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## Public sector calls for more industry talent

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by 2020.

...health, transport,  
...ence, central and  
...ent.

...D Ian Fishwick  
...leading the group  
...lected as the tele-  
...representative on  
...office SME Panel.  
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...February 28th.

...“If you have ever found it  
...difficult to sell to the public  
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...to explain why to the Cabinet  
...Office,” said Fishwick.

...“We need to understand the  
...changes required to make it  
...easier to do business. There will  
...be a chance for everyone in the  
...audience to air their views.”

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**Comms People**  
This month's movers and shakers



# Government calls on industry talent

**THE UK Government has called on the telecoms industry to help it spend 33% of all public sector money with SMEs by 2020.**

**SPECIAL REPORT**

A group of industry leaders are collaborating with the Cabinet Office and the Crown Commercial Service to help communications providers address public sector opportunities and provide the best possible value to taxpayers.

Their target is to have a third of all public sector money spent with small and medium sized businesses by 2020.

This amounts to circa £2-3bn per annum across all sectors including health, transport, education, defence, central and local Government.

Adept CEO Ian Fishwick (pictured) is leading the group having been selected as the telecoms industry representative on the Cabinet Office SME Panel.

He is also Commercial Director at Innopsis, the not-for-profit trade body charged with helping businesses secure Government contracts across all public sector fields.

Comms Dealer is supporting the initiative and is co-sponsoring the 'Go Public Sector!' thought leadership event which will take place at the Institute of Directors in London on February 28th.

"If you have ever found it difficult to sell to the public sector then this is your chance to explain why to the Cabinet Office," said Fishwick.

"We need to understand the changes required to make it easier to do business. There will be a chance for everyone in the audience to air their views."

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

LIKE vultures, elements of the press and a section of Avaya's rivals circled low above the vendor when it filed voluntary petitions under Chapter 11 of the US Bankruptcy Code last month. With the scent of blood strong in their noses they sniffed an opportunity and

grasped it with both talons. Naturally, outright opportunists do not balk when it comes to stirring things up to grab a sensational headline or unsteady the ground beneath resellers loyal to their troubled brands. Ironically for the disrupters, perhaps in its perceived 'death throes' Avaya has pursued a course of action that, if anything, will breath new life into the business which, by the way, is profitable.

No doubt there is uncertainty in the market following the move and investments in its technology may be brought into question. But is Avaya's future any less certain than the day before it decisively set about sorting out the restructuring of its debt? For years speculation and rumours have created a storm of uncertainty around Avaya, but the business continued to do well and retained the loyalty of a staunch band of resellers and customers. Even with the dial turned up on the hype around Avaya's Chapter 11 move, I can only see the vendor ringing up more of the same as it evaluates its options in terms of selling off assets and securing new funding, while repositioning as a software-focused company and achieving the flexibility to invest in innovation and growth.

Adept Telecom CEO Ian Fishwick observed, 'Avaya will continue as a brand and as a business. US companies that successfully entered and emerged from Chapter 11 include General Motors, American Airlines, Texaco, Macy's and Bloomingdale's' (see page 8).

So, you don't need to be Mystic Meg to predict where all this is likely to end up. For the industry's sake, Chapter 11 will hopefully signify the turning of a new page and the start of another episode in Avaya's ongoing story.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

# GCI ups the stakes with Freedom deal

BGF-backed GCI has added £18m to its £57m revenue run rate following its acquisition of Watford-based Freedom Communications for an undisclosed sum.

Key reasons cited by GCI for the buy include Freedom's Microsoft Skype for Business (SFB) credentials and its strong presence in the public sector where it is listed on nine of the 11 lots of RM1045 Network Services Framework.

Freedom adds 40,000-plus SFB seats to GCI's Microsoft UCaaS arm taking it to more than 180,000 seats overall.

The deal is GCI's fifth acquisition in under 12 months and draws on its £50m M&A war chest announced in October with more acquisitions expected. Last year's buys include Outsourcery, Packet Media and Fusion Media.

GCI CEO Adrian Thirkill commented: "The acquisition of Freedom is a steady step in our journey to deliver progressive and cost-efficient managed services to all our customers.

"Freedom's heritage and skills as a UC systems integrator and its focus on transitioning customers from old world to new is aligned with our own



Adrian Thirkill

growth strategy and is a great fit for us.

"We are backing the big four of UC, cloud, compliance and security, underpinned by next generation infrastructure and networking technologies."

Freedom MD Pat Botting said: "Not only is this great news for our people, it is also great news for all of our customers gearing up for full UC adoption. Exciting times ahead."

Philip Carse, Analyst at Megabyte.com, observed: "Subject to the usual caveat over price, this seems a sensible move for GCI, providing a boost to its Microsoft standing and adding significant scale.

"On paper, its target, Freedom, does not have a par-

ticularly attractive financial track record, which we attribute partly to being a lifestyle business and partly to the recent investment in SFB.

"The opportunity for GCI therefore is to both build profitability through taking out lifestyle costs (some of which will fall away immediately, for example a portion of the £1m of directors' remuneration), as well as energise Freedom's sales function.

"Meanwhile, with this deal representing at most a third of the new £50m M&A fund, we fully anticipate more GCI acquisitions this year." >p20

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COMMENT: TECH GIANTS CONVENE



Richard Carter

HAVING recently returned from the world's biggest innovation event in Las Vegas it's clear technology is going to have an even deeper impact on our working and home lives this year. 'CES 2017 Catapults a Connected World', the official press release proclaimed, with 5G, cars,

clothes, content, health care, sports, travel, smart cities, AR, VR and robotics all taking centre stage.

CES showcased the connected future of technology as more than 3,800 exhibiting companies and 175,000 industry professionals, including 55,000 from outside the US, convened to drive the ever-evolving global technology industry further forward.

Away from CES was an equally impressive milestone as the iPhone celebrated its 10th anniversary, and despite all the latest cutting edge tech talk in Vegas it got me thinking about whether there has been one single device that has made a bigger impact in the modern era.

There's no doubt that the iPhone has inspired a modern communication and technology revolution, and Apple is on the brink of a major financial milestone. The US tech giant will have made more than \$1 trillion from the iPhone and its related products by the middle of the year, analysts say.

They estimate that cumulative sales of iPhones and other hardware that uses the iOS software, including the iPad, iPod touch, Apple Watch and Apple TV, will reach almost £800 billion by the summer. Sales from iOS services, such as Apple's cut of app revenues will help it to become the first company with a stock market value of \$1 trillion. The iPhone has made Apple the world's most valuable company and the next 10 years will be even more intriguing.

**Richard Carter, Director of Channel Sales, Nimans**

- Ericsson-LG champion Intellia has marched into Edinburgh waving the Korean vendor's flag. Its mission is to firmly establish the brand in Scotland's capital having secured a new operational base (p50).

# Endless swoops on £70m storage firm

STORAGE infrastructure and security company MTI is under new ownership following its acquisition by Endless, the ex-owner of Trustmarque.

The EMC partner boasts £70m turnover and was sold by US-based private equity firm Garnet and Helfrich Capital for an undisclosed sum.

MTI is headquartered in Godalming and operates mainly in the UK, Germany and France. Its services include on-site and cloud-based storage, security solutions and IaaS.

MTI CEO Keith Clark said: "Endless' ownership of MTI Europe will allow the business to grow organically and through further acquisitions over the coming months."

Ed Ransome, Investment Director at Endless who led the transaction, commented: "Endless has a strong appetite to invest in profitable businesses that operate across Europe."

"MTI has generated strong profits for many years and we will support Mike and his team in taking the business to a new era of growth through both organic means and from pursuing add-ons.

"While Brexit has brought uncertainty to investors and



Keith Clark



Ed Ransome

owners of UK companies, we continue to pursue overlooked assets that possess underlying, latent value. We believe there will be significant opportunities for us to invest further in such businesses in 2017."

Last month's MTI acquisition is Endless' eighth investment from its £525m Fund IV and comes after the successful exits of Trustmarque, Liberata, Chaucer Foods and West Cornwall Pasty Company.

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# Academics to aid TeleWare



Paul Millar

A TWO-YEAR partnership between Teesside University and TeleWare underlines the growing role that educational institutions will play in shaping the future look of comms products and services.

This collaborative Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) aims to drive innovation and turn academic thinking into real world solutions. KTPs are part funded by Innovate UK.

Key focus areas are Big Data, machine learning and analytics, which will help TeleWare to explore the best way to collect data from customer interactions – whether through traditional call centres, social media, web chats or other channels – and analyse it to enhance the customer experience.

Dr Teng Fu, who is an Artificial Intelligence specialist, will be based with TeleWare full-time, and the comms specialist will gain access to research from Drs Yifeng Zeng and Claudio Angione who are based at the university's School of Computing.

Dr Geoff Archer, Head of Knowledge Exchange at Teesside University, said: "To maintain a technological advantage businesses today must gain

insight from a range of different sources including the latest academic thinking and theories.

"This will allow them to more fully understand the needs of customers and their industry.

"We are able to offer TeleWare the benefit of our knowledge to help guide its development process. It's exciting for us to then see a practical application of our thinking."

Machine learning is a large part of TeleWare's CX Analytics as the technology can learn best practices and then deliver those insights back into businesses.

"We've always had a great relationship with Teesside University," commented Paul Millar, Chief Innovation Officer at TeleWare. "Our CEO Steve Haworth is a Teesside graduate.

"The KTP is proving to be fruitful for us as we continue our journey into CX Analytics and enhancing the communication between businesses and their customers.

"Having this academic support to constantly improve our knowledge is paying real dividends in terms of how we develop our solutions."

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COMMENT: NETWORK MATTERS



James Hickman

I RECENTLY met a customer wanting to know all about a SD-WAN project. I listened intently while the benefits were declared, gave a slight cough before whispering, 'you are describing SDN not SD-WAN, they are different'.

Let me explain: Before anybody had thought about building private networks using technology like MPLS you could buy a fixed

network using physical circuits. Or, you could buy lots of cheap Internet circuits and use VPN technology to create encrypted tunnels between offices. The first approach had higher running costs but was reliable. The latter, more expensive to set up, cheaper to run and a bit of a gamble.

Internet bandwidth has got better, the tunnelling technology more efficient and a bundle of other techniques make the whole thing more predictable. As the tunnels are basically just bits of software you can buy the big boxes at each office and control everything from a central control adjusting how it behaves. Thus SD-WAN was born.

Providers of the underlying connectivity service should be using a different technology set called Software Defined Networking which manages how a WAN is built and configured. SDN has a particular leaning towards MPLS or VPLS as it simplifies the core configuration into a set of services that other layers can manipulate as needed. SDN makes building and changing a customer's network easier than typing lots of config by hand.

SDN can be used to build underlying transport systems for SD-WAN but as it can't control a third party Internet connection you lose the benefits of the technology when you try to mix-and-match between providers. SD-WAN can sit happily on a SDN controlled network or be run over the Internet. Or more commonly a combination of the two. So they can complement each other, or they can run entirely on their own.

James Hickman, CTO, Virtual1

# Mills moves to Chairman

SIX Degrees Group (6DG) CEO Alastair Mills is stepping back six years after setting up the firm, taking the Chairman of the Board role and making way for incoming chief exec David Howson effective February 1st.

Six Degrees has grown to more than £100m revenue with over 500 staff.

Following its sale to Charlesbank Capital Partners in 2015 the company has also invested significant new capital in people, services and technology.

6DG has completed 19 acquisitions, most recently adding new solutions capabilities for application performance management, platform services and public cloud hosting.

Mills is changing roles to spend more time with his wife and young children, and focus more on supporting charities such as WeSeeHope where he is a long-standing Ambassador.

Howson brings 25 years experience in the industry, most recently spending six years at Zayo where he was a member of the Executive team. Prior to Zayo he spent 12 years at Level 3 Communications in a number of senior roles.

Mills commented: "It has been a huge privilege and a



David Howson

great joy to have led the company as CEO since we first put pen to blank sheet of paper, almost exactly six years ago.

"Now is the perfect time for me to step back from the front line and for a new CEO to lead the next chapter of our growth story. David is well known to the management team and Charlesbank and his track record speaks for itself."

Howson added: "The team has built meaningful scale and a compelling portfolio proposition, giving me fantastic foundations to build on."

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SHORT CALLS

8x8's cloud-based Virtual Contact Centre and Quality Management solutions will be key to ensuring Bluecrest Health Screening attains a much valued quality management standard, according to Kevin Scott-Cowell, UK MD of 8x8. "It's important that companies like Bluecrest can rely on their chosen technology to work effectively and improve customer service," he said.

A new bundle from collaborators iHub and Panasonic Business includes the vendor's SIP handsets with iHub's BroadSoft-based hosted voice platform. Panasonic Group Sales Manager for the UK Bob Mercer said: "Panasonic has developed a SIP telephony range to meet the needs of the market and our collaboration with iHub helps us to do just that."

Global VoLTE connections are poised to hit 3.33 billion in 2021, according to research from Ovum. VoLTE currently stands at just 324 million connections, but by 2021 the technology will have penetrated 53% of total cellular subscriptions worldwide, reckons Ovum.

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COMMENT: INTERNATIONAL TALK



Alex Tempest

WE RECENTLY surveyed 1,000 UK business decision makers with Censuswide and found that nearly half (46 per cent) of businesses were planning on internationally expanding their operations within the next 12 months, despite the global uncertainties due to Brexit and a Trump presidency. Crucially, this was not just among large multi-national corporations as one-in-three businesses

planning for international growth were SMEs. But setting up new international offices can be costly and highly risky. Small businesses in particular may think twice about establishing overseas offices to achieve the international growth they want.

One option is to create a 'virtual international footprint' through the clever use of communications technology such as a good website and International Numbers, an inbound call service that uses a country's local area code which then re-directs to the UK. With this option the costs and risks are low while opening up potentially lucrative new markets.

If, on the other hand, your customer is already a multi-national, the approach is different. It is likely they need a physical presence in each of the markets they operate in, but enabling telephony for teams across multiple countries can be challenging. In this case, global SIP solutions can be deployed to simplify international calling, allowing the business to use just one provider and have one international tariff for all countries in a single bill.

International expansion can be tricky, but there are resources to make the process as simple as possible for our customers. There is huge potential when it comes to overseas growth, not just for the UK's businesses but also for their channel providers and partners. If nearly half of your customers are planning to expand internationally, can you afford to miss out on a slice of that market?

Alex Tempest, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

# Avaya starts new chapter

AVAYA has ended years of speculation over the action it would take to deal with its debt burden having filed voluntary petitions under Chapter 11 of the US Bankruptcy Code.

The firm's foreign affiliates are not included in the filing and for them it's business as usual.

The move indicates that Avaya believes its \$6bn debt to be a manageable one.

"Our business is performing well and we are confident that we can emerge from this process stronger than ever," according to CEO Kevin Kennedy. "This path is a reflection of our debt structure, not the strength of our operations or business model."

Reducing a company's debt through the Chapter 11 process has proved to be a springboard for other significant US firms, observed Adept Telecom CEO Ian Fishwick.

"Chapter 11 gives breathing space for businesses to sell off assets or secure more funding," he said. "US businesses that successfully entered and emerged from Chapter 11 include General Motors, American Airlines, Texaco, Macy's and Bloomingdale's.

"Whatever happens, Avaya will continue as a brand and as



Kevin Kennedy

a business but the ownership or structure of its finances will change. Chapter 11 is just one way of achieving this."

Avaya has obtained a \$725m debtor-in-possession (DIP) financing facility underwritten by Citibank, and Kennedy confirmed that the sale of Avaya's contact centre business was not currently on the cards.

"This is a critical step in our ongoing transformation to a successful software and services business," added Kennedy.

"Avaya's current capital structure is over 10 years old and was put in place to support our business model as a hardware-focused company, which has evolved significantly since that time. We need to recapitalize the company."

# Channel's on call for utilities biz

CHANNEL Telecom MD Clifford Norton has joined forces with former colleague Danny Woods to launch Channel Utilities, a provider of bespoke gas, electricity, water and waste management solutions exclusively through the channel.

Norton and Woods first met at Cable Telecom where Norton, then Sales Director, mentored Woods who went on to set up ADK Communications with two other colleagues.

The company was sold when Woods joined the Fidelity Group before founding Woods Communications in 2013 which also sold energy solutions.

"Small customers could potentially be large energy consumers," commented Woods.

"For example, ovens in bakeries use a lot of energy, but bakeries may just have one phone line. Channel Utilities provides cost-effective utility solutions for all customer types."



Clifford Norton

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COMMENT: WHAT'S REALLY KEY?



Pete Tomlinson

WE ALL put a lot of time and energy into evangelising about new models of cloud-based services, and every time there is a bit of bad weather or another train strike a dozen providers rush out ads extolling the virtues of their particular hosted UC&C solution.

As a big a fan of these

technologies this all makes me happy and it's great to see adoption ramping up. However, I also read some stats about broadband that concerned me. As we all know, for most small businesses and some larger ones that's the underpinning connectivity that makes all the interesting stuff possible. But a recent Ofcom study of 1,500 small businesses shows 67 per cent are still using ADSL broadband despite speed and reliability of connectivity being cited as two key concerns for small businesses.

With FTTC-based fibre broadband coverage having reached a tipping point where it is widely (albeit not widely enough) available to businesses at an affordable price point, I don't get why? It could be in part that 34 per cent said they did not feel well informed about how communications could help their business survive and grow, yet one in seven also said they felt business growth had been stifled by a lack of products and services.

So, while I applaud the desire to create a universal service obligation for 10Mb or higher broadband speeds, something that the Federation of Small Businesses and others champion so passionately, let's also help to educate and encourage businesses on the benefit of the fast, cost-effective connectivity that they can take advantage of today.

Maybe it's the right time to consider a campaign to encourage all our business customers to make the leap to fibre broadband so they are in the best possible position to take advantage of those great new cloud services we all get so excited about.

Pete Tomlinson, Director, KCOM

# Key birthday for TeleWare

## Pure fibre lights and links cities

TELEWARE is celebrating its 25th anniversary, having set out a quarter of a century ago with Geoff Haworth at the helm and operating out of a garage.

Today, TeleWare counts some of the world's largest companies among its customers and has received accreditation from the likes of Avaya and numerous Microsoft Gold and Silver partner competencies.

Last year TeleWare delivered two Microsoft world firsts – the first being to route, record and analyse a call in real-time through Microsoft Azure. The second being to completely migrate all fixed line call recordings to Microsoft Azure.

Three out of five FTSE 100 banks use TeleWare technology and the firm is also a popular SIM-based mobile voice and SMS recording provider.

TeleWare is now investigating how customer analytics can be best applied to shape the customer experience.

Beyond that, the firm is looking at how machine learning can be used to help organisations get the most out of their data and artificial intelligence to create automated communications.

This is in addition to developing intelligent bots to improve



Steve Haworth

communications management and augmented and virtual reality call centres.

TeleWare's CEO Steve Haworth stated: "There has been incredible growth in entrepreneurship in the 21st century, resulting in a sharp decrease in the average company lifespan. People are now starting businesses with the aim of exiting almost as quickly as possible.

"That's not the TeleWare way. We look at the last 25 years as building a solid foundation and legacy that can propel us into the future."

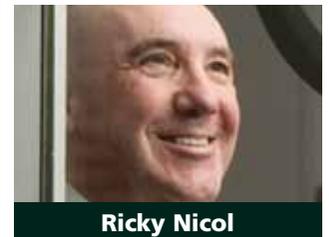
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COMMSWORLD has established its own pure fibre telecoms route to link networks in Glasgow and Edinburgh, operating at up to 100Gb/s, 5,000 times the speed of an average UK broadband connection.

Commsworld applied its DWDM (Dense Wave Division Multiplexing) technology to 'light' a span of dark fibre at practically unlimited capacity.

Chief executive of Commsworld, Ricky Nicol, said: "This is a major and exciting step forward for our business as it means that an independent Scottish firm is operating this level of infrastructure rather than it being the preserve of the biggest industry names.

"We now have control over speeds, from the business connection, the local network, to the exchanges and beyond. It means clients with offices between Edinburgh and Glasgow can experience some of the fastest network speeds around."



Ricky Nicol

**ASSEMBLY CHANNEL SERVICES**  
... it's a reseller thing

- 87%** Resellers who reported an increase in their sense of general well-being since they began working with us
- 5** No. of major industry awards our game-changing Assembly UC solution was a finalist for in 2016
- 13** Comms Dealer page on which you can find our life-changing UC decision-making flowchart
- 100%** Our commitment to being the most honest, flexible, friendly, reseller-focused, transparent & innovative wholesale telecoms provider in the world
- 78** Life-expectancy of an average UK male
- 114** Life-expectancy of an average Assembly reseller
- 0%** Sense that this graph makes
- 2014** Resellers: 3, End Users: 1,600
- 2015** Resellers: 9, End Users: 73,000
- 2016** Resellers: 23, End Users: 212,000

Our growth since launching in late 2014

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insight



COMMENT: MOBILE MATTERS



Dave Dadds

JANUARY started with an unexpected rush: Our Make The Air Fair campaign crashed through the 100,000 signatures mark. They think mobile spectrum availability (something most consumers don't even know the first thing about) is important enough to write to Ofcom ahead of the forthcoming spectrum auction. Well,

100,000 consumers can't be wrong, can they? FCS has been glad to support Make The Air Fair. No, we don't think capping maximum mobile spectrum holdings at 30 per cent is the perfect answer. But it's a quick, easy and comprehensible way to stop things getting worse.

Looking at Ofcom's auction consultation, you wonder if we're taking about the same market. Time and again we read, 'The UK mobile market is currently working well for consumers and businesses'. When mobile phones first came to the UK, Ofcom's remit was to encourage the building of mobile networks without the taxpayer having to foot the bill. So it regulated on this basis – you build the mast sites, you build the network, you get to enjoy a monopoly control over the charges to customers who use that network.

FCS believes it's time to recognise this infrastructure ownership model has run its course. Now is the time to mutualise the mast sites and place them in the hands of an Openreach-style utility management company, with a corporate governance model close to that of Welsh Water.

FCS is encouraging Ofcom to re-visit the principle last used in the 4G auction of deliberately reserving specific blocks of spectrum to encourage new competitors into the market. And that a condition should be attached to each of the other blocks offered for auction to require price controlled wholesale roaming access to the operators using those aggregators' services. That's not a perfect answer, but it'd be an interesting start.

Dave Dadds, Chairman, FCS

# 1Portal puts MPLS on tap

VIRTUAL1 channel partners will soon be able to quote customers for MPLS network orders via the company's fast growing 1Portal.

The system is being trialled by select partners and is planned to go fully live early this spring, according to CEO Tom O'Hagan.

"Partners will be able to generate a representative quote quickly and simply, complete with specifications and a network diagram of the proposed solution that they can share directly with their end customers," he said.

"This will enable the early capture of essential information, which means less duplication, faster provisioning, quicker revenue realisation and, most importantly, increased end customer satisfaction."

Released to the channel six years ago Virtual1's 1Portal now offers options around resiliency, firewalls and data centre interconnectivity, as well as connectivity to the leading SIP and UC vendors such as BT, Gamma, Shoretel and Unify through Virtual1's SIP and UC exchange service.

"We have also built in private access to the main public cloud



Tom O'Hagan

providers including Microsoft Azure, AWS and Google Cloud, through our recently launched Cloud Exchange product," explained O'Hagan.

"And in the next few months our market firsts will continue with the release of network change controls into 1Portal through SDN which will put our partners directly in control of the configuration of solutions they provide.

"Being focused on the wholesale market means that the aim of each release is to make life for our partners as simple and easy as possible."

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# Seminars add value to exiters

TWO early morning seminars to be held in London and Manchester will aim to lift the lid on the changing valuations in the TMT sector and explain to company owners with an exit strategy how to build value into their business.

Run by corporate finance specialist Evolution Capital in association with Comms Dealer, the breakfast events will consider the sale of Lanway to Chess and feature a presentation from Vernon Yerkess, former shareholder, explaining the process that Lanway went through with Evolution and the value that was added as a result.

Simon Kelson, M&A Advisor at Evolution, said: "These are must attend events for any ICT business owners looking at an exit or planning one in the next year or so."

Later on in the year, continuing the series, Evolution will be staging a larger event to look at the impact on valuations a year on from Brexit.

To register for the breakfast 'Business Valuation' events to be held at the Ivy in London on 2nd March and the Radisson Blu Edwardian in Manchester on 30th March please visit: [www.evolutioncapital.com/register](http://www.evolutioncapital.com/register)



## The Comms Dealer 5-a-Side Tournament, sponsored by Nine Wholesale! Have you signed up yet?

Prizes will be awarded to the winning team, top goal scorer and top player of the tournament, followed by a buffet and refreshments.

- Thursday 27th April 2017
- Kick off at 12pm
- Goals Soccer Centre, Wakerley Road, Leicester
- Entry is £295 per team or £500 for two

**Spaces are limited to just 20 teams so book your place now!**

Please enter via the Sparks website:  
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For additional details contact:  
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All monies raised go directly to Sparks.



# Stirling poised to go Gigabit



James McClafferty, Johanna Boyd and Ross Duke

STIRLING is set to become Scotland's fourth Gigabit City following a city-wide fibre roll out by CityFibre working in partnership with MLL Telecoms that kicks off in June.

The initial development phase is expected to take 14 months and will deliver 20km of infrastructure spanning from Bannockburn to the Stirling Agricultural Centre.

The copper-free ultra-fast network will connect over 30 Stirling Council sites including schools, libraries, offices and community facilities.

It will also provide a platform for further digital developments such as connecting mobile masts and enabling smart CCTV and street lighting.

The network will be extended to offer the majority of Stirling's 3,000 businesses access to gigabit speed services.

Stirling Council Leader Johanna Boyd said: "This leap forward for our digital connectivity will make our businesses more competitive, encourage new businesses to the city centre and enable us to deliver education and skills programmes which not only ensure our students are the most digitally skilled in Scotland, but also provide people of all circumstances and skill levels with opportunities for employment. It will also allow those accessing council services to do so faster."

CityFibre's Head of Regional Development in Scotland James McClafferty added: "By providing unlimited bandwidth and true fibre connectivity, CityFibre's privately funded investment in Stirling will benefit all areas of the community."

"As the first organisation to be connected, Stirling Council will, for example, explore the e-learning potential offered by gigabit connectivity in schools and libraries, while improving the use of digital and web-based tools and services for both staff and customers."

"As the project progresses we expect Stirling to benefit economically as the city becomes more competitive in terms of attracting new businesses, supporting growth among existing firms and creating jobs."

"We are already seeing this trend emerge in our Gigabit City projects across the UK and in others throughout the world."

Ross Duke, MLL Telecom's Technology Director, said: "The Gigabit City network will transform the way in which Stirling's communities, organisations and businesses can collaborate and work together. Our role will be to make sure this happens seamlessly and securely."

CityFibre is leading Gigabit City projects in 40 other UK cities including Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

See page 34

IT'S TIME TO CHALLENGE THE CHANNELS

Decision-making flow chart for hosted telephony resellers seeking wisdom, enlightenment + very happy customers

Are you either an IT services provider or telecoms reseller that delivers connectivity, telephony and/or communications services to your SME/Mid-Market customers?

YES

Do you wish that someone would create a hosted telephony solution with full UC capability that was designed to give resellers maximum control, flexibility + ease-of-development?

NO, I'm happy with mediocrity

NO

Oh, right. Well feel free to skip over to page 17, but if you're looking for the sports section then you may be reading the wrong magazine.

ER, I already have that

Congratulations! You're already an *Assembly* customer!

YES, that would be great

Would you love £6.50 pm extensions, 30 day rolling contracts, MS Skype for Business/Lync compatibility, branded softphones, customisable wallboards, FSA/PCI compliant call recording, feature-rich call centre functionality, free UK landline + mobile calls + inbuilt anti-fraud mechanisms all delivered + managed via your own fully-branded user-friendly portal?

NO, I'm happy with mediocrity

So it seems. What if we told you that this was a collaboration between one of the UK's most innovative UC developers + one of the CRN Channel Awards Emerging Vendor of the Year finalists? And that the first few deployments in 2016 saw us named as Comms National Awards finalists in the Best Convergence Distributor, Best SME UC Solution + Best Wholesale Service Provider categories?

HMM, sounds too good to be true

Game-changers always do at first. Here's a quote from one of our Resellers:

"Their new UC solution is the most Reseller-friendly product I've seen + proves that they are the only guys who understand what the market wants."

OKAY, you've got my attention

Get in touch for more information, full technical specs, network topography + a live demonstration - it'll be the best 20 minutes you'll spend this year.

YES, You're damn right I would!

In exclusive partnership with ITEC Support Building Unified Communications

COMMENT: RISE OF SELF-SERVE



Vincent Disneur

IS THE data game still worth the candle for service providers? 2017 promises to be a pivotal year in the telecoms sector as SPs arrive at the tipping point of costs versus revenues in the supply of data connectivity and, consequently, look to self-service provisioning and software-led automation to rebalance the equation.

One of the big questions for the comms industry, particularly for network operators, is how it should adapt to the threat posed by falling revenues. This is particularly topical as many analysts predict 2017 will be the year we finally see operator revenues per bit fall below more slowly declining costs per bit.

Although falling operator profits threaten investment in infrastructure, it seems unlikely that regulatory change will be used to limit the attractiveness of OTT services that have led to declining revenues. Based on Ofcom's recent Digital Communications Review, it seems the regulator welcomes the rise of OTT services as a positive outcome for consumers.

Without regulatory change to alleviate pressure, carriers will target profitability by reducing operating expenditure. One way of accomplishing this is through software automation, particularly in the provisioning process. The goal for operators is to offer comprehensive but easy-to-use provisioning portals for a range of services, making it possible for partners to self-serve and manage an entire solution without excessive interaction with the carriers.

Software automation combined with the advance of self-serve portals has the potential to deliver huge opex savings, while providing agility when it comes to deploying services. We also expect to see significant developments in cloud services as this is unquestionably a growth area for the comms sector, spanning infrastructure, telecoms, security and line of business applications.

Vincent Disneur, Head of Sales, Union Street

# Nine reveals eve platform



Barnes Clutterbuck

AN INTEGRATED SIP trunk and hosted telephony platform is being rolled out to Nine Wholesale partners having been put through its paces by a select group of existing channels and their customers.

"We have worked collaboratively with these partners over the last six months to successfully complete beta testing," stated Barnes Clutterbuck, MD of Nine Networks.

The platform, called eve ('exceptional voice everywhere'), has gained full interoperability certification from the major PBX brands and offers hosted telephony via an automated interface.

"Nine is no stranger to hosted telephony platforms," explained Clutterbuck. "Over the past 12 years we have been at the

coalface, offering a number of variants and managing the challenges at a time when connectivity was far less mature.

"Nine understands the importance of building a platform from the ground up with feedback from channel partners guiding our development.

"eve is easy to use, commercially simple, reliable, and incorporates an integrated SIP trunk offering to enable mixed estates of hosted and traditional PBX. Demand is exceptional."

eve comes to the market in three license bundles offering features and functionality such as minutes, handsets, mobile and desktop apps, call recording and reporting.

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# Sophie on course for marathon

COMMS Dealer sales exec Sophie Timms recorded a personal best in Farnborough's first Half Marathon on January 22nd, a key milestone of her training regime in the run up to the London Marathon.

On completing the Farnborough course in under 2hrs 10m Sophie immediately revised downwards her target time for the big day on April 23rd.

"Last October I finished the Wimbledon Half Marathon in 2hrs 33m," she said. "In just three months I have been able to shave 24 minutes off that time.

"My original aim was to finish the London Marathon in under five hours, but I'm confident of doing 4.5hrs."

Big hearted Sophie is running in support of kids charity Sparks and she has invited the channel to support her long distance fund raising campaign.

Please visit [www.justgiving.com/Sophie-Timms1](http://www.justgiving.com/Sophie-Timms1)



Sophie Timms

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# Cloud blocks break down

BOOM time beckons in the cloud services market as barriers to adoption tumble, reckons Synergy Research. Operator and vendor revenues for the year ending September 2016 reached \$148bn across six key cloud services and infrastructure market segments, a 25% annual increase, calculates Synergy.

IaaS and PaaS services displayed the highest growth rate at 53%, followed by hosted private cloud infrastructure services at 35% and enterprise SaaS at 34%.

Synergy Research also said that 2016 was notable as the year in which spend on cloud services overtook spend on cloud infrastructure hardware and software. Overall, cloud service markets are growing three times more quickly than cloud infrastructure hardware and software.

The companies that featured most prominently among the 2016 market segment leaders were Amazon/AWS, Microsoft, HPE, Cisco, IBM, Salesforce and Dell EMC.

Over the period, total spend on hardware and software to build cloud infrastructure exceeded \$65bn, with spend on private clouds accounting

for over half of the total, but spend on public cloud is growing much more rapidly.

Investments in infrastructure by cloud service providers helped to generate almost \$30bn in revenues from cloud infrastructure services (IaaS, PaaS, hosted private cloud services) and over \$40bn from enterprise SaaS, in addition to supporting Internet services such as search, social networking, email and e-commerce, noted Synergy.

UCaaS is also growing steadily and driving some 'radical changes' in business communications, said the report.

"We tagged 2015 as the year when cloud became mainstream, and 2016 is the year that cloud started to dominate many IT market segments," said Synergy Research Group's founder and Chief Analyst Jeremy Duke.

"Major barriers to cloud adoption are now almost a thing of the past, especially on the public cloud side. Cloud technologies are generating massive revenues for technology vendors and cloud service providers, and there are still many years of strong growth ahead."

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## Time ripe to expand says Gold

CLOUD firm Intermedia has pledged greater channel support via a refreshed sales organisation headed up by newly appointed business leaders.

Eric Martorano, the incoming SVP of Worldwide Sales (who moved from Microsoft), said: "Now is the time to bring on additional experience and talent to expand our go-to-market capabilities."

Intermedia CEO Michael Gold commented: "Under Eric's leadership we've begun to scale our channel business at an accelerated rate."

Intermedia has upped its investment in most sales functions, said Martorano. "Partners want more enablement and support, so we've added that," he stated. "They wanted more engagement from their account managers, so we have made it possible for our sales team to engage more deeply by decreasing the number of partners managed by each representative."

In the UK, Intermedia has hired a new VP of Worldwide Field Channel Sales & Distribution, Eric Roach, who brings 20 years channel experience, most recently working in Microsoft's worldwide SMB sales team.

# Wi-Fi firm in hiring mode

A STAFF recruitment investment of £5.4m by Wi-Fi firm Purple has prompted a move to bigger premises that will house its expanding team of workers.

Purple expects to hire another 200 people worldwide, including 10 new staff members for its new Oldham HQ. The company moved from Ashton-under-Lyne where it operated for four years, starting its commercial life with just six employees.

Purple now has 20 million users worldwide with deployments in 73 countries and offices based in the US, Spain, Chile, Singapore and Australia.

Purple's Wi-Fi solution generates real-time analytics for venues and businesses by measuring the behaviour of visitors



Gavin Wheeldon

and turning physical spaces into intelligent ones.

Gavin Wheeldon, CEO, commented: "Purple has experienced unbelievable growth over the last few years and our relocation to a bigger and better headquarters allows us to continue building momentum."



COMMS and IT industry footballers from all over the UK will get the chance to show their skills at the Comms Dealer national five-a-side football tournament which returns this spring. Once again sponsored by Nine Wholesale (pictured is the Nine team), the legendary tournament will take place on April 27th at the Goals Soccer venue in Leicester and all the proceeds will go to children's charity Sparks, which now has a close tie up with Great Ormond Street Hospital in London.

"Nine are kindly funding the venue, the referees, trophies and post tournament refreshments so all we need now is teams to raise a bumper sum for Sparks!" said Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent. "We used to run the event in September, but it's such a busy time of the year after the summer holidays we have decided to move it to the spring to encourage more teams to enter. It's a great event and has been much enjoyed by industry teams in the past so we're aiming to get our best ever turn out."

Team places are priced at £295 per team and £500 for two. To register go to: <http://www.sparks.org.uk/event/comms-dealer-5aside-football>

# Murria's enlisted by Sophos

ONE of the IT sector's most respected executives has joined Sophos as a Non-Exec.

Vin Murria is also a member of the security firm's nominations and remuneration committees. She brings more than 25 years experience in building technology companies in the UK, working with both private and publicly listed companies in the software sector.

In a glittering career Murria founded Advanced Computer Software where she was CEO for seven years until its sale



Vin Murria

to Vista Equity Partners in 2015. Previous roles include CEO of Computer Software Group which was backed by HG Capital and acquired by Hellman & Friedman in 2007.

Her earlier career includes 15 years with Kewill Systems

where she was CEO before leaving in 2002. Murria was named Cisco's Woman of the Year and Tech Entrepreneur of the Year in 2012.

Peter Gyenes, Chairman of Sophos, said: "Vin has a strong background in building and advising technology-based companies and growing shareholder value. Her deep understanding of this market and significant UK listed company experience will be of great benefit to the board as Sophos continues to execute on its strategy."

# Streets Ahead



\*!#!

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# Proud Cross gains medal



Brendon Cross with his fiancée Claire Willcox

THE support given to charity SpecialEffect by STL MD Brendon Cross has been recognised in the New Year's Honours list with a British Empire Medal handed over for 'services to disabled people'.

Cross is also Vice President of SpecialEffect and organises the Twin Town Challenge, an event held in 2014 and 2016 that has already raised over £500,000 for the charity which gives people with physical disabilities access to technology to play games and interact with friends and family.

The Twin Town Challenge, which sees cars costing £500 drive from Witney to Le Touquet, has been well supported by household names in the comms and games industry and local Oxfordshire businesses.

Cross commented: "I am humbled and honoured to accept this award on behalf of the Twin Town Challenge and all of the SpecialEffect family, many of whom have dedicated their lives to helping severely disabled young people.

"Each year we have smashed the Twin Town Challenge fundraising target and the event planning is well underway to make Twin Town Challenge 2018 even bigger and better."

Dr Mick Donegan, SpecialEffect founder and CEO, said: "Brendon and his family are dear friends of SpecialEffect and their friendship and support has had a life changing impact for the people we help."

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# Murphy takes COO position

TIMICO Technology Group has enlisted former Eclipse MD Clodagh Murphy who joins the firm as COO.

She is well known as a business transformer having led Eclipse (which was acquired by KCOM) from a single product consumer broadband supplier to a multi-product business technology service provider. Her previous experience also includes business planning roles at Eircom.

"Anyone who knows me knows that I am passionate about two things – the people I work with and the customers we look after," stated Murphy.

"I will bring this passion and my energy to Timico and I know the next few years are going to be great fun as we deliver our plans to develop the business."

In another senior hire Jeff Palmer has been appointed as Timico's new Sales Director, bringing almost 20 years experience in sales and business development to the company.

He joins from Daisy Group where he was Director for Group Vendor Alliances & Supply Chain Services.

Previous roles include Head of Sales at Damovo UK and Account Director at Touchbase



Clodagh Murphy

UK, dealing with enterprise and commercial customers.

Palmer commented: "Timico has clear plans for future growth and I'm looking forward to being a part of that journey as we enter this new phase."

Timico CEO Ben Marnham commented: "The arrival of Clodagh and Jeff comes just weeks after our new Chief Commercial Officer, Simon Payne, joined us from Capita. This will be a pivotal year for the company as we cement our new strategy for the business."

## NEWS ROUNDUP

A reseller event hosted by Nimans, Microsoft and Yealink at the Belfry aimed to raise awareness of Skype for Business and its projected 250% growth this year.

Ian Brindle, who is Head of Conferencing and Telephony Sales at Nimans, commented: "Globally, 75 million people work from home, there are 600 million mobile workers and one billion office cube spaces. Full collaboration of voice, video and content sharing is the way forward."

Zen Internet has swung its gaze onto the public sector (including local authorities and NHS hospitals) having secured Public Service Network (PSN) accreditation for its IP VPN product.

Jon Bauer, Zen's Technical Director, commented: "PSN accreditation will give us the opportunity to support a whole new sector. But what is equally important is that it shows all our partners how seriously we take the security of their customers' information and data."

PSN accreditation comes on the back of a big investment in Zen's core network and an expansion of the company's on-net presence to over 500,000 postcodes.

Distributor DMSL has welcomed 50-plus Vonage resellers in four months in a recruitment drive that's set to accelerate this year.

DMSL linked up with the cloud VoIP provider in September and set about building a network of resellers to push sales of B2B hosted voice services primarily in the small business sector. The company hopes to enlist up to 100 additional resellers in 2017.

"We need more resellers to fully exploit the potential," commented DMSL MD John Carter. "Interest in VoIP is soaring, so now is the right time to get on board and grasp the opportunity."

## SHORT CALL

Microsoft has awarded TeleWare Gold Cloud Platform competency in recognition of big strides made towards pure cloud comms. The upgrade from Silver status follows TeleWare's achievement in recording and analysing a call made completely through the Microsoft Azure platform, a world first. Another world first was achieved when TeleWare completely migrated fixed line recording to the cloud.

# Points to ponder in 2017

NIMANS' Network Services chief Mark Curtis-Wood has spilled the beans on a trio of industry matters at the forefront of his mind that, he says, will dominate the channel agenda this year.

Fixed Mobile Convergence, he says, has 'finally come of age' while the IoT and mobile data are not far behind.

On FMC Curtis-Wood said: "One of the biggest conversations during 2017 is around FMC which is about to hit a key tipping point. It's now being



Mark Curtis-Wood

driven by operators that see an opportunity to get the upper hand by leveraging an asset (fixed or mobile network) that other competitors don't have.

"Part of Nimans' strategy this year is to give resellers choice by leveraging FMC through technology rather than assets. This way resellers are not just going direct to a single carrier, but using an aggregator that offers a much wider choice to help them adopt and evolve their own businesses at their own pace.

"For example, they can take a PBX solution from Nimans along with hosted services and FMC from multiple different network vendors."

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Water

The Opportunity to switch water Supplier in England and Wales is currently underway and From April 2017 the rest of the English market will be deregulated which will enable Channel Utilities to help more businesses across the UK to save more money on their water bills.



Waste

Channel Utilities offers you a solution to your waste disposal needs. We are one of the UK's only specialist company offering Commercial waste collection services to our Channel Partners and Customers.

# Exit pays off for Freedom

# Gamma promises to ratchet up marketing

BUSINESS owners wanting to sell-up should focus on preparation, planning and executing on a clear strategy to maximise value, according to Adam Zoldan, Director at Knight Corporate Finance, the comms and IT sector M&A specialist.

To underline his point he cited the firm's role in advising the shareholders of Freedom Communications on its disposal to GCI, saying Freedom displayed a classic growth model that all would-be exiters should aim to replicate.

"Freedom Communications is a forward looking company offering a range of services from traditional PBX, hosted voice and latterly Skype for Business," said Zoldan.

"Ultimately, its strategy and ongoing investment in people, products and expertise paid dividends, with GCI being the successful bidder in a competitive sales process.

"The price paid fully recognised Freedom's strengths in the public sector and expertise in Skype for Business that would help cement GCI's position as a leading Microsoft partner."

Zoldan said the deal offers a useful blueprint and that the mechanics of Freedom's growth



Adam Zoldan

engine should become standard across the industry in terms of vision, planning and process.

"Freedom had a strategy and identified a specific type of customer together with a next generation service," he added. "It invested time and money in building presence and expertise. When it came to exit it was clear this investment had paid off with stiff competition among buyers that wanted to build scale in the public sector and leverage its Skype for Business expertise."

According to Zoldan, there are clear signs that 2017 is set to continue the high level of sustained deal activity witnessed during the past year.

"Well funded buyers are acquiring and financial institutions will continue to invest in the sector," he added.

GAMMA has pledged to take its marketing support for partners to 'the next level' with the introduction of two new initiatives.

The first, Accelerate, is a self-serve online marketing portal available to all partners.

It includes an asset library that enables users to leverage tools that customise campaign material and product collateral.

In the lead up to Accelerate's launch Gamma also expanded its white label marketing offering to include an end-to-end campaign-in-a-box model.

Gamma's Platinum Partner Programme, launched in 2015, now includes a Gold level, giving partners access to a Partner Programme Manager who will support lead generation activities including managed lead nurture campaigns.

Gold partners also get funding for marketing, enhanced training and support, and access to multi-tactic marketing automation features.

The company said it will deliver managed marketing campaigns to Platinum and Gold Partners using the Accelerate platform; while Accelerate's content syndication module will be available exclusively to Platinum Partners.



Justin Coombes

Gamma's Head of Marketing Justin Coombes commented: "These new initiatives enable us to take the marketing support we offer to our channel partners to the next level.

"All of our partners can easily brand marketing material

on a self-serve basis within the portal. The premium features, such as content syndication and automated lead nurture, add value to the Platinum and new Gold proposition, providing an opportunity to boost lead generation and increase sales."



AERIAL Business Communications has staged an Apprentice-style team building challenge in aid of Portsmouth-based charity The Roberts Centre (which supports families struggling with homelessness or suffering the impact of a relationship breakdown). Teams were tasked with sourcing a number of items on a festive shopping list which were then taken to The Roberts Centre. Paul Davis, MD, said: "While the team building aspect is great fun for the staff, knowing that our event helped to make some families' Christmases just a little bit better makes it all the more worthwhile."

## SHORT CALL

Limited experience of the channel marketing basics could jeopardise the ability of comms resellers to compete effectively, claimed Bowan Arrow MD Andy Grant. "Partners who understand the full extent of the funds available from their various vendors could add more than 50% to their annual marketing budget, greatly improving their capacity to generate leads," he said. **Grant's marketing reality check – page 32**

## VDSL poses risks

VOIP over VDSL is a risk to business continuity despite many company leaders rating the technology as adequate.

The crux of the issue is a lack of QoS guarantees for VDSL which leaves businesses vulnerable to poor voice quality with no route to resolution, according to Spitfire.

It says the situation is set to worsen as more public Internet services such as Amazon Prime, Netflix and digital TV are prioritised. And users wanting to upgrade to Ethernet connecti-

ty for VoIP can face deployment lead times of up to a year.

The answer, says Spitfire, is a complete end-to-end SIP service run over a wholly owned IP and TDM infrastructure.

Harry Bowlby, joint MD, said: "Businesses that opt for a VoIP solution without QoS guarantees gamble with their future. VoIP over VDSL is a potential risk to UK business."

Graham Lewis, Director for IP Engineering, has written a white paper on the issues raised in this article.

## BT in MVNO deal

VIRGIN Media and BT have sealed a new five year Mobile Virtual Network Operator (MVNO) agreement.

Under the new deal, EE, a BT Group company, will provide wholesale mobile network services to Virgin Media, a subsidiary of Liberty Global.

The full MVNO agreement, which covers voice and data services, replaces an existing wholesale agreement and extends its exclusivity to 2021.

Peter Kelly, MD of Virgin Mobile, said: "This will give

Virgin Mobile more control and firepower to deliver services to the UK mobile market."

Gerry McQuade, CEO of Wholesale and Ventures, BT, added: "This has proven a successful relationship for both parties for many years and, as we enter a period of further technological change in the mobile market, we are very pleased to renew and extend our 17 year old relationship.

"BT values the economy of scale that Virgin Media brings to our network."

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# Best techies jumping ship



Peter Groucutt

RETAINING the services of top techies will be a big challenge for organisations this year, reckons research by employment standards agency Investors in People which indicates that 75% of IT professionals could switch jobs in 2017.

Figures also suggest that confidence in the tech job marketplace is already up 6% on last year, with the main prompts to jumping ship being a requirement for new challenges and better pay, while 36% cited a lack of career progression within their current role as a reason for moving.

"To avoid losing valued employees organisations must foster a culture of innovation that enables workers to channel their aspirations," said Peter Groucutt, MD of DR service provider Databarracks.

"Some larger organisations have looked to address this through a formalised process, such as Google's Area 120, a start-up incubator that allows employees to work on personal projects full-time.

"However, initiatives like this often only take place within large enterprises where there is sufficient funding and support available. What we need to see is more SMEs embracing this incubator culture."

Groucutt explained that Databarracks encourages its own staff to develop products and solutions. Successful initiatives can even be spun out into new businesses, such as Kazoup, a solution for analysing unstructured file data which was founded and developed by Databarracks employees.

Kazoup was launched as a new business led by its heads of R&D and Business Development, with shares held in the business by senior members of the Databarracks team.

The company has also applied this innovation model to other parts of the business including its marketing department which now operates independently as a provider of marketing services to other organisations as well as Databarracks.

"This approach provides employees with the freedom to develop new skills and ideas, giving them greater ownership over new projects," stated Groucutt. "The purpose of an incubator culture is to ensure that you are able to retain your most skilled employees by enabling them to explore and develop new projects and ideas outside of their usual remit."

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## NEWS ROUNDUP

Daisy has ploughed £3.5m into a hardware upgrade being rolled out to business continuity customers.

The investment will equip its 13 nationwide work area recovery sites with 6,000 desktop computers from Hewlett Packard.

Daisy's Head of Business Continuity Operations Les Price said: "The level and quality of service that we are able to provide to our customers in their time of need is of upmost importance to us.

"This is a major investment initiative that demonstrates a commitment to the continual enhancement of what we do and how we do it."

**Exclusive Group** has pocketed Netherlands based VAD TechAccess, growing its combined Benelux operation to over 150 staff.

The acquisition adds Fortinet distribution into the Netherlands, extending a relationship that spreads across all of EMEA and APAC.

Other shared synergies include Arista, Infoblox, Gemalto and Brocade.

Olivier Breittmayer, CEO of Exclusive Group, said: "We identified TechAccess as a strong candidate to boost our Benelux market presence and to provide the catalyst for further growth in the region."

**Fundamental** billing mistakes have cost EE £2.7m following a fine levied by watchdog Ofcom which says almost 40,000 customers were overcharged a total of around £250k.

The penalty is the result of an investigation which found that EE broke a fundamental billing rule twice.

Customers who called the firm's 150 customer services number while roaming within the EU were charged as if they had called the US, £1.20 per minute instead of 19p.

Ofcom also found that EE's 'carelessness' contributed to these billing errors.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

**Nimans** and Unify (the Atos brand for comms software and services) have ramped up their mid-market and upwards channel aims with the launch of a licensed-based pay-as-you-go proposition that scales up to 1,500 users and offers full OpenScape Business functionality to SMBs and enterprise level users.

The venture kicks off with a series of educational webinars that will explore deployment scenarios including on-premise server-based solutions and via a resellers' own hosted service provider. Other subject areas will focus on cost control and centralised web-based management.

The deal registration schemes of multiple vendors can now be accessed by Tech Data resellers via a new streamlined Bid Portal.

Cathi Low, Director of SMB at Tech Data, said: "The idea is to remove all of the complexity and make it as easy as possible to apply for special bid pricing.

"Every vendor handles bids in their own way, making it confusing and time-consuming for resellers. The Bid Portal irons out the differences and provides customers with a single form to complete for all vendors covered."

Initially, around 15 of Tech Data's vendor partners will be covered by the portal, including HP and Dell. More will be added at a later date.

**Intelisys** Global has signed up its 40th EMEA sales partner since launching a US two-tier distribution channel model in the UK less than six months ago. The company reached this milestone after deals with UTelcom, Primetel and Allumno.

"Selling cloud solutions is very different and UTelcom, Primetel and Allumno recognise that they need a new approach to succeed," stated Stephen Hackett, who is MD for Intelisys Global.

# Fidelity hails big changes



Richard Thomas

HENLEY-based Fidelity Group is ramping up its channel development programme following the appointment of Richard Thomas as Channel Director and the launch of new educational and marketing initiatives.

Thomas worked for Avaya Solutions in the early 2000s before being enlisted by a major south west reseller dealing in Alcatel and Toshiba products as well as IT networking and mobile solutions.

He later became Sales Director for a cost reduction consultancy, franchising its business and growing turnover from £1m to £4.2m in three years. Most recently he worked for Focus Group restructuring its partner offerings, commercials, support mechanism and supply chain.

"We have plans to create some exciting changes and offerings in the coming year," stated Thomas. "We will review how we connect with the customer, what we are offering and how we offer it.

"As part of these changes, we will further develop our billing platform, add features and give partners more flexibility and control."

Thomas believes that resellers with multiple vendor partnerships are liable to extra financial costs and greater pressures on their time. "We want to help partners provide better joined-up communications and energy solutions to save businesses money, while freeing up time for them to focus on other important areas of their business," he added.

# Utility dumbs down comms

CATEGORISING communications services as a utility is to greatly understate the business critical nature of connectivity products and services, says Entanet's Head of Marketing Darren Farnden.

"Connectivity is increasingly perceived as a utility but it's assumptive and complacent to see it that way," he stated.

"Organisations looking to transform themselves into super-efficient, responsive and digitally dependent operations need to keep that at the front and centre of their thinking."

He also emphasised the role of reliable and available fast connectivity as a key driver of digital transformation.

"Every business's digital transformation is driven by the nuts and bolts of communication, which includes every form of connectivity imaginable, such as business grade broadband, fixed and wireless Ethernet, IP VPNs, hosted voice, virtualisation and a myriad of cloud-based services," added Farnden.

"But comms often fails to be recognised as the linchpin of digital transformation. With the move towards hybrid infrastructures and growing use of cloud services, what connects a cus-



Darren Farnden

tomers digital strategy to the real world is one of their most important decisions and they must get it right first time."

Farnden also believes that the customer experience is at the heart of digital transformation. "We live in an age where the customer expects to be able to access anything, at any time, from anywhere," he stated. "If their chosen provider is unable to fulfil all of these obligations they'll simply move on to someone else who can.

"This is where the channel still has a golden opportunity to add value and ensure that a customer's digital transformation solution is fit for purpose."

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# Gamma bosses acting up

GAMMA leaders and partners are set to take centre stage at the firm's theatre themed 2017 roadshow under the banner 'Much Ado About Gamma'.

Previous themed roadshows have been hosted in stately homes, museums, universities and castles. But this year's events will be staged at the Theatre Royal in Glasgow (28th February), The Lowry in Manchester (1st March), The Hippodrome in Birmingham (7th March) and London's The Barbican (8th March).



Gamma's execs take their lead roles seriously

Gamma MD Daryl Pile commented: "Feedback from our partners plays a vital role in helping us remain ahead of the curve and shape our roadmap

specifically for the channel. Our annual roadshow gives us a unique opportunity to spend time and catch up with our channel partners."

## SHORT CALL

**Adrian** Barnard has stepped down as CEO of The Change Organisation after successfully completing his brief to increase sales margins and re-shape the sales structure of the company, a task that took just nine months to wrap up. The move allows Barnard to focus on new projects including a comms industry venture planned to launch in the coming months and a new business in the legal sector.

# Think events urges Carter



John Carter

DISTRIBUTOR DMSL is incentivising resellers to attend business club events with a pledge to provide resources and support staff to help open discussions with more local firms.

Pop-up stand displays and marketing material are also available to resellers.

DMSL's MD John Carter said: "Small businesses prefer to have an IT and comms services provider to be local so they can call on them for help and advice at any time.

"We've already supported partners at local business club events and generated a good number of enquires and sales."

Hosted voice services have attracted the most interest during business events, noted Carter. "VoIP is something most small businesses have heard

about but don't completely understand," he added. "Having our team there means we can answer all the questions and explain the different options and services available on the spot.

"They are often surprised at the choice and quality of what's on offer, and we can help them select the right service."

DMSL then works with the local reseller to provide quotations, manage orders and provision services.

"DMSL will consider supporting any committed reseller at any kind of event, anywhere in the UK," pledged Carter.

"Depending on the circumstances, some funding support may be available."

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## NEWS ROUNDUP

Annodata's ambitions in the public sector have been further advanced following its placement on the Crescent Purchasing Consortium (CPC) framework for Multi-functional Devices and Associated Print Services.

Rod Tonna-Barthet, CEO, said: "The public sector is an important vertical market for Annodata which we understand intimately.

"We've helped many public sector organisations to get a grip of their print estate and achieve the visibility, transparency and control needed to drive down costs and improve their environmental footprint and efficiency."

Swindon-based Excalibur has gained Vodafone's topmost accreditation to become an elite Total Communications Partner. Excalibur now has access to a wider range of training and tech support.

James Phipps, Excalibur's CEO, said: "With digital technologies now so important to businesses, this recognition is a fitting testimonial to our hard working team."

Nick Birtwistle, Head of Partners and Alliances, Vodafone UK, stated: "Excalibur's team has shown great commitment and vision to leading a new era in communications and connectivity."

SureVoIP has pledged to pay for the primary school tuition of 50 Kenyan children in support of Gathimba Edwards Foundation (GEF), its charity of the year for 2017.

GEF helps disadvantaged children living in Kenya such as Eliud Mugoya (right) who received computer equipment from SureVoIP prior to starting a human resources management degree in Nairobi.

SureVoIP's MD Gavin Henry said: "A massive difference has been made to dozens of young lives in a relatively short period of time."



# Energy's working for Utilities team

IT and mobile security specialist Cybermo is the latest ICT channel business to add energy services to its portfolio alongside Fidelity Energy.

The Winchester based company has set up a new division – Utilities for Business – and is now successfully offering energy solutions to its existing telecoms and IT customers, plus new businesses within the manufacturing sector, care homes and serviced offices.

The new division has already made over £15k in profit and has secured a pipeline of energy business of around £100k.

"We were formerly Opus Telecom, a Unify partner and sold the telecoms base to NIX Communications in the summer," said Director Matt Boyce.

"We've been trading for over 15 years as a fully independent mobile provider, specialist SME security provider for IT security, Microsoft partner and partner of Fortinet security products distributor Exclusive Networks. Our aim is to secure businesses against constantly evolving threats easily and affordably."

So why has the company decided to move into energy supply?

"I can see why some telecoms or IT companies would be cautious to diversify, but if you do not diversify as a business then you're not moving forward and it's down to how it is pitched. Fidelity provide all the tools to make it easy. We first heard about them in a magazine

feature and we knew their MD John Haw from his Gamma days. When John came and presented the proposition to us the attraction was clear. Energy provided us with another revenue stream, it was easy to administer and set-up and ultimately made the customers more 'sticky'.

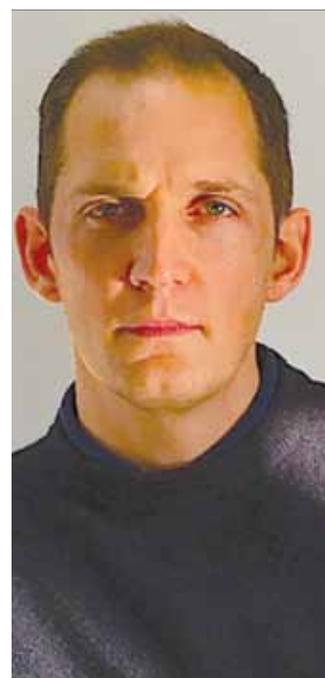
"Also, it was very easy to get going. We have a dedicated Fidelity Energy account manager who is superb, the Fidelity portal is very easy to use and we are now self-sufficient with processing quotes."

Boyce says Utilities for Business is aiming to be ahead of the curve in giving customers the best possible energy deals.

"We are slightly different and aim to be a solution type provider for energy so we monitor the raw material prices and produce reports each week. Ultimately we are more informed than the major suppliers which is a key differentiator for us. In the main, customers have been receptive because of how we pitch it and Fidelity allow us to be fully independent with the suppliers which is a great benefit.

"Selling energy is a great opportunity; it's a very transactional model and the customers ultimately sign with the supplier such as British Gas, so they still have the security of big supplier but the customer care of a dedicated company with a face.

"Anyone with a customer base should speak to Fidelity," added Boyce.



“In the main, customers have been receptive because of how we pitch it and Fidelity allow us to be fully independent with the suppliers which is a great benefit.”

Matt Boyce,  
Director, Cybermo



TELECOMS World has pledged its support for Kent-based Demelza Hospice Care for Children in 2017 with an initial donation of £500. Donations are expected to multiply during the year with a series of fund raising activities and events. "Funding enables Demelza to provide expert and compassionate care to seriously ill babies, children and young people and their families when they need it the most, enabling families to stay and play together, creating precious moments and happy memories," said MD Neil Barrall.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

**Oak's** v2.0.4.0 call reporting and performance analytics solution is now rated compliant with Avaya IP Office 500 V2 Release 9.1.

Evolve helps formal and informal contact centres monitor call traffic in real-time. It also produces a range of historic reports.

"Now customers can be confident that Evolve will interoperate seamlessly with their Avaya system, making it easy and cost-effective to incorporate this new technology into their communications infrastructure," stated Phillip Reynolds, CTO, Oak.

**Cisco** is to acquire AppDynamics in a \$3.7bn deal. "Applications have become the lifeblood of a company's success," said Rowan Trollope, SVP & GM of Cisco's IoT and Applications Business Group. "Keeping those apps running and performing well has never been more important.

"The combination of Cisco and AppDynamics will allow us to provide end to end visibility and intelligence from the network through to the application, which, combined with security and scale, will help IT to drive a new level of business results."

AppDynamics will continue to be led by CEO David Wadhvani as a new software business unit in Cisco's IoT and Applications business, reporting to Trollope.

**Blueface's** hosted voice platform, Blueface UC, has received a 2017 Internet Telephony Product of the Year award from TMC.

The platform was developed in-house and it took 100,000 hours of research and development to bring the service to market.

Alan Foy, Blueface Group CEO, said: "We are committed to innovation and have many more exciting product releases on our technology roadmap in 2017."

# Unify builds up partners

UNIFY has reaffirmed its commitment to scale up the proportion of business it does through the channel to 70%, and has confirmed that the addition of 50 new UK partners last year has propelled it closer towards realising this ambition.

Barry Tuffs, Vice President for UK and Ireland Channels, has pledged to accelerate the gathering momentum during the coming year, promising potential partners a full portfolio of hybrid communications and an opportunity to join Unify's technical PreSales and Consultant Community group, an information resource known as TechConnect.

Tuffs stated: "TechConnect enables partners to engage in technical dialogue, view product feature and functionality roadmaps, share common approaches and gain direct access to Subject Matter Experts."

He also confirmed that Unify will increase its emphasis on delivering flexibility to partners via a portfolio of on-premise, cloud and hybrid solutions spanning TDM and IP technologies, backed up by a revamped approach to doing business through the channel that, for example, segments the market and provides specialised vertical-specific support.

"We've overhauled the Unify Partner Program to ensure that partners receive high-touch expert advice on specific vertical sectors, as well as marketing and implementation support," added Tuffs.

The purpose of Unify's technology is to transform how enterprise and mid-market companies communicate and collaborate, an objective that was advanced by leaps and bounds when the vendor was acquired by Atos in January last year. The combined entity soon began to leverage Unify's UC expertise in tandem with Atos' dexterity in the IT services space.



Barry Tuffs

"Backed by Atos we are also continually investing in our product portfolio, which includes innovations such as Circuit and OpenScope, enhancing these solutions for partners and mid-market organisations," commented Tuffs.

Having articulated Unify's coherent channel strategy, Tuffs talked-up the role of the cloud in Unify's thinking and highlighted the vendor's integrated proposition for unified communications, mobility and real-time comms.

"With cloud at the centre of our product portfolio we will continue to deliver a UCaaS experience that brings together multiple voice, video and data networks, connected devices and applications into one platform, allowing teams to collaborate securely anytime, anywhere," said Tuffs.

Also driving Unify's UK channel campaign is David Lindley, Head of Sales UK&I, who is at the vanguard of 'transforming Unify's sales teams'.

"We are moving away from a direct sales model and focusing our attention on a Channel Centric High Touch approach," he added. "This emphasis on channel-centricity will ensure that Unify and our partners continue to gain market share."

# Gvt votes for comms firms

Continued from page 1

BY 2020, the Government plans to spend one third of its goods and services budget with SMEs and as Tony Brown, Category Lead for the Crown Commercial Service explained, the Government doors are truly open for business.

"We're responsible for managing the procurement of common goods and services, so public sector organisations with similar needs achieve value by buying as a single customer," he said.

"Our commercial agreements are developed in consultation with our customers and suppliers to deliver a competitive and diverse market place.

"Currently, we are involved in a campaign declaring that Government is 'Open for Business' and we want to work with more small businesses across the UK.

"The 'Open for Business' campaign will demonstrate how becoming a Government supplier is a great way to make a difference to your business. Companies report an increase in turnover, higher profits and an expansion of their workforce."

More and more SMEs within the technology sector



are said to be doing business with Government. Technology Products 2, G-Cloud 8 and Networks Services are the latest CCS frameworks with successful SME participation at 54%, 87% and 25% respectively.

"We are making it easier to become a Government supplier and we want to hear from you in order to improve the process, to enable you to bid for and win Government contracts," commented Brown.

For more information and to register for a place at the 'Go Public Sector' seminar go to [gov.uk/openforbusiness](http://gov.uk/openforbusiness)

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# Funding boost

CARDIFF-based thevoicefactory is pushing ahead with its international expansion plans following a funding boost that enables the firm to address opportunities in the US.

Knight CF advised thevoicefactory on a debt funding package from Finance Wales that also allows the hosted telephony provider to increase its headcount and strategic focus.

Paul Billingham, Director at Knight CF, said: "thevoicefactory is a fast growing company but was constrained by a lack of



Paul Billingham

funding. We knew that an injection of cash would enable the business to recruit new people, invest, and most importantly free up management resource so key staff could focus their time more strategically."



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# 8x8 UK sets the pace in

In the pathways of his career, 8x8 UK's Managing Director Kevin Scott-Cowell occupies a space somewhere between fate and self-determination. You decide. But his disposition to lead from the front in new technology areas and drive emerging markets is without question.

**S**cott-Cowell believes that the course of his life has been influenced, in the main, by fate. But self-determination, decisiveness, taking well-considered risks and immersing himself in dynamic environments that catalyse change all feature prominently in his career story. So was Scott-Cowell's destiny really on the cards, or did he himself create the conditions in which he has always thrived?

Rewinding the clock, his first job was not in telecoms, but automating processes for a glass manufacturing company where he also gained a scholarship. He then moved to Plessey to build digital PBXs and, in doing so, take on the mantle of a seasoned industry forecaster. "I knew at that point that this technology was going to be revolutionary, so I wanted to be part of something that would last," he explained. "Since then I've always been in the technology industry, primarily all things related to communications."

Scott-Cowell also played a key role in running and managing one of the biggest manufacturing sites for GEC Marconi Radar and Defence Systems. Here, he assimilated the importance of leadership, teamwork and the value of sourcing and retaining people with talent. With this experience under his belt Scott-Cowell put gutsy adventurism before

caution and took his biggest risk, leaving GEC Marconi (where he worked with 3,500 people across a 35 acre site) to join a relatively small start-up with just 90 people – an environment where he could stand up and be counted. "I wanted to see the impact of what I was doing and it's much easier to witness this in a smaller company, which is incredibly rewarding," he added. "You feel more invested in what you do and that's important."

Having magnified the positive effects of his work on the wider business Scott-Cowell set about scaling up the impact of his efforts and ultimately helped to change the dynamics of a whole market. The influence of 8x8 on the UK comms space was first felt in 2004 when the company began its commercial life as Voicenet. Attracted by its pioneering pedigree, Scott-Cowell joined Voicenet in 2010, moving from TS Technology Services where he was Managing Director for five years.

"Voicenet was one of two 'first to market' service providers and launched a hosted service on its own platform," said Scott-Cowell. "We have operated as an independent pure play cloud service provider ever since. It's exciting to be at the forefront of cloud communications."

Voicenet invested in the BroadSoft platform in 2005 and claimed a market first



**Kevin Scott-Cowell**

## If you're championing collaboration for your clients, you need to lead by example

with the launch of a feature rich hosted IP telephony solution for SMEs, dealers and white label service providers. Not surprisingly the company caught the eye of US-based cloud giant 8x8 which acquired Voicenet three years ago, a move that has significantly strengthened its presence and capabilities in the hosted and UCaaS space.

"Since our acquisition we have added the DXI purchase, bringing strong product management and development competencies," noted Scott-Cowell. "As

cloud-based communications becomes the standard among UK businesses we're able to expand our reach further. We're now seeing many more mid-market businesses consider cloud as the norm. This is where we're focusing our growth."

8x8 is already in expansion mode and has opened new offices in Manchester, Romania and New York. The UK operation has exhibited strong 30 per cent growth during 2016 which is expected to continue. "We've got ambitious growth targets and we're asking

our partners to join us on our exciting journey," added Scott-Cowell. "This won't be a short sprint. We've set our sights on long-term growth and we can't continue our rate of growth without the support of partners. Our success is entwined with the success of the channel so resellers will be key to our growth strategy in 2017 and beyond. This means continuing to invest in our partner programme, including training accreditations, marketing funds and PR support, as well as expanding our partner reach."

8x8 UK also has offices in Aylesbury and in October opened a new flagship office in the Relay Building in London, consolidating its two previous offices in the capital. "We may be a large international company but we try to breed a culture of openness and transparency," stated Scott-Cowell. "Apart from the meeting rooms our new London offices are completely open plan, as is the kitchen and breakout areas. We encourage everyone to come together for lunch or for informal meetings. If you're championing collaboration to your clients, you need to lead by example."

Collaboration is not about the simple replacement of phone systems, its purpose is to help companies move to a seamless communications system that enables employees to interact using

# cloud comms

whatever device they choose, pointed out Scott-Cowell. "What we call Enterprise Communications as a Service (ECaaS) brings all real-time communications and contact centre services together in one integrated platform that's user centric, 100 per cent cloud and mobile first, delivering continuous communications for distributed organisations and remote workers," he added.

8x8 has shown the way forward with innovation becoming a standard part of its strategic plan. "One of our biggest strengths is that we own and develop all of our technology," commented Scott-Cowell. "We are constantly innovating to build on our 125-plus patents, and as a result have been named a Gartner Magic Quadrant UCaaS Leader for five consecutive years. For partners and customers, this means they are always using innovative technology. It also means we can react quickly to developments in the market."

One trend that has moved to the forefront of Scott-Cowell's mind is the use of chatbots and AI as businesses attempt to scale their customer service channels. "While automation is important we don't see this as a threat to human agents," he added. "Companies will continue to invest in AI as a way to reduce easy-to-fix issues that would only drain the time of experienced agents. But there's no code at the moment that could allow a chatbot to deal with sensitive customer enquiries or emotional support.

"However, we're seeing wider adoption of call

analytics platforms across businesses as a way to make better decisions based on Big Data. These platforms are now easier to deploy across any department. The data can be used to improve employee performance, sales campaigns, customer experience management and offers easily accessible insight into staffing requirements."

### Accelerating market

Demand for 8x8's technology will also be driven by a new National Productivity Investment Fund introduced by the Chancellor in his Autumn Statement. The initiative includes a £1 billion investment in the UK's digital infrastructure and according to Scott-Cowell this 'open door to the world of cloud comms' is going to drive an already accelerating market. "This will provide welcome relief for many remote workers and catalyse the adoption of cloud systems that offer access to sophisticated communications tools on the go," he said.

Resellers cannot escape the implications of the market trends discussed in this article. They must keep up with the times to be relevant and competitive. "Resellers need to constantly educate themselves to make sure that they understand the issues facing their customers and the products they can deliver," advised Scott-Cowell. "So we have created the 8x8 Academy to upskill our partners. For wholesale, dealers and affinity partners 8x8 has a laser focus on channel enablement."

We have seen that 8x8 UK is a modern business with deep roots. It has retained the flexibility of a start-up and aligns tightly

with the dynamics of an evolving comms market, while unlocking revenue opportunities for channel partners via a combination of services and support founded on experience. The company, and its ethos, encapsulates much of Scott-Cowell's personal qualities, therefore its destiny was perhaps decided the day the company was founded. "I'm a great believer in fate, and everything in my career has led me to where I am now, a role that I'm fortunate to have," said Scott-Cowell. ■

### Just a minute with Kevin Scott-Cowell...

#### What possession could you not live without?

My car, it's my personal environment to recharge

**Industry wish:** To enhance the network infrastructure. It's close to being great but ubiquitous connectivity isn't available everywhere

#### What do you fear the most?

I don't fear anything, but I hate to miss a commitment

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Winston Churchill, a fantastic leader; James Corden, a very funny guy; and Albert Einstein

**What talent do you wish you had?** To be better at learning languages

**One example of something you have overcome?** At my age, overcoming stress and a sedentary life is a great accomplishment. It's too easy to let yourself go. I've lost three stone and I keep fit

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I'm a Club Master at my local bridge club

**Top tip:** Be educated on new and emerging products to maximise the opportunities

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# Invosys duo build platfo

The next phase of Invosys' growth strategy has begun with characteristic earnest and its business leaders have big markets to aim at and a model that must be admired.

**T**he rise of Manchester-based Invosys must rank in the pantheon of comms sector success stories. The company was founded in 2006 as In Call Solutions by former Norweb high flyers and best pals Rob Booth and Peter Crooks, their catalyst being a gap in

the market for an inbound services model that was cost-effective for SMEs. The partnership between Booth and Crooks works with not an inch of daylight detectable between them, always adapting the business structure and their roles to reflect the changing market, bringing growth through stability. Booth is CEO with a responsibility for strategy while Crooks takes care of the day-to-day running of the business as COO.

Since its inception as a virtual carrier and a challenger to its much bigger rivals Invosys has stolen a march with its simpler and smarter products. "We launched with a web-based portal to set up numbers and manage the calls to them, and we have built on this foundation over the years," explained Crooks. "In the early days the KPI we always used were the calls managed via the platform – one million minutes a month quickly grew to five and ten million. Each call and every second was generating income that allowed us to be profitable. Today, we deal in hundreds of millions and billions."

The company managed 100 million more calls on its platform in 2016 than 2015. Also on the up is staff numbers which have increased by 30 per cent, while turnover's up by almost 40 per cent. "Despite 2016 being our best year yet we forecast that 2017 will beat this success, driven by larger resellers, enterprise



Invosys founders Peter Crooks (left) and Rob Booth

clients, and delivering more products into new and existing markets," stated Booth. "We see big increases in turnover being achieved through a combination of new products, new markets and acquisition. Inevitably, our team will grow and every single person will be developed to be the best they can be and given opportunities to push themselves."

In its approach to market and long-term planning Invosys is a model for other ambitious

comms entrepreneurs. The company rebranded from In Call Solutions in 2014 to mark its evolution, with key developments being the launch of NumberManager in 2011 (its flagship portal for the UK inbound market) and a shift from TDM to IP technology which unlocked potential to scale via access to enterprise sized clients. Having steered away from its roots, Crooks sees the platform as key to growth. "We are now a technology-led company whereas our origin and focus initially was

about being sales-led and the account management," he added. "Invosys is now a much bigger organisation with a technical outlook, and each day has a focus on platform technology, its maintenance and R&D."

Also crucial to Invosys' strategy is acquisitions. "We are pursuing an acquisition that will allow us to introduce more products and services into our channel, such as managed IT services or co-location in our data centre," explained Booth. "Our

## Just a minute with Rob Booth...

**Role model?** My father. His positive influence on me is timeless

**What talent do you wish you had?** To be multi-linguistic

**What do you fear the most?** Social media and the rise of the machines

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I am a secret racing driver in a famous car called the Red Arrow because it is the fastest of its type in British rallying

**One example of something you have overcome?** A challenging situation seven years ago that could have been damaging for the business. What does not kill us makes us stronger

**Biggest risk taken?** Walking away from a six figure salary with only small savings and a new mortgage to set up business and back myself

**What could you not do without in your job?** A good Wi-Fi signal

**What possession could you not live without?** My pen. I'm always writing notes

**How do you relax?** Walking my dog

# rm for growth



technology, the features and the available options," he added. "It will be exciting to see how quickly we can grab market share. A variety of IP-based communication solutions and mobility convergence-type products are also on our roadmap.

"NumberManager will be updated with our own SIP and hosted products that will combine with the existing technology. The portal has also been successfully deployed to Australia and New Zealand, so rolling out our technology and products into other countries might also be feasible."

#### Wholesale-only

Growth has mainly been organic and this will continue as increasingly large resellers and carriers promote Invosys' products as their own to large enterprise clients, pointed out Crooks. "From day one, ours has been a wholesale-only proposition for resellers and carriers to use and promote, and we have 350 in the UK including some of the largest," he said. "The role of resellers will continue to be key in the channel. They are able to offer the end user best of breed solutions."

Invosys remains ambitious to the core and its lens is permanently focused on harnessing leading edge technology to maintain and develop its platforms and ensure that it remains at the forefront. "Technical staff now make up a third of our team and we only employ the best in the business who can sometimes be difficult to find," commented Booth.

What Invosys exhibits most, perhaps, is a business fit for purpose that will continue to

walk the walk supported by a loyal base of partners and a like-minded and enthused team of employees. "We've worked hard to create a family culture where everyone is valued, regardless of their job title," commented Crooks. "This has paid off and our staff genuinely enjoy working here. We are open and honest, trusting, nurturing, empowering, determined, dedicated, hard-working and have plenty of fun. It is a successful model and every single person stands to gain."

#### Just a minute with Peter Crooks...

**What possession could you not live without?** My car

**Role model?** My dad. He was self-employed for many years, running his own business and supporting the family, during which time he built his own house

**What do you fear the most?** Public speaking

**Your biggest risk taken?** Going self-employed when I had a very good job with a large salary and excellent benefits

**What talent do you wish you had?** To play the guitar

**One example of something you have overcome?** My youngest was born 11 weeks early weighing less than 3lbs. It was the toughest period of my life. He is now a happy five year old

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I can do magic

**Top tip:** Be reliable, honest and don't give up

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** Writing horror novels

**How do you relax?** Riding mountain bikes off road

highest priority recently has been the acquisition of MergedComms and the consequent productisation and integration of a hosted telephony service that has great potential and will be promoted through our wholesale channel."

Hosted telephony and VoIP services will be the big growth market in the coming years, believes Booth. "We will soon be launching our own product to the channel which will stand out in terms of the

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# A personal story that's en

Here, Dave Trivett, Managing Director of Assembly Channel Services (ACS), reveals how a wake-up call ultimately opened the channel's eyes to the true nature of partner engagement.

**F**ew surviving stroke victims would describe their misfortune as a chief agency of personal progress – a proper kick up the behind. But Trivett didn't let a serious illness get him down, and things got better as he peered through the gloom and saw the light ahead. "I had a major stroke aged 38," he explained. "That was a huge wake-up call and drove me to get away from filling out spreadsheets for one of the larger aggregators and create something of value with my life. Out of chaos comes opportunity, and I'm grateful to have had the awakening and subsequent second chance."

Trivett's future lay not in slaving over spreadsheets and the tedious realm of statistics, but in turning a new page, his ambition fuelled by a newly acquired clarity of vision and a desire to do things differently and with more meaning, an ever present spur to progress. "I wanted to do things the way they should be done, so set up Assembly Channel Services in 2014 with an old friend and client Peter Smith," he stated. "We haven't looked back."

Trivett previously worked for what he called 'brilliant and agile' smaller aggregators but he always arrived at the same place. "The small guy would be swallowed up by a big guy," he said. "I became just another member of staff and our partner clients suffered

the same fate having lost the personal relationships they had developed. Clients were forced to navigate huge teams and processes, they were often passed from pillar to post before getting told to raise their issue via the portal."

ACS operates as an engine of improvement across all aspects of the business. This motivates Trivett and his approach to market – so how powerful is a posse of like-minded partners? "We made sure we gave our partners the service that they craved and only deal with like-minded people who value our approach," he stated. "That goes for both our suppliers and our partner clients. The result is an ever-expanding merry band of IT and telecoms VARs and SIs who love working together and have a similar view on how business should be done."

ACS spent the second half of 2016 working closely with Sam Dawkins and his team at ITEC Support to create a new 'Champions League' reseller-friendly UC solution that shone in terms of deployment, management and commercials. "The response from the market has been extraordinary and the first few deployments last year saw us named as finalists for five major industry awards," added Trivett. "Assembly UC will, I am certain, prove to be a major milestone as we continue to grow our visibility and reputation in 2017."



**Dave Trivett**

On advancing his partner and customer engagement ethos to the channel the reaction to Trivett's personable strategy was significant. Put people first and others will follow. "As for growth plans, I just want to keep working the way we currently operate with the same flexible, relationship-focused approach and with more like-minded partner clients," he said. "I'm not interested in offering products and services for the sake of having the perceived capability to offer them. I'd rather focus on delivering against our partners' requirements on any given day, and we've had some very bespoke requirements over the years, as well as doing what we are expected to do."

In this light, ACS enables partners to simply provision and manage network services and infrastructure with aggressive wholesale rates and flexible contract terms. "And because we love what we do everything is delivered with a smile as standard," enthused Trivett. "No needless bureaucracy, no ridiculous contract tie-ins, no hidden costs and certainly no faceless, vanilla account management. Some said I was naïve setting up with such a simple offering, but we're still here and enjoying steady growth."

The company's 2014 revenues topped £360k, peaked at £790k in 2015 and £1.3 million in 2016. "I'd like to see that pattern continue

in 2017 and beyond, but not at the expense of our service levels," said Trivett. "After all, it's not what we do but the way that we do it that is so well received by our partner clients. It's not complicated, and it's a personal mission to ensure we don't make it so. Everything we do has been designed to be scalable, ensuring we retain that special edge."

For Trivett, the approach to market of larger players is a different matter and his biggest opportunity. "The bland, faceless, complacent mediocrity offered by large carriers and big aggregators is a huge opportunity for us in terms of continuing to grow our partner client base," he explained. "Our whole approach is geared towards listening to resellers rather than dictating to them. It's all about relationships for us, and that seems to resonate with a lot of frustrated resellers who are tired of being taken for granted by the big boys."

"There's genuinely only one priority, to deliver margin-rich solutions that our wholesale partners require in a no-nonsense and honest way, and always with heartfelt enthusiasm. Obviously that's easy to say, but what we deliver works and is delivered as promised. I'm a firm believer in honesty and transparency in life as well as business. It's not problems that lead to client satisfaction or dissatisfaction, but rather the way we respond to

# entirely elevating

those problems. This view has heavily influenced ACS to date and will continue to do so. We're pro-active in our approach with partners in terms of our creativity in finding solutions to issues. There's always a way, and we work consultatively to find it when required."

The threat Trivett poses to market rivals is not hard nosed business ambition but common decency and plain being nice while having a firm grasp on the requirements of partners and the wider market. It's not in the nature nor the culture of ACS to pursue an all-out aggressive assault to grab market share, but its niche in the channel has been nonetheless indelibly carved and its place assured, certain to stand the test of time.

## Keeping it real

"We're six in number, with plans to add an additional member to the team later in 2017 to deal with the rise in partner enquiries and build on our pro-active consultative approach," added Trivett. "We need to keep it real and remain focused, but if we continue to love what we do and do it brilliantly then steady organic growth will follow. We don't want huge offices and hundreds of staff. We just want to carry on helping our partners to deliver against their end user requirements as simply as possible.

"ACS is always looking at what can be improved and our new Assembly UC is a perfect example of this. We're not looking to re-invent the wheel, but when you see everyone is being sold square wheels sometimes you have no choice. Our focus has now

## We describe ourselves as a boutique wholesale aggregator and deal broker, and we mean it

moved from telecoms to communications. As the line between telco and IT has vanished, so our offering has also diversified. Our client base has shifted and we find ourselves working with increasing numbers of MSPs and IT experts who need to offer an end-to-end solution to their end users, as well as established telecom resellers who are diversifying the other way."

As if to prove that no enterprise in comms is safe, no matter how large and entrenched, ACS sprung up to challenge the once 'unassailable' and inflexible legacy incumbents. Trivett has forged close alliances with partners who share the same vision and purpose, and their pragmatism is a strength. "If a partner has a deal on the table that needs some sharpening of pencils then we'll always work to get to where we need to be so long as it's commercially beneficial for both parties," said Trivett. "Our growth is driven by our partners' growth. We describe ourselves as a boutique wholesale aggregator and deal broker, and we mean it. We've found something that works and plan to replicate that as precisely and as many times as possible."

Trivett repeats his message with conviction, a trait that stems from his early career, pre-telco, when he was a marketer who became smitten by the potential growth in demand for comms. "Telecoms was always on the up, diversified, and wholesale routes to market were becoming increasingly easy to adopt," he recalled. "We all need to communicate, and that excited me in terms of potential. But it doesn't need to be the way it's always been. If you don't like the way the table's set, then re-set the table."

### Just a minute with Dave Trivett...

**What talent do you wish you had?** Self-flight

**Your greatest strengths and what could you improve on?** My strengths would be knowing my weaknesses

**What do you fear the most?** Flying

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:**

I was the front man in an Irish folk rock band. I'm also a life long member of Adderbury Village Morris Men

**Describe ACS's culture:** We're a happy, creative, entrepreneurial and straight-talking team of like-minded individuals who don't wear ties

**Role model?** My dad. He worked his nuts off, lost it all due to the market crash in the 80s, started over and succeeded again, all while providing for our family

**Biggest risk taken?** Setting up ACS

**Personal milestone?** Taking new offices in Chesham. I am proud to walk through the doors each day

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# Grant calls for marketing

Marketing is too often the black hole of a channel business's strategy, operating in the dark and plagued by spurious planning, claims Bowan Arrow Managing Director Andy Grant who advocates a far more holistic and strategic approach.

The essence of any cutting-edge marketing strategy is valid planning and genuine consistency, argues Grant, who urges channel marketers to play the long game and align their strategy to the overall business plan and the flow of time. As Grant has shown, a short-lived marketing campaign that is misaligned to the bigger picture and carried out in isolation is a contradiction in terms. "Marketing is not a quick win activity, and you can't turn it on and off overnight,"

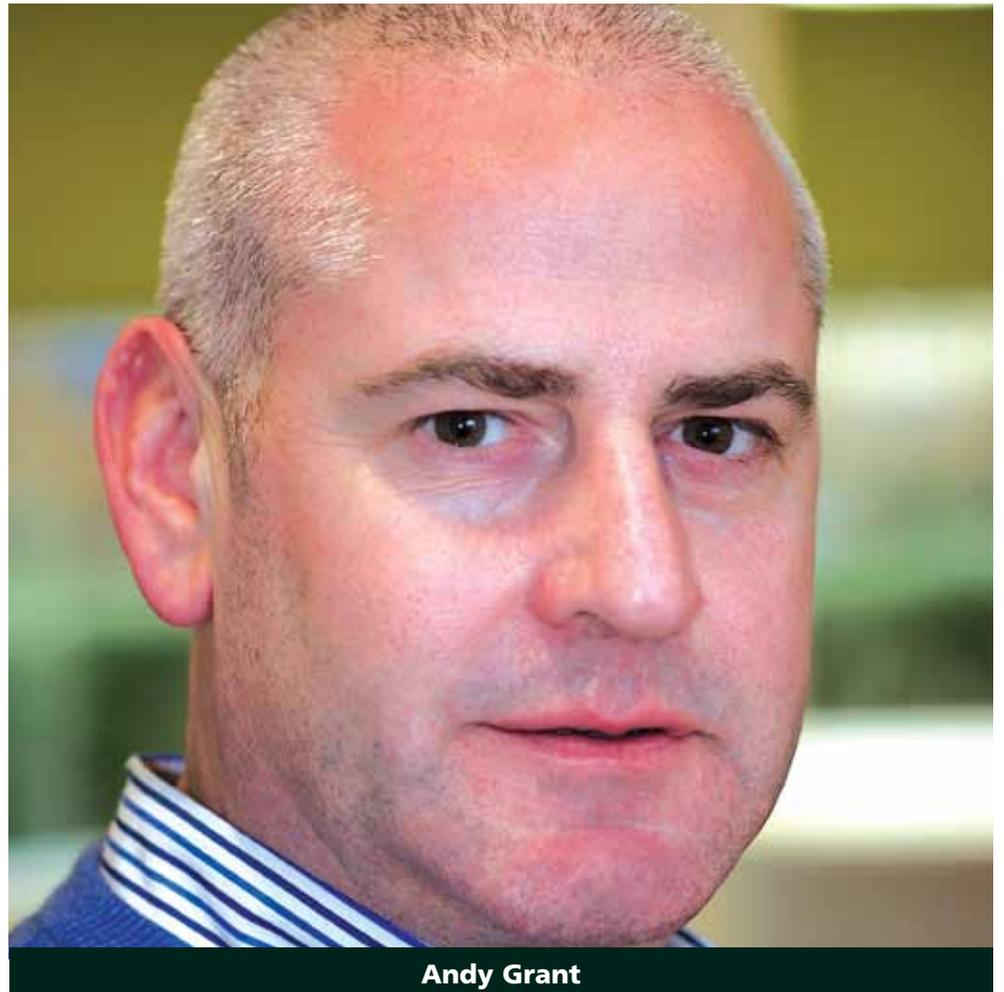
## About Bowan Arrow

ANDY Grant's previous industry experience includes handling national accounts for Microsoft, Iomega and 3Com while working for Australia's top field marketing agency in the '90s. He moved to the UK in 2000 and was enlisted by Lucent (which became Avaya). He then joined Nortel in 2007 and struck out on his own two years later to set up Bowan Arrow as an independent B2B channel marketing consultancy with marketers and designers based across the UK. Grant works with his wife, Louise, who has channel and programme management experience having worked for tech giants Polycom, Avaya, 3Com and IBM.

he stated. "Marketing needs to be planned, budgeted and forecast just like any other departmental activity. The marketing strategy should link seamlessly to the overall business plan. But I've seen vendors and partners chop and change tactics in a bid to manufacture positive ROI, and marketing campaigns are often dismissed because they don't bring immediate results."

Too many channel players market themselves in similar ways, often using the same generic terms to describe their business and the services they offer. But their biggest opportunity is to ensure their brand connects with its audience and differentiates from the competition. "Shout from the roof tops about your business and why you are the best at what you do," said Grant. "But it needs to be a planned and consistent message. Marketing is not a short-term fix, it contributes to the business by achieving its aims over time."

In a comms market populated by companies offering similar solutions, channel businesses need to think outside the traditional marketing box to stand out. "Positive PR stories, specialised events, industry award recognition and wins, particularly for complex solution deployments will differentiate a business tremendously," commented Grant. "It gives



Andy Grant

a business a reason to reach out and tell target prospects why they should consider their solutions and services."

## Digitalisation

Rehashing the same marketing mistakes delays the key role that digital should play in opening up opportunities to influence potential customers. Digital holds much promise for channel marketers, but is it delivering as a branding vehicle? "Yes, it delivers because B2B brands need

to create awareness and a reputation that first differentiates them from the competition but more importantly maintains a consistent relationship with all audiences," explained Grant. "This can be achieved quickly and monitored daily using digital communication channels and monitoring tools, most of which are free. Therefore, a digital content marketing plan is of vital importance for attracting and retaining customers in 2017 and beyond. Digital

should be at the forefront of marketing efforts."

Grant says all channel businesses should concentrate on three or four of the major social media channels to build their brand and create awareness. LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram which is becoming increasingly popular. "We help our clients to develop a monthly social media plan that schedules posts of relevant content across those channels," he

# g reality check

explained. "YouTube should also be considered. Although it's not a primary driving force for demand creation it does raise some awareness."

Community building in a social media environment requires time, energy, content, and most importantly resources, and if the activity is not monitored it could be a drain on resources. "The best way to improve interactions via social media platforms is to identify and document ideal customer or customer types," added Grant. "When these 'customer avatars' have been created it is time to start planning, designing and creating content that interests, educates and informs. Social media platforms are designed for sharing information that readers will find educational and useful enough to form part of their research. These platforms are not designed for direct selling."

Many channel players are now leading with a hosted, hybrid or SaaS solution, but this is often not represented in their brand, website and the way they communicate with customers and prospects, pointed out Grant. He also noted that new research by Adobe suggests that 76 per cent of people feel that marketing has changed more in the past two years than in the previous 50. "A brand needs to be maintained and needs constant re-adjustment to ensure that the audience understands what is offered and how that business can in turn help their business," said Grant.

Bringing the marketing department into the wider strategic mix is a clever

**Partners who understand the full extent of the funds available from their various vendors could add more than 50 per cent to their annual marketing budget**

move, but a lack of channel marketing experience and skills could jeopardise progress. This is where specialists like Bowan Arrow come into their own. "We help vendors and partners to make the most of their MDF funds and create better shared returns," said Grant. "Partners who understand the full extent of the funds available from their various vendors could add more than 50 per cent to their annual marketing budget. Once we have established what funds are available and the types of activities that can be funded, we discuss the strategic vision and develop a plan."

As already mentioned, research indicates that the nature of smart marketing today is almost unrecognisable compared to just two years ago. One example of this transformation is next-generation data management and targeting called predictive marketing, which is more science than Mystic Meg. "This technology uses customer data that helps to

predict which customers and prospects are most likely to buy, and enables marketers to identify channels and tailor content to increase engagement and sales," commented Grant.

"The best results always come from thoroughly analysed, planned and budgeted long-term marketing activities that move with the times and are fully understood by all employees, and create genuine results in terms of new clients, greater market share and revenue increases. Helping clients to improve the yield of their marketing activities using technology is a win-win situation."

#### Just a minute with Andy Grant...

**What talent do you wish you had?** To speak Spanish

**Your greatest strengths and what could you improve on?** Determination is my strength, but I need to work on listening and learning from others

**What do you fear the most?** Heights

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** Gardener or greenkeeper

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I once played Seymour in Little Shop of Horrors

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Liev Schreiber, the best current TV and movie actor; Prince Harry, a different and 'real' royal; and actress Kerry Washington

**What's the biggest career risk you have taken?** Going it alone and starting a marketing consultancy when my wife was pregnant with our first child

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# CityFibre spotlights growing

**CityFibre has now secured its footing in the bedrock of British infrastructure provision as an alternative provider of pure fibre to cities. But scrape the surface and you find a toolkit of active products and an expanding portfolio, including Ethernet, in the development pipeline.**

**W**hile busy reshaping the infrastructure map of Britain, CityFibre is now shining a light on its active products, of which the company has barely spoken a whisper. They are indeed a work of engineering and worthy of bold headlines, explained Head of Products Clayton Nash. He said CityFibre is hastening the demise of copper and its limitations and in doing so answering the connectivity prayers of organisations shackled to legacy infrastructures. "CityFibre has matched limitless capacity and speed to the requirements of a digital society, and has a modern wholesale model to match," stated Nash.

CityFibre's in the process clearing the decks of copper dependent connections in UK cities, making life better for whole populations. "Our pure fibre based Internet services have not evolved from legacy copper networks," said Nash. "They're provided over a completely independent, capacity-rich modern architecture. And because bandwidth is abundant, even if it's shared you're still looking at a very different end customer experience."

Nash also highlighted the popularity of CityFibre's low wholesale price for

symmetrical gigabit services. "We're talking about a service that typically delivers headline speeds almost ten times faster than a 100Mb/s dedicated leased line, yet at a fraction of the cost," he added. "We base our prices on exactly what it costs us to run our networks, plus a margin of course. The market prices that should be scrutinised these days are the ones that we've all been conditioned to accept over the years – prices driven by delivery over a legacy architecture with little desire and insufficient investment to change the status quo."

The price that many small and mid-sized service providers have historically had to pay is directly linked to the complexity of consumption that exists within the supply chain, pointed out Nash. "Take Openreach's GEA FTTC product for example. As many providers will know, it's not just a case of 'place an order, pay one price and Bob's your uncle'," he said. "You need space and power in exchanges, backhaul capability, routers and cross connections from the exchange head end to your own equipment. Only then are you ready to order the FTTC connections yourself. And if you want to consume point-to-point Ethernet services, it's not much different."



Clayton Nash

## Maintaining performance certainty and great service are top priorities

This complexity and associated extra cost forces many providers to buy services from those who have invested the resources and jumped all the hoops so they can resell at scale. But whenever you add any middleman you're immediately waving goodbye to a chunk of potential margin. At CityFibre we've put simplicity at the centre of our product and pricing decisions and made any necessary hurdles as low as possible. There's no expensive preparation needed. Nor is CityFibre running its active products with any

kind of 'loss leader, bite later' pricing strategy."

### Confronting a contentious issue

A barrier to many successful sales conversations in our industry is the performance uncertainty associated with products provided over a shared physical connection. Contention is an important part of any GPON based network though, including the ones that underpin CityFibre's Metro GIG Connect products. Any operator running such a network can choose to share fibres with up to 64 end

customers, or in some cases more. Their decision depends primarily on the following three criteria – the service they want to be known for, the type of requirements they want to serve and the margin they want to make.

"Contention is a negative word by definition and it's earned a patchy reputation in our industry," said Nash. "The reality is that you could take the best network in the world, but if you're out to maximise margin regardless of the consequences, or you need to sweat a scarce asset to serve more and more users, it's ultimately going to be at the expense of the end customer."

CityFibre has beaten the drum about the importance of making high-performing, high-speed services affordable to all businesses, and put flesh on its words with deeds that deliver what's promised on the tin. "We achieve this by using contention in the right way," said Nash. "For our Metro GIG services we operate a target eight-to-one ratio and aim to keep it this way. That's incredibly low compared to others. Our careful use and monitoring of this is why no end customer's headline speed has ever been materially impacted.

"Of course, we can still evaluate a worst-case

# ng active product portfolio

scenario (based on all eight users trying to use a full gigabit of bandwidth at the same time for an extended period). But not only is it unlikely to happen, even if it does, because contention is so low, the minimum guaranteed bandwidth would still knock a dedicated 100Mb/s leased line for six."

CityFibre's planning and mode of operation has a predictable effect as it does not contend its network with the intention of restricting anyone. It's merely a by-product of operating them in the most cost-effective way. Dedicating additional capacity as demand for these services grow is also fully anticipated. And through its partner programme CityFibre also supports 'right customer' targeting.

"Our partners typically recommend our Metro GIG Connect services to businesses who can't yet justify (or simply don't need) a dedicated point-to-point fibre connection," noted Nash. "Once interest is aroused, the door is open for them to differentiate and confidently sell-in a range of other services such as a VPN, VoIP and hosted applications etc, knowing that speed will never hinder performance for the customer, or damage anyone's reputation."

## Service matters

For connectivity-reliant businesses today, network availability and fix times are more important than ever. CityFibre believes that swift, standard repair terms are a basic right, not an excuse to claw extra pounds from those who already face challenging economic times. With a network that's copper-free and almost entirely

underground, its services are rarely impacted by bad weather, flooding or falling trees. In fact, something very serious must happen to cause a catastrophic failure. "Common headaches associated with copper are also eradicated by full-fibre, including interference from power cables, electrical devices and fluorescent lights, all of which can snatch away megabits of available bandwidth," said Nash.

"Connectivity products with multiple working day or even 12-hour repair SLAs are not fit for purpose when running a business. A more robust, modern network and fewer variables to adversely impact performance puts our network ahead of others. We back that up with an eight hour repair SLA as standard, across all of our products. We can agree to work quicker than this of course, and regularly smash the standard eight hours. At our heart is the belief that when a product is sold to keep a business connected, it should do just that."

## What's next?

Last year CityFibre announced a programme to extend its fibre to over 500 business parks across its 40-city footprint. This much-needed move will give an estimated 22,000 additional SMEs access to a lower priced variant of Metro GIG Connect – with no catches. CityFibre is also gearing up to meet growing demand for shared and dedicated point-to-point Ethernet services during 2017.

"Our network offers too many advantages to leave such a gap in our portfolio and there have been more than a few knocks at our

door," said Nash. "Our existing GIG Hub aggregation product already gives us some Ethernet style capability, but we're looking at a series of evolutionary steps beyond this. Investment in the right platform and equipment to meet this challenge is already well underway."

Timescale wise, CityFibre plans to run a beta program in the coming months, partnering strategically to ensure new Ethernet services are spot-on for the market and priced attractively. "We'll start by offering products that connect sites within a single metro area," explained Nash. "These will evolve into national services capable of connecting one end into an alternative major metro area – typically those where large data centres are located. From there the evolution will continue. Availability will spread in line with our ever-increasing nationwide footprint, but our focus is to bring great products to market with robust processes and the kind of service wrap our existing partners have come to rely on."

## Partners remain at the heart

Alongside the evolution of its portfolio sits all-important channel development. To date CityFibre's approach has been to seek out partners who share its transformational vision. Nurturing these relationships is what's helped them bring almost 20 Gigabit Cities to life across the UK so far. "Our city launch partners remain incredibly important to us, and they also understand better than most that to keep growing our footprint we must ultimately throw our doors open wider," said Nash. "It's an evolution,

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- No sharing of bandwidth with households means no 'school's-out' slowdown.
- Unlimited usage guarantees no unexpected bills.
- Just pay the extra monthly rental when you upgrade from 500Mb/s to 1Gb/s.
- The installed fibre can be used to provide a fully dedicated service later.
- Services are less susceptible to bad weather while electrical interference and copper theft become worries of the past.
- The ring-based metro network design means that if a main fibre break occurs, traffic can be easily re-routed.
- Connectivity savings leave business with more to invest in hosted and cloud services, with the confidence that they'll all run as they should.
- With a modern fibre connection sorted, attention can turn to future system and IT upgrades.

not an overnight switch though, and we still have many more Gigabit Cities yet to come to life and partner commitments to honour."

CityFibre conceded that its channel and product roadmap brings operational challenges. Scaling up nationwide and introducing new products demands growth in automation and integration as well as a steady uplift in service delivery resources. "Delivering best-in-class service and maintaining a genuine personal touch is top of the agenda," added Nash. "Not only do we want to protect

the experience of existing partners as we scale, we also want to make sure that the first experience for new partners is a great one. While we continue to invite new partner enquiries with open arms, we'll be asking many for patience along the way."

In conclusion, CityFibre is, step by step, welcoming more partners to resell its active services to UK businesses. The company has urged interested parties to visit [www.cityfibre.com](http://www.cityfibre.com) and request to be alerted when it is ready to engage. ■

**CityFibre Market Report continues on page 36**

# Triangle leads in Bristol

**CityFibre embarked on its Bristol Gigabit City project one year ago alongside launch partner Triangle Networks, enabling the local ISP to steal a march by delivering Gigabit-speed-as-standard to customers massively restricted by the limitations of copper wires. One such client is Wildseed Studios.**

**W**ildseed Studios is a production company based in the heart of Bristol that works collaboratively across the globe. It specialises in TV and cinema production, and one of its larger projects involved working alongside Disney XD. Wildseed handles the majority of its conceptual work but relies on production teams in Canada to create the final product. This cross-Atlantic operation demands a reliable Internet connection with Skype calls and file sharing a vital part of the shared production process. At any one time across the office there will be at least two or three Skype calls taking place, communicating with teams across the UK and internationally. But it's not just the VoIP access that stresses the network, file sharing too is an essential business function.

Animations are typically huge graphical files with an average 10 minute episode amounting to a 175GB file that had to previously be uploaded and downloaded on Wildseed's inconsistent BT connection. Sometimes, because the connection was so lacking, the upload would have to restart three or four times, and in some extreme cases the firm had to physically post a hard drive with the full episode across the Atlantic to Canada to be prepped for broadcast. One project required Wildseed

to deliver 52 episodes of this size, so the networking team knew they needed an alternative solution.

Enter local comms provider Triangle Networks, CityFibre's Gigabit City partner in Bristol, which connected Wildseed's building to CityFibre's Gigabit network, immediately transforming the business. Video communication is now seamless having reduced lag by 250 per cent to a level not even noticeable. File sharing has also switched from being a headache to a business tool. The typical 40GB master files that would be shared multiple times throughout the production process used to take Wildseed over 27 hours to download, and the transfer would often fail. Now, a transfer takes just minutes.

#### Vital connection

"Having the speed is great," explained Chris Pearless, Networking Manager at Wildseed. "But more importantly, the 1Gbps connection has given us flexibility. Instead of days, we can now make changes in hours. It's added an agility and quality to the production we haven't seen before."

The investment has proved to be more cost-effective than the copper 25mbps EFM service. And Wildseed plans to install another identical connection to host its managed services. Paul Anslow, Managing Director,



Paul Anslow

Triangle Networks, added: "The connection speed and latency of the Metro GIG Connect products are game-changing for our business customers. One likened them to a leased line in a large office, costing many multiples more. Someone else told us the Metro GIG Connect service excels on all counts and is now non-optional on their networks. Another customer used to struggle with two simultaneous video conferences forcing them to stagger meetings. Now they don't even think about it.

"The Metro GIG Connect service opens up so many

other opportunities that were previously impossible to realise. For the first time our customers don't need to make sacrifices with reliability, cost or bandwidth. Furthermore, our partners can now provide SIP and Wi-Fi options with absolute confidence, and they benefit from delivering an incredibly fast connection. Another highlight has been improving the installation lead time to a blisteringly fast 13 days compared to the 90 days taken by some of our other suppliers. Next it's about working with CityFibre to grow the network and our catchment area."

Triangle began its commercial life in 2004 and by 2006 had built its first VoIP platform. The company's offering includes Internet access, traditional ISDN services, numbering, SIP trunking and its Hive Wi-Fi social media log-in platform. The company also has a hosted system called Noodlebox with a variety of apps designed to improve the customer experience for partners. "We have provided connectivity and voice services throughout the UK, but the Metro GIG Connect product allows us to really focus on Bristol," added Anslow. "It was clear to us that CityFibre wanted to change the entire landscape by partnering with companies that shared a long-term vision, not just the quick wins."

Triangle's channel partners display a shared vision to drive change in the industry. "Rarely do we partner with organisations that just want to resell products that 'will do'," stated Anslow. "It is surprising to see that some companies would rather sell a traditional service that is marginally cheaper, especially one that will be insufficient in less than a year's time. We have become more selective for that reason, and our partnership with CityFibre allows us to be much more discerning. If you have the appetite for something very new, get involved. For the right company this is a game changing opportunity." ■

# Diva blazes fibre trail

## Armed with CityFibre's game-changing Metro GIG Connect pure fibre solution Diva Telecom is driving a much-needed infrastructure revolution in Leeds.

In September 2016 Diva Telecom began to leverage CityFibre's network assets in Leeds following its selection as a Gigabit City launch partner four months earlier. Diva has a large customer base globally as well as expert local knowledge. Its Managing Director Erica Lewis was confident that a new suite of Gigabit Fibre services would cement Diva Telecom's reputation as innovators, helping to transform Leeds into a Gigabit City and deliver superior ultrafast and resilient Internet connectivity.

Working with the infrastructure provider has already spurred Diva's growth, prompting the company to increase its headcount by 50 per cent (in less than a year) to support the flood of demand for Gigabit Fibre connectivity. The increasing need for bandwidth has largely been driven by a vibrant digital collective in Leeds and is a result of trends centered on the adoption of cloud solutions.

"Becoming CityFibre's Leeds B2B partner has raised our local profile and enabled us to lead the way in transforming and future proofing the Leeds business community," said Lewis. "The partnership also allows us to upsell cloud telephony and our in-house SMS and audio conferencing products to provide more complete solutions."

Lewis says CityFibre's presence in Leeds is a game-changer for

the region, cementing her strong view that alternative communications infrastructure provision in Leeds and the UK as a whole is a must-have. She said: "CityFibre is an increasingly attractive choice for councils because it supports local economic growth and offers more tailored and responsive solutions. Mobile operators are buying circuits from CityFibre too – what does that tell you? CityFibre is not reliant on any other network provider and its networks are robust and offer natural resilience."

Not surprisingly, Diva's customers are enthusiastic about their experience. They witness remarkable business transformations with immediate results, such as a big impact on business productivity. One customer, Philip Mutter, co-owner of Pen-Life Associates (chartered financial planners), enthused: "Everybody in our business can now access web applications without the slow down we used to experience. The difference that a Gigabit connection has made to our company is incredible."

The CityFibre Gigabit Fibre service provided by Diva transformed Pen-Life's Internet connection experience. The company needed faster access to client information, with all of its confidential client records held in a back office database. Pen-Life moved to a cloud-based system with 28 users, but the existing 40mb/s connection ground to a halt when everyone



Erica Lewis

accessed the database. Also, more bandwidth was required to facilitate the rising number of applications that were run in the cloud.

### Seeing the light

Mutter added: "We have been working with Diva for a while. When we were made aware of the Gigabit service and the speeds being available locally, we jumped at the chance to take up the Gigabit Fibre connectivity. The cost is considerably cheaper than a leased line solution and that really stood out to us. And the reliability of the service has had a massive impact on our business, especially when compared to our previous connection."

Diva's enhanced local reputation as an innovative and community spirited provider prompted a group of businesses based in Eltofts, a rural area north of Leeds, to approach Diva for help in getting properly connected. They were frustrated by the

lack of options available from the main service providers to deliver fast, reliable broadband to the area, so they enlisted Diva to help build their own private Gigabit Fibre network. It took just four months for their ultrafast Gigabit Fibre connection to go live.

Before enlisting Diva's help it became clear that most service providers' solutions still involved delivering the connection over old copper lines, which was problematic, so much so that engineers would sometimes visit the area once a fortnight. Because of its community connections and reputation as a problem solver, Diva was called on to help secure a private CityFibre Gigabit Fibre connection. Following a consultation, Diva was able to provide a Gigabit speed connection over a 24km length of fibre to Wetherby Road in Eltofts, and from there residents dug their own trenches so that the fibre could be laid directly to their home offices.

Eltofts now has one of the fastest rural broadband connections in the world and benefits from upload and download speeds of 1 Gigabit per second. Andy Wright, owner of Bardsey Computers based in Eltofts, said: "For years Eltofts has suffered from slow Internet speeds and sub-par services. As a community we agreed that action had to be taken which is how we came to explore the option of a private fibre optic leased line. "Diva provided us with the

ability to take control of our own connection and install a network at much lower cost that provides an upload speed up to 3,000 times faster than our previous connections. It's been an amazing improvement and has had a huge impact on our lives. A fast and reliable connection is now a necessity for businesses and like many rural communities we were being left in the dark ages."

Twelve premises have now been connected to the Gigabit Fibre network in Eltofts, including resident Professor Simon Kay, a plastic surgeon who performed the first double hand transplant in the UK last year. He said: "This new connection has dramatically improved our digital quality of life and allows us finally to take advantage of the technology and digital advancements that have become the norm. One of the most significant improvements for myself is that I'm now able to do multi-participant HD video conferencing with other surgeons around the world from my office at home, something that was never possible before."

Lewis added: "When the businesses in Eltofts approached us we were struck by how dire their situation was and were keen to support their project. We already had the perfect solution with CityFibre, it was just a case of working together to plan a proper implementation strategy." ■

**CityFibre Market Report continues on page 38**

# Revolution marches on

**CityFibre partners Diva Telecom and Triangle Networks have shown us that organisations located in and around Gigabit Cities no longer need to wrestle with copper's limits. Pure fibre is the future, and CityFibre's pioneering Gigabit City project continues to remind us precisely why.**

CityFibre's capacity to disrupt and drive change has rarely seemed more needed than now – a requirement that was recognised by the Chancellor who, in his Autumn statement last year, revealed plans to launch a new Digital Infrastructure Investment Fund in a bid to drive productivity. The fund will see over £1 billion invested in the UK's digital infrastructure, catalysing private investment in fibre networks and supporting 5G trials.

Faced with the demands of a modern digital society, it is becoming more widely understood that copper infrastructure fails utterly. "The digital age is here, and with an estimated 5.6 billion unique mobile subscribers across the world by 2020 – more than the number of people with electricity, running water and bank accounts – the traditional copper-based capacity constrained infrastructure is creaking at the seams," said Mark Collins, CityFibre's Director of Strategy.

Strength in strategy depends on reason, and copper simply does not make sense to forward looking organisations. Yet pure fibre is a different matter and CityFibre has pressed the button for a decisive outcome that the incumbent will not like. Why? Because it is a fact that legacy



Mark Collins

copper infrastructure is approaching end of life, and it's just as inevitable for providers and users of pure fibre to exude optimism over the limitless potential of almost endless capacity, as already experienced by businesses in Gigabit Cities served by CityFibre.

The future is clear, and there's no standing in the way of a pure fibre revolution. "Supported by entirely new duct and full fibre infrastructure, Gigabit City networks provide entire communities with world class copper-less foundations on which to build future proof, ultra-fast and resilient mobile and digital services for the benefit of all," added Collins.

Furthermore, consumer demand for bandwidth continues to outstrip supply as home and social life increasingly moves online. According to Collins, wide scale deployment of fibre

to the Home (FTTH) is the only robust option. "It's the ultimate goal of every Gigabit City network we build," he stated. "Last year we successfully trialled FTTH broadband with Sky and TalkTalk in York, extending our network to over 14,000 homes. Delivered on target, this project has laid strong foundations for the next phase of CityFibre's fibre revolution."

#### Growing network

CityFibre's network now spans an impressive 3,200 km of pure duct and fibre and is growing by the day as private and public sector organisations give the company's revolutionary approach a swift vote of confidence. "For public services, Gigabit connectivity can help bring dated systems into the digital age," added Collins. "Digital service platforms help to improve the customer experience while creating cost efficiencies.

They can also support the roll out of digital learning in schools and colleges while easing the management of information at NHS sites and council offices.

"Our public sector projects in Edinburgh, York, Peterborough and Coventry, for example, have not only helped council leaders to position their towns and cities as tech hubs ripe for inward investment, they have enabled the development of new digital teaching methods in schools, smarter traffic management and CCTV systems."

Gigabit City status has also marked a step change for UK businesses as they experience increased productivity, growth and competitiveness, while supporting new innovation and helping cities attract talent and investment. "Our project in Peterborough is a perfect example," added Collins. "Within just 12 weeks of launching over 10 per cent of all the businesses in the city had registered interest in our service. In 2015, Peterborough was crowned Smart City of the Year and witnessed record business start-up rates."

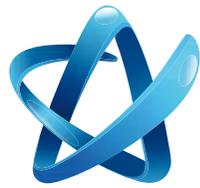
The ongoing achievements of CityFibre and its Gigabit City partners confirm that pure fibre networks will underpin the UK's digital future. This reflects other flagship projects around the world such as Stockholm's Stokab, Google's

Fiber Cities and Singapore's NGNBN, which like CityFibre's UK city roll out have pioneered the development of true Gigabit connectivity with transformational results.

CityFibre's national footprint has already reached 70,000-plus more businesses, a figure that is certain to rise sharply as the company acts on plans to develop over 500 business parks nationwide. "This will unlock new potential for broadband as the fourth utility – always on and always accessible – permanently changing the way customers, suppliers and employees buy, sell and deliver services," stated Collins. "Vastly improved mobile connectivity is another important Gigabit City feature, and this has been a major focus for CityFibre during 2016 having increased our cell footprint by over 25 per cent to over 7,800 sites. With most data now being recorded and consumed via mobile devices, it is likely that access to 4G and 5G connectivity or greater will underpin the future of all mobile technology."

CityFibre is primed to build on its achievements and continue to drive the pure fibre revolution with no easing of strategic intent. "The Gigabit City movement is the greatest infrastructure development in a generation" enthused Collins. "And we're only just getting started." ■

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# White keeps it simple

In philosophy 'Occam's razor' decrees that the simplest explanation is usually the right one and it's a principle that Paul White has applied to his business life when things get too complicated. The approach has worked remarkably well for him and his NTA hosted services business is now giving resellers a fast and easy route to riches.

**W**hite is a straight talking Essex born entrepreneur who lives two minutes away from NTA's headquarters in Harold Wood just a few minutes' drive off junction 29 of the M25. "Why complicate things commuting," he declares as we sit down in the shiny new showroom he has had custom built in a bid to convert more partners to his hosted telephony model. The 'keep it simple' theme continues to resonate as we discuss how his business has grown organically to a multi-million turnover concern just five years since he took a headlong plunge into building a VoIP telephony platform, adopting a 100 per cent channel only paradigm and developing a unique sales model.

"I believe NTA has many differentiators," he stated. "We have many models for our partners that are flexible, however the most profitable one for our resellers is that we sell on

a channel/simultaneous call model so you do not have to buy a license per seat. This means partners are not restricted by a buy price per seat and so can be flexible on solution and price when selling to an end customer. Our resellers tell us their margin on our hosted platform is 80 per cent plus."

Support is also fundamental to White's simple channel philosophy. "You call us we answer, we don't just give you a ticket number and then call you back later in the day, tomorrow or never at all. I always say that if Carlsberg did support teams then probably we have the best. We have a great on-boarding process for all new partners. We offer sales and technical training courses that are run at our offices in Essex, but we can also offer these at our partners' premises depending on the number of staff that need training.

"We offer marketing collateral and programming guides for end customers



Paul White

which can all be white labelled in our resellers' logos. Our telephone account managers and tech support team offer fantastic support and our field sales team also offer hand holding at end-user customer meetings."

#### No brainer

White is confident NTA will be the 'go to brand' in the hosted environment within a year, once more resellers see the 'White way' forward. "I really do think that when resellers see the difference between buying on a per seat basis and NTA's model it really is a no brainer," he commented. "Our resellers are now much bigger companies with bigger sales teams, and as we move forward I want NTA to become the company people think of when they are talking about VoIP, like the 'Hoover' of vacuum cleaners.

"PBX resellers find our product easy to sell as they

do not need to work out how many cards they need, whether the cabinet is big enough or if they need a ring generator or VM card. Also it's easy to deploy, support and maintain with the tools that NTA provide to our partners.

"We are in a world where everything is becoming hosted. IT support and managed services businesses are encroaching on the traditional comms space as they see this product as just another peripheral. Most of our hosted partners have moved their business from other hosted suppliers. I can only think they are doing that because they want better support and bigger margins. It would be great to speak to new partners at the beginning of their hosted journey so they don't need to move it again. The amount of new resellers and dealers we have on-boarded in the last 12 months

proves that we have got our model right. And I can also honestly say not a single partner has moved away."

White intends to keep ploughing profits back into NTA's channel development programme and he has a simple message for the economic doom-mongers. "2017 will definitely be another boom year," he said. "The UK is unique and resilient and full of entrepreneurial people. Our industry constantly reinvents itself, and I believe NTA will have its best year ever." ■

#### Just a minute with Paul White...

**Role model:** My Dad. He's the best salesman I have ever had the pleasure to see in action

**What talent do you wish you had?** To speak more than two languages – English and Essex isn't enough

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Richard Branson, he's inspirational; God, so I can ask why so much anger and torment; My Grandad, he died before I was born and I would just like to know him

**What do you fear the most?** Heights

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I'm colour blind, hence my dodgy dress sense; and I used to be very heavy

**What do you regret not doing when you had the chance?** Completing my education and going to University

**Best day of your life so far?** When my daughter was born 21 years ago

**Name something you have overcome:** The fear of standing up in front of people

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# Love them or loathe them



LORRIN WHITE  
TOTAL

“ In this current climate of market consolidation, be realistic, ready to flex and always include contingency in your budget. If every penny counts, understanding and knowing your threats makes contingency essential - but without a crystal ball, it's still possible to encounter unanticipated events. If your model has plenty of headroom, it's likely you've 'done' your years of watching the pennies. However, as we all learn, at times there are sharks out there, big and small! We are all being circled whilst swimming in the same ocean. If you haven't got the flex in your numbers to fight them off, change direction or jump in a boat, you could sink - or simply find yourselves being someone else's dinner. ”



DAVE TRIVETT  
ASSEMBLY CHANNEL  
SERVICES

“ As an independent telecoms wholesaler, our role is essentially to provide business-enabling tools and if these didn't include cost control mechanisms as standard then we'd be dead in the water. Our clients are all resellers and clear commercial reporting functions are as essential to them as technical ones. Likewise, our resellers' end-user clients simply wouldn't consider any telecoms solution that didn't facilitate clear, actionable Business Intelligence. For many sectors, competition is fierce, and any business technology solution with variable costs needs these capabilities in order for businesses to achieve the accurate forecasting/budgeting reports that can often be the difference between maintaining your competitive edge or not. Trends come and go in our industry, but cost-control functionality is here to stay. ”



CLIFFORD NORTON  
CHANNEL TELECOM

“ A budget means you can clearly see where and how much you are spending compared against predicted expenditure. You are then able to evaluate each output and determine the return worth. As your business grows, your budget becomes more comprehensive and strategic. Budgets are a constantly developing set of documents that should be continuously monitored which will ensure the avoidance of any nasty surprises. At the beginning of each year, you should complete a minimum spend of anticipated budget so that you can understand your projected costs. A contingency budget in reserve will cover unexpected outgoings. If business goals are achieved after each quarter and money from your reserve is not used, you can then invest them in marketing to grow your business. ”



JOHN PETT  
CHESS

“ Setting a budget is vital to allow a business to both predict and then control expected future performance and cash flow. However, a budget is only useful if it is initially approved by stakeholders to ensure it is aspirational and attainable, and is then used to benchmark actual results against. That's why it's important to layout the budget in the same way that the actual results will be presented to allow a meaningful comparison. It's also important to document the assumptions underlying the budget in as much detail as possible, so that these aren't forgotten later on! To use a budget as an effective control, ensure that people involved in purchasing are aware of the budget limits, and have appropriate authorisation procedures. ”



JOHN CARTER  
DMSL

“ You always need a plan and the budget is an important part of that. Like anything, it's a balancing act between investing for the future and maintaining stability. In our industry, it's very important to make sure you explore new business potential. If you don't, you'll get left behind. In 2017, for example, any comms dealer that is not investing in hosted voice is going to miss out big time. You have to be bold and ambitious and prepared to adapt and change your plans and your budget. It's important to stay right on top of the figures and to act fast. Make cuts if you backed the wrong horse, or invest more and seize the opportunity if you picked the right one! ”



IAN BREWER  
ENTANET

“ The budget exercise forces companies to regularly sit back and take a hard look at all areas of the business - from product range/mix to margins to resourcing. It creates a culture of forward thinking and bench-marking to ensure the business is kept at the forefront of developments in the market and encourages regular analysis of competitors' businesses. Budgets provide an important early warning system should trading deviate from plan, to allow for corrective action. The budget also aligns departmental goals and objectives, providing a framework for control and delegation. ”

**B**udgets? Who needs them when the economic outlook is so unpredictable and you never really know what could affect your revenue pipeline? And who has the time to sit and mull over spreadsheets when there are sales to be done and people to manage?

We jest of course; although some chancy entrepreneurs optimistically stick one finger in the air or trust their gut feelings, the reality is that any business starting out or beginning a new year without a budget, is like a hiker heading for the mountains without a map, a compass and a weather forecast.

A budget enables entrepreneurs to set goals and evaluate the viability of business ideas. For established companies it's a tool that tells directors whether or not financials are on track and acts as an early warning system to alert them of unexpected income or expenses. And, of course, a budget is crucial to getting loans, bringing on new partners, and attracting investors. Remember there's always someone on the outside looking in who wants to

## OK, let's grow

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# m, budgets are essential



DAN PROCTER  
HENRY HOWARD FINANCE

“ In our current technology cycle where customers are looking to acquire ICT as a service, most ICT firms, particularly those in growth stage, are pressured to invest substantially in virtual and hosted services. Asset finance provides an effective way for growing ICT firms to preserve working capital. By leasing their infrastructure, growing ICT firms are able to build required services, whilst preserving cash flow, minimising debt and maintaining equity. The right financial partner will support the ICT firm with innovative structures to release cash from customer contracts, eliminating expensive business consultants. An unpredictable business environment can disrupt the most prudent ICT budget, and leasing is the only vehicle that allows firms to accommodate essential investment without breaking the annual budget. ”



PAUL BILLINGHAM  
KNIGHT CORPORATE FINANCE

“ Setting a budget is a good discipline for any business to undertake, but it especially important for businesses that are growing quickly and going through an element of transformation, which applies to most ICT businesses. By setting a budget you are creating an internal target for management teams and staff to aim at and you're also ensuring that you will know in advance what the longer term impact will be on any material changes occurring through the year. If you want access to funding, you will need a minimum two year budget from any potential provider. ”

see planning and deliverables.

A fledgling company that doesn't establish a budget may find it is selling as much product as expected and has attracted as many customers as was anticipated, but the numbers just don't stack up, usually because the expense of recruiting customers eats into income.

Budgets prevent nasty surprises that could ultimately endanger a business and they should not be treated as a one-time chore, or a once-a-year exercise, but as a constant point of reference.

Start by pulling together all anticipated sources of income, consider seasonal fluctuations and additional income sources that might come along in the future and what your marketing programmes are is likely to generate in terms of increased income throughout the year. Do the same thing for fixed costs and variable expenses and you'll be well on the way to really understanding how you company looks. And be conservative. It's always great to have some contingency funds!



DAVID BENNETT  
NIMANS

“ A budget isn't just a financial tool, but a business plan of what you are trying to achieve. It represents a road map of how and where you to plan to grow – and the resources, support and investment required to deliver it. A budget is a business management tool. It enables you to plan for what your year is going to be, set objectives and identify how and when they are going to be delivered. You should regularly review performance against it. It's not based on a static 12-month period but a rolling view moving forward. A budget enables you to join up financing, sales, marketing and business planning. It's an effective way of bringing everything together. ”



MARK SAUNDERS  
NINE WHOLESALE

“ It is hard to imagine a coherent business that would not set a budget and then regularly measure actual performance, so that any variance could be quickly addressed. My advice would be to make sure that budgets are set with significant input from those closest to your customers and the market. Remote mathematical manipulation of last year's performance by ill-informed bean counters can only be a recipe for problems. Keep the channels between finance and marketing wide open, so that as the inevitable unexpected events occur, they are speedily factored in. Surprises can be welcome, but not in financial accounting. ”



VINCENT DISNEUR  
UNION STREET

“ No business, regardless of turnover or industry, can operate and scale effectively without careful budgetary planning and oversight. Accurate forecasting is essential to staying in control. Following events in 2016, economic conditions have become harder to predict. It's therefore important to build tolerance into the budget and keep this under review to ensure the impact of any nasty surprises can be mitigated. With proper care and foresight, most companies should be able to manage their budgeting without need of external financial advisors but, if you do decide to work with advisors, make sure you do your homework. You can't do too much research when it comes to selecting a partner for this critical area of the business. ”



MAGNUS BÅTSVIK-MILLER  
VIRTUAL1

“ A budget provides an excellent, efficient way to pre-approve the majority of the spending decisions during a year, and thus allows precious management time to focus on the inevitable out-of-budget requests that come along. When creating a budget be realistically prudent about spend without excessive sandbagging, go with the latest data you have (e.g. FX rates), and stand by that budget during the year with only re-forecasts (rather than re-budgets) to help identify areas in the income statement to achieve the original performance budget. Only re-budget mid-year if there is a material change to the company's strategy (as opposed to economic or political factors alone that are affecting results). ”

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# Portals that open doors

If anyone still needs convincing that the old world order in comms is finished, they need look no further than the scale and scope of portal developments.

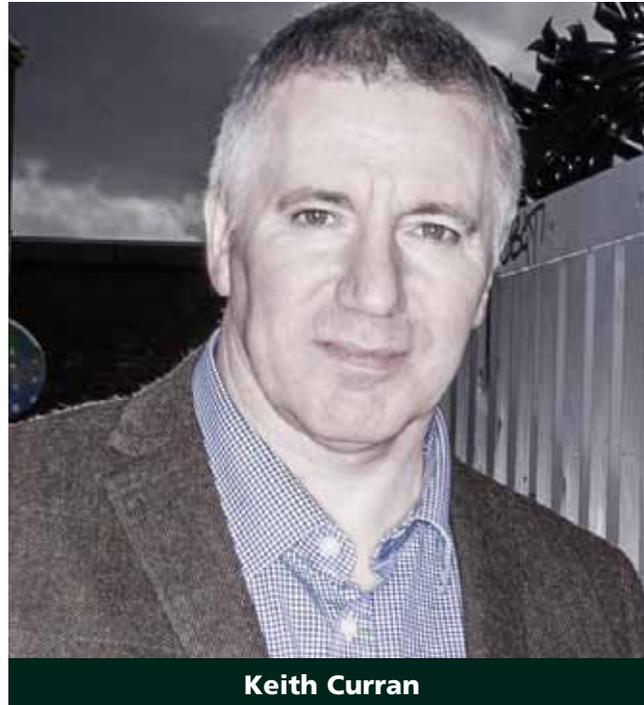
If any lesson can be drawn from the rate of portal development, it is that old ways of doing things are defunct. Since launching into the UK market in April 2014, plan.com has developed three versions of its portal and according to co-founder Keith Curran version four will 'totally change the way partners do business'. "The portal powers everything we do so our investment from both a financial and time standpoint is huge," he said. "Rather than assuming we know what our partners need, we let them tell us. The more easily they can access and manipulate their business information with technology, the more efficient and profitable they become."

Portals have become a must-have and their evolution will bring about a polarisation in the market as portals developed by technologists in collaboration with their partners become poles apart from those that fail to give users a competitive edge, believes Curran. "Portals are about replacing outdated ways of doing business rather than simply reproducing them online," he said. "And the advanced intelligent portals of the future will use a combination of clever technology and algorithms to react with speed, detail and precision, giving partners a valuable advantage. An

intelligent portal that can monitor and report the status of every SIM in real-time and automatically calculate the best position for partners and customers would take the whole experience to a new level. These will be the successful portals of the future."

With new products and features constantly coming into the market, there's little time for developers to sit on their hands. Voiceflex's team of techies are busy developing tools to automate as many of the firm's processes as possible. The majority of business it conducts is now done through its portal. "In the rapidly changing communications environment often it's the products that are the easiest to provision and configure that have the largest market penetration," said Sales and Marketing Director Paul Taylor.

Full automation of the provisioning processes, including real-time number and SIP trunk provisioning, have proved popular. "With our fraud protection application this makes for a self-service portal with true value add," noted Taylor. "And the simplicity of the portal reduces the need for extensive administration and training, allowing for a faster time to market for resellers who have 'get up and go'."



Keith Curran

The API market will only go one way – up. "During the evaluation of new suppliers we always look for available APIs and integration opportunities. Automation is now a must, and this is reflected in how our customers wish to deal with us," added Taylor.

Jola has developed software to help partners differentiate their propositions. "Using our dealer portal a partner can be with a customer and build an online quote on their laptop or mobile that automatically checks the availability of Internet connectivity, sets up new numbers and arranges porting," explained Managing Director Andrew Dickinson. "The system then emails a dealer-branded proposal to the customer. Jola partners can also get a range of the connectivity options from every UK carrier in three minutes. The first supplier to meet and quote the prospect usually wins the business."

Jola wasted no time in applying its development experience to the mobile

space. "Mobile Manager was only fully launched late in 2016 and already manages around 15,000 mobile data SIMs worldwide," added Dickinson. "Mobile Manager fully automates the SIM-only process and gives resellers management control over their mobile data estate. They can monitor individual usage, activate, pause and bar SIMs."

#### Mobile app

Marston's Telecoms developed its own mobile app last year, a move that enabled partners to manage services more efficiently by functioning as a self-service tool that can be accessed anywhere, at any time. "The app has greatly improved the nature of our reseller engagement," stated Rob Derbyshire, Head of Telecoms. "Through our main portal and mobile portal app resellers have access to everything they need, from ordering and provisioning through to booking engineers and billing, all in one place. This removes the need for calling multiple teams and

waiting to speak to the right person. Everything can be done quickly, efficiently and from any location, which has made the lives of our resellers much easier."

As more hosted providers differentiate their services via portals the 'must-have' appeal of these tools will only grow stronger, noted Robin Hayman, Director of Marketing and Product Management, SpliceCom. "We matured our original IP PBX Management Portal to include Manager Assist, a set of wizards and tools for cloud, on-premises or hybrid deployments that include many features requested by our channel's technical specialists," he said. "These include bulk programming, simple wizards for larger solutions and complex deployments, and advanced diagnostic tools."

"Continuing our focus on portals, last month saw the launch of our new Administration Portal, allowing simple browser access to everyday programming features alongside those frequently used, but often slightly more complex tasks, such as Time of Day, Auto Attendant and Queue Messages etc. All aimed at making system administration simple."

A portal is no longer just a provisioning tool, it is an access point for multiple departments into a business, noted TelcoSwitch Sales Director Paul Gibbs. "Our portal is an interface between multiple departments from provisioning, to finance, to sales through to marketing," he said. "Future portals will have to adapt to how businesses report as well as how they sell." ■



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# CN Award winner exemp

The industry needs more women like ICA founder and Director Pamela Blanchard. Not just to help redress the gender imbalance, but to take the sector to a whole new level.

**N**ot for nothing did Stockport-based ICA scoop last year's Comms National Customer Service Award. It was no accident, but Blanchard's introduction to the comms sector was pure chance. "I didn't aspire to having a career in telecoms, like many I found myself in the industry to earn some extra money while studying part-time for a psychology degree," she explained. "I began working as a telecoms trainer, which only required me to know how to use a telephone. But programming a PBX and answering technical questions posed by the end user introduced a real challenge. I hate to be stuck for an answer so I decided to train as an engineer.

"I sat the course with 11 men who found my attendance as amusing as I did challenging. I'm not ashamed to say that I found it hard going, and while evenings on the course should have offered relief from three letter acronyms and a well deserved pint with the lads, I studied harder than ever and in 1995 became the first female Alcatel Certified Field Engineer."

But in an industry dominated by male engineers with experience Blanchard's gender proved to be a disadvantage before she'd even unloaded the car, let alone dared to be seen branding a krone tool. "I may have spent more time on site than was needed but I gained valuable experience

and a flair for doctoring my sign off sheets," she added.

Blanchard, who is something of a super woman, had underestimated her considerable talents and worked for an engineer contracting to Alcatel at a time when the vendor had an impressive base of clients spanning the country and a community of resellers. "When Alcatel changed its business model in the mid-nineties and gave up its legacy base many of the customers with whom we had built up relationships found themselves without a choice of maintainer," explained Blanchard. "A clear opportunity had presented itself, so with no idea how to run a business I started ICA in 1995. The next few years brought about steady growth and a reputation for providing good solid service to both end users and resellers."

### Milestones

Two big turning points for ICA were the introduction of network services in 2007 and winning a significant number of support contracts following the collapse of a large telco. Overnight ICA doubled in size and moved into larger premises. "During the last 21 years we have organically evolved from a service and maintenance provider to a systems integrator with a culture to match," added Blanchard. "Finding and keeping the right team with a passion for innovation and knowledge is the behaviour that drives



ICA's Pamela Blanchard collects the 2016 Nine sponsored Comms National

our success. Our company values are delivered through strict policies and procedures that ensure the business stays focused. We understand the need to continually improve these processes to challenge our efficiencies and productivity. This is an industry that demands companies to respond to market changes fast without compromising on service."

Blanchard's career story to date reflects a deep imbalance in the industry's

gender make-up but also shows what can be achieved by the 'minority' if more women decide to relieve the disparity. Under Blanchard's direction ICA has witnessed double digit growth in the past three years across all products and services. During the past year the company generated over 300 per cent growth in hosted services, doubled its maintenance and support business and launched IT support services to its existing clients. "To maintain this level of growth

we will recruit additional support staff to ensure our quality of service isn't jeopardised by the high volume of client acquisition and also expand our account management team," added Blanchard. "Although growth is a priority for me and the team it is imperative that we achieve this in a manageable way that doesn't impact the service received from our client base."

Since inception the company has matured in its approach,

# ...olifies pure inspiration



Customer Service Award

of self-development that I embarked upon and how this would give me the foundation to introduce and maintain changes. Once introduced and underpinned by our quality management frameworks the policies and procedures revolutionised the way the business operates, and these are fundamental to our ongoing success."

In self-reflecting mode, Blanchard recalled two areas of the business that she might have managed differently with the benefit of hindsight, decisions that would have impacted positively on the company. "The first was to offer network services much sooner to our clients," she said. "As a maintenance company our focus was too heavily weighted on PBX support. In hindsight it would have been an easy service to sell to our base of maintained clients and to have accelerated our revenues quicker. Secondly, acquiring an IT company was discussed at many a board meeting but never executed. This should have been a milestone in our strategy. Once introduced, our IT services increased profitability overnight."

ICA's focus for the coming 12 months will be on the contact centre space and the omni-channel customer experience, walking customers not only through the technology but also mapping the cross-channel journey. "Delivering multi-channel solutions also highlights some of the challenges we face," added Blanchard. "While many clients underestimate the advantages of embracing the technologies available, others want it overnight with restrained budgets.

## I hate to be stuck for an answer so I decided to train as an engineer

Understanding and meeting customer expectations and fulfilling change management are essential skills for any team in this space. The only way to address these challenges is by taking time to truly understand the customer expectations and ensuring each project is expertly managed by a qualified project manager."

### Planning is key

Another big trend in the marketplace is hosted technology and the diminishing ISDN and PSTN revenues due to the exponential growth in SIP. "Although we are seeing huge adoption of these technologies there remains a large number of businesses that are not quite ready for such a migration, or where the technologies are not ready for the business," noted Blanchard. "It is this space where ICA can add great value by working carefully to accurately consider the benefits of such technologies, highlight the risks and build a strategic plan to ensure maximum return is delivered from existing investments before moving to other solutions."

In three-five years time ICA will have two clearly defined and very different divisions. One being hosted telephony and inbound services and the second specialising in contact centre solutions managing

projects from inception through deployment. "We currently have a team of contact centre specialists working in partnership with our clients dedicating their time to ensuring that the technology is fully optimised," commented Blanchard. "This is an area of our business that we are passionate about and will hopefully result in our company growing four-fold, which means we'll outgrow our HQ."

She also expects ICA to move into a space opened up by consolidation, and has already seen opportunities created from the acquisition of comms providers by larger systems integrators. "As more telecoms providers similar in size to ICA are acquired I believe the gap is widening between the larger corporate entities and the VARs, and we see this as an opportunity to step in and play a more prominent role," she explained. "We have already seen a shift in how enterprises choose to engage with their communication partners and our agile approach to supporting those businesses will help us secure more significant contracts over the coming 24 months. Once engaged our clients are impressed and surprised by the service and ethics of the business, which leads to long-term relationships."

No one reading this article can deny that Blanchard is truly inspirational and well deserving of the Comms National Customer Service Award. It's an achievement made all the more remarkable when you consider that she also fulfils the responsibilities of a foster carer who has supported young teens for over 10 years. On her award

win, Blanchard said: "Our clients and our partners have known for years that we deliver exceptional customer service, but winning such an award has allowed us to back-up those claims to prospective clients. There has also been a hugely positive impact internally. My team work exceptionally hard to maintain the level of service expected by our clients and winning the award is great recognition for them all." ■

### Just a minute with Pamela Blanchard...

**Role model?** A woman VP of a well-known technology corporation who I worked for in the USA. She left her house at 5am, returned at 10pm, and had three kids. She visited recently and told me I work too hard!

**What possession could you not live without?** A kettle

**What do you fear the most?** Failure

**What talent do you wish you had?** To be sporty

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** The late Robin Williams, Barbara Streisand and J.K Rowling

**Something about yourself we don't know:** I have been a long-term foster carer supporting young teens for over 10 years

**Top tip:** Be a first rate version of yourselves, not a second rate version of someone else

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** I would love to be a children's writer

**How do you relax?** Spending time with my children

**How would you like to be remembered?** As an inspirational leader at work or at home

# It's time to recognise your

Acknowledging the success of the hardworking teams in your channel business should never be underestimated and the opportunity to give them the recognition they deserve has come round again.

**Entry Deadline March 1st**  
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**W**e are delighted to announce that the Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards 2017 is open for entries!

Now in its sixth year, the Awards will once again give ICT Channel businesses a unique opportunity to acknowledge the skill, determination and success of their sales and marketing stars.

Specifically aimed at teams rather than individuals, the Comms Dealer Sales and Marketing awards will once again be fully supported by KCOM, who take up their position as headline sponsor for the fourth year running to the delight of Director, Pete Tomlinson.

"This event has become an anchor moment in all our marketing calendars, not only because it gives us the opportunity to say thank you to all the sales and marketing teams that we rely on every day to achieve our growth and deliver our ambition, but also because on finals day we get to see and shake hands with the many channel partners that we all work with collaboratively day in day out.

"The channel continues to be a remarkable place. It's rare in business that we can sit alongside our competitors and champion their success;



**KCOM director Pete Tomlinson**

but in the channel, that's exactly what we do. Every day we learn from each other, we compare services, we use training resources, we repurpose marketing ideas; by sharing our experiences and

learnings we can all achieve a better outcome for our customers and that's what makes the channel great."

This year Tomlinson has welcomed the inclusion of

four new categories namely:

- Best Partner/ Customer Event
- Best Partner/ Customer Portal
- Best Company to Work For
- Best Apprenticeship Scheme

"Each of these celebrates the efforts that we all put into turning both our customers and colleagues into fans," he said.

"Those partner events we all love attending, with maybe a few too many glasses of fizz, are the work of dedicated marketing teams who want to add value to your businesses; the portals don't update themselves but are a rich and valuable source of content to help us sell and market our products. And we should never forget how important it is to develop and retain our talent by providing a fun and rewarding work environment. "Wouldn't it be great this year if we found those stories where we took a risk, moved out of our comfort zones to try something new and it paid off? Maybe recognition for the traditional comms reseller who's successfully moved into Cloud services; or for the brand that has changed their competitive focus, maybe from price to experience; whatever we celebrate we want to make sure it's something we value and champion across our communities and something that we can collectively take pride and inspiration from.

"We continue on our mission to make technology easy to take advantage of and enjoyable to use. For us, our place in the market is clear - simple, reliable solutions and a great customer experience - and we try not to get distracted from that path. We encourage everyone to do the same, find what you're good at and make it great and then ensure that it's embedded in everything you do for your colleagues, your customers and your partners.

"We all know first-hand that our sales and marketing teams don't stop working at the moment of sale. They continue to deliver huge value throughout the relationship with account management, training, guidance, bid support and end customer on-boarding. This hand-in-hand relationship is what keeps the channel growing, adding increasing value for both us and our customers. "So I urge you all to find the time to enter, to dig under the surface of your business to find the nuggets of greatness that we all have to celebrate. Writing award entries can be time consuming but the moment when you are regaled as the winner is the greatest buzz in the world. Only by putting pen to paper will you make sure your teams get the recognition they deserve for helping you all achieve a great 2017."

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"The Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards offer a fantastic platform to recognise the hard work your Sales and Marketing teams put in towards making our businesses flourish. Having always supported these events, we are proud to sponsor them as they grow larger each year. We feel that they are an important calendar event that rewards and honours our valued teams that work behind the scenes. We can't wait for the 2017 ceremony in May and the very best of luck to all the industry teams that enter."



**Vincent Disneur, Union Street, category sponsor**

"There are not many business environments as competitive as the telecoms channel. To stand out from the crowd requires the highest levels of professionalism, dedication and commitment. It is right, therefore, that the efforts of our industry's top performing sales and marketing teams should be recognised in spectacular fashion and this is what makes the Comms Dealer Sales Awards such an important event in the industry calendar. We're very much looking forward to this year's CDSAs and on behalf of everyone at Union Street, I wish the best of luck to all this year's entrants."

### WINNERS 2016



"We were thrilled to be named double winners in the 2016 awards. Bringing the whole channel community together, our award success gave the ProVu team the recognition they deserve in front of the whole industry and we look forward to being part of them again in 2017."

**Darren Garland, ProVu Communications, Best Distributor Account Team and Best Distributor Marketing Team 2016.**



"Winning Reseller Sales Team of the Year again was a proud moment and being presented with the Overall Large Sales Team of the Year for the second time felt incredible. The affirmation of Focus' market positioning and being an attractive company to work for was a great morale boost"

**Chris Goodman, Focus, Best Reseller Sales Team and Best Overall Sales Team 2016**

# THIS YEAR'S CATEGORIES ...

#### Reseller Categories

- Reseller Sales Team of the Year (businesses up to £2.5m turnover)
- Reseller Sales Team of the Year (businesses £2.5m- £7.5m turnover)
- Reseller Sales Team of the Year (businesses over £7.5m turnover)
- Best Marketing Campaign

#### Distributor Category

- Channel Account Team of the Year
- Channel Marketing Team of the Year
- Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year

#### Vendor Category

- Channel Account Team of the Year
- Channel Marketing Team of the Year
- Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year

#### Service Provider Category

- Channel Account Team of the Year
- Channel Marketing Team of the Year
- Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year

#### Special Awards

- Best Partner/Customer Event
- Best Partner/Customer Portal
- Best Company to Work For
- Best Apprenticeship Scheme



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Sponsor of the Best Apprenticeship Scheme



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Sponsor of the Vendor Channel Account Team of the Year



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# Intellia's on the march

Ericsson-LG champion Intellia has marched into Edinburgh waving the Korean vendor's flag. Its mission is to firmly establish the brand in Scotland's capital having secured a new operational base in the city, according to Directors Tony Whelan and David Fisher.

Intellia is a small company with big ambitions and by sales volume one of Ericsson-LG's larger dealers in Scotland. "After a long time being based in the Falkirk and Stirling area we have opened a new branch office in Edinburgh," explained Whelan, Business Development Director. "Intellia has many customers in Edinburgh but for a long time, with no incumbent dealer, I've felt the Ericsson-LG brand has been under-represented in Scotland's capital city. We intend to create a much stronger profile for Ericsson-LG in this commercially important part of Scotland; and use this office as a springboard to scale by around 20 per cent."

As well as promoting the range of Ericsson-LG iPECS on-premise and cloud solutions Whelan sees Edinburgh as a key market for the recently launched SO Wi-Fi product which is designed to increase customer flows by using imbedded Facebook likes and Trip Advisor reviews for customers who log on to the Wi-Fi.

Intellia has also shown great ambition in its adjustment

towards VoIP and unified communications, improving its skill sets in these areas. "So much so, last year we won the iPECS Innovation Award from Pragma Distribution for a major multi-site business win," added Fisher, Technical Director.

Intellia has a stable group of employees, 600-plus customers and turnover in excess of £500k. Revenues are generated mainly in the SME sector, typically 10-25 users. "We offer a bespoke service with a close contact approach to customers," said Whelan. "We look for opportunities with any business or third sector organisations particularly where related services such as network cabling, lines, broadband or mobiles might be required."

While a big emphasis on cloud and UC are Intellia's biggest opportunities, along with the roll out of fibre, its main challenge is to increase its penetration into the market and be more aware and involved in opportunities that are currently missed. "Another serious issue is the ability to recruit suitable staff, but an Edinburgh location will help overcome this hurdle," added Whelan.



Tony Whelan (left) and David Fisher

"We also need to completely refresh the way we get our name out via website updates and improvements in how we connect with existing customers. There will be increased marketing, re-branding and a shift in emphasis from a local company to Scotland's capital Edinburgh."

#### Rewind the clock

Whelan's career began in 1984 as a seller of office equipment, moving into telecoms soon after deregulation. He took a five year break in the early 90s to study for a degree in Business Studies as a mature student, aged 30. With the degree under his belt, Whelan returned to the comms sector and worked as a freelancer contracting with others to do the install work. He was introduced to Fisher (who was then an engineer with 17 years experience at BT before deciding to set out on his own) in the late 90s through a mutual supplier and they began to work together on projects. "After about 18 months it became

clear we were a good team so we formally merged our two small businesses into Intellia in December 2001 and as co-owners have never looked back," noted Whelan.

"I'd previously been looking for a dealership to improve our margins and at that time Ericsson-LG, then known as LG, was making a big push in Scotland. We've been an exclusive partner ever since. In 2005 we moved from our Stirling offices to a new home in Grangemouth after acquiring a 5,000 square foot building that we also operate as a business centre with seven tenants."

Opening an Edinburgh office has already boosted Ericsson-LG's profile in the city and Whelan is currently addressing key issues that must be overcome to take his strategy to a new level. "It's really about finding the right staff with a good baseline of skills, even if not directly related to the sector," he said. "We need to improve the way we handle information about

customers and manage our growth within the constraints of the time and finance available to us. We are still quite a small company, so this isn't always easy.

"However, we will become a more all round company offering end to end solutions from network services to hardware including IT infrastructure and support. We're aiming to be around 50 per cent larger in terms of staff and turnover and want to use technology and better connected data about what we do to help us improve." ■

#### Just a minute with Tony Whelan...

**What talent do you wish you had?** To sing (I was a drummer)

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Dario Franchitti, a great Scottish racing driver, a true gentleman and credit to his country; Noam Chomsky for his world view; and Isaac Asimov for his brilliant imagination

**What do you fear the most?** People hearing me sing

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I got to number 48 in the UK singles charts in 1983

**What could you not do without in your job?** Optimism and email

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** Motor sport. I'm a huge fan, bikes and cars

**Name something you have overcome:** Starting again from nothing in 1998 after five years in full-time education at the age of 30

**Top tip for resellers:** Find a small number of core suppliers and fully collaborate on growing together

# ELITETELE.COM'S MANAGED IT SERVICE AND UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS OFFER TOPS INDUSTRY FOR QUALITY OF SERVICE

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Our clients are now benefiting from a full end-to-end managed service for IT and unified communications which is unmatched in the industry.

Adam Turton, Sales Director, Elitetele.com

sions, offering new ways of adopting technology to make them more efficient and more competitive. We provide independent consultative solutions to fit the specific requirements of each customer and pride ourselves on giving the best service quality in the market. We are able to do this because of our talented and highly skilled staff who are passionate about delivering outstanding service, coupled with our acquisition of niche technologies.

Elite's product suite includes the design, installation and support of complex IT infrastructure solutions, including Cloud hosting, server virtualisation, superfast enterprise storage, LAN & WAN solutions, perimeter security, and data replication for BC/DR and Microsoft technologies. Our Cloud hosting solutions are a great fit for the SME and mid-market sectors, providing a one-stop-shop for all our customers' IT needs.

We deliver true ROI by implementing fully managed end-to-end IT and com-

munications that are reliable and grow with each business. This allows our clients to focus on their core business without the usual IT and communications problems that other companies encounter. We have responded to our clients' requests to provide a full range of IT managed services which we can now fulfil. Looking forwards we will be developing more products and services for them in the IT, PBX and connectivity arenas.

We will continue to work with our clients to ensure we are meeting their needs and exceeding expectations in terms of how they can use technology to thrive in their own markets.

To find out more about our managed service for IT and unified communications and how it can benefit your business please contact: Adam Turton at [adamturton@elitetele.com](mailto:adamturton@elitetele.com) or visit <http://www.elitetele.com>





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# ITSPA's two big issues

The Internet Telephony Services Providers' Association (ITSPA) has embarked on a two pronged project this year – to help unravel the tangled issues around number portability and to push the Government into more effectively combating toll fraud. Here, Chair of ITSPA Eli Katz outlines the big lobbying plan.

Last year was another busy time for the industry and also ITSPA on a regulatory front with a number of key issues coming to the fore, including merger activity (and blocked merger activity), the implementation of Ofcom's Digital Communications Review and the publication of the Government's Cyber Security Strategy – not to mention the referendum. This year promises to be yet another pivotal year for the industry, and ITSPA has already planned significant lobbying work on two key areas that will be led by dedicated task forces made up of members willing to devote resource and time to these efforts. This will accompany our other ongoing initiatives and usual events programme.

## Number portability

The first of these two key areas is what we refer to (for the purposes of this lobbying work) as 'business switching'. Industry is sadly already well aware of the myriad of ongoing problems and difficulties throughout the

fixed line number portability system and the failure of the numerous industry led attempts to reform the system over recent years.

We have decided to refer to this problem as 'business switching' when engaging with policymakers to highlight the remarkable inefficiency of the fixed line porting system in the UK when compared to both international counterparts and the UK's system for mobile switching. As providers know, while mobile users can switch in an hour it can take fixed line business customers over a year. Often, porting issues result in consumers losing their telephony service or being denied from switching altogether, damaging the competitiveness of the sector. The scale of the difficulties means that providers are forced to devote an inappropriate amount of time and resource to resolve the problems.

In the opinion of ITSPA's Business Switching Task Force, the time for industry-



Eli Katz

## We urge all members to get involved in both the Business Switching and Cyber Crime Task Forces

led solutions has passed and the regulator Ofcom must now act to assist in reforming the system. ITSPA had hoped that the ongoing review of Ofcom's General Conditions, the main regulatory regime for communications networks and service providers in the UK, would include significant changes to GC 18, the General Condition which sets out porting requirements. However, this was not the case, with Ofcom instead stating that it is 'not

proposing any significant change to the current rules'.

While many across the industry see a central call routing database as the ultimate long-term solution, ITSPA is emphasising to policymakers and the regulator that there are relatively easy to implement regulatory steps that could provide considerable and immediate improvements to the system. These include getting Ofcom to clarify

the 'reasonable timescales' under which a port should be completed and then taking action if these were not complied with.

## Cyber crime

Our second key lobbying focus is cyber crime, specifically telecommunications fraud. ITSPA has long had concerns over the level of telecommunications fraud in the UK. Global estimates on the cost of fraud are \$46 billion, which we equate to adding two per cent on average to consumers' bills. Other estimates put the UK cost at £953 million, equivalent to 2.4 per cent of total operator revenue.

However, despite the scale and obvious importance of the crime, telephony fraud did not feature as part of the Government's recently published Cyber Security Strategy. Ensuring that this issue receives greater attention from Government (including in the Cyber Security Strategy) and also from the regulator and law enforcement is a key objective of the lobbying work that ITSPA's Cyber Crime Task Force is carrying out.

In recent months, ITSPA has been involved in constructive dialogue with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (including meeting the Digital Minister Matt Hancock MP) and Ofcom on both this issue and also that of number portability. We urge all members of ITSPA to get involved in both the Business Switching and Cyber Crime Task Forces. For further information please contact our Secretariat. ■

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# Why leasing adds up

Here we spotlight some of the ways that leasing services are fuelling business growth in the channel through higher conversion rates.

In our technological age of ongoing automation and the rise of cloud communications, lenders must plan ahead with vision to align their services to the needs of resellers operating in a fast developing market. Love Finance, for example, is a new entrant to the UK leasing and funding market, and therefore fleet footed in the implementation of its business plan. "We start with no baggage and our growth strategy is to take a vertical approach to the comms sector," said co-founder Jack James Smith. "We are also focused on automating the leasing process to help drive down costs such as wasted visits to non-creditworthy customers. Higher conversion rates on

the day of a visit are achieved through instant acceptances and instant documentation."

Smith identified comms companies selling a strong cost saving model as those most receptive to leasing options. "Stretching the repayments over as much as seven years can make the committed quarterly reserve from the customer seem like a no-brainer," Smith added. "To switch to a new system and reduce the current telephony bill will make closing the order much more likely, resulting in more sales, lower acquisition costs and more customers."

According to Smith, the elephant in the room for the comms and leasing sectors



Dan Proctor

**This year we expect to lend more than £100 million, up from £75 million last year and £40 million in 2014.**

is the funding of services and the cloud. "The two industries need to work together to find an equitable answer to the difficult concept of paying for services in advance of their usage," stated Smith. "To date, many UK funders have shown a lack of vision which has left the comms industry either funding the opportunities in-house or turning their back on the leasing option."

#### Lending spree

Far from being a start-up, Henry Howard Finance (HHF) has been in operation for over 20 years and currently has a portfolio in excess of £150 million that includes more than 20,000 UK-based businesses. "This year we expect to lend more than £100 million, up from £75 million last year and £40 million in 2014," stated Dan Proctor, CTO.

HHF has invested in funding options and technological

infrastructure, including an online funding portal known as HowApp which offers instant financing decisions to vendors. "HowApp reduces transaction times and can be used on any device, allowing sales teams to transact from anywhere," added Proctor. "We are flexible too, as our in-house funding line allows us to make timely and reasonable decisions ahead of many high street lenders."

Nimans Leasing offers finance options on a wide range of equipment, not just traditional telecoms, and its acceptance rate has increased to 90 per cent, a rise that can be attributed, in part, to an e-sign facility. "This allows end users to sign a contract from anywhere in the world, so long as they have a mobile number and an Internet connection," commented Tom Maxwell, Head of Dealer Sales. "The lease agreement can be signed in minutes, meaning a quicker

payment turnaround for the reseller and less expenses on time and petrol."

According to Maxwell, one of the most important areas that often gets overlooked is how leasing can help resellers lock-in their customers over a long period of time. "There's no worries about cash price discounts that can erode margins, and resellers also have greater control over a customer where they can upgrade or add additional equipment further down the line," he added.

The rising popularity of operational leases in the education sector is also an important area of the market that is fuelling growth.

"Funding for local authority schools has changed following instructions from the Department For Education to include an operating lease," explained Maxwell. "This is where the end user only pays back 90 per cent of the value of the lease in their rentals – so someone has to take a residual value risk, which makes the lease cheaper."

Leasing is a proven way to help resellers unlock deals by overcoming traditional obstacles when cash is in short supply. "For example, one of our customers has clinched an £87,000 order for 40 touch screens in a school on a five year lease," commented Maxwell. "More resellers should be taking advantage of these opportunities so we need to raise awareness about the benefits. Another priority this year is to focus on the end of lease agreements that can generate additional income for dealers via upgrade options and associated business opportunities." ■



Tom Maxwell

**There's no worries about cash price discounts that can erode margins, and resellers also have greater control over a customer where they can upgrade or add additional equipment further down the line.**



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# Analytics: The channel's g

There is no going back on the rise of analytics, it's 21st Century and a widely accepted main feature of the digital revolution. On analytics the market has spoken, and we should remember that resellers will fail to meet customer expectations if they do not take heed.

One of the most significant aspects of customer analytics has been the speed of its ascendancy and its emergence as a defining issue for companies such as TeleWare. The central task for TeleWare is to convert customer data into actionable insights and revenues. In meeting this challenge it has been assertive, even linking up with leading academics at Teesside University and enlisting the full-time services of an Artificial Intelligence specialist (see page 5). Now, TeleWare is increasingly putting actionable analytics at the heart of everything it delivers. "It's all about providing the right information, in the right place and at the right time so that our partners and customers can deliver world class customer



Lee Mansell

**It's all about providing the right information, in the right place and at the right time.**

experiences," said Lee Mansell, Product Manager.

In a mobile dominated multi-channel world, establishing a single 360 degree, real-time view of customers and their interactions has never been more important. Therefore the role of analytics is massive. Emotion is the most significant driver of loyalty, so if a customer experiences something that triggers a negative reaction it needs to be identified.

"During calls a customer's emotion can be recorded and later analysed to help understand what triggered each response, enabling counter measures to be put in place," explained Mansell. "But it's not just about being reactive. Analytics can be used to predict what a customer is going to order and potentially deal with any account issues before a client has noticed. This kind of proactive customer service creates a more favourable view of a brand and increases customer loyalty."

Although analytics is rising, it's not about taking an all-new approach to the market. The conversation with customers in terms of promoting an analytics solution is, in many respects, the same as a traditional one. The key is to focus on the customer's desired outcomes and then look creatively at how an analytics-led



Phil Reynolds

**The AI revolution will see more and more intelligent automated services dealing with customer interactions.**

approach can contribute. "Look beyond the glossy front end dashboards and establish solutions that deliver the customer's must-haves in terms of flexibility, automation, security and ease of implementation," said Mansell. "Look for vendors that can provide a rich service wrap to help you and your customers extract real value from analytics tools tailored to their specific business needs."

**Disruptive**

The one dimensional nature of traditional customer engagement is being replaced by a rising demand for more personal services via channels of choice, which can be disruptive to brands and requires a smart response. Reputation is influenced by a multitude of sources. Word-

of-mouth and word-of-social-web can combine rapidly to create potent forces for good or otherwise. "The contact methods are all measurable, but the challenge is around consistency. For example, research shows that the same question posed to a company via chat, email or phone call will often produce a different response," added Mansell.

"It is vital to challenge conventional wisdom and be prepared to trial extensively, innovate and learn rapidly from early experiences in using these methods. Be prepared to be surprised. The way to monetise a company's data is for the results to be simple and provide recommendations where they should focus resource. The easier it is for a company to use the results

to make improvements and increase profit the more valuable this kind of analytics would be to them."

The age of analytics is in its infancy but there is evidence to show that it has already changed the course of the comms industry. Communication, like computing, is going through a paradigm shift with analytics a prime mover for change. "Every forward looking business needs to manage the customer experience through insights into client data, but for resellers wanting to shape the future of customer engagement it's a case of going back to basics," stated Phil Reynolds, joint CEO, Oak Innovation. "What is the customer's business? Where are the touch points? What CRM do they use and how will the workflow include the analytical elements? With an affordable cloud delivery model the ultimate solutions will scale from a one man band to the likes of Amazon. It's an exciting time."

As we move away from call centres into the 21st century contact centre where agents are dealing with a range of multi-channel communications, Oak's analytics and media blending offerings have become relevant to today's customer experience, noted Reynolds. "It's also important to be engaging

# greatest opportunity?

with AI and bots which service a continuing higher percentage of enquiries and improve the customer experience," he added. "The AI revolution will see more and more intelligent automated services dealing with customer interactions."

It's just as important, says Reynolds, to interface with all forms of media, especially social media where customer complaints tend to be posted and need to be monitored. Other media includes the traditional email, Whatsapp, Webchat, SMS and regular surveys. "It's not difficult to measure different methods of communication but it is difficult to create a unified valuing system," added Reynolds. "Is an email equal to a phone call? Is a webchat equal to a tweet? You can focus on the outcomes of every interaction, you can automate the customer survey, you can get a measure of the overall satisfaction and use this as a driver throughout the business."

### Deep insights

Bringing more and more data together opens up the opportunity for ever more complex modelling which delivers more insight, which in turn highlights the key performance indicators that are more measurable and manageable. Not surprisingly, the analytics and reporting market has become hotly contested as comms companies jostle to understand their customers' journeys quickest to maintain an all important competitive advantage. "For example, we can alert a supervisor to calls in a queue that are leads created in Salesforce.com," said Steve Tutt, Marketing Director, VanillaIP. "The



Steve Tutt

### The up-sell and cross-sell opportunity is massive, but you need insights into the user community to execute.

supervisor can then prioritise such calls to the top of the queue. The information has to be relative and contextual to have maximum value."

Customer-side analytics and call centre solutions go hand in hand, with more of the value proposition in the reporting rather than call routing. "We have committed considerable R&D in developing custom reports that measure every conceivable call handling parameter," added Tutt. "Relying on the native BroadSoft reports is not an option. In fact, we have hidden them on our platform unless a customer specifically asks for them to be available. We layer intelligence over the BroadSoft call centre solution. An example is our call centre Supervisor which can export a list of CLIs that were abandoned into the queues and assign them to agents for call back."

Analytics as part of the overall customer solution is key, but let's not overlook analytics for the reseller. "In the old PBX days there was a limited opportunity to up-sell customers,"

stated Tutt. "With cloud, the up-sell and cross-sell opportunity is massive, but you need insights into the user community to be able to execute. Our Uboss reseller reports show P&L, services deployed, how many users/services/handsets were deployed and when. For example, resellers can see how many of their customers are not using a specific service, run an export of all their contact details for an ecast campaign or attach a promo pdf that gets sent with the bill. This is the beauty of cloud and the opportunity for the channel to move beyond fire and forget models."

Customers have many unique identifiers now – CLI, email address, twitter handles and cookies on their machine that are best managed by the customer's CRM platform. "Our integration allows us to dip into the CRM, such as Salesforce.com or MS Dynamics, to profile any calls in a queue as leads or contacts," noted Tutt. "Such mashups of multi-vendor solutions add value to the customer because the UC platform is

never going to replicate the CRM, but work with it."

Tracking and monitoring conversations are fundamental to understanding the full customer experience and incorporating call analytics to any Customer Journey Map provides business leaders with the assurance that their decisions are based on a more complete picture of their customers' behaviour. Tollring achieves this by delivering a single mobile-optimised portal as a cloud, hybrid or on-premise solution, with different views for different user types (supervisors, agents, managers, administrators etc). "A user interface is important to customers, along with being intuitive and easy to use," said Tony Martino, Managing Director, Tollring.

He sees most demand for analytics in business reporting for customer facing teams. "Typically, companies keep track of call centre analytics, but in our experience many organisations forget about what happens outside of the call centre," added Martino. "This could be

communications within business departments (sales teams, finance teams, support teams etc) or communications that fall outside of call centre statistics, such as those that do not reach the call centre because the queue is full, those that are transferred out of the call centre or calls transferred into the call centre. The complete picture is essential to understanding the entire customer experience."

Statistics show that when calls are left unanswered, 56.7 per cent of callers do not leave a message and don't call back. When it comes to call analytics, the value of a missed call soon becomes apparent. "Understanding abandoned calls, waiting and unreturned missed calls are critical to monetising the value of a lost call," said Martino. "A big challenge is ensuring that the whole sales team understands the importance of selling the value, the marketing team understands the importance of promoting the value and the account management teams understand the importance of highlighting the value." ■



Tony Martino

### The complete picture is essential to understanding the entire customer experience.



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# Murphy's dealer role



Joe Murphy

HOSTED comms provider TelcoSwitch has enlisted Joe Murphy to lead a newly formed dealer channel operation. He brings almost 20 years industry experience, including a notable stint at Adept Telecom, and has pledged to implement a tried and tested model for recruiting and supporting dealers.

The company provides online deal calculators and proposal tools and will sell under a sister brand which has a dedicated website and product information.

"Years ago there was a departure from the traditional dealer model with vendors either developing their own billing platform or buying one, so a lot of dealers migrated to virtual reseller models," explained Murphy.

"This is great for those wanting to develop businesses capable of provisioning and supporting a customer base, but it has limited the options

for freelance telecoms specialists who want to focus on selling and building commissions. We are bringing back an option that was always popular and supporting it with modern mechanisms."

Russell Lux, CEO, commented: "We are not experts in selling directly, so we are actively recruiting partners who can now choose their preferred method of engagement, dealer or wholesale."

# Fidelity hires Katie Sloan



Katie Sloan

FIDELITY Group's capacity to market itself has been cranked up following the appointment of Katie Sloan as Channel Communications and Marketing Manager.

She is a certified PRINCE2 Project Management Practitioner with a background in network marketing, communications, and project and event management. Sloan built a career in the Australian Government before starting her network marketing business with Arbonne International. She moved to the UK in 2015.

Managing Director Alan Shraga said: "Katie's background in network marketing and passion for growth will give Fidelity Group a fresh new direction with a focus on shaping strategic and channel growth."

Sloan added: "I welcome the challenges that will help me to grow and create innovative change to benefit the company."

## Also on the move...



Stephen Duffy

**PENNINE stalwart Geoff King, Product and Services Director, has retired following the sale of the business to the Nycomm Group. He joined Pennine in 1984 as a technician and after a series of promotions became a**

board member in 2004. Following King's departure Pennine named Stephen Duffy as its new Group Head of Technical Services. He is a Fellow of the Institute of Science and Technology and brings over 26 years experience working in IT and technical services. He joins Pennine from the Higher Education sector, moving from the Manchester Metropolitan University where he was Head of Technical Services.

**SENNHEISER has reaffirmed its channel commitment with the addition of three new staff. Tracie Marina joins as Reseller Account Manager bringing over**



Tracie, Imre and Richie

**15 years of industry experience; Richie Rankin has been named Sales Manager for Ireland and Scotland, having**

spent the last eight years as a Sales Director for a reseller in Dublin; and Imre Csuri joins as Reseller Sales Manager with over 11 years experience in the IT industry. "These appointments underline our ambitions for continued channel growth in 2017," commented Jane Craven, Director of Sales, Sennheiser UK and Ireland.

# Henson's in as Ideal MD



Mike Henson

CISCO partner Ideal has appointed former Trustmarque cloud and managed services chief Mike Henson as Managing Director, taking over from co-founder Claire Hopkins who becomes Founding Director to focus more on supporting the executive management team. Henson has also held senior roles at Maxima,

Xchanging and Morse. Hopkins, who set up Ideal in 2009 with Mo Merrick, commented: "Mike is taking responsibility for leading Ideal through the next phase of its growth, building on last year's move to larger offices and our continued investment in our team and portfolio."

"We have always been about delivering on our promises, and bringing Mike on board means that we can continue to do this as we grow the business. He has great experience in putting the customer first and creating propositions that leverage technology to deliver tangible business outcomes."

Henson added: "I'm hugely excited about the company's potential for further growth."

# Purple flies flag for women in IT



Angharad Little

OLDHAM-based Wi-Fi specialist Purple is helping to increase the number of females working in technology, recruiting 14 women to its team in recent months. This intake included 27-year old Angharad Little who joined the business as Partner Account

Manager. She commented: "I am excited to be working with Purple. It has an energetic, innovative culture, and working with such a thriving technology start-up gives me the opportunity to contribute to something great."

Gavin Wheeldon, CEO, added: "Our key criteria when recruiting candidates is having the right aptitude and attitude. We are aware of the gender imbalance in our industry and are actively encouraging females to apply for more male dominated roles and promoting the opportunities available to them."

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To apply in the first instance please send your CV and cover letter to: [paul.shirley@btl.co.uk](mailto:paul.shirley@btl.co.uk)

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## Get Involved

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**Simon Turton**

sturton@bpl-business.com

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07759 731 134

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