use and leave, without any start-up or exit fees," said Hansford. "Skyscape charges by the hour, allowing departments to scale up or down based on their needs, and only paying for what they use."

In November last year the company announced its eighth successive price drop, made possible by growing economies of scale which have led to storage costs falling by 90 per cent this past year alone. In the years ahead, the company aims to more than double its size and accelerate growth in



Simon Hansford

the public sector based on a proven formula. "Skyscape doesn't serve commercial customers but chooses to invest its expertise in understanding the digital transformation challenges affecting the public sector, and how our cloud platform can be used effectively by customers," added Hansford. "This enables the us to provide an environment that puts customers in control, delivering value and ultimately benefitting UK citizens and businesses."

Stellar growth

Skyscape's headcount currently stands at circa 130 and revenues have increased almost nine fold in two years from £3.7 million to £32.1 million this year, a compound annual growth rate of 195.8 per cent driven by high consumption of compute hours. In its next financial year Skyscape is forecasting strong growth in both

revenues and profitability as new customers, additional partners and more workloads transition to the platform. The company now has over 100 customers, 200-plus workloads and partners with a 60 per cent direct and 40 per cent partner split.

Hansford's main challenges are recruiting and retaining appropriate technical, operational, commercial and leadership talent in the face of a national skills shortage. "Despite having a recruitment and human resources management programme to identify, recruit, develop, motivate and retain talent, we have over 30 roles to fill but finding and competing for people is a challenge," he said.

Another challenge is bidding for and winning large scale contracts on a G-Cloud platform that has a vast and complex legacy estate.

The solution? Enabling a robust risk management strategy with a formal bid review process, and certified service delivery with simple terms and conditions in line with G-Cloud.

"I genuinely see the market moving in our direction," stated Hansford. "Cloud adoption remains low, less than eight per cent, and is forecast to be over 30 per cent within the next four years. It's about focus, getting to scale and delivering a quality service at the right price point. We're doing something that makes a difference in terms of services delivered to citizens and saving taxpayers' money." ■

Just a minute with Simon Hansford...

Role model: An uncle who gained a 1st in Engineering from Cambridge, became an accountant, went into sales, ran a product marketing team and by the age of 45 was a CEO in a large multi-national

What talent do you wish you had? The ability to switch off or a good singing voice

Lessons learnt: To perhaps act and invest with more speed and confidence

What do you fear the most? Not doing the best job possible

Name three ideal dinner guests: Steve Jobs, Sting and Marilyn Monroe

Name one thing you couldn't do without in your job: Ability to think outside the box

If you weren't in comms, what would you be doing? Flying helicopters

Top tip: Be brave, listen and deliberately disrupt



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Platforms of the future

Communication platforms are centre stage and undergoing constant evolution. Here, we take a behind the scenes look at the technologies that are top of mind for R&D experts.

The cross-disciplinary nature of communications platforms is a driver for multiple, disruptive or semi-disruptive changes in the market; and technological developments in areas such as radio technology, computational hardware and security will all feature prominently in the future look of comms platforms. "With the 4G evolution, and even more with soon-to-be 5G, mobile radio technology takes a big leap onto higher frequency spectrum with advanced concepts such as massive MIMO and cooperative transmission," commented Björn Ekelund, Research Director, Device Technology and Ecosystem, Ericsson.

Ekelund highlighted that computational hardware continues to beat Moore's law using new interconnect topologies and advanced parallel architectures. "With the development of new semiconductor technology, radio hardware becomes dramatically more broadband and more digital," he added. "Security technology faces the challenges of not only quantum computing but also the rapidly growing value of data and massive system complexities. On top of this, new concepts are

making their entrance on the industrial scene such as block chain. And software continues to demonstrate higher and higher levels of intelligence making it possible to use it in new areas and on bigger data sets."

As an ICT company with both product and service offerings, Ericsson's focus is broad, but the advent of 5G communications technology is one of its main areas of R&D investment. "Since 5G is targeting both humans (smartphones and mobile broadband) and non-humans (the IoT) we also invest in applications for the industrial and societal use of ICT technology," added Ekelund. "But to make a world class communications platform you need to excel in all disciplines – hardware, software, interconnect, transmission, mechanics, energy, antennas and so on. And we invest accordingly."

Ericsson also places a high priority on sustainability. This drives further innovation in virtually all technical areas. Another area of interest is 'wonder material' graphene. "Being a member of the Graphene Flagship we of course have big hopes for this exciting new material," added Ekelund. "We can see applications in many diverse



Björn Ekelund

areas such as photonics, electronics and antennas, but we also have realistic expectations. It will still be some time before we see graphene in such products."

Wonder material

ShoreTel is primarily a software company, but graphene could be used in its electronics, such as switches and endpoints for thermal dissipation, according to Eugenia Corrales, Senior Vice President for Product at ShoreTel. "Of great interest is the fact graphene has a 95 per cent solar efficiency, so maybe solar applications are the most immediate priority," she said.

Graphene will surely play a critical role in future communications, just as open source is becoming an integral part of business applications today. For example, Linux and Hadoop are revolutionary, and multi-vendor solutions can

ensure interoperability with key functions such as CRM and ERP, noted Corrales. "We will continue to see increased adoption of cloud-based technology to create greater flexibility and cost-effectiveness for our customers," she said. "Furthermore, mobile-first development leverages the fact that mobile devices are now the dominant vehicle for businesses, changing the way we do transactions permanently."

Corrales also noted that innovation is being seen in modular design, which allows a customer to select only the functionality they need today while having the flexibility to build new capabilities later. "Real-time improvements enable customers to get new features and capabilities faster," she commented. "Added to this, a rich community of contributors from different industries, regions and specialities will

enable customers to integrate best-in-class capabilities."

There are four broad technology areas that are shaping the future of communications, according to Peter Kim, Vice President Research and Development at Ericsson-LG Enterprise. These are 5G mobile connectivity, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual or Augmented Reality and the IoT. "5G offers over 100 times faster speed than 4G and enables 4K/8K Ultra High Definition (UHD) transmission and Virtual Reality services including 3D hologram," he said.

"Artificial Intelligence can be converged with communications, and Virtual/Augmented Reality makes it possible to share richer information and enable tele-experience communications. Furthermore, the IoT widens the scope of communication from human-to-human to human-to-machine and machine-to-machine. This will have a profound change on the way we live our lives both professionally and privately."

In terms of Ericsson-LG's R&D the shift from hardware to software is mostly complete and the focus now is on virtualisation and the cloud. "We have adopted a cloud-first strategy in that everything we now do is prioritised for cloud deployment," added Kim. "From a client perspective our focus is on WebRTC which forms part of our mobile integration strategy. We are also investing in developing technologies that can help make the mobile device a seamless part of the enterprise ecosystem. Security is increasingly a concern, and another area we are investing in is of course IoT." ■



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Nuvola rises in UC era

Nuvola Distribution is a clear reflection of irresistible market forces, and its Managing Director's character, outlook and drive have been equally shaped by compelling influencing factors – so it's no accident that the combination of Nuvola and Michael Lloyd is a force to be reckoned with.



Michael Lloyd

A conjunction of personal influences have instilled in Lloyd a strong work ethic. Role models in this respect include his father and grandfather whose work philosophy, based on diligence, honesty and knowledge, made an early impact on Lloyd. These traits were put to good use early in his career when selling Olivetti word processors to companies in London. Cold calling provided a solid foundation in sales, and Lloyd also learned how to turn a 'no' into a 'yes', and he quickly realised that you only get out of life what you put in,

reinforcing his appreciation of the balance between effort and reward, and building on the strong work ethic already at play. "There is no substitute for hard work when it comes to achieving success," said Lloyd.

Nuvola Distribution was created out of Nuage Communications which was formed in 2010 by Lloyd and Operations Director, Nigel Emerson. The company operates as a dedicated services business working exclusively within the channel, delivering expertise in UC, VoIP, contact centre, WLAN, Lync and mobility. Nuage evolved into the

services division of Nuvola Distribution which was created three years ago to distribute technologies and services around UC and VoIP solutions. Nuvola Distribution is now a fast growing VAD that provides both services and product, underpinned by sales, marketing and technical support.

Key partners

The first brand distributed by Nuvola was the Alcatel Lucent Enterprise range, making it one of just two distributors in the UK. The company is also a ShoreTel EMEA Services partner and last year was awarded the distribution licence

by ShoreTel. Nuvola then targeted the cloud market with its own hosted UC solution, Nuvem, which is now the foundation for other cloud services planned for the future. "From the very beginning we saw an opportunity in the marketplace to offer UC services, hence the business was built around this proposition," said Lloyd.

The shift from on-premise to cloud solutions is a big trend noted by Lloyd, along with the growing popularity of 'as-a-service' subscription models. "UC is the main area of differentiation," he stated. "The business change required to understand and deliver services is not an easy one for resellers, but we have been doing this for six years and are very proficient. We can add considerable value with our experience, expertise and qualifications; and our proposition enables resellers to offer a complete portfolio of UC solutions and services to their customers."

Nuvola's target markets are existing UC partners and IT related businesses, and its strategy is paying off with more than 35 per cent year-on-year growth. "Providing customers with product-only is clearly not the way forward," stated Lloyd. "The web and cloud are changing the marketplace and the way that people and businesses source products. We are seeing a high demand for 'Everything as a Service' along with consumption-based pricing. This means resellers and SIs have to, more than ever, provide solutions customised and tailored for their customers' requirements, and subsequently wrap services around those solutions.

"To do this effectively will require a sharp focus on specific market profiles and vertical markets. Resellers also need to embrace IoT technologies as these are changing everything. And most importantly, resellers will need to develop their partnering abilities and form relationships with businesses that complement their own skills and capabilities."

The profile of Nuvola's partners range from small owner run businesses up to some of the largest system integrators in Europe. As well as offering them managed services and solutions around cloud technologies the company has also launched a loyalty programme, called NuLoyalty, which offers free MAC hours based on spend. "The NuLoyalty programme helps resellers improve their knowledge, quality and standards of delivery, allowing them to differentiate in their marketplace and improve customer retention," explained Lloyd.

Everyone at Nuvola has a clear understanding of the business direction. Its culture fosters collaboration and the business has a family atmosphere. "Many of our employees are family members and have a vested interest in the success of the company," said Lloyd. "Since inception we have enjoyed a 95 per cent staff retention rate, which is an achievement in today's employment market. People are our most valuable asset. They are what makes the business really work, and I've learnt that staff members should be considered in all decisions. I now spend more time reflecting on important decisions and I try not to sweat the small stuff." ■

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The customer benefits of moving to hosted include cost savings, ease of set-up, flexibility and future readiness. Resellers can benefit by moving from a Capex to an Opex-based model, removing the need for any upfront costs and ensuring the customer only has one monthly cost for the service. This compelling proposition enables resellers to shift the focus of sales conversations from price, to features and benefits.

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*Gamma Connected Business Report - Sept 2015

Hosted telephony advocacy

The market for hosted telephony is no longer new or emerging and early doubts about its success have become a non-argument, but large numbers of resellers are yet to go hosted. Here, we canvassed the views of some key channel suppliers who urge all resellers to join the hosted telephony rolling campaign convoy.

The principle reason to sell hosted VoIP is because it's inextricably linked to the growing influence of the cloud in general. "The chances are that a reseller's clients or prospects will already have some IT services in the cloud, or will be considering moving to the cloud," said Adam Crisp, Managing Director for Firstcom. "Resellers need to offer hosted voice to keep up and stay ahead of the curve."

As well as keeping up with tech trends a hosted VoIP solution enables resellers to address demand for mobile communications. "We have seen a huge shift in personal communications, and the younger workforce expects to communicate inside the office in the same way as they do outside," added Crisp. "Gone are the days when being away from the desk means being disconnected from voice or data."

The business case for selling hosted telephony is plain and simple, noted Crisp, citing ease of adoption, installation, management and configuration as key market drivers. Nor is that all. Seasoned comms and IT resellers already own the skills needed to enter this market. "Adding hosted to their portfolio gives them the opportunity to increase



Adam Crisp

"Gone are the days when being away from the desk means being disconnected from voice or data."

revenues by doing what they already do," added Crisp.

When pitching hosted VoIP to a prospect resellers should focus on the way modern communications can drive a business forward. "Unified communications and convergence is much more

than a PBX in the cloud," noted Crisp. "It's about bringing the client's daily communications together and enhancing productivity."

Benefits

One of the most obvious benefits of cloud-based VoIP is that users are not

bound by geography. Many businesses have a mobile workforce and function as multi-site organisations, so it makes sense for them to adopt a cloud-based system that seamlessly connects remote and home workers. "Today's always-on culture and constantly connected world means that businesses need to be available and responsive wherever, whenever," commented Crisp. "Businesses that do not adopt technology to facilitate this will inevitably miss out to the competition. Inherent flexibility and agility is a driving factor. Today's agile workforce demands a system that adapts to their needs and eases the pain of scaling up or down."

A key point of interest noted by MyPhones.com Managing Director Dr Stuart Marsden is the growing number of hosted telephony providers in the market, creating more choice and an environment where resellers can more readily sell to sub-resellers. Alternative options have also emerged such as Skype for Business. Furthermore, prices for hosted are starting to come down and that trend is certain to continue given the increased competition in the market, he believes.

Against this backdrop, early adopters are now coming to the end of their first

contracts. "They've gained knowledge and experience and aren't afraid to switch to different systems and new providers," commented Marsden. "While telephony features are important, price is clearly a key factor. Therefore MyPhones.com's policy has always been to be competitively priced with a simple pricing structure."

Staying true to its policy, MyPhones.com's prices have not increased since the launch of Altos and according to Marsden there are no plans to change the pricing strategy despite ongoing investment in new features to improve the customer experience. In fact, things can only get better, he says. "The improvement in connectivity and broadband speeds hasn't just improved the quality and reliability of calls via hosted telephony platforms, it is also making integration with other services easier and more successful," he added.

"Through the Altos hosted telephony platform end users can do far more than just make and receive phone calls, pick up their voicemails and twin their office and mobile phone. They can also make and receive video calls, access their internal contacts directory, personal contacts directory and corporate contacts directory wherever they have access

ates urge greater uptake

to a computer and Internet connection, as an example."

Developments like video calling, video conferencing and presence features all provide additional ways for businesses to communicate with staff and customers. And because social media plays a role in everyone's personal communications now, it's not surprising that businesses would be interested in ways to bring these into the workplace. "Hosted telephony systems can help to make these accessible to businesses of all shapes and sizes, not just large corporations," stated Marsden.

He said that MyPhones.com's Altos product is especially popular because it is fast, easy and cheap to deploy, and it's more flexible than traditional PBX systems. Resellers can easily upgrade, downscale and even change a system completely whenever they need to. "More people are considering or using cloud-based services in their personal life," said Marsden. "Hosted telephony isn't as niche as it used to be, and with improvements in security and broadband



Sean Blackmore

"We are seeing large single site offices taking hosted as a result of the commercials available, the appeal of an opex model and access to a rich feature set."

speeds delivering better quality and reliability there's less resistance to the adoption of cloud-based business services.

Toe dipping

"It's safe and easy to dip your toe into the pool of modern cloud-based services. Hosted telephony integrates well with other services and it's a good way to explore

different communication systems and how they can be combined to improve engagement with staff, customers and stakeholders."

BT's strategy to move customers off ISDN services in 2025 is a significant hosted market opportunity. And as connectivity becomes more readily available and commercially more attractive to consumers, it is only natural that hosted telephony sales will continue to increase, observes Sean Blackmore, Hosted Sales Specialist at Gamma, who has witnessed strong uptake of Gamma's Horizon platform.

Like other hosted solutions Horizon helps resellers move from a capex to an opex-based model, removing the need for up-front costs and maintenance, and ensuring the customer only has one monthly cost for the service. "This enables resellers to

shift the focus of sales conversations from price to features and benefits," added Blackmore. "We are rivalling traditional PBX manufacturers for functionality and the platform is updated on a regular basis. Features like 'one number anywhere' integrate fixed and mobile capabilities so that end users never miss a call, enabling more productive and flexible working."

Horizon is based on the Broadsoft call controller platform that provides a range of fixed and mobile telephony capabilities via a portal. Channel partners can configure Horizon through the portal in real-time. And within 24 hours the chosen handsets will be delivered, fully pre-configured and ready to go.

With this proposition Gamma targets the sub-500 seat market. "At one time the hosted product set was attractive to customers with multiple sites and a low number of users per site, but we are now seeing large



Paul Burn

"Resellers need to grasp the nettle because hosted is no longer in the early adoption phase."

single site offices taking hosted as a result of the commercials available, the appeal of an opex model and access to a rich feature set," said Blackmore.

Nimans has witnessed strong take up of its own GS-hosted proposition that allows resellers to move into hosted in a 'choice way'. They can maintain their upfront margin model or opt for a monthly income. Selling hosted is simply a *de facto* case of giving customers what they want, reckons Paul Burn, Head of Category Sales at Nimans. "One of the biggest reasons resellers should be selling hosted is because their customers are demanding it," he stated. "So there is a danger of being left behind if customer requirements are not met. Resellers need to grasp the nettle because hosted is no longer in the early adoption phase. Its reliable and established technology with high potential."

New conversations with customers should be about what they want and need, along with the business benefits, pointed out Burn. But he believes that such conversations are all too often digressing into discussions about delivery and how hosted solutions enter a building. "It should always be about business benefits," he emphasised. "Applications is where resellers should be focusing, particularly the mix of on-premises and off-premise products. For example, door entry and call recording can still be on-site alongside a hosted telephony platform. Hosted is not an all or nothing conversation. Businesses can have their cake and eat it."



Dr Stuart Marsden

"Early adopters have gained experience and aren't afraid to switch to different systems and new providers."



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Dealing with disruption in

commsvision



The new world of platform-driven communications takes centre stage at this year's gold standard Comms Vision Convention, and while the growth opportunities are significant, challenges must be overcome to realise the market potential, writes Content Director Paul Cunningham.

In May the World Economic Forum predicted the digital economy to return one hundred trillion dollars by 2025, disrupting the known industrial economy in the process. The numbers are mind-boggling, so how do they translate for comms channel businesses that could and should be at the heart of this transition? That will be the focus of our speakers and delegates at Comms Vision 2016 at Gleneagles in November.

To become and remain competitive, today's enterprises must design and equip their business to create value, and the concept of a Business Platform can play a critical part in achieving this. A Platform can usefully be thought of as an integrated and open business model, not necessarily a specific technology, that determines how an organisation engages with its stakeholders, promotes technology innovation, designs its business processes and develops an effective culture and brand.

We are currently witnessing the inexorable rise of



technology-enabled platforms for businesses, and their corresponding impact on the business communications marketplace is also keenly felt. Emerging software-based platforms for business communications, integrated with common business applications and complemented by new technologies such as sensors, analytics and machine learning, are leading a drive towards contextual communication and are changing the game.

The innate ability to serve the most appropriate communications medium (and supporting information) automatically to an individual or a team according to the real-time context of their location, activity or expertise is already established. In the

imminent future this will encompass factors such as our reputation, our health status, proximity to problems or opportunities, or a myriad of other external human and technology factors.

Key acquisition

Last month Microsoft agreed definitive terms to acquire LinkedIn, the world's biggest professional social media platform for \$26 billion, at a premium, making it the third largest acquisition in the history of the tech industry. Notwithstanding the ongoing debate about this valuation and Microsoft's motives, this is clearly a 'Platform' play intended to parlay LinkedIn's 430 million global subscribers (and significant expertise in data analysis) into a value generator across Microsoft's solutions in CRM,

Unified Communications and Office Productivity.

Closer to home, Vonage recently spent \$230 million on Nexmo, an established but niche communication platform business that most UK comms channel players will be unfamiliar with. Cisco's recent launch of the Spark collaboration platform brings it into this fast expanding territory, with a just-revealed but well advanced API collaboration with Apple bringing it rapidly to the attention of professional smartphone users.

What does this mean to the comms sector and its channel models? Service providers, vendors, system integrators and applications developers must quickly determine their

role and opportunity in the new world of platform-driven communications, and they may be facing an existential challenge. This will be decided in the battle to make communications relevant to the customers' current and future workflows and culture, redefining business processes and disrupting markets via innovative business models.

The future will be based on building, buying or borrowing (renting) platforms that customers, partners, suppliers and employees can integrate with and develop on to collaboratively solve business problems. This is having a major impact on established ecosystems and supply chains as they are reconfigured or supplanted, with business leaders recognising the inherent and growing value of being in the platform business.

Traditional vendors such as Cisco and Microsoft are walking a difficult line between partner and competitor by pitching themselves and their more innovative collaborators against their existing service provider customers. Meanwhile, SIs and ISVs

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Oak innovation

n the age of the Platform

have become essential to the building of and access to scarce data management and application development resources. In the ensuing scramble for position, new providers such as Slack and Twilio have emerged, offering opportunistic and agile business solution developers a compelling platform.

Where next?

How can the channel respond? The comms channel has long been recognised for its ability to sell, assure, bill and deliver business comms solutions. To this can now be added the need to either own development resources or offer access to them, while providing global or regional delivery and support for customers. Channel players must translate customer business requirements into real life solutions with the ability to integrate to multiple platforms. The fundamental service the channel can deliver is network connectivity, with a major part of the opportunity focused on simplifying the often complex and challenging nature of dealing with service providers.

Many channel players identify the provision of ICT services as a natural extension of this current core business and a way of adding new revenue streams, and as these migrate to the cloud new opportunities will emerge. The channel is well positioned to offer cloud services, the performance of which is highly dependent upon a foundation of network availability and

quality. However, if they are to be more than just the plumber laying the pipe they must develop and offer relevant bundles for their customers, differentiated by understanding the impact of these on the network and sustaining end-to-end quality of experience from design through deployment and operation.

Although comms solution providers have identified a range of cloud services they can bundle – including enterprise apps, storage, analytics, CRM and billing – according to Ofcom research only 23 per cent of UK SMEs report using cloud services. This leaves considerable headroom for market growth as businesses are educated about the impact of these services on business performance, and as key enablers such as superfast broadband are deployed.

If the key to success in the Platform Age is building a focused but flexible offer based around the needs of customers, the channel has to rapidly develop infrastructure and services that in turn can be quickly adapted for their target markets.

The platform that will support this future must be applicable to a diverse spectrum from consumer to higher end enterprises. This represents a reversal of the traditional industry view where SMEs and consumers were at the foot of the pyramid that always got the attention of the incumbent product development and marketing teams. So what



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is needed to meet this oncoming opportunity? Three key areas of potential development come to mind:

A Converged Platform: A mix of mobile and fixed services that match the needs of the customers' business is essential. The customer will decide and the platform must be flexible enough to allow mixing and matching of services to fit the business. The channel's ability to offer an optimum blend of networks, devices and applications to improve business performance and save the customer money is a critical success factor.

Cloud: Being alert to the potential impact of cloud-based services on their business and that of their customers (and their networks) is essential to the channel. This will

embrace ICT services such as storage and computing as well as UC services and informal contact centres.

Analytics: Data doesn't have to be big to be important. Analytics are not just for the very largest business clients, SMEs can and should benefit from the power of data analytics generated from the core of the network, across service bundles and directly from their existing billing, CRM and operational systems as well as those of their vendor and distribution partners.

So why a Platform again? Digital platforms provide a foundation that others can build on, providing an architecture of participation. The most successful digital businesses have recognised that intrinsic value lies in the network the platform

enables, not within the platform alone. The World Economic Forum's digital economy forecast is massive, and every business, even the largest global player, is dwarfed by it. But what if you could plug the power of that network into your business? This is what the Platform concept offers by being highly scalable, applicable to diverse business models, and acting as a sustainable, cost-effective multiplier of inputs and outcomes.

Your customers will require increasingly sophisticated services as they seek to compete with larger or more established businesses, leveraging the digital economy and services available to them from many sources. Comms Vision 2016 promises to play a key part in achieving this. ■

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Why experience matters

Turning businesses into places fit for today's empowered clients is a matter of complete control over the customer experience. Anything less is a doomed exercise in outdated communications and obsolete work practices, according to Comms Vision Platinum sponsor 8x8 which aims to deliver a consistent and sublime customer experience based on the right technology.

Impeccable service has a unique potency in the customer's mind, it demands loyalty, while turning your back on clients and prospects is a recipe for strategic collapse. Fall short of the mark and you will surely be held accountable as disgruntled callers seize on opportunities at their finger tips to contact competitor companies and broadcast their dissatisfaction on various media, even in real-time as they experience poor service.

It is beyond argument that providing an immaculate customer experience is a boon to all businesses, but research by 8x8 has revealed the extent and impact of widespread customer interaction breakdown. The survey results show that just 22 per cent of callers ringing a business get through first time, and 35 per cent of the calls that went unanswered were made by new customers looking for information on products, how to open an account or make a purchase.

It goes without saying that when customers call a business they hope to quickly receive the benefit of a knowledgeable mind, trained to assess their requirements and offer helpful conclusions. A failure to deliver this basic response can result in swift retribution according to the survey that found 12 per cent of callers have searched for competitors online during a badly handled call.



Kevin Scott-Cowell

It's crucial to make every interaction count

This statistic rises to more than a quarter in the 25-34 age group which displays a lower tolerance of bad service. Even worse, if callers turn 'anti' where no formal safeguards are in place, fierce reactions can be let loose as bad experiences are broadcast on social media and review sites. Over 90 per cent of survey respondents cited a poor experience on the phone and they are far more likely to shout about bad service than a great experience.

8x8's study also deduced that 11 per cent of callers have, during a badly handled call, named and shamed a company live on social media (rising to 26 per cent

of those aged 25-34). To contain such outbreaks of customer dissatisfaction a business communications management regime is urgently needed, and helping companies to improve their customer experience is a big market opportunity for the channel, according to Kevin Scott-Cowell, UK Managing Director for 8x8.

First impressions

"A business only has one chance to make a great first impression and getting off on the wrong foot can destroy the customer relationship from the outset," he said. "It's crucial to make every interaction count, and that starts by making sure new customer calls are answered

first time and directed to an appropriately skilled agent. This stops them being passed to multiple agents and becoming frustrated by the whole experience. With the right technology in place it can be easy for businesses to make sure calls are routed to a manned phone and appropriately skilled agent so new customers are never exposed to rivals."

The role of Enterprise Communications as a Service (ECaaS) in delivering an enhanced customer experience to the collective benefit of all cannot be in doubt, enabling companies to foster client loyalty and move into an unassailable lead over rivals. But too many businesses are missing a large number of inbound enquiries from potential customers.

Scott-Cowell's message is clear: "Make sure someone picks up the phone when a customer calls," he urged. "It can be tricky in a busy office or contact centre, but having the right technology in place will ease the strain. This would help route calls to the first available person who can deal with the enquiry, whether they're based in another office, another country or even another continent."

He emphasised how cloud contact centres improve the client experience. They give customers a choice of channels and callers

can get in touch via most devices. This new dynamic has been labelled 'customer empowerment' and makes the customer experience a key differentiator. 8x8 argues that cloud-based contact centres enable companies to more readily advance their customer care strategies and best practices by engaging with clients in a personalised way through multiple channels and applications. Customer contact routing based on historical case resolution data also improves the customer experience. This technology makes it easy for customers to receive a service by reducing the effort required to contact a knowledgeable agent while increasing agent productivity and performance.

According to research, SME contact centres deployed in the cloud outperform on-premise solutions across a number of KPIs, including a lower cost of customer care. Cloud solutions also show stronger 'first contact' resolution rates and drive customer satisfaction more cost-efficiently while generating greater chemistry between a business and its customers and more revenue. "We all want our customers to engage with us," added Scott-Cowell. "But too many fail to get through and are lost to competitors. Customer empowerment is defined by their experience, which can be impeccable if the right technology is deployed." ■



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BE A CUT ABOVE

White outlines game plan

The rebrand of Cheltenham-based Total to Bamboo Technology Group signals a new phase of 'change and growth' according to Managing Director Lorrin White whose strategy is founded on ambition, stakeholder growth, long-term partnerships and a revamped channel programme.

White has brought big plans to the table as she looks to build on the implementation of a ramped up channel proposition that retains the familiar Total brand. "While shooting for the long grass with a newly framed B2B proposition as Bamboo we intend to firmly hold on to the Total name and its brand equity in the channel," she explained. "Historically referred to as the Focus Partner Programme under the Total umbrella, the new channel proposition incorporates the values of the Bamboo brand and will now be known as the Total programme. Taking advantage of the brand equity that Total has instilled in its channel programme is pivotal to the long-term success of the group."

While the rebrand signals change across the business, for the channel it signifies bigger ambitions as the business looks to appeal to a growing audience of customers and resellers. All major company rebrands underline the critical balance between holding onto core values and expressing positive and progressive change and

'difference'. In this case, the concept fulfils this imperative as a true guide to how Total has developed and what it now represents, hard wired to both traditional values and long-term strategies. Here, brand marketers dismissed conventional thinking and planted a stand-out flag in the ground with the Bamboo banner becoming a motif of the company's strength, growth and flexibility.

Core focus

"Strategic positioning over the last two years has been of utmost importance and the introduction of new supply chain partnerships, relevant accreditations and appropriate brand presence has been a core focus," explained White. "Our market positioning is now akin to that of our largest competitors."

The company launched its third party channel in 2010 and 40 per cent of revenues are now derived via partners. In 2015 partner numbers rose by 33 per cent along with a 44 per cent rise in partner mobile connections. "This trend is likely to increase as we place a greater focus on our channel proposition," noted White. "In response



Lorrin White

Taking advantage of the brand equity that Total has instilled in its channel programme is pivotal to the long-term success of the group

to this growth we have recruited more members to our support and account management teams and will be rolling out a new structure to streamline the channel, to best serve all partners, regardless of size, location or needs. This will provide transparency and clarity to connect and drive growth for all, which is what

the business and the Total programme is about."

The team's added oomph signifies a new level of strength, growth and flexibility in a fast-moving marketplace, says White, which underlines the critical balance achieved by the company as it seeks to make significant channel gains in

2016 and beyond. Following two years of development, restructure and recruitment across the business, the wider channel proposition now accommodates bureau billing, exclusive bespoke partner offerings, a robust M2M model, reseller, wholesale and referral options, all gradually introduced into the marketplace since 2013

Plan for growth

and now underpinned by best practice information security processes of the ISO27001 accreditation.

With all that done, White stated clearly what she requires of the new Total programme. "Now it's time to push hard for the partnerships that support integrity, transparency, openness and reciprocal connection benefits," she said. "Whether a member of the team, a direct client or a channel partner, stakeholder growth is our measure of success."

One of the programme's roles in the channel is to remove obstacles to the market for all partners and meet their increased need for transparency and control; and the programme's ability to unlock potential and put control into the hands of resellers will ensure continued growth, believes White.

Convinced of Bamboo's strategic potency she explained how the company will separate itself further from the competition. "Our revitalised philosophy stands for complete flexibility, strong ethics and team values based on integrity, independence, collaboration and challenge," said White. "These all form part of our promise to play the long game with our partners. We are looking ahead with a clear focus."

The team is starting its new channel campaign in promising circumstances that build on existing achievements. And despite White's laser focus on the long-term plan she has no intention of relinquishing Total's past triumphs. With its new look and feel governed by the group rebranding,

White promises to leverage the firm's experience and pedigree to 'pitch to the biggest and best' with consistency, distinctiveness and a continued sleeves up approach that has become a trademark.

The company dates from the earliest era of channel development and was established in 1996 as a provider of telecoms services to its local region, often being recognised only for its mobile heritage. But today Bamboo is transitioning from a traditional telco to a fully managed ICT provider; and expanding the product and service offering also means dropping many of the company's adopted terminology and programme identifiers, such as Focus, Connect and 360.

Brand clarity

"As many businesses do, Total has historically created names and identities for each and every addition to its proposition, which is confusing," added White. "The new look and feel also takes the business down a clear brand presence route, with the aim of fresh simplicity at the heart of the messaging. The Total triangle and wider company brand platform should in time be recognisable as being ours and ours alone, while also strengthening our presence in the market."

With a solid background in network service provision and a legacy of providing quality service, the ambitious growth plans for the business have rallied support and talent from both inside and outside of the industry. "Strong leadership, a commitment to change and a definitive five-year plan has galvanised

the entire team," stated White. "We have developed a vibrant culture as well as robust expansion plans, also attracting the interest of external talent pools and partners. For channel partners it means a significant investment into supporting and resourcing their goals, and it's a completely new way of doing business. We have an ambitious target number for 2018 and all efforts now go into realising that milestone."

White pointed out that the whole team aims to work with partners of all sizes and industry, across the full spectrum of ICT products and services. "We focus on understanding partner alignment from day one and open the door to investing in strategy collaboration from the initial point of contact," noted White. "In the channel, opening discussions with partners is all too often about the additional margin, the opportunity to have short-term wins and the ability to offer more to their clients quickly, while relying on third parties to be as good as you are, or better. We will continue to have those discussions, but only after we understand the need for the partnership and a partner's long-term goals and values."

"However, this is just the beginning of a new journey and our hard work encompasses far more than a strategy revision and extended growth plan. The Total programme is a fresh and strong approach that reflects our desire to stand out and do things differently. Furthermore, we will continue to develop our product and service offering to secure our place at the forefront of the ICT marketplace." ■

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COMMS DEALER was the first publication to reward and recognise excellence in the channel and the Comms National Awards remain the industry's most respected and highly prized awards programme.

The Comms National Awards are independently judged by a panel of experts to recognise the vendors who provide quality support to channel partners and the resellers who develop and install high value solutions into public and private sector organisations.

Since its inception, the CN Awards have been hosted by the best in the business and past masters of ceremonies have included Marcus Brigstock, Patrick Kielty, Rufus Hound, Hugh Dennis, Stephen K Amos, Michael McIntyre, Ronnie Corbett and Vernon Kaye. Guests can be assured that as ever this year the entertainment will be top drawer.

The Comms National Awards 2016 returns to the lavish ballroom at London's famous Hilton on Park Lane which plays host to the UK's top awards events and, as ever, the hospitality will be first class!

All these ingredients add up to the Comms National Awards being recognised as the evening channel people gather to celebrate excellence, network with industry friends and truly enjoy themselves.



Awards Categories

VENDOR AWARDS

Network Category

Best Mobile Network Provider
Best Fixed Line Network Provider

Service Provider Category

Best Wholesale Service Provider (up to £10m t/o)
Best Wholesale Service Provider (above £10m t/o)
Best ISP

Telephony Category

Best SME Telephony System
Best Enterprise Telephony System
Best End-Point or Device
Best Hosted Platform

Software Application Category

Best Call Management Solution
Best Billing Platform

Distribution Category

Best Convergence Distributor
Best Mobile Distributor

Partner Services Category

Best Channel Business Service
Best Installer/Maintainer

RESELLER AWARDS

Contact Centre Category

Best SME Contact Centre Solution
Best Enterprise Contact Centre Solution

Vertical Market Category

Best SME Vertical Market Solution
Best Enterprise Vertical Market Solution

IOT/Wireless Category

Best SME M2M/Wireless Solution
Best Enterprise M2M/Wireless Solution

Cloud Communications Category

Best SME Cloud Solution
Best Enterprise Cloud Solution

Unified Comms Category

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Nine takes top position again as headline sponsor



Mark Saunders

LEADING service provider, Nine Wholesale, is delighted to reprise its headline sponsorship of the Comms National Awards at The Hilton, Park Lane on Thursday 13th October.



According to Nine Group's Marketing Director, Mark Saunders, renewing their sponsorship of the awards for a fourth year was "a straightforward decision which reinforces our commitment to the channel and our love of a great night out".

The standard of entries was truly exceptional last year, so the winners will have had to work extremely hard to achieve success this year and Saunders stated, "I look forward to meeting and heartily congratulating them all. This is a truly memorable evening, reflecting the innovation, excellence and energy in our sector, with no doubt many well-known characters taking to the stage, as well as some welcome newbies."

Nine Wholesale also sponsors a special award to recognise outstanding customer service, which was won last year by Lily Coms. This award is presented to the reseller who can truly demonstrate that everything in their business is led by the customer's perspective and how they have remodelled and transformed their business to achieve this.

Saunders is a passionate advocate of articulating any business ambition in the customer's voice, claiming, "The availability of just about any information on line has finally enabled the age of the customer. Our award can only be secured if it is the customer who recognises the excellence of the service that is delivered, not the reseller who advertises it. Personalised customer engagement and messaging are now essential, while marketing teams who continue to broadcast indiscriminately across random media channels should consider themselves irrelevant, if not obsolete."

Category sponsors recognise power of CN Awards



"At Bowan Arrow, we jumped at the opportunity to support the Comms National Awards this year as a hospitality sponsor. For us these awards mark the pinnacle of the IT & Telecommunications

industries accolades and for every business or individual that has the privilege of being shortlisted they should take great pride in their association with the Comms National Awards.

"Writing winning award entries can be a time consuming challenge that most companies just don't have the manpower or expertise to complete, or the time to decide on which awards to enter and which ones to ignore. Yet winning an industry recognised award can reap big rewards in terms of positive PR and new business opportunities so it's a really worthwhile activity to add into your annual marketing plan.

"Entering and or sponsoring awards activities are great fun and an excellent way to boost morale and do some team bonding. If you are considering if you should enter the Comms National Awards, then the answer is YES. Just remember to work off the event promotional activity including social both pre and post event. Involvement in awards is an investment in either time to create an excellent submission or budget to generate new business and greater awareness. Plan to do both and the results will follow.

"Good luck to everyone involved this year."

ANDY GRANT – MANAGING DIRECTOR
BOWAN ARROW
HOSPITALITY SPONSOR



"BT Wholesale is excited and delighted to be once again sponsoring the Service Provider Category at this year's Comms National Awards.

"Our dedication to the channel continues and we have seen and experienced significant change in our business recently and identified huge areas for growth and opportunity both internally and through our large network of reseller partners.

"Focussing on the security and integrity of our network and enhanced hosted portfolio will help to support the desire and need for fixed to mobile convergence. Our relevance to our customers has never been better and we are committed to excellent customer service as well as the development and enhancement of our product and service portfolio. Our goal continues to be supporting and guiding the channel through to continued success and the move into new and adjacent markets.

"Good luck to everyone attending this year's Comms National Awards."

JAMES HENNAH - CEO OF MEDIA & BROADCAST
SALES DIRECTOR CARRIER AND CHANNEL
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THE SERVICE PROVIDER CATEGORY



"Since starting Knight Corporate Finance, we have seen a continuing

evolution of our industry. We are re-evaluating the way we interact and communicate with each-other driven by changes in technology, connectivity with businesses striving to deliver ever more effective communications.

"It is a pleasure to support an event which recognises and rewards those organisations and people that are leading the way. Every year, the quality of the entries get better and better which is a great illustration of the strength of the comms channel.

"We are consistently impressed by the levels of innovation and entrepreneurialism that keep the sector so dynamic and this is reflected in this long period of M&A activity and consolidation that shows no sign of slowing. We are also seeing new businesses are establishing themselves and now banks and other financial institutions are investing heavily in the sector as growth continues and new opportunities emerge.

"Knight Corporate Finance helps companies maximize value for their business, whether they are planning to raise finance, considering growth by acquisition or having taken the decision to exit. When the time is right for you, we will be able to provide the experience and expertise to help you realise your aspirations and ensure you get the deal that you want.

"The Comms National Awards celebrate and reward the people behind every great business. It's a chance to network, celebrate success together and of course congratulate the winners."

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Davidson champions IoT

Enter Iain Davidson, Product Marketing Manager at Arkessa, a tech-immersed marketer with an irrepressible passion for improving the world via the Internet of Things.

Few make the successful transition from an engineering development background to marketing, but the zeal to extol what you believe to be transformational technology can be an irresistible driving force. "I am passionate about the Internet of Things (IoT) and its potential to make the world safer and more energy efficient," stated Davidson. "Getting out of the lab into the marketplace has been a journey, but I should have made it earlier and quicker. Great technology needs great marketing and commercialisation."

Davidson joined Arkessa in June last year from the embedded processor and networking world where the 50 billion connected device forecast first emerged. Davidson's experience and insights gained during his time in the engineering sector, combined with Arkessa's growing market presence, is paying dividends. He worked primarily in the automotive, enterprise and industrial sectors, and along with his mass market experience Davidson has gained a strong understanding of best practices when it comes to working productively with a global channel partner network.

Arkessa began its commercial life in 2002 when it was established by a group of like-minded TMT industry leaders and serial entrepreneurs. The firm is



Iain Davidson

part of the Telefonica M2M Global Partner Programme, and the majority of its team is based in the Bishop's Stortford office, located near Cambridge and the Silicon Fen and Cambridge Wireless communities. It also has offices in London and Germany.

Following an MBO in 2009 the company went in search of its first customers. "Our passion has always been to make it easy for organisations of all sizes to connect their devices and assets to the IoT," explained Davidson. "That means being easy to do business with and offering a technical solution that is easy to adopt, integrate and scale. We provide our M2M managed connectivity service to customers in the automotive, transport,

industrial, retail, energy, health and smart city sectors. Some customers are start-ups or SMEs while others are large enterprises or multi-national corporations."

Key challenge

Arkessa's greatest challenge has been to dispel the hype around IoT and drive the adoption rate in line with market forecasts. "We are still in the infancy stage of IoT and large enterprise adoption has lagged behind that of the faster moving SMEs," said Davidson. "Nevertheless, we have developed some long-standing relations with leading enterprise players over the last six years and that's now paying off. In that context, we have enabled numerous successful projects that have showcased the technology and business

benefits. But perhaps more importantly for larger scale enterprise adoption, they have proven the concept, created new business models and demonstrated RoI."

Educating the market is top priority and is an area that Arkessa invests in significantly. "But it is sometimes frustrating to have to battle the noise and inertia of the global organisations entering IoT," noted Davidson. "This is made easier by working with strong enterprise and industrial SIs such as Fujitsu and Siemens, as well as Zest4 which shares our passion for making M2M and IoT easy. We are achieving success with a diverse group of channel partners and we are excited by material progress with enterprise partners and customers."

Davidson also noted that Arkessa's approach to the enterprise space differs from IoT device or product companies, and its go-to-market generally is differentiated. "Our partnership with Zest4 is a great example," he explained. "Zest4 provides UC solutions to traditional dealers and reseller partners across the UK. It has a modern and refreshing approach to selling M2M services in a style that organisations across a number of sectors can relate to. For example, inroads into construction, logistics and the taxi sectors have yielded early successes. Together we make M2M more accessible to businesses that are not

bamboozled by IoT hype and clearly understand the solutions and their benefits."

Looking ahead, Davidson is intrigued by modern attitudes towards purchasing and ownership and the potential impact of this on IoT. "The pay-as-you-go/use culture is nothing new, it didn't arrive with the millennials," he said. "The model came to prominence across many services and industries such as AirBNB, Netflix and Uber which are key examples. In an IoT context, this trend creates the conditions for service oriented 'as-a-service' or ad-funded business models, as well as opex-based purchasing which will all help accelerate growth." ■

Just a minute with Iain Davidson...

Role model: Muhammad Ali. He was the greatest

What do you fear the most? Flying to London Heathrow Airport, there are almost always delays!

Name your three ideal dinner guests? Leonardo da Vinci, Isambard Kingdom Brunel and inventor James Dyson. We'd create the Smartest City in an evening

Greatest strength and what you could improve on? I put much passion and energy into my work and should apply the same, more equally, to things I don't enjoy so much

Tell us something about yourself we don't know? I'm from Glasgow and like cricket!

Open for M2M business

The launch of UC provider Zest4's M2M Partner Programme in May sparked a flurry of interest from resellers who have already been fast-tracked to market-ready status. Here, we assess the progress of Zest4's partnership with Arkessa and highlight four real world success stories.

Zest4's entrance into the M2M market followed a link-up with Arkessa in October 2015. Arkessa enables IoT device and applications developers to connect to the Internet of Things (IoT), regardless of network operator or radio technology. Its managed services span single and multi-network cellular with first time connect capabilities and secure communications. Mandy Fazelynia, Zest4's Operations Director, explained: "Our partnership allows us to develop the M2M opportunity through our channel partner programme, thereby making entry into this market a reality for all of our partners. The M2M package that we created helps partners to unlock new revenue opportunities. The prospect for growth and therefore revenue generation in this sector is huge."

Arkessa provides the technical know-how required by these solutions and its experts trained the Zest4 team to understand how M2M solutions apply to all market sectors. "We have extended the Zest4 Partner Academy to include M2M training and have built a tool kit of materials that enable partners to offer bespoke M2M solutions," added Fazelynia.

The tool kit includes a tailored on-boarding programme, sales and operational training, help with creating marketing

plans around M2M, the provision of sales and marketing collateral, identifying opportunities, technical support and a one bill solution. The response to Zest4's programme has been strong with 10-plus existing partners quoting for new business following training and marketing support from the firm. Opportunities in the taxi segment and public Wi-Fi have caught resellers' attention in particular and Zest4 is now working with those partners to scope out their support requirements.

Nor is that all. Zest4's presence at the Margin in Voice and Data seminar last month resulted in a number of conversations with delegates keen to add M2M to their portfolio. "We had 12 delegates request follow up meetings on building an M2M strategy," added Fazelynia. "The programme is buzzing with activity, high levels of interest and sales are already being secured. Most partners will have opportunities in their existing base."

She noted that Zest4's mobile reseller partners are the early adopters of M2M, exploring their existing customer base to identify opportunities in what is a natural progression for them. IT resellers are also in the frame, pre-prepared with knowledge of security and firewalls and the integration of solutions into existing IT infrastructures. According to Fazelynia, partners are finding



Mandy Fazelynia

quick wins in taxi solutions, public transport and logistics. Opportunities in retail, leisure and the healthcare sectors are also opening up.

Case studies

One partner has struck a rich seam of opportunity through installing M2M solutions into taxis. This sector has advanced greatly in tandem with technology, with people wanting to book online, pay by card and even track their taxi. Therefore taxi companies that resist the shift towards 'going digital' risk losing out to tech savvy rivals. Tracking devices are easy to install and the software is easy to use. Solutions such as this are truly transformational.

Zest4's M2M partners are also delivering transformational solutions to the construction sector. In one instance, a construction firm working on a brownfield site faced the

problem of giving workers onsite connectivity without breaking security policies. They needed a safe and secure way to connect to the Internet and a functional office to work from, such as a pop-up office that could quickly be set up and taken down as required. Arkessa enables M2M connections wherever needed and built a fully loaded enterprise grade router in a box (configured to security requirements) that can take multiple SIMs for any carrier, meaning it can be used anywhere, unplugged from one site and replugged at a new site, meaning no more long-term contracts or patchy mobile broadband.

Another Zest4 partner secured up to seven years of revenue with its first M2M deal for a logistics firm. The connectivity costs levied by the incumbent supplier were too high,

SIMs across two networks made things complicated, and the company was being over charged as well as locked in on their devices. Zest4 stepped in, providing and connecting new SIMs. Arkessa built a 'magic box of tricks' that programmed the new SIMs one device at a time with the customer's settings, before helping to install the new SIMs in devices located in warehouses across the UK. The partner was rewarded with guaranteed recurring revenue for the next three years, and because most M2M solutions don't move once in situ the deal equates to seven years revenue.

Smashing annual targets by putting free Wi-Fi into buses is the success story of another reseller who got on board with Zest4's M2M programme. Following consultations between the partner, Zest4 and Arkessa, a bespoke solution was proposed that overcame all of the challenges associated with installing routers in buses, such as location, power, transmission and other physical issues. This partner has now sold over 5,000 SIMs by replicating this model across most of the major bus companies.

"Selling M2M solutions like these doesn't need to be difficult or complicated, and they can add significant value to a resellers' business," commented Fazelynia. "Success is all about choosing the right partner." ■

Mobile market in the spotlight

News broke on 11th May that the European Commission had decided to block the proposed acquisition of O2 by Hutchison under the EU Merger Regulation, writes **Eli Katz, Chair of ITSPA**. The Commission's decision followed intense lobbying from much of the industry (including ITSPA) and calls from Sharon White, Chief Executive of Ofcom, underlining that if the deal went ahead it could result in higher prices for consumers.



Eli Katz

In summary, the Commission had three primary concerns about the proposed takeover deal. It felt that if the deal were to go ahead it would lead to less competition in the mobile market and therefore a rise in prices, hamper the development of future mobile network infrastructure (as the merged entity would have been part of both network sharing arrangements MBNL and Beacon), and result in a reduction in the number of MNOs 'effectively willing to host virtual operators'.

In our communications with Ofcom and the European Commission, ITSPA focused particularly strongly on the potential impact of the deal on the MVNO market. Our members felt that the merger would have damaged this market significantly, resulting in negative outcomes for UK consumers. We were therefore delighted that our concerns were taken into account and hope that the UK mobile market can now become as competitive and innovative as it currently is for fixed telephony.

Additionally, the European Commission stated that the remedies proposed by Hutchison did not adequately address the three principal concerns about the merger. Hutchison offered a set of measures intended to grant MVNOs access to 4G and future technologies. However, the Commission stated that these were commercially unattractive for MVNOs and they did not believe they would be implemented effectively.

Concerns

Similarly, in an attempt to address the Commission's competition concerns, Hutchison proposed giving access to a share of the merged O2/Three's network capacity to one or two MVNOs; divesting O2's stake in Tesco Mobile and offering a wholesale agreement for a share of its network capacity to Tesco Mobile; and offering a wholesale agreement for a share of its network capacity to Virgin Media.

The Commission was unconvinced that Hutchison's remedies would resolve the structural problems that would have been created by the disruption to the current network sharing

arrangements. Also, the Commission did not feel they were capable of replacing the weakened competition in the retail and wholesale mobile markets and were uncertain whether they could be effectively implemented and monitored.

In terms of next steps, Telefonica is expected to announce the IPO of O2 in the coming weeks. However, market volatility after the British vote to leave the EU could delay this. Telefonica is seeking to raise funds to help write down its 52.2 billion euro debt. More generally, the majority of ITSPA's membership believe that this market is still mainly foreclosed to other operators, often through contractual limitations on over-the-top services or through restricting access to 4G.

Our members believe that there is a highly restricted wholesale market for MVNOs and that, while they are pleased that a merged O2/Three will not exist to foreclose the market even more, further action should be taken to ensure that the UK mobile market becomes as innovative and competitive as the fixed market. ■

Deal doing made easy

Telecoms contracts, particularly business to business ones, are now sold via channels which can include broadband and landline and mobile phones, rather than single phone contacts. It is now innovation in software that is driving the market, not the equipment. "With UC systems, applications and usage are becoming independent of the physical platforms," commented Daniel Proctor, Chief Technology Officer at HH Vendor Finance.

"A phone call, for example, can now be made from a mobile phone, or a tablet or a laptop, and the end result will be the same. The lines between devices have become increasingly blurred with all of them offering the same services. This means the way telecoms contracts are packaged and sold to businesses has changed (or needs to change), often resulting in a more complex and multiple set of contracts of varying lengths together with increased approvals and administration."

However, a vendor finance team with expertise in mobile

leasing can help to simplify these complex contracts by bundling everything into one contract. For example, HH Vendor Finance works with Olive Communications to provide one managed service contract that covers everything from mobile and fixed lines to data and airtime contracts. By rolling the handset and airtime contracts together, HH Vendor Finance ensures its partners own the billing relationship while they operate the cash collection making the process simple and seamless.

Benefits

"This gives partners a cost-effective direct debit agency and adds to their long-term value by giving them ownership of the billing," said Proctor. "Business customers benefit from the simplification of receiving one bill. For SMEs, the costs are neutral and by separating out the contracts they are getting the best handset deals and airtime costs. For the bigger corporates, separating the mobile device costs from the airtime contracts offers flexibility so they can save money by taking control and bulk buying the devices at cut down prices." ■



Daniel Proctor



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When the uncertainty



ADRIAN BARNARD
TECH ENTREPRENEUR

“ Uncertainty is risky for the majority and it is likely interest rates could rise higher and faster than expected. The huge current account deficit continues to be ignored and dealing with it is fully urgent. B2B will flourish as incumbents come under scrutiny and independents drive costs down and improve productivity. The Government should now deal positively with the EU on exit negotiations, foster entrepreneurs and enterprise to compete globally and communicate clear timeframes, goals and stick to them. ”



BRENDON CROSS
STL

“ In the short term, Brexit means uncertainty and market volatility, which can effect economic activity, but in time we may well end up with an even stronger UK economy. Unfortunately, the majority of small businesses don't have the luxury of working to a five-year plan and so pegging things like corporation tax and business rates is important. For STL, our customer base is very broad and we are not overly exposed to any particular sectors so we are quite bullish. Most people have now worked out that Brexit was more about the political ambition of a small number of politicians who over-promised and a remain vote in a second referendum would be a tonic and a shot in the arm for the UK economy. ”



Like it or not, Britain is out of the EU and the die is cast. As predicted, there was economic turmoil and it will be some time before the UK settles into a new era. In the build up to polling day opinions across the ICT channel and in Comms Dealer Towers were divided and after the historic vote opinions still diverged on how the dust will finally settle. Some argue that an economic slowdown is inevitable and public and private sector ICT projects may hang in the balance. It's already muted that some financial institutions may depart these shores, along with giants such as Vodafone, but the counter argument is that new opportunities may well come to the fore.

Therein lies the bigger issue - uncertainty – and such unresolved conditions make it easy to talk the UK into a recession. This must not be allowed to happen. In its 20-year lifespan Comms Dealer has witnessed a number of



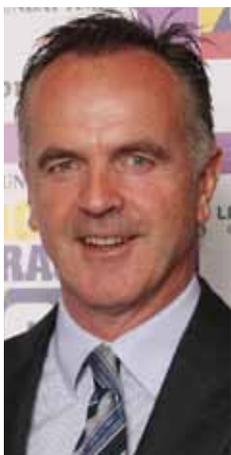
VIVIAN WOODSELL
THE PHONE CO-OP

“ In the short, medium and longer term the overall impact will be profoundly negative. We are a recurring revenue business, so we are sheltered from the worst impacts of the initial shock. In a period of turmoil, switching telecoms providers isn't a priority for many so there will be a significant impact on sales. Most telecoms hardware is imported so we can also expect prices to rise as the pound falls. In the longer term, the complexities of managing telecoms in a country that is splitting up are also immense. Finally, if pensioners can have a "triple lock" on their pensions, surely the younger generations are entitled to at least a "double lock" on a decision as momentous as this. We need a second referendum. ”



PAUL BRADFORD
SOUTHERN COMMS

“ I would be amazed if we do not see a significant slowdown of the economy over the next 2-3 years. That said it is not the same as 2008/9 and the economy is fundamentally strong, so we might be lucky. I am fully expecting a slowdown in capex solution sales and we have already seen decisions postponed or put on hold. I am glad to say that 90% of our revenue is recurring and actually in a recession companies are keener to look for savings, so I am expecting difficult capex sales balanced by bolstered recurring sales. It would help if the Government substantially reduced the corporation tax rates to make the UK the most attractive country in 'Europe' in which to do business. ”



DAVID POLLOCK
CHESS

“ Brexit is bad for the economy and is bad for our reputation around the world. It will lead to many years of uncertainty however Britain is Great and we will weather the storm. The result will have very little effect on our business in terms of UK sales and growth but we were considering some European acquisitions which we've now shelved. I think the Conservatives should now elect Boris as PM quickly and keep George as Chancellor as he's a safe pair of hands. That will stabilise the economy and help convince the world we're not all crazy. ”



CHRIS WILCE
DATAPHONE

“ Short term uncertainty will delay some investment decisions. In the medium term, I believe we can build a more prosperous and democratic UK shaped by UK politicians rather than by the EU in Brussels. We will benefit from allowing controlled immigration from the whole world rather than uncontrolled EU immigration and very restricted immigration from the rest of the world. From a business perspective, I don't envisage any significant effect across our diverse client base but I do think the Government should quickly appoint a strong new leader that will unite the parties and the country to shape the future of the UK as the 5th largest world economy. ”

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PETE TOMLINSON
KCOM

“ I’m personally relaxed about the mid and longer term implications of Brexit, provided it’s handled in the right way and we create an ambitious, open and competitive business environment. The fundamentals of our market or business haven’t changed and we will continue to succeed. Our customer base is UK centric and our eco-system of technology partners global, so direct exposure to European trade is limited. It’s mainly the multinationals who are perhaps being a little more cautious right now, but most people just want to get on with growing their businesses. Now the vote has happened, we need a government that has economically and emotionally intelligent leadership, so the real key is who David Cameron passes the baton to. ”



CHRIS GOODMAN
FOCUS

“ In the short term the Brexit vote has created uncertainty, which the markets hate. David Cameron’s decision to step down and leave the triggering of Article 50 to his successor staves off the worst of any impact. In fact, it questions whether a successor, or even a new government in the event of a General Election, would have the stomach to invoke the article, despite the marginal mandate given by a proportion of the UK population. I think we have to expect market and currency volatility for a couple of years, but I do not think it is all doom and gloom as suggested by some. I suspect it will have little impact on our business which is entirely UK centric within the private sector. ”

slowdowns and our message to the industry is simple – if there is talk of a recession let’s have nothing to do with it.

The UK economy is still a powerhouse on the world stage and our industry will always be innovative, resilient and buoyant enough to weather any potential storms. This view was echoed at a timely investment seminar run by M&A specialist Evolution Capital and hosted at Nat West Bank’s headquarters in London just a few days after the Brexit vote. Hans Prottey from investment bank Coutts said short-term uncertainty will not stop investment. “Our clients have so much cash and I can’t see that dying up any time soon,” he said. “The UK has some fantastic ICT companies and people will still want to fund them in the long-term.”

Views from then industry are inevitably mixed but the message to the Government cannot be clearer: End the uncertainty.



KARL MCCAFFERY
GTEQ

“ Uncertainty will play a part until we have a new Prime Minister that can bring some confidence to not only the City but also the worldwide banks. A serious PR campaign promoting UK overseas trading is also needed. I’m sure there will be some negatives, but nobody can answer this yet. The lead up to the vote was not compelling to ‘stay’, as facts were short on the ground. I believe the Government should drop interest rates by 0.25% and go out and ‘win’ new trading agreements outside of Europe. We had a £69 billion trading deficit with Europe and therefore we need to turn the tables within Europe. I think we should also confirm how we are going to help the NHS. ”



MARK CASEY
NEXUS IP

“ All projections forecasted a loss in GDP – anything from 0.5-9% – so we can reasonably expect a tough time economically, especially if manufacturers such as Nissan maintain their previous position and withdraw from the UK. We do not trade/export in the EU, but many of our products come from Europe which may lead to complications. Ultimately, the exchange rate fluctuations will need to be absorbed by the supply chain in order to protect stable pricing and maintain confidence. The Government need to define new trade agreements, protect jobs, and manage the new legislative changes required. All parties also need to project an image of stability and competence to reassure both the public and businesses. ”



BOB FALCONER
GAMMA

“ The net effect of Brexit is the gap between the boost the economy would have got on a Remain result and what has happened subsequently; that’s substantial. Whilst this uncertainty seems likely to persist for some time, the long term hope must be that a renewed entrepreneurial spirit is released. At Gamma, we don’t export goods or services but we do acquire equipment from the US and elsewhere and the drop in the pound against the dollar is not helpful. On the positive side, one effect we noticed during the last recession was an increased willingness of UK businesses to look to suppliers other than the incumbent to provide service. That could create opportunities for the channel, particularly those with a strong balance sheet. ”



IAN FISHWICK
ADEPT

“ We had the best economy in Europe and we are now in danger of heading for a DIY recession. Uncertainty is the biggest problem as businesses often postpone growth plans until they are clear of the economic outlook. As a UK only business we hope the damage is limited but some customers may put off buying new phone systems or taking on new premises. The telecoms industry relies to an extent on events such as companies moving or expanding. The Government should reduce interest rates, accept a short term budget deficit, keep tax allowances for capital equipment and R&D and give the go ahead for major infrastructure projects. ”

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Hired to focus on IoT



Nick Sacke and Situl Shah

THE IoT market is squarely in Comms365's sights following the appointment of Nick Sacke as Head of IoT & Products and Situl Shah as Head of Business Development. They bring 45-plus years joint experience including expertise in developing and implementing IoT, M2M, wireless, IT security and managed ICT solutions.

Mike van Bunnens, Managing Director, said: "Nick and Situl are responsible for building our IoT solutions business, as well as supporting and nurturing our market focus for enhanced connectivity, M2M and cloud solutions."

Sacke has spent the last eight years at Pinnacle Technology Group scoping and guiding its product strategy. He stated: "There is a lot of noise around IoT at the moment and it's quickly becoming one of the fastest growing areas of technology. However, there is a need for an end-to-end solution that delivers value for the customer, which is what I believe we can offer from Comms365."

Shah was previously a Business Director and Management Consultant specialising in smart services, next generation wireless networks, strategic alliances and data centres across international and emerging markets with companies such as Amphenol, BT, Cisco, EE, IBM, HP, Huawei, Microsoft, NEC, Level 3, Reliance, Schneider, Vodafone, Telefonica and Tata. He added: "Working alongside Nick my aim is to increase annual revenues by 25 per cent thorough a mix of direct customers and strategic partnerships, as well as identifying new technology areas for growth."

Distie fills in director role

WESTCON-Comstor has welcomed Wayne Mason, its new Commercial and Marketing Director of the Unified Communications and Collaboration (UCC) Solutions



Wayne Mason

Practice for the EMEA region. He brings over 20 years UC and distribution experience to the role and is responsible for product management and solution marketing strategies. Mason joins from Imago ScanSource where he worked for 12 years in various sales, product management and marketing positions, most recently as Head of Group Marketing. Before rocking up at Imago he led the high-touch sales team at Tandberg.

"Wayne's ability to develop, manage and lead fast growth sales and marketing teams, and build long-term profitable channel relationships will be a great asset to our organisation," said Guy Koster, EMEA General Manager and UC&C Solutions Practice Lead.

Also on the move...



Samu Konttinen

F-SECURE'S Samu Konttinen has stepped in as President and CEO following the resignation of former chief exec Christian Fredrikson who left to pursue a new career opportunity. Konttinen joined F-Secure in 2005 and

has held a range of senior management positions including Executive VP of Sales and Marketing and Executive VP of F-Secure's consumer business. Latterly he served as Executive VP of the Corporate Security business. Risto Siilasmaa, Chairman of the F-Secure Board of Directors, stated: "Samu has proven his ability to drive innovation and ensure a steady strategy execution that delivers growth."

DIMENSION Data has underlined its strategy to deliver more services and drive end user business transformation with the appointment of Barney Taylor as Managing Director for UK&I.



Barney Taylor

He joined the firm in 2012 and has worked as part of the Global Services leadership team based in London. Taylor said: "It is important to take our clients into new operating models and bring our full

services portfolio and global strength into the market. We must demonstrate services-led business value to our clients and partners in a way that we have not done before in the UK and Ireland."

ProVu's new team leader



Anna Maria

PROVU'S multi-talented Anna Maria Marzec-Smith has been promoted to the role of Sales Team Leader. She joined the distributor three years ago in a Sales Account Manager position and quickly made her mark with her strong organisational skills. Marzec-Smith's extended remit is to maximise the benefits of

closer departmental collaboration and introduce new procedures and processes.

Prior to joining ProVu she worked as an artist which remains a strong interest and she is a musician in a ska band called The Trilbeats. "I've always been passionate about music and art and have an equal passion for working at ProVu," she commented. "I have spent the last nine months heavily involved in standardising processes in the sales team, which has been necessary to ensure the high standard of customer experience we provide is consistent across the whole team. My appointment as Sales Team Leader also frees our Sales Director to focus more on other areas such as product developments and marketing."

Avaya appoints UK commander

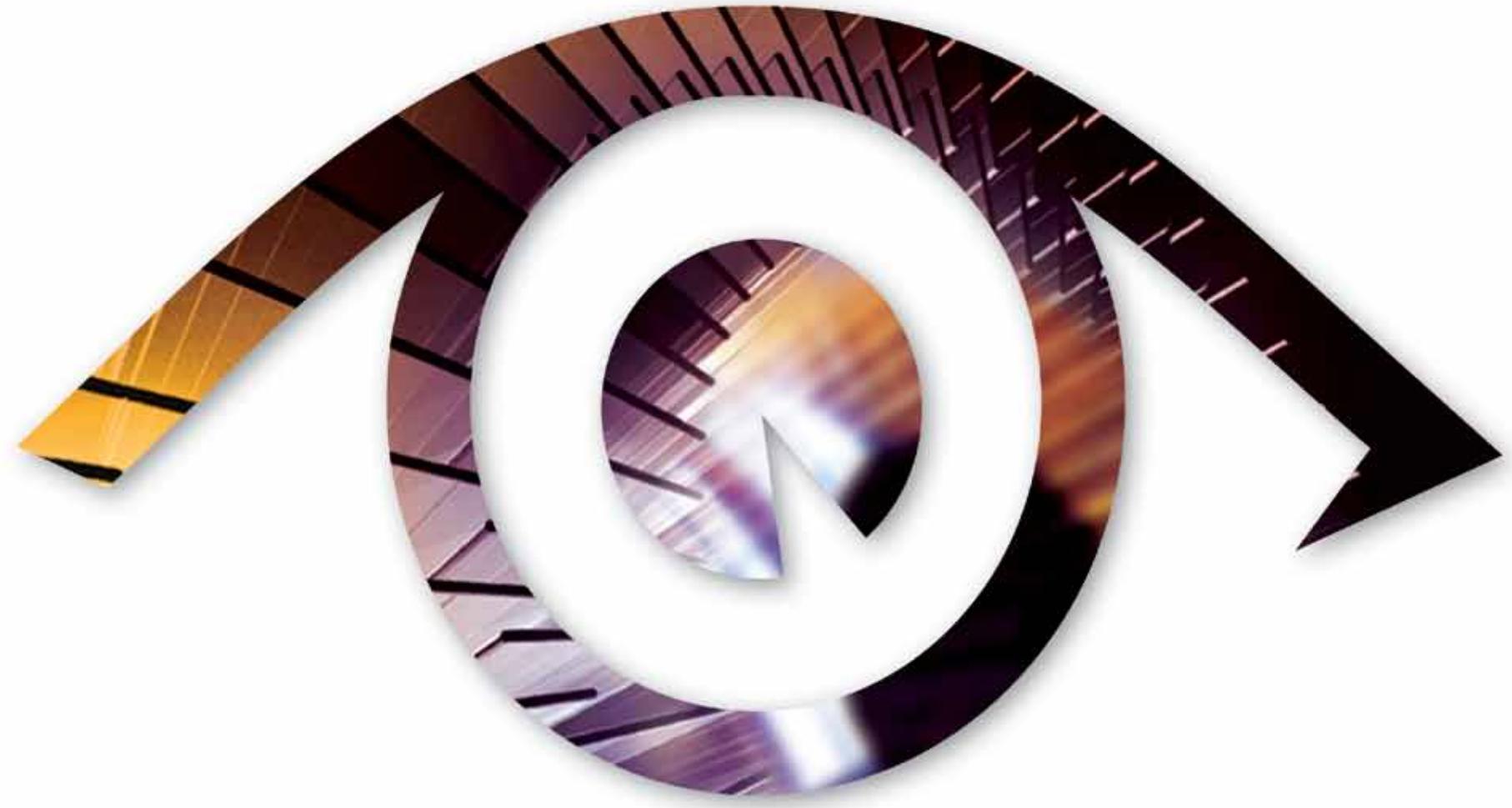
THE strategic direction of Avaya's UK business is now in the hands of Steve Rafferty following his appointment as Managing Director of the region, reporting to Ronald Rubens, Vice President for Northern Europe. Immediately prior to his appointment Rafferty was Vice President of Service Providers and Systems Integrators for Avaya in the EU region.



Steve Rafferty

He brings 25-plus years experience in the telecoms and enterprise software space having also worked in senior sales positions for BT and SCC. Previous roles include stints at ArmourSoft and Software AG before joining Avaya in April 2015.

Rubens stated: "We have seen Steve transform his teams to deliver deeper engagement with customers, and we look forward to seeing his skills in action in the UK market."



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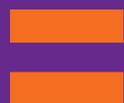
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