



How 4net chief plans to hit £100m revenue target p22

Ways to inspire greater diversity in your business p26



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Comms Dealer January 2020 Click to open Faster fibre roll out now critical

LABOUR'S threat to nationalise full fibre has subsided in the wake of the election but calls for the comms sector to 'Get fibre done' are intensifying.

SPECIAL REPORT

In drawing nationwide attention to FTTP Labour has succeeded in driving forward the fibre agenda and the onus is on the UK comms sector to deliver.

"Full fibre featuring as one of the top issues in political discourse can only have positive effects on our industry, whether through increasing customer awareness of FTTP or by guaranteeing public money for difficult to reach areas," commented Guy Miller (pictured above),

Director of Fibre For Everyone at TalkTalk. "Acceleration is critical now, both for the fibre builders and the communication providers who sell the services.

"There was a lot of talk from our industry during the election that we could achieve success through a competitive market. We need to prove this is true."

Marcus Allchurch, Partner at Acuity Advisors, is upbeat about prospects following the election. "I've advised a number of companies to raise funding so far and have a strong

pipeline of opportunities, so I'm confident that the sector is rising to the challenge," he stated.

"In many respects Labour's policy did a great job of highlighting that FTTC is not full fibre, and that full fibre is what you need if you want a great digital experience."

Glide MD James Warner added: "The threat of Labour's plans should spur the fibre builders and Openreach to get the job done and stop any possibility of similarly outrageous future announcements." >p21

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Fibre roll-out critical

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

READING the market to predict future developments is the traditional pastime of industry pundits especially pre-Xmas and post-New Year. That their outcomes always tend to be exercises in stating the obvious is nothing new. But there are

two sides to the Predictions coin. On the one side there is the worn out tradition to deliver the obvious, sprinkled with Christmas glitter to elevate the appeal of 'big themes', which are of course the mere continuum of existing trends.

On the other side is the total unpredictability of the time to come. We are after all living in uncertain times and the real forces at play that may come out of the blue and massively impact our industry are not yet so obvious.

Who could have predicted Labour's intent to nationalise fibre deployment? Nobody saw that one coming. What else lies in store? To this question the industry must remain ever vigilant as out there, beyond our immediate world, there are developments and forces that could over the short-to-mid-term – and almost certainly will over the long term – impact the channel's traditional working model.

In truth, all business models are up for grabs for anyone with an alternative idea that makes sense to ICT consumers, including businesses, and with pockets deep enough to overturn existing sectors.

A consumer might ask: Why not a one-off sub-£100 charge for superfast connectivity? Another may see greater merit in sourcing their broadband from a satellite provider with unfathomable cloud compute resources and everything else to offer in voice and data, like Amazon, a true giant we are all more than happy to use.

At this time of year, and all other months, it pays to read events outside our immediate marketplace, and identify narratives that could one day become our big and super disruptive story.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

• HOW technology innovation will drive UCaaS adoption (p30).

Gale drafted as Sabio CEO



Jonathan Gale

THE former CEO of NewVoiceMedia Jonathan Gale has stormed into Sabio as Chief Exec with a remit to advance the business into a new phase of expansion including the completion of a string of acquisitions. He takes over from Andy Roberts who moves to a new role as Vice Chairman with a focus on inorganic growth.

Gale brings over 30 years experience in the SaaS industry including two decades focused on contact centres and the customer experience.

Before NewVoiceMedia Gale was SVP for Product at Mimecast, and previously ran Product Management & Business Development at Symantec Cloud

Services which he joined via the acquisition from MessageLabs.

Horizon Capital backed Sabio has completed six acquisitions in three years and has more in the pipeline.

Gale said: "Our focus is on enabling our clients to embrace and maximise the value from the latest technologies such as AI-powered self-service, truly channel agnostic customer engagement tools and scalable and elastic cloud platforms."

Sabio Group Chairman Lee Shorten commented: "We're taking this step to strengthen our leadership with a new set of skills and experience that will take the company on the next stage of its journey."

NEWS ROUNDUP

SCC's run of record revenue years continues with 2019 figures coming in at £2.2bn including services and solutions growth of 15%, some of which is being reinvested in SCC's Birmingham based HQ which is undergoing a £7m do-up. 2020 will see SCC mark 45 years in business. The firm was founded as Specialist Computer Recruitment (SCR) in 1975.

RESPONDING to the growing popularity of Microsoft Teams and an expected surge in cloud comms uptake, Wavenet has launched the TeamsLink package, available through its wholesale arm and designed to ease the adoption of Teams Calling features. The bundled service includes Microsoft's Direct Routing and Calling Plan services with unlimited talk time.

WITH three years experience in hosted communications provision under its belt and following a boost to its product feature set CircleLoop is on the hunt for channel partners. The firm is targeting its cloud comms system at SMEs and integrates with over 15 other software products including Hubspot, PipeDrive, Capsule, Zoho, Office365, Freshdesk and Intercom.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

REDCENTRIC posted a mixed bag of H1 results reporting sales down, profits and debts up. Revenue was down by 9% to £43.2m but with £38.8m recurring revenue representing 90% of the total. Gross margins improved to 64.5% from 59.8%. Ian Johnson, Non-Exec' Chairman, said: "New customers were added in the period which, together with effective cross selling, led to quarter-on-quarter revenue growth."

MOST adopters of IoT tech across the pond are also taking blockchain and combining it with their IoT networks, says a Gartner report. "The integration of IoT and blockchain networks in the US is a sweet spot for digital transformation and innovation," said Avivah Litan, VP at the industry researcher.

A PRICE competitive FTTC Ethernet service from Spitfire Network Services with QoS SLAs for VoIP is intended to shake up the SME connectivity market. Sales chief Dominic Norton said: "The SLAs mean customers can use it for both voice and data applications. With the growth of VoIP and cloud-based data services, customers have a critical need for assured connectivity which is not available on standard broadband products."

Stone sees Harbridge led MBO

EXECUTIVES at ICT services provider Stone Group have completed a MBO led by CEO Simon Harbridge and backed by Souter Investments.

The deal sees RJD Partners' second fund, which backed the previous buyout in 2008, realise its investment and David MacLellan, Chairman and founder of RJD, has taken the role of Non-Executive Chairman at Stone.

Existing debt facilities have been refinanced with Shawbrook Bank.

Harbridge commented: "We continue to grow strongly, adding net new customers in each of our vertical markets while continuing to develop infrastructure solutions and services alongside our traditional hardware offerings, growing the value of each customer."



Simon Harbridge

4site bolstered by Indigo acquisition

LIMERICK HQ'd 4site is eyeing international markets following its acquisition by Indigo Telecom Group.

The deal creates a £50m powerhouse with 300-plus employees located across 10 offices in the UK, Ireland, France, Germany and Singapore.

4site was established in 2002 and specialises in mobile wireless and fibre services, with a strong emphasis on supporting demand for 5G and FTTx networks. The transaction boosts Indigo Telecom's capabilities in designing, installing and maintaining international telecom and data networks.

Indigo Chairman Kevin Taylor said: "The acquisition complements Indigo Telecom Group's core expertise in the supply of multi-vendor telecom support services.

"The synergies present opportunities for continued growth and we see benefits for our customers from our expanded portfolio. Both organisations have strong reputations for delivering consulting, projects, delivery and service."

4site CEO Ian Duggan said: "The deal accelerates our growth ambitions by becoming part of a global business.



Ian Duggan and Kevin Taylor

"With its financial backing and scale of operation, Indigo Telecom Group is positioned to support 4site's growth plans and

vision for the future, and the development and expansion of our telecoms services in Ireland and the international market."

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Rob Potter

EQUISTONE backed WHP Telecoms' capabilities and influence in the fixed and mobile markets have been boosted by the acquisition of Sitec Infrastructure Services. The deal creates a circa £100m organisation with 500 staff.

Sitec provides network design, roll out, upgrade and management services to the mobile comms industry.

It also has expertise in wayleaves, design, planning and the installation of fixed line fibre optic networks. The

acquisition will also provide a platform for WHP Telecoms to enter the fibre market.

"This is the first acquisition WHP has made since completing a management buyout backed by Equistone Partners Europe in 2018 and represents an important step in the group's strategic growth plan," commented WHP CEO Rob Potter.

"The acquisition is consistent with our appetite to lead consolidation in the sector and continue to strengthen our services and breadth of offering."

NEWS ROUNDUP

A SERIES of roadshows hosted by Beyond Connectivity (formerly Nimans Network Services) put a spotlight on the three big forces it says are revolutionising the industry – full fibre, 5G and the cloud. "We are facing the biggest industry changes since the advent of broadband," said Beyond's Head of Sales Graham Wilkinson. "It's important to prepare for the connectivity journey of tomorrow."

SOMERSET-based full fibre infrastructure provider and ISP Truespeed has set out plans to extend its ultrafast full fibre network into Wells city centre and surrounding areas. Truespeed's targeted area covers approximately 6,000 residential properties and 1,000 registered businesses.

ACRONIS' acquisition of 5nine, a global provider of Microsoft Hyper-V and Azure cloud management and security solutions, enables the security firm to integrate 5nine's technology into its Cyber Platform and provide new services through the Cyber Cloud Solutions portal.

Newing increases stake in mobile app firm DriverNet

ELITE Group founder Matt Newing has upped his stake in tech firm DriverNet, which was set up in 2017 by Ant Chisnall who has a 17 year career under his belt working in logistics for small fleet operators and large multinational hauliers.

The DriverNet app provides real-time dispatch, route status, map views, arrival and duration times and automatically updates routes of mobile workforces.

"I'm keen to support new tech that will make a difference to other organisations," said Newing. "It's tough for start-ups and it's good to be able



Matt Newing

to help with the next phase of investment to ensure DriverNet continues its growth."

Chisnall said: "We are working with some of the biggest UK councils, the NHS and private health care providers to

help improve their logistics and transport capabilities."

DriverNet has won key tech awards including a European Space Agency gong and Merseyside Innovation and Future of Mobility awards in 2019.



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Mesch rallies IoT MVNO Jola rolls out eSIMs to channel extra forces



Greg Mesch

ARMY veterans and reservists could play a key role in advancing the UK's charge towards Digital Britain, according to CityFibre which aims to recruit a wave of fibre infrastructure builders from a pool of army trained personnel.

In ramping up this recruitment strategy CityFibre has signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant, enabling it to offer work or apprenticeship opportunities to this section of the Armed Forces.

Drew Jeacock, who is the Head of Engagement for the Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association for Greater London, commented: "CityFibre has pledged specific steps to ensure the Defence community is not

disadvantaged and that it recognises the transferable skills that reservists and veterans bring to the workplace."

CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch added: "Infrastructure projects of this scale require a wide range of skills but many of those can be found in the men and women who have trained and served in the Armed Forces.

"By signing the Armed Forces Covenant, CityFibre will be able to tap into a community of people who are highly skilled, disciplined and have all the qualities we are looking for to help deliver Britain's full fibre future."

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JOLA'S CTO Adrian Sunderland claims the launch of eSIMs will unlock the IoT market opportunity for the channel as the firm positions itself as a global IoT MVNO.

The multi-network eSIM is based on eUICC (Embedded Universal Integrated Circuit Card) technology which enables users to switch service provider over-the-air, removing the need to change the SIM card itself.

Jola worked with Simfony to provide the MVNO network while the eUICC element is delivered by Massachusetts-based iBASIS.

eSIMs can be embedded into devices or delivered as a traditional removable SIM.

"eSIMs offer an alternative to MNO contract lock-ins and save customers the pain and expense of swapping out SIMs," said Sunderland.

"Operator profiles on the eUICC can be remotely updated over-the-air. Instead of swapping plastic SIM cards, profiles are downloaded and managed on a device as needed. In the eSIM model, a device is ready to deploy anywhere network coverage exists. If a device moves and crosses networks its profile can be quickly updated.



Adrian Sunderland

Jola said it has deployed a UK-based MVNO mobile core network with global connectiv-

ity to over 450 networks, and local connectivity with all four UK mobile networks.



THE power and generosity of the telecoms industry was brought into focus last month at the TalkTalk sponsored Night of Ambition staged at London's Natural History Museum, which raised a staggering £420k for Ambitious about Autism. £30k of the money raised will be pledged directly to the charity's Employ Autism programme. Hosted by comedian Ruby Wax the extravaganza put the spotlight on how difficult it is for autistic people to secure and keep jobs, even though they have a lot to offer businesses, especially those in the technology sector. Pictured: Auctioneer Edward Rising, CEO of TalkTalk Group Tristia Harrison, event host Ruby Wax and CEO of Ambitious about Autism Jolanta Lasota.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

THE Henry Howard Finance brand name has been retired following the introduction of the 'Propel' moniker. The rebrand is the first in a series of strategic moves that include the opening of new offices in Manchester and the launch of tech upgrades such as the acceleration of online acceptances. CEO Mark Catton said: "Propel means to drive forward. Our aim is to push the boundaries of what's possible in finance."

NTA has revealed details of a four day partner conference to be held this year at a five star resort in Cyprus. "The conference is open to current and prospective resellers and will be educational with breakout sessions together with an element of fun," stated NTA's Channel Manager Justin Blaine.

ALLIOT Technologies is now the main distribution arm for Abeeway products in the UK following a new deal. By leveraging multiple geolocation technologies with LoRaWAN connectivity Abeeway trackers are used to track and monitor assets such as trucks, containers, parcels and people. Nicolas Jordan, CEO of Abeeway, said: "Tracking and logistics is becoming one of the key verticals for IoT adoption."

PE firm LDC backs Nicol



Ricky Nicol

MID-MARKET PE firm LDC has completed an investment in Commsworld that puts the Edinburgh-based comms provider on track for UK expansion and another year of double digit growth. The financials of the deal remain undisclosed.

Commsworld began its commercial life in 1994 and has 110 staff based across its offices in Edinburgh, Glasgow, London and Aberdeen.

For the financial year to December 2018 it recorded revenues of £20m, a 41% increase on the previous 12 months. The company has developed its own carrier grade network with UK and international reach.

Head of LDC in Scotland Mark Kerr and Investment Director for Scotland Colin

Bennett join the Commsworld board alongside CEO Ricky Nicol, CFO Graeme St John and Non-Executive Director Steve Langmead. Telecoms guru John Trower is also joining Commsworld as Chairman.

Kerr commented: "Ricky and the team have transformed Commsworld in recent years from a telco reseller into a national network operator. Our investment will help them to build on this hard work and success and deliver further on their ambitions for Commsworld."

Nicol added: "LDC's investment is a real signal of our intent to further invest in our offering and capacity so we can continue to disrupt the market. We'll be targeting another year of double digit growth."

Evolve IP's new voice for Teams

EVOLVE IP's launch of voice enablement for Microsoft Teams brings a hybrid deployment model and two license options under the brand Voice2Teams and Voice2Teams Plus.

The service is based on the Cisco BroadSoft hosted UC platform which has over 70 million users worldwide.

"We are bringing our many years of delivering carrier grade hosted telephony to the Microsoft world," said MD Paul Harrison. "By leveraging our portfolio of products alongside the Cisco BroadSoft platform, Evolve IP can deliver services and solutions on top of the Microsoft Platform.

"Customers can use voice enabled Teams mixed with other IP endpoints with just the Teams users requiring a Microsoft license. The solution also brings call routing and a UC feature set with Disaster Recovery and real-time fraud management."

The launch comes as Cisco reaffirmed its commitment to BroadWorks as a 'critical strategic asset', quashing opposite industry rumours.

Cisco also confirmed that BroadWorks is the call control application for its new Webex Calling solution.

NEWS ROUNDUP

FOLLOWING a year long spell of testing and developing its CRM and billing system with resellers and dealers Ebb Solutions has rolled out Amaya, the brainchild of CEO and lead developer Sean Marsh. "Every aspect of Amaya is designed to work independently and with any external programme or API," said Marsh. "Ebb Solutions' bespoke channel CRM adapts to any product or service with integrated provisioning, customisable functionality and reporting fetches for every department."

WILDIX is set to hold its second UCC Summit in Barcelona (February 3rd-5th) and according to CEO Steve Osler 2020 will be a pivotal year in the UCaaS market. The company launched its UK&I channel campaign in 2017 and has since signed up over 60 partners in the region.

PANASONIC'S range of SIP communications devices have been certified for use with Exponential-e's UC platform. Bob Mercer, UK Group Manager for Panasonic Communication System Solutions, stated: "The partnership will strengthen the offerings of both Exponential-e and Panasonic in the cloud communications market."

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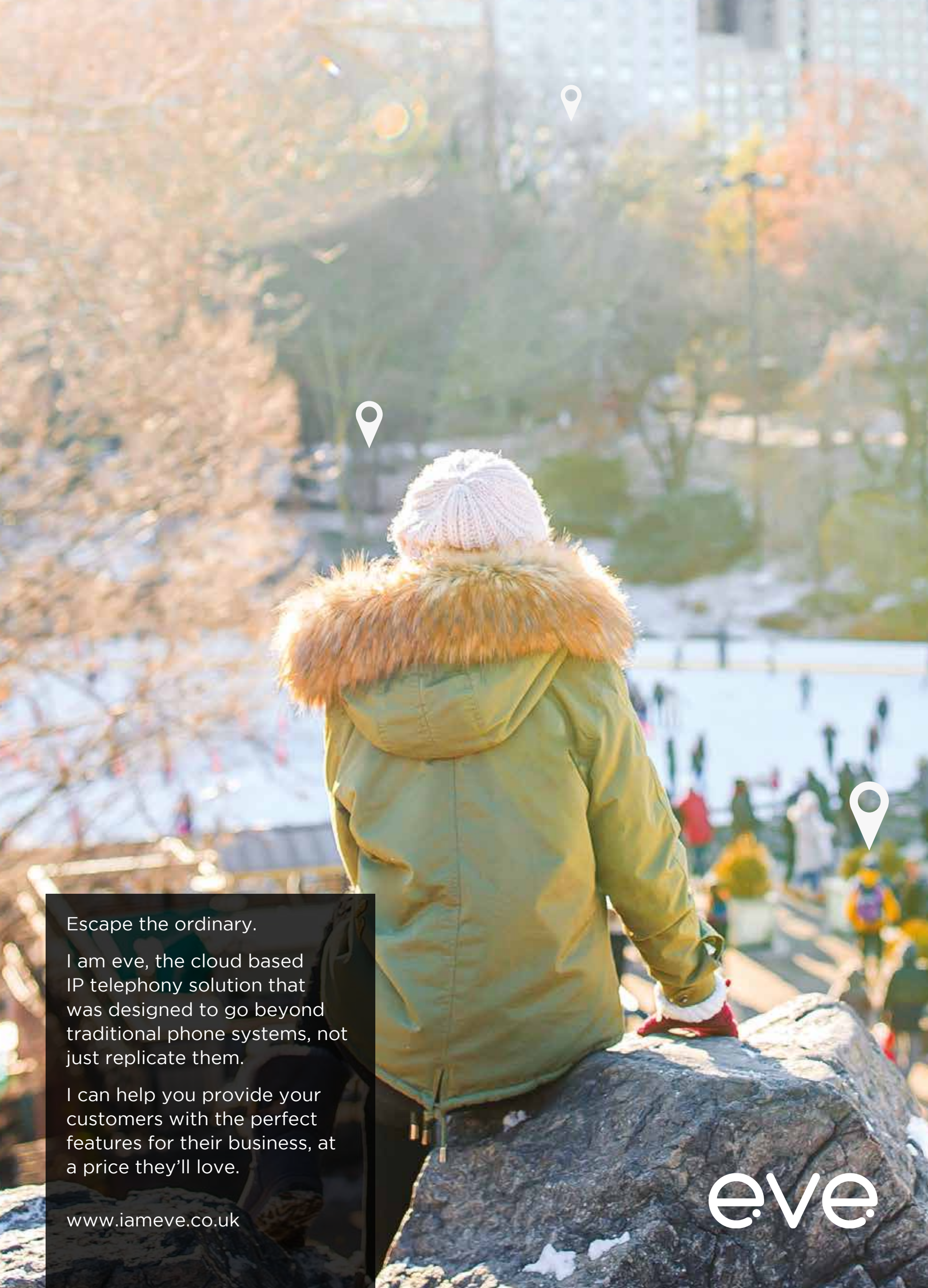
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SoConnect's Netopa deal UCaaS alarm as rivals arrive

SOCONNECT'S bolt on acquisition of Edinburgh-based MSP Netopa creates a combined £4m revenue business.

Newtown Saint Boswells located SoConnect's merger with Netopa's 10-strong team takes the headcount to 30 and adds an established IT managed service offering.

SoConnect was founded by CEO Campbell Fraser in 2011 and supports the SME market in Scotland and across the UK through a nationwide network of over 200 engineers. Fraser continues as CEO of the enlarged business.

Netopa began its commercial life in 2011, set up by CEO Bob Bazley, a British Army veteran who brings over 25 years IT

experience including a stint as CTO of Noble Group and a spell as VP at Merrill Lynch. Following the SoConnect deal Bazley takes the role of COO.

Fraser commented: "Bringing Bob and the Netopa team on board strengthens our offering and provides us with a footprint in Edinburgh.

"For the SMEs we work alongside, simplifying and improving the efficiency of IT and comms infrastructure through the use of cloud technology is at the core of everything we do.

"Increasingly, we are also becoming a strategic virtual CTO for many SMEs that lack the resources to have a dedicated CTO in place."



Paul Taylor

AN UPCOMING 'big explosion' in the UC&C space will be a major threat for the comms industry, warned Voiceflex Sales & Marketing Director Paul Taylor, citing the growth in usage of MS Teams and Workplace by Facebook as prime drivers of change.

Taylor raised a red flag to alert resellers not yet considering UC&C as part of their future strategy to take immediate action. "The threats are coming from a different direction, leading with UC&C with voice as an option," he stated.

"If you're not looking at UC&C now it needs to be on your agenda for 2020. The market is fast moving, and the opportunity could pass you by, so don't get left behind.

"When ISDN stops being sold we will see a real motiva-

tion to move completely over to SIP and hosted.

"There's a massive untapped market for UC&C and the channel is well placed to take advantage, building on its already colossal voice experience."

In this, says Taylor, education is key. "There are many UC&C applications we use in our personal lives which are transferable into the business arena," he added.

"APIs and AI is far easier to programme and deploy, so pick a platform which offers the most, not only in hosted voice but with UC&C and APIs building from the ground up.

"The sooner the leap is made, the quicker resellers will reap the rewards."

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

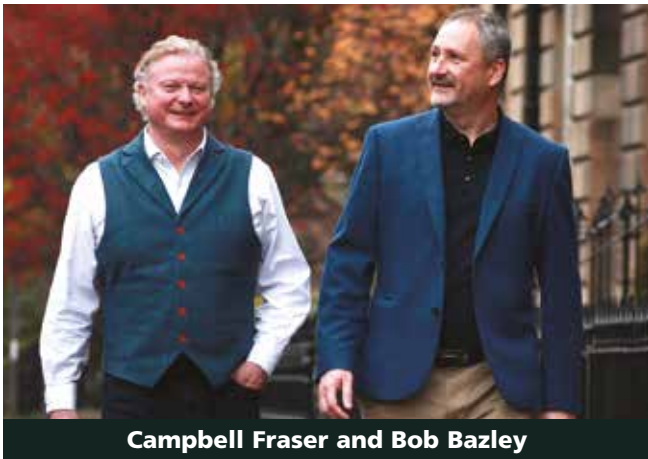
Pragma files Web Listings

PRAGMA resellers are clicking up greater monthly billing revenues following the launch of Web Listings, a value add service developed by the distributor alongside tech partner SO Connect.

The service, which is set up and managed by Pragma and So Connect, enables resellers' customers to update information ranging from store opening times and preferred payment methods to contact information on over 50 platforms through one user interface.

"With a 900% increase of local searches for businesses online over the past two years, it has become crucial to ensure the accuracy of information on web directories, sat nav systems and social media platforms to remain visible to prospective customers," commented Pragma's Sales and Marketing Director Will Morey.

Lily Comms MD Chris Morrissey said: "Web Listings has helped us drive the benefits of digital transformation to customers while increasing our monthly billing revenue. Web Listings has helped customers to increase their visibility on directories and search platforms and attract more business."



Campbell Fraser and Bob Bazley

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NEWS ROUNDUP

VERSION 12 of Swyx's comms platform comes with a new look Windows client, updates to the VisualGroups queue management tool, a fresh redundancy concept for automatic failover and a monitoring service. The range of management information in Analytics 12 includes key figures on service quality, performance of groups and agents, average and maximum waiting times and measuring results and trends of specific periods.

COMMS services including hosted telephony, handsets, connectivity and calls and a cash donation to the combined tune of £10k have been given to Leeds Mencap by The Technology Group. Leeds Mencap supports over 400 people with learning disabilities and their families each year, as well as over 3,000 people via its facilities at The Vinery Centre. Jonathan Marsden, CEO of The Technology Group, said: "This is an opportunity for us to give something back as part of our social responsibility." Below: Jonathan Marsden and Leeds Mencap CEO Cath Lee.



Fibre deal to boost Devon



Jurassic Fibre's CTO Sanjoy Bose, Michael Maltby, Brian Lodge and South West Comms Commercial Director Jon Whiley

BUSINESSES located in towns and rural communities across the south west could soon be staring ultrafast fibre broadband in the face following a link up between ISP Jurassic Fibre and South West Communications.

Jurassic Fibre is rolling out a gigabit capable network in the region as part of a five year infrastructure project initially targeting towns and villages in east Devon.

Jurassic Fibre's key technical facility is co-located in South West Communications' data centre in Sowton, Exeter.

"Jurassic Fibre's network will be a welcome and long awaited connectivity option for businesses in these areas," said

South West Communications MD Brian Lodge.

"They will now benefit from speeds of up to 10Gbps, which means they can reliably use cloud-based services. This represents a huge opportunity for this business community."

Michael Maltby, CEO of Jurassic Fibre, added: "Our joint offering to the region's business community is a step change in terms of broadband speeds and reliability, helping them to reach their full potential in an increasingly digital dependent regional, national and global economy."

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

Goldman Sachs aids CallMiner

PROVIDER of AI driven speech and customer interaction analytics CallMiner has closed a \$75m investment round from Goldman Sachs. The deal underscores the vital role that AI and analytics will play in the contact centre environment.

"Customer intelligence is critical for organisations to compete effectively in today's environment of rapid change and digital advancement," said Paul Bernard, President and CEO of CallMiner.

"Success requires understanding what your customers and contact centre agents say, mean and how they feel – and leveraging that insight to fundamentally change the way you operate and perform. It all starts with AI-driven customer insights and intelligence."

CallMiner analyses over two trillion words annually across all forms of customer interactions including calls, chats, emails, surveys and texts.

Holger Staude, Investor at Goldman Sachs Growth, added: "The convergence of interaction analytics and customer experience creates a significant market opportunity. CallMiner is well positioned to transform the way organisations operate."

Uni hails Avoira's chieftain

AN ERSTWHILE radio techie has picked up an Honorary Doctor of Science degree from the University of Salford for his long-term involvement with the institution, along with his help in shaping programmes around science and innovation and holding masterclasses.

Avoira's MD Andrew Roberts has accrued 40 years comms industry experience and has a 20 year relationship with the university.

He said: "It is a great honour for my life's work, first in radio comms, then telecoms and most recently in the field of Unified Communications, to be recognised with this award."

Roberts started his career as an apprentice at Avoira, then known as Pennine Telecom, and went on to work his way through the ranks.



Professor Nigel Linge and Andrew Roberts

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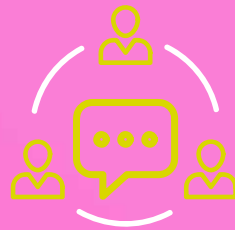
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Advances made in next gen Wi-Fi trial

A TRIAL of next generation Wi-Fi delivering mixed reality and 4K video streaming across a factory network has been hailed as an industry 'milestone'.

The Wireless Broadband Alliance (WBA), which is the body leading development of next generation Wi-Fi services, said the completion of its phase one trial of Wi-Fi 6 infrastructure and services at the Mettis Aerospace factory is an important part of its test and development programme.

The trial took place at the 27 acre Mettis Aerospace facility in the West Midlands in collaboration with various WBA member companies including

Broadcom, Cisco, iBwave, Intel, Concurrent Engineering and Keysight.

The tests included applications of 4K video streaming, large scale file transfers, messaging and voice/video communications in addition to the first stage of IoT sensor and mixed reality testing.

During the trial, speeds of 700 Mbps using 80 MHz channels were achieved and low latency applications, like video calling and video streaming, performed well with results below 6ms.

WBA CEO Tiago Rodrigues commented: "These results proved that Wi-Fi 6 infrastructure

can operate well in the presence of interference and noise in a complex and challenging factory environment, as well as deliver high quality services for monitoring and maximising machinery performance, minimising downtime and improving communications on the factory floor.

"The completion of this initial phase marks a significant milestone for the adoption of Wi-Fi 6.

"The Mettis facility is an especially challenging environment for wireless communications with furnaces, presses and heat, moving heavy machinery and the presence of dust and in-air particulates.

"Nevertheless, the field tests that were carried out in this highly charged atmosphere have proven that Wi-Fi 6 technology works well and can play a vital role within the industrial enterprise and IoT ecosystem.

"If Wi-Fi 6 can deliver highly reliable, high quality and high bandwidth communications in this type of factory environment, then it can deliver it almost anywhere."

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

SPEAKING at a dinner event hosted by Aura Technology at the Harbour Hotel in Southampton former England rugby coach Sir Clive Woodward inspired an audience of 150



business leaders with insights into his innovative use of technology in sport. Woodward is a Non Exec Director at Aura Technology and is best known for leading the England rugby team to victory in the 2003 World Cup, on which he partly attributes the success to being the first rugby coach to use tracking technology to monitor the performance of players. Aura Technology MD Tim Walker said: "This was an opportunity to welcome some new and familiar faces and to thank our staff, partners and customers for their roles in our success. Sir Clive delivered an entertaining and candid presentation."

Fontevo in fresh push on UK soil

GERMAN telephone system manufacturer Fontevo has set its sights on UK resellers addressing SME business customers seeking a plug-and-play phone upgrade in advance of the ISDN switch off.

Fontevo is the marketing brand for vendor Auerswald which boasts 16,000 reseller partners in Europe.

The company launched in the UK last year and says it is planning a new drive in the UK ICT channel with a range of SIP and cloud telephony solutions.

"The D-400 is aimed at SME resellers who can offer customers looking to migrate from ISDN to SIP a telephone for the small office or home worker," said COO Axel Klossner. "The D-400 has the same open sourced infrastructure across all systems, reducing the need for extensive training sessions."

Other features include a touch screen interface, integrated range of DECT phones and the headset facility for wired and Bluetooth connections.

The D-400 can also be supplemented with up to three COMfortel D-XT20 key extensions, adding a maximum of 60 additional function keys each with three levels.

NEWS ROUNDUP

IN A BUSINESS update Tollring CEO Tony Martino divulged big growth ambitions for 2020 following a company restructure including new leadership roles and a 20% boost to staff numbers. To drive the business to the next level Martino said Tollring has increased investment in people through internal and externally led training programmes, restructured departments and cross functional teams and invested in process management tools. He also said the launch of iCall Suite version 4 will enable Tollring to expand into new global territories, mainly due to investments in product localisation and partner management.

DATA and deep analytics have emerged as key trends in the evolution of digital signage, providing the insights that businesses need to measure the performance of their solutions. But more must be done, reckons a study by Sharp, which says the industry is not properly measuring digital signage nor deploying enough analytics. Birgit Jackson, Commercial Director, Visual Solutions, said: "It is key to work together as an industry to make sure we are creating solutions that remain useful and relevant to our customers."



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Networks poised for emerging age of autonomosity

It would take a cool nerve to deny that the future of connectivity does not lie in autonomous networking, says Masergy's EMEA Channel Director Emily Nerland.

On the evolution of networking, we stand at a pivotal moment, and according to Nerland there is no mystery about how connectivity will shape up over the coming five years. "Autonomous networking is the future of connectivity," she stated. "Businesses are pushed to make savings and find efficiencies, and networking is the area with the most room for development."

While AI is taking network innovation in a new direction, automating a specific task such as fault detection, segmentation or provisioning is in itself not radically transformative, but that is about to change. "As single-task automation develops alongside neural nets and general AI, it will become easier to combine multiple, separate Machine Learning algorithms to work as one," added Nerland.

We all know that computers have a superhuman ability to process data, but a shot of AI changes the game and promises a new dawn, so long as certain conditions are met. "If AI technologies become standardised or even open source, and algorithms are given the right training and development, AI-driven networks will ensure a consistent



Emily Nerland

optimised performance that is constantly running at its potential due to the hundreds of micro-alterations it could make across a global network each second in the name of efficiency."

Bringing forward UC

As businesses design and implement their digital transformation strategies through the early 2020s, many UK organisations will be reluctant to take out new contracts on legacy infrastructure like the PSTN network. "This brings UC to the forefront of the connectivity frontier," added Nerland. "When considering which telephony strategy to implement businesses must also consider their entire connectivity estate and ensure their connectivity allows for peak utilisation of all services and systems – cloud storage, SaaS, backup, collaboration etc – as well as extra growing room to ensure the entire organisation's requirements are provisioned for."

By 2025, it is expected that the new trinity of IoT, 5G and edge computing will have a significant impact on network traffic and processing, and turning the buzz around 5G into widespread real world solutions will be of primary importance. "The establishment of this triumvirate will also allow businesses to adopt much more reactive IT agility strategies," commented Nerland.

"When operations have the data and insights that IoT, edge and 5G can provide at such speed, actionable strategies will be faster to discover and implement. Furthermore, this will accelerate the convergence between development and operations to ensure decision makers are better informed about the wider operation of the business and can strategise accordingly."

However, all of these developments and evolutions will be delayed if the current skills gap, not only in cyber security but programming and technology in general, is not addressed. "This is not just a US or UK problem," stated Nerland. "That said, there are pockets of innovation and enterprise needs to find a way to invest in education and build the skills into the workforce of the next generation." ■

Sabio secures strong lead in CX revolution

Sabio has set its sights on becoming a dominant player in the CX market, building on three years of expansion, achieving a 25 to 30 per cent organic growth rate year-on-year, spreading geographically and also through the addition of adjacent technologies with a string of six acquisitions since 2016. "We're leading customers through an unprecedented period of customer experience evolution," stated Michael Andrews, Sabio Group's Vice-President of Commercial Strategy. "Our platform of contact centre, digital and insight offerings are focused on enabling clients to embrace and maximise the value from the latest technologies, including AI-powered self-service solutions that take automation to the next level; channel agnostic customer engagement tools that take CX beyond the omnichannel model; and endlessly scalable and elastic cloud CX platforms."

Greater emphasis on smarter customer journeys is expected this year, ones that will help direct people towards the channels and resources that are most appropriate for what they're trying to achieve, believes Andrews. "Being able to deliver this level of engagement at scale is always going to be challenging," he added. "But we see three specific opportunities: Conversational User Interfaces are becoming the dominant way for customers to begin



Michael Andrews

their engagement with organisations. However, truly successful virtual assistant solutions need to focus as much on the 'Art of CX' as the different technologies involved. The second opportunity is effective end-to-end customer journey analytics. This can be complex but the benefits are significant.

"Thirdly, as the industry moves beyond Peak Voice we're finding that for most organisations the actual complexity of calls coming into their organisations is increasing. As agents are left with interactions that can't be resolved through self-service alone, we'll see more emphasis on the application of augmented voice services that effectively add digital channels in parallel with the voice connection."

It should always be remembered that each client has a unique start point. "Often it is necessary to implement foundational steps such as migrating to a cloud platform to obtain agility and scalability," said Andrews. "For others the focus is on conversational automation to drive efficiency, accessibility and great CSAT from the outset of the project." ■



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Fanvil breezes into UK

The fruition of Fanvil UK's channel building strategy would see it become the number one provider of VoIP endpoints, according to UK Managing Director Craig Graham who has already made expansive inroads across swathes of home territory.

There is no doubt that Fanvil UK is stealing a march in the market for VoIP phones, its speed of growth testament to the man at the centre of an ambitious UK channel building campaign. According to Graham, product quality is indivisible from channel success, and with the right support is enough to make big strides in short time across target territory. In just two years he has rallied 1,000 resellers to the Fanvil flag and signed agreements with four distributors – Yellowgrid, Corptel, Nuvola and Provu – with other significant channel partnership agreements in the making. "Many of the well known ITSPs and carriers are at various stages of interop testing which promises to make 2020 a big year for Fanvil," stated Graham.

The Chinese VoIP desktop phone developer and manufacturer is now one of the primary VoIP phone brands in the world. It produces devices for small and medium sized businesses, as well as large mission critical enterprise environments, and is set to become a global IP voice and video terminal manufacturer. The company also produces door access and intercom devices.

Although Fanvil has been an established brand in China for almost two decades it was relatively unknown in the UK until 2017. "Fanvil UK was founded on a simple



Craig Graham

We are looking to further disrupt the market and continue to gain share

strategy," explained Graham. "VoIP resellers and installers look for products that are technically stable and robust and hold customer appeal, with good pre and post sales support, offering strong margins. So we set about a strategy of education. We put a Fanvil phone in the hands of resellers and supported them through initial set up and testing. We expect to continue doubling the number of UK resellers year-on-year."

The continuing industry transition from a traditional capex model to an opex one has increased pressure to source hardware that offers a short-term RoI when building a monthly subscription based model, observed Graham, who claims that Fanvil's status as a privately owned company, free from investor

demands for dividends, means it is well placed to reach price points that catch the eye of resellers.

Disruptive times

"We are looking to further disrupt the market and continue to gain share," stated Graham. "The UK VoIP market is maturing, alive and well, attracting many PBX vendors, and Fanvil works closely with all the well known and emerging PBX vendors to ensure compatibility, ease of deployment and management."

Previous demand for VoIP solutions derived from companies migrating from ISDN to SIP, noted Graham, who is now witnessing a rise in churn from early adopters of VoIP seeking solutions that offer greater

UC features for less cost. "This often results in the provision of new phones, similar to what we have seen in the mobile phone market over recent years," added Graham. "UC will become increasingly important, and there will be future developments with further integration between the GSM and SIP worlds, CCTV and security with greater dependency on Microsoft products. Meanwhile, FTTP, G.Fast and 5G will prompt a host of reinventions of existing solutions."

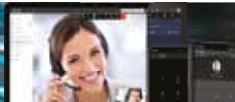
You would be doing yourself a big favour by noting Graham's words, which are delivered with the weight of many years industry experience and sector insight. He began his IT career 21 years ago working for the R&D division of Echostar, a large American satellite broadcasting company based in the UK, supporting electronic and software engineers who were developing digital set top boxes for the digital TV market. He gained skills managing Windows and Linux environments and acquired MCSE and CCNA certifications.

"I then spent a number of years in outsourced IT providing consultancy services primarily to SMEs," added Graham. "This led me to starting my own company specialising in VoIP. During this time we developed a relationship with Fanvil and created Fanvil UK which is

Just a minute with Craig Graham...

- Role model:** Paul Scholes, he quietly gets on with doing a great job
- What talent do you wish you had?** To have a photographic memory
- Best advice you have taken:** Always end a negotiation with 'Yes, if...'
- How do you relax?** Mountain biking and building stuff in the garden
- The biggest risk you have taken?** Starting my own business in 2007, and asking my wife to marry me
- Who do you admire most in the channel?** 3CX CEO Nick Galea, an inspiring entrepreneur who has created great companies and surrounded himself with talented people who stay loyal
- Your biggest achievement?** Leaving a secure job, starting my own business and keeping my family fed and housed
- Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I can ride a unicycle
- Top tip for resellers:** Drive sales through education

sharply focused on supplying and supporting Fanvil products to the channel. That's why we added new distributors that allow us to better cater for growing demand, and Fanvil continues to make significant UK market gains with a 100 per cent rise in year-on-year sales volumes." ■





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Infrastructure deals cont

Philip Carse, Analyst at Megabuyte.com, reports on the trading performance of leading companies in the comms space during the last quarter.

While telecoms infrastructure remains the focus of corporate activity, the most notable event in the last quarter was the deal that didn't happen, with the sale of TalkTalk's FibreNation FTTP business stymied by the Labour Party's unexpected proposal to offer free broadband. At the time of writing, even after the General Election, TalkTalk has yet to announce a sale.

Infrastructure deals actually announced included Cellnex's proposed £2bn acquisition of Arqiva's UK mobile towers and KKR's investment in Hyperoptic. Other deals of note include Enreach's UK entry through Network Telecom, Timico's acquisition of ATOS IT, a £12m fund raise by CloudCall, an investment in Vaioni by private equity investor Panoramic Growth Equity, and a £10m fund raise from Albion Investments for Grain Connect, a London-based provider of fibre broadband to new builds.

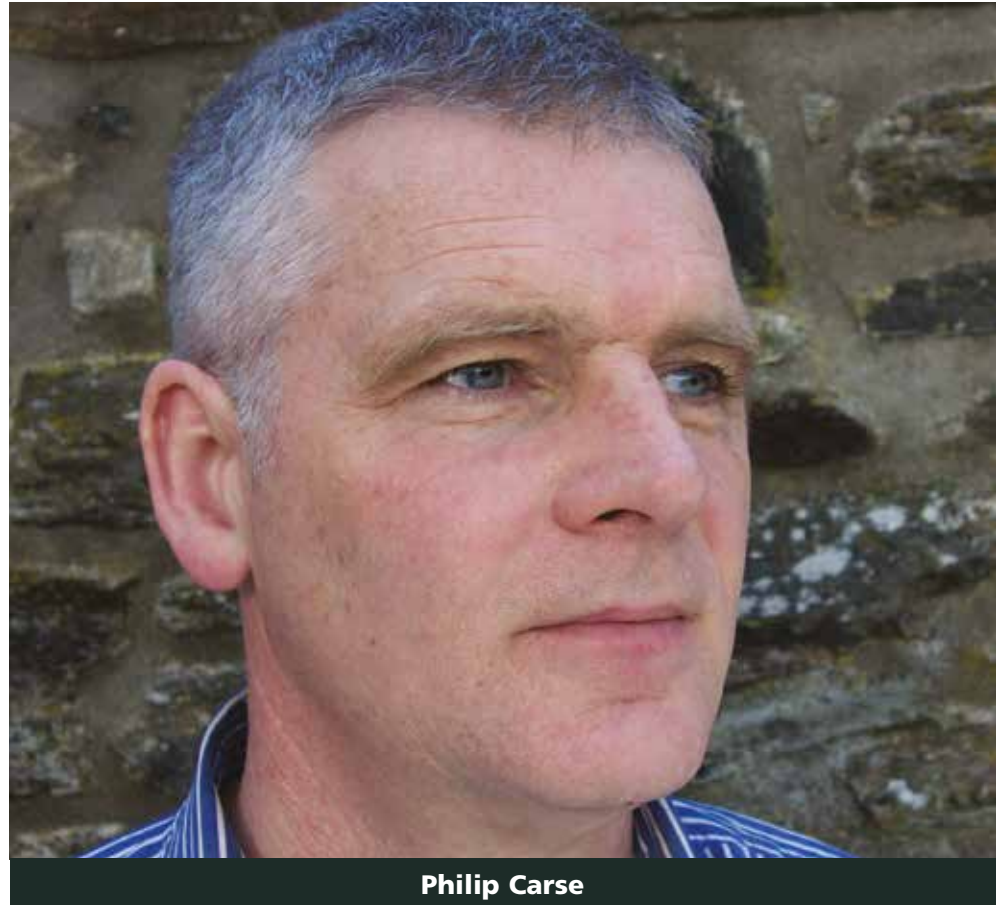
The threat to the UK telecoms sector from the Labour Party free broadband proposal and BT Openreach nationalisation has obviously now receded. But for the record, we estimated that giving away a product that generates an estimated circa £10bn of revenues would wipe out two thirds

of UK telecoms industry profitability, remove the cashflows that fund around £8bn of annual capex, and imperil an industry that employs 200,000 people. It would almost certainly delay the roll out of FTTP compared with the current, accelerating, combination of private sector and public subsidy-funded builds.

Network focused players generated the more interesting results this quarter, including Commsworld, Glide, Wifinity, FluidOne, euNetworks, WIG and SAS Group. Meanwhile, several of the larger private comms and IT sellers reported, with strong numbers/outlook from Southern, Focus, Onecom, issues at Timico and GCI, while Daisy revealed details of its new, more independent constituent operations.

AIM-listed Adept Technology and Redcentric both highlighted macro headwinds. We also spoke to three companies that are benefitting from transformational M&A: Vodat, Peach and Babble Cloud. The more interesting other results included from Truphone, Commify, Natterbox, CSL and WCCTV.

Megabuyte has developed a company ranking methodology called the Scorecard based on growth, margins and cash flow. The



Philip Carse

Network focused players generated the more interesting results this quarter

Telecoms Services peer group has a Scorecard rating of 47, versus 50 for the Megabuyte universe. Its medians are: 5.7% for one year organic growth (2nd quartile), 13.8% for three year revenue growth (highlighting considerable M&A), 11.6% for EBITDA margins, 0.3pp for annual EBITDA margin expansion (all 3rd quartile), and 91% for OCF and 55% for FCF conversion of EBITDA (both 2nd quartile).

Scorecard

Note that the Scorecard is based on companies with £10m+ revenue and <£100m EBITDA, so excludes the major network players. Interesting Scorecard moves this quarter included strong inaugural rankings

for Commsworld, 4net and WCCTV, reasonably strong improvements for euNetworks, Southern, Onecom and Focus and falls from WIG and CSL. The peer group top ten includes a strong showing by M2M and Messaging companies (Wireless Logic and CSL) and Networks and Connectivity (M247, Commsworld, Exponential-e and euNetworks), with three comms and IT resellers (Bistech, 4net and Charterhouse) and one telecoms network support service provider (Indigo).

Telecoms services shares rose 7.9% over the quarter, under-performing the 14-16% for Megabuyte ICT and Software but ahead of

the +1.8% FTSE All-Share. The main gainers were BT (+17%) and Gamma (+12%), while Adept fell 5% on a slight forecast downgrade. There is a similar pattern for 12 months: Telecoms Services +17% lags ICT and Software's +30-34% but exceeds the FTSE All-Share's +5.6%. Gamma leads with +66%, while under-offer Inmarsat is up 32% and CloudCall 27%, with TalkTalk, Maintel and BT down 16-26%. The average valuation is 9.1x EBITDA. ■

IS Research publishes www.megabuyte.com, a company analysis and intelligence service covering over 1,300 public and private UK ICT, software, media and business services companies.
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Continue at pace

COMPANY NEWS ROUND UP

Excalibur gets mobile growing again

Swindon-based business comms and IT provider Excalibur has reported EBITDA up 10% to £1.7m on revenues up 13% to £9.2m for the year to June 2019. Estimated organic growth of 10% represents a pick up on the prior year's 3.3%, due both to stabilisation of mobile ARPU's and contributions from fixed line and IT services. CEO Peter Boucher promised more of the same for the current year, with very much an organic focus. Meanwhile, Excalibur founder James Phipps, who handed over the reins to Boucher in the May 2018 MBO, will step down as Chairman next April.

Avaya looks to revenue stability in fiscal 2020

Avaya reported weak fourth quarter to September 2019 results, with EBITDA up 3.4% at \$184m on revenues down 5.7% at \$726m (25% margin), both undershooting consensus by 2-3% and triggering a 5% after hours share price decline. Most of the revenue decline was in EMEA, down 9% to \$183m (partly forex related) versus a 6% decline for the US (to \$392m), though the under-performance was attributed to a delayed US social security contract. The firm believes that 2020 will see revenues start to stabilise after years of decline, aided by the RingCentral partnership and other new products, including CCaaS, with guidance of \$2.82-2.90bn revenue (stable to -2%) at a 23-24% EBITDA margin (versus 17% for 2019). First quarter guidance is \$700-720m revenues (3-6% decline) at a 24% margin.

Gamma adds to dev capabilities with Telsis

AIM-listed business comms provider Gamma acquired Fareham, Hampshire-based Telsis, which provides a range of communication services and UCaaS software development capabilities. The fact that this hasn't been announced through a London Stock Exchange announcement suggests that it is not material for Gamma. Indeed, Telsis' average headcount of 30 in calendar year 2018 compares with Gamma's 976 for the same period, and probably over 1,000 now given market forecasts of 15% revenue growth in 2019. We suspect that the deal is primarily about obtaining both product and software development capabilities rather than customers or revenues, with Gamma continuing to build out and strengthen its Unified Communications platform to serve its indirect channel partners.

NFON hit by macro weakness and staff shortages

German-listed but pan-European UCaaS player NFON detailed its weak third quarter to September 2019 results that triggered a reduced full year outlook on postponed orders, with the company cutting prior 2019 revenue and seat growth targets of 40-45% and 'at least 45%' to 30-33% and 39-41%. Third quarter EBITDA losses of 1.5m euros compared with breakeven last year on revenues up 42% at 15.1m euros (boosted by the DTS acquisition), on seats up 41% at 431k and monthly ARPU down 2.5% at 9.71 euros. The company seems

to have stopped reporting by geography, but UK revenues were 12% of the total at the half year stage. The nine month numbers show EBITDA losses of 4.2m euros versus breakeven on revenues up 33% at 41.5m euros, operating cash outflows of 6.3m euros and capex of 3.2m euros. The company has also delayed its product roadmap due to a shortage of R&D staff.

NVM's Gale blows into Sabio as CEO

Horizon Capital-backed contact centre specialist Sabio announced the appointment of Jonathan Gale as CEO, replacing Andy Roberts who becomes Vice Chairman (under Chairman Lee Shorten) with a remit to lead M&A. Gale was previously CEO of cloud-based contact centre provider NewVoiceMedia from 2011-18, leading its sale to US-listed UCaaS player Vonage for \$350m/5x 2018 revenues. See page 3

Telecom Plus' high energy interims

AIM-listed multi-utility reseller Telecom Plus, which trades as Utility Warehouse, reported in-line interims to September 2019 with adjusted pre tax profits up 5.9% to £27.5m on revenues up 14% at £353m, with the latter boosted by higher energy consumption and prices and 8% growth in services taken to 2.6m. The company reiterated full year guidance of £60-65m adjusted pre tax profits (up 12% at the mid-point) while pointing to an up-tick in new partners and salespeople recently and the introduction of positive regulatory changes. ■



James Warner

Continued from page 1

Labour's announcement and the shock wave it sent through the industry highlights the importance of a supportive regulatory environment for alternative network operators, noted Allchurch. "While full fibre is the most appropriate solution in most places there are parts of the country where other solutions can be more practical, at least in the short term," he stated. "So Ofcom and others must ensure a joined up strategy."

Warner also noted that some aspects of the full fibre infrastructure sector will need to be reassessed if progress has any chance of accelerating. "Wayleaves, wayleaves, wayleaves," he reiterated. "We have the knowledge and the capability, the funding and interest from private and public sources, but the challenge is the time it takes to help a freeholder improve the infrastructure of their building. The only winners are the lawyers. Another challenge will be in the EECC (European Electronic Communication Code) and

new gaining provider lead switching, and how we as an industry will move from a single infrastructure supply to multiple, and manage the complexity of switching that must take place seamlessly for the end user."

Simplistic approach

County Broadband CEO Lloyd Felton says Labour's manifesto pledge was a 'simplistic approach' to a complex roll out. "What is needed is the backing of Government to stop allowing FTTC solutions to be marketed as fibre broadband," he said. "What has also been highlighted is a significant need for providers to educate the public and wider stakeholders on what is, and what isn't, FTTP broadband, and the limitations that FTTC and copper cable has on broadband speeds when it reaches the property. We need to ensure momentum is not lost and appeal to the public's greater interest by raising awareness of how FTTP will be the future-ready choice for homes and businesses in the near future."



Lloyd Felton

Allchurch confirmed that there is growing momentum in the full fibre sector with an ever increasing number of alternative network operators rolling out network architectures and customer propositions appropriate for a particular region and type of town, or type of building. "There are also a large number of funds with billions of pounds which are keen to invest," he added. ■

4net chief outlines £100m

The unwavering conviction of 4net Technologies Managing Director Richard Pennington is that he can achieve his ambitious business goals only by continuing to re-engineer the company in line with market and customer requirements. This is his big £100 million strategy.

There is no denying that the future success of 4net's bid to become a £100 million business within five years is inseparable from Pennington's pragmatism in meeting both the great strategic challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. "There is rapid change all around us," he stated. "Not just in the development of communications and technology but also in the way buyers are procuring our solutions and services. Customer expectations go far beyond the technical solution in itself. Therefore we need to make sure we're able to deliver more."

A new focus on business outcomes is the one constant in this fast changing market, hence there is greater measurable value in holistic approaches to familiar scenarios. "There is a clear move by customers to measure our projects on business outcomes rather than simple, or complex, technology deliverables," explained Pennington.

"Sophisticated customers now expect a fully managed project delivery measured against their own business goals and user experience, rather than a clean technical implementation. Previously, we would build, install and train on the software, and our customers would try to make it work. Now, our projects need to be aligned to what the customer wants to achieve from the software.



Richard Pennington

Our business model is changing from designing, selling, building and supporting technology infrastructure to consulting, integrating, customising and managing public and private cloud services

"Once we have ensured it is working we don't say farewell. The customer wants to see the benefits in a measurable way. That means we need to prove that the 'dream' of the solution being transformational is real. This has an impact on how we plan for and execute the delivery of our major projects. It means we've had to broaden the

skill set of our workforce, employing business analysts as well as the technical team for example."

Shift to cloud

Another key to unlocking future growth prospects lies not in traditional comms but in a big shift towards public cloud services. "Take Microsoft Teams, which customers now procure

directly and then work with partners to consult on, embed, customise and manage the service," said Pennington. "There was a time when we would have sold the service, built, supported and managed it. That 'sell, build, maintain' infrastructure piece is starting to disappear for us. As a result our business model is changing from

designing, selling, building and supporting technology infrastructure to consulting, integrating, customising and managing public and private cloud services."

For the three times 2019 Comms National Award winner (Enterprise Reseller of the Year, Best Enterprise Cloud Solution and Best Reseller Innovation), growth

m revenue plan

is also about capitalising on the inability of large legacy providers to change and adapt quickly to meet customer needs. "We are seeing a shift in customer buying patterns and we are winning eight figure deals which, ten years ago, didn't happen to businesses of our size," commented Pennington. "Bigger organisations are getting left behind because they can't adapt fast enough, whereas we can and do. We also listen to and stay close to our customers and ensure we have the appropriate open channels for customer feedback and input."

Future success also lies deep within the 4net business, in its ethos and morale as well as staffing. "Maintaining culture during an expansion phase is often a major obstacle for businesses like ours and I'm determined as Managing Director, and one of the founding partners of 4net, that we don't lose our culture, which is one of Customer First," stated Pennington. "A big differentiator for 4net is that we do work as a team – cross functionally. Part of our culture is that we empower staff to try new things, to be agile, flexible and innovative, and to fix issues quickly as they arise. We also ensure transparency across our objectives and empower people to help us reach them."

In the short to medium term, and as new developments come along in technology and customer requirements, as well as nurturing culture there are other challenges faced by 4net. "The biggest challenges we see ahead are staying at the forefront of the new wave

of technology coming along and meeting growing customer expectations," explained Pennington. "Secondly, ensuring that we fulfil all of our recruitment requirements, that means not only managing to recruit the growing numbers we need, but also the correct skill sets across the business."

As we have seen the genesis of 4net's upcoming expansion period in large part lies in a refashioned plan for the age of the cloud and its project delivery credentials. "Our biggest opportunities sit within a cloud first strategy," added Pennington. "Customers are turning away from legacy

We are winning eight figure deals which, ten years ago, didn't happen to businesses our size

environments to the cloud. And we are recognised – not least through our recent industry awards from Avaya, including Enterprise Cloud Partner of the Year 2019 – as a leading cloud player, so we have experience and credibility to capitalise on.

"More complex and sophisticated customer requirements enable us to add to our solutions and services, so we not only meet the customer's business outcome specifications but enhance the overall service we offer. The increasing reliance on

application development and customisation services is also a major trend. This includes everything from application integration to chatbots and Artificial Intelligence which growing numbers of our customers are demanding."

Adaptability

The way to realise targets like Pennington's £100 million objective can only be to remain alert to the demands of the market and develop the agility to adapt, because an ICT provider's relevance to the changing customer and technology landscape is neither inevitable nor guaranteed. Prepared on all fronts, Pennington's three year £60 million revenue target is a prelude to something much bigger. "We are preparing to double our revenues," said Pennington. "Becoming a £100 million business will require transformation. We will continue to grow and focus on our core markets. For example, in the public sector and all the different verticals – central Government, housing, blue light, health etc.

"But we will also need to grow more in other sectors such as large enterprise and expand our international business, with the possibility of small bolt on acquisitions that add capability to our cloud and managed services. Our portfolio of services is also broadening, particularly with enhancements to the customer experience and making sure we provide secure services. 4net's ambition is to be around longer than any of our competitors. We will do that by providing the best solutions and service within our power, and keeping up with the times."

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Piper plays his strategic

On Aidan Piper's career menu... food, wine and comms for afters: Here's how the Welcomm Communications Chief Executive kept the best course 'till last.

From catering on oil rigs to scoring the winning goal in a European cup final for the over 40s, the CEO of O2's two-time Direct Partner of the Year continues to play a blinder on the business growth playing field, which he ran onto straight from school when he kicked off a career in catering and trained as a chef. But following 10 years in hospitality and catering which included working in hotels, top restaurants and providing catering services on oil rigs, a change was clearly needed and he turned his interest in wine tasting and drinking into day to day work, joining Diageo, the largest drinks company in the world. "They trained me to sell, and with my catering background I focused on high end quality hotels and restaurants," said Piper.

Then the economic slump shifted the wine industry's plates, which was the prelude to Piper's entrance into the comms sector. The move proved a golden opportunity and gave him every incentive to succeed fuelled by ambition, using his sales prowess to force through the best chance of success. "After the wine business

liquidated in the early nineties during the recession a friend introduced me to a comms company with exciting products and great people who were struggling to sell," said Piper. "I used my sales skills to develop a team and we grew a large business.

"I also partnered with Welcomm Communications,



Aidan Piper

I had a target to take Welcomm past £10 million turnover. After joining as the Managing Director I knew we could do it

then a mobile specialist with skills we lacked in our comms business. By the late nineties I spent more time with Welcomm and joined the company, becoming Managing Director in 2009. From that moment Welcomm aimed to always be at the forefront of technology, and we still are as evidenced by our recent

acquisition of Leversedge Telecom Services."

Growth area

Fellow Leicestershire communications provider Leversedge's traditional business is in commercial two-way radios, fleet vehicle solutions, IoT and 'cash and valuables in transit' products and services. With the deal

now sown up Piper plans to deliver push-to-talk over cellular, having already seen a number of applications where he'll be looking to install this technology over the next two months. "We see this as a massive growth area," commented Piper. "If you've got a critical need, push-to-talk is the only way. Critical voice will stay with

radio. Push-to-talk over cellular technology currently works when it's run over 3G, but we look forward to the wider and significant roll out of 5G to deliver latency sub-500 milliseconds."

In retrospect, a turning point for Welcomm was the move from analogue to digital in mobile. "My skill sets

growth hand

were very much in data and PBX," added Piper. "Adding these services to Welcomm's portfolio in the early 2000s created much more customer loyalty as clients were able to receive a broader range of services from the same supplier. This makes it easier to identify and resolve technical issues. It was also around this time that we made a strategic decision to move from retail outlets to solely business to business.

"Milestones for Welcomm also came in the form of acquisitions we made with other O2 partners between 2009 and 2013. We grew through acquisitions and

Experience tells me that customers will embrace new technologies as long as they trust you

have 73 people working with us now. When I first joined Welcomm the turnover was just over £1 million."

Every tactical consideration propelled Piper towards his aim to create a £10 million business and a springboard for more rapid growth, which he has achieved through the acquisition of Leversedge. Now Piper hopes to grow revenues by 20 per cent this year and increase EBITDA by 40 per cent, driven by the synergies between the two companies and additional sales. To that end, over the past two to three years Welcomm has introduced new products and services, and in particular developed

its managed services offer to provide additional value to customers through proactive insights into their accounts. From an IT perspective Welcomm is working closely with a number of vendors around security.

Two pronged approach

"Our business continues to grow through acquisitions, but our strategy is now twofold: To sell more products into our existing 3,500-plus customer base, and through the development of Welcomm's sales academy," commented Piper. "We are also driving new business using traditional methods including door knocking, telesales, networking, a new website coming soon, marketing and social media."

Deploying a range of sales and marketing tactics to attract customers does not on its own deliver sales. The golden opportunity is to take command of a client's communications destiny and understand in detail the workings of their business through consultation. "I take each customer on a journey that sometimes they don't want to go on," commented Piper. "Change can be difficult for any business, but we have better comms and tech solutions to offer them.

"Experience tells me that customers will embrace new technologies as long as they trust you. We must first seek to understand, then take our customers on a journey of education about new solutions. We have always been influenced and driven by the demands of our customers. To this day, we remain customer focused, keeping them at the heart of everything we do." ■

Just a minute with Aidan Piper...

Name three ideal dinner guests: Billy Conolly, he's highly intelligent and very funny; Muhammed Ali, an incredibly talented bloke and had a lot to say from himself – he also made me laugh; Serena Williams, she has revolutionised the relationship between sport and business, had a baby and came back to compete at the highest level

Best advice you have ever been given: My father always told me that hard work never kills you, and you don't need as much sleep as you think

In hindsight: I wouldn't have acquired shares in a wine wholesale company. While they had great products and I had a lot of fun, it was an expensive mistake

Name one example of something you've overcome: Divorce

What's the greatest risk you have taken? Moving from a safe large multinational company in wine to comms which I knew little about. I took the risk because I knew they had a good product, the market was changing and I knew I could sell

How do you relax when not working? I enjoy walking and all sports, spending time with my partner and two boys

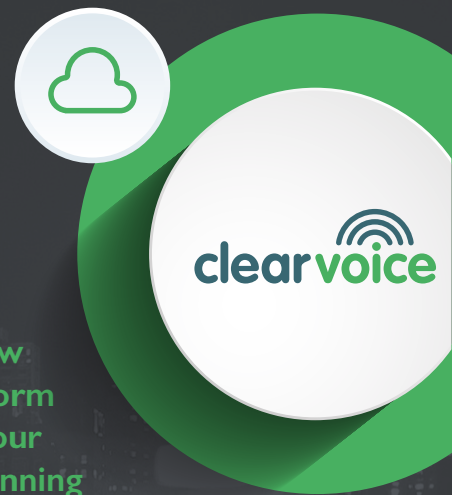
What possession could you not live without? Wine

Biggest achievement? I still can't believe how I produced two amazingly good looking sons

Tell us something about yourself that we don't know: I played for an over 40s football team and scored the winning goal in the European Cup final!

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Inspiring diversity with p

Industry research and discussion alone will not solve the channel's diversity and inclusion (D&I) deficit, it needs a cultural stimulus from shining examples of D&I champions such as 9 Group. This month, Louise Abbey, Head of Customer Marketing, discusses how the company has been leading the charge towards a more diverse workplace.

Every business leader should know by now that future growth is far more assured by having greater levels of diversity and inclusion within their workforce. And according to Abbey, business organisations in the channel with a big emphasis on D&I will be stronger in many respects, bolstered by (among the many boons) a boost to the bottom line and improved staff, customer and partner engagement. "There is overwhelming evidence that diversity leads to greater profits," she stated. "In the ICT sector, those who are embracing diversity at all levels are winning by welcoming new voices and fresh ideas to the table. Their inclusive approach leads to innovation, which is fundamental for future success in the ICT space."



Louise Abbey

That business leaders and managers could also steer a course that leads to broader benefits for the local community is a given, says Abbey, who is staunch in her conviction that active D&I proponents have the power in their hands to help bring to fruition a more prosperous and equal world. "Leaders in our channel can positively contribute to a more inclusive society by recruiting and empowering marginalised groups," she added. "The ethical argument is strong enough on its own, but when coupled with the proven positive financial impact that

There is no doubt that the industry's sorry state of diversity is rooted in history. But it is equally clear that the lack of a proper diversity strategy will only reinforce past tendencies

diversity can deliver, it's a no brainer. Businesses with staff from a wide range of backgrounds are proven to outperform firms with a less diverse workforce."

9 Group's pledge to boost diversity and inclusion became public knowledge when it hosted a round table discussion on the matter in association with Comms Dealer in May 2018. The

debate was inspired by 9 Group CEO James Palmer, a D&I champion, who showed that it is crucial for such initiatives to infiltrate the whole organisation.

Leadership matters

"James was insistent that we raised awareness of the importance of diversity in businesses and made positive moves to stamp out gender stereotyping

in the industry," explained Abbey. "He inspires genuine change within our channel, so we take a determined approach to creating a sustainable corporate culture that respects diversity in all forms. This approach can be felt throughout every interaction across our entire organisation. There are over 220 people in our team and we have maintained a close-knit environment

while undergoing business expansion. Likewise, our inclusive culture has always helped us to retain staff, so much so that the average length of service in our support team is over five years. We simply encourage everyone to be themselves."

9 Group's approach to D&I is composed of many aspects and has evolved into a scrutinised professional

Positive actions

practice, with elements of corporate self-examination, a diversity audit and inclusive culture that delivers remarkable results. "Valuing diversity in the workplace isn't just the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do," noted Abbey. "Our recruitment process, how we communicate with staff and work together as a senior management team is defined by our diverse and inclusive culture, which we see filtering out through all teams and in the way we engage with our partners every day."

Collaboration

Initiatives that promote D&I pass seamlessly from one part of the business to the other in a system of cross-company responsibility aided by technology that creates a community spirit and staff loyalty. "We're currently developing a new web-based collaboration tool that will enable us to 'broadcast' a clear and consistent voice across all offices," said Abbey. "Staff will have access to news, policies and resources which link with our diversity strategy and help to support our culture."

"Mentoring is also important. Senior managers with an interest in diversity are approached to mentor staff who are keen to learn more. The social element is also key. Our social committee works hard to organise inclusive events throughout the year, which are aimed to suit a diverse mix of personalities. We also carry out a lot of charity initiatives, which is an important part of our culture."

Unlike 9 Group, the comms sector's record on diversity has not won feathers for its cap, such is the ingrained

of legacy maleness. But change is underway, observed Abbey, which suggests that the age of male domination is ending, and a big part of this evolution boils down to recruitment strategies and approaches. The answer, she says, is to take a leaf from the activities of 9 Group. To recap, the company has put in train a formal process for the assessment of diversity issues and it is the job of leaders to test certain scenarios and recruiting actions against key criteria.

"Last year we broadened our recruitment channels by employing an in-house recruitment expert who supports us in attracting the

There is overwhelming evidence that diversity leads to greater profits

perfect candidates for our roles," commented Abbey. "Part of their process is to hold a consultation with the hiring manager ahead of promoting the job to understand more about the personality and make up of the team. So our job adverts are carefully written to encourage applications from candidates from all backgrounds."

"If we have a large pool of applicants for a role we view the CV blind to remove all references to personal details. This is because our management team is aware of the potential impact that unconscious bias can have on the process. By discussing the subject we are conscious of

the issue and regularly share our thoughts and concerns as a team. This allows us to appeal to an untapped and diverse pool of candidates. By recruiting across a range of ages, backgrounds, nationalities and levels of seniority we have benefited from a variety of expertise, experience and perspectives. This has enabled us to identify new opportunities and explore fresh ideas that otherwise would not have been discovered."

There is no doubt that the comms industry's sorry state of diversity is rooted in history. But it is equally clear that the lack of a proper diversity strategy will only reinforce past tendencies. 9 Group's message is not just that it is within the scope of all organisations to push D&I up the agenda, it is that the sector can take a collective initiative that ensures the age of male domination is at long last passing.

To that end 9 Group disseminates its diversity message throughout its partner base, and in leading by example it helps partners to overcome staffing hurdles. "I hold regular consultations with our partners around the support and advice we can offer," explained Abbey. "The topic of recruitment comes up repeatedly as many partners struggle to recruit and they seek help with their advertising for candidates. During these conversations we share insights into our approach to diversity, the success factors and our positive experiences, and show how making small changes can help attract a broader and richer group of candidates. It's rewarding to be introducing change like this on a wider scale." ■

swcomms partners with Fidelity Energy

SOUTH West Communications Group (swcomms) has signed a partnership agreement with Fidelity Energy to offer a brand-new energy service to customers, resulting in the launch of its new business, swcomms-energy Ltd.

swcomms has offices in Exeter and Portchester and has been providing telephone systems to businesses since 1983. The company now provides the latest in voice, connectivity, cloud, security and data centre solutions and has been winning a range of business and industry awards along the way.

The new partnership will enable swcomms-energy to offer new and existing customers a wide range of utility and procurement services that Fidelity Energy can provide, including the most recent addition to its portfolio; the installation of electric vehicle (EV) charging points that can be personally customised to each customer's branding or preference.

Jon Whiley, Commercial Director at swcomms-energy said: "The board were not only impressed with the savings Fidelity Energy were able to secure for our offices but with their professionalism and efficiency. It was apparent that Fidelity Energy were aligned with our company's values and we therefore decided to become one of their partners."

"My team has been able to assist existing customers of swcomms to better understand their own energy bills, where sometimes busy workers can allow the contract to roll, resulting in much higher costs. My team can now take on that role of reminding our customers they are close to renewal and searching the market to find the best deal for their company."

Sustainable methods of energy consumption is a huge topical issue and swcomms-energy can now capitalise on this by offering 100% renewable energy contracts to customers concerned with the impact they are having on the environment. In some cases, the cost to switch to a green contract is cheaper, with many green suppliers being able to offer rates that are competitive with the non-renewable suppliers.

"In recent years I have seen a

massive change in attitudes surrounding our understanding of the importance of looking after our world. Our reliance, as humans, on fossil fuels is becoming a more prominent issue and many are now looking at other sustainable options.

"swcomms-energy is proud to have the ability to offer green energy options. Each green energy deal we sign takes one step further to reducing harmful emissions," added Whiley.

John Haw, Managing Director at Fidelity Energy said: "We are delighted to have partnered with swcomms-energy and look forward to working with them to take the energy service offerings to their customer base. We are confident that we will be able to offer a significant price savings on their business energy bills."

"We are passionate about providing the best experience possible to our customers and swcomms-energy share similar core values. This has resulted in us both holding long-standing relationships with many of our customers, which speaks for itself."

"The potential of this opportunity is phenomenal and the team at swcomms-energy have fully immersed themselves with the integration of energy to their portfolio. There is much to look forward to with their upcoming pipeline so, we are excited for where this partnership can go."



Jon Whiley

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PBXact Cloud

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We sat down with our Director of Sales in Europe, Mr. Simon Horton, to see what he had to say about the UK market and how hosted business phone systems are revolutionizing the industry.

In your years of experience in the telecom industry, have you ever seen a sudden shift in needs and expectations from customers?

Simon: "Yes, customer needs and phone system requirements change all the time, but the shift of business moving to the cloud is proving to be more than just a trend. Customers are looking for an easy to use phone system that is reliable and scalable with their future needs and growth. PBXact Cloud can easily meet those needs while providing the popular UC features that customers are requiring in this technology age. Providing an affordable, hosted UC solution is certainly the most common request we hear from our partners and customers. The other big change we see is that customers want to spread the cost rather than pay upfront. With PBXact cloud and Sangoma phone rental that is completely possible."

What are some of the biggest concerns customers have about moving to the "Cloud"?

Simon: "We hear all the time: "Can I trust something that is not in my direct control?" "Does the hosting vendor properly maintain their data centre?" "Being dependent on an ISP, should I be worried?" The list goes on and on. It is a fact that moving to a hosted business phone system is now safer than ever. Data centres are taking extra precautions to have multiple underlying carriers and redundancy procedures in place to ensure uptime for their customers. Rest assured knowing that with proper network readiness, moving your phone system to the cloud is perfectly safe and reliable."

Last question, Sangoma is offering one full year of PBXact Cloud service for free when you sign a 3yr contract. Has Sangoma ever attempted like this before?

Simon: "This is unprecedented, we have never done anything like this before. Sangoma is confident PBXact Cloud is a perfect phone system for businesses of all sizes. We wanted to make sure that if you have thought about moving from your current provider to a hosted phone system or trying PBXact Cloud, this is an offer you cannot refuse."



SANGOMA

About Sangoma

Founded in 1984, Sangoma is a leading voice and Unified Communications (UC) solution provider and the primary sponsor and developer of Asterisk, the world's most widely used open-source communications solutions. The company has cultivated over 1.5 million deployments in support of 35 million endpoints globally. Sangoma believes organizations can achieve greater levels of success by having access to powerful, affordable communications solutions from a reliable partner and that building tomorrow's solutions will help the world to connect and collaborate in new ways.



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Tech innovation to drive

Evidence suggests that the channel will be well equipped to take the gaping UCaaS market by storm, so long as resellers do not neglect the great strategic advantages offered by Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and 5G, argues Keith Jackson, 8x8's Director of Channel Sales EMEA.

The fast developing UCaaS market is saturated by technological innovation. Chief among the sweeping developments are AI and Machine Learning which are already changing how the UCaaS space operates, with the promise to continue improving processes and productivity. "These technologies ensure businesses have a true understanding of which channels a worker prefers and automate tasks such as setting up conference calls," said Jackson. "AI also helps manage the huge amount of data customers have access to, making sure that insights are delivered to help improve the business. Data analytics creates so many opportunities for organisations, helping them to solve problems more effectively."

Today's workers expect to operate from any location at any time which sets a high bar for IT teams to deliver against. "We will see more vendors that can deliver a location and device-agnostic, integrated suite of video, chat and voice products that empower the workforce of tomorrow," added Jackson. "We are also interested in how video conferencing will evolve over the next year. The use of video is a key tool for effective business collaboration, this is why we have recently launched 8x8 Video Meetings for our customers."



Keith Jackson

Long gone are large warehouses full of boxes, instead we have the intelligent digital delivery of new applications and associated services from the cloud

Jackson has pledged to take 8x8's partner business programme 'to the next level'. He joined from RingCentral in November 2019 and previously spent over 10 years working with vendors including Unify, Gigaset and Ingram Micro. Key to success, he says, is 8x8's approach to developing purpose built packages for the different types of users in an organisation, all on the same platform and directory

for cross-organisation collaboration. The company also consolidates management, reporting, data and user policies, provisioning, recordings, transcriptions and other tools across voice, video, chat and contact centre in one administration tool for IT.

Key advantages

Thus the advantages of real-time system visibility through voice and video

performance, usage analytics, quality management and network visibility can be realised. Small wonder open minded customers are opting for modern alternatives in communications. But the task of successfully influencing the choices made by ICT buyers, who may be in thrall to legacy kit, should not be an underestimated challenge. The art is in nurturing a journey of self-discovery among stick in the

mud organisations, which would lead to a new outlook on their communications estate, as we shall see later in this article.

"Most of our growth comes from replacing legacy outdated on-premises phone systems that are inefficient and do not support new, more modern, decentralised and flexible work styles that combine multiple communication modes,"

UCaaS adoption

noted Jackson. "We also see a fair amount of growth from customers that expand their footprint to different areas of their organisation. We start with one team or office and then move to convert the rest of the organisation over time."

Jackson's priority is to accelerate the transition from legacy communications infrastructure to a modern cloud-based service. He says the opportunity is to make IT more efficient, empower business leaders with the right data insights they need to achieve their business objectives and unify the dispersed workforce on one platform where they can collaborate in real-time, regardless of location. But despite the business case, converting customers is not as easy as you'd imagine.

"The challenges are usually around the 'cost of doing nothing' scenario," commented Jackson. "In other words, there is a strong emphasis on thoughts around 'if it ain't broken, don't touch it', which makes for long technology refresh cycles. Partners play a huge role in helping us to address the refresh cycle and overcome the cost of doing nothing.

"Our services methodology helps to mitigate any perceived risks customers may have from changing technology and vendors at the same time, by ensuring a smooth, fast red carpet experience. The key is a designated project manager who coordinates all the different aspects of implementation and deployment, including porting numbers and training users and admins on the new system before customers are

ready to give the green light and roll out the system."

Thus, the role of the reseller will move increasingly into the services driven market space. With the device, the speed, capacity and performance increasing significantly, the market opens up a rich new area for applications and services, and new recurring revenue streams not appreciated before. "No longer will the box shifting channel companies be able to compete on price and flexibility," warned Jackson.

The key is a designated project manager who coordinates all the different aspects of deployment

"Resellers not yet into cloud and the associated recurring revenues will have to reimagine their revenue streams. This takes time and training as the large capex expenditure purchases drop away in favour of lower, albeit new, recurring revenue streams. This can impact cash flow in the early stages if not managed correctly. However, once in place the new revenue streams can and often do outpace the contract value versus the traditional purchase model."

As well as the financials and cash flows, areas like delivery can also be developed. "Long gone are large warehouses

full of boxes, instead we have the intelligent digital delivery of new applications and associated services from the cloud," added Jackson. "Adjusting the delivery will in the longer term add a positive impact to the reseller's bottom line."

Transformational 5G

Just as data and analytics is transforming the UCaaS space, the advent of 5G could also redefine the market. "Improvements to last mile network access technologies have resulted in a massive increase in UCaaS and collaboration functionality and quality, but 5G will bring access and connectivity speeds that are only common in the data centre to the mobile device in our pocket," stated Jackson.

"This will enable incredible applications that we are just now beginning to see – augmented reality, real-time access to mapping and navigational data and more. The business applications of 5G will make the increasing use and blending of data in communications applications commonplace.

"For the channel, 5G brings significant new opportunities. For example, with 5G being key to the delivery of IoT – its high connectivity speed, high capacity and significantly reduced latency means that enterprises can scale to their customer requirements in both applications and services. Furthermore, UCaaS and collaboration can now scale to increasingly larger customer bases with real-time connectivity, and provide bandwidth to accelerate the adoption of services such as video, multi-point video or rich media sharing, all happening in the moment." ■

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Where's the big money in mobile?

According to technology analysts, around 3.5 billion people are now connected to the mobile internet and there are no signs of this figure decreasing. Mobile data consumption continues to rise as more and more businesses deploy mobile based solutions.

The arrival of 5G super-fast connectivity will fuel more exponential growth and create huge opportunities for resellers to provide an increased range of mobile, IoT and UC solutions to their customers.

Now is the time to ensure your mobile communications and IoT offerings are fit for purpose and your business is poised for growth.

Following its successful debut last year, Margin in Mobile will once again provide resellers with the knowledge and understanding of the new margin

opportunities in the fast expanding mobile solutions landscape.

Part of the hugely successful 'Margin in' series of events organized since 1999 by Comms Dealer, Margin in Mobile 2020 will provide the most effective platform for vendors and resellers to meet and explore these new opportunities.

During an inspiring day of education and networking, you will meet a range of mobile and IoT operators, service providers, vendors and distributors all expert at helping you launch into or grow existing mobile revenues.

Subjects to be debated and discussed at Margin Mobile will include:

- Where are we now? A state of the mobile market review (analysis, trends etc - scene setter and provide context for what follows)
- 5G and mobile network innovation: What next for business mobility?
- Managing mobile: Harnessing the power of portals
- Mobile UC/Mobile Office/Mobile Conferencing: Staying connected anywhere, anytime.
- Realising the potential of mobile Apps and APIs
- Intelligent mobile: The rise of wireless and Wi-Fi analytics
- Mobile Security: The cyber threats and how to protect against them
- Mobile planning: How to develop an end-to-end employee mobility strategy for customers
- Working with suppliers to identify the most profitable mobile solution opportunities.
- How will the supply of M2M/IoT solutions fit into new 'as a service' business models?
- How will resellers get sales teams up to pace with Digital Britain and the new mobile solution opportunities.
- SIM device management. Never

Margin in Mobile will help you understand:

- What's new in technology?
- What solutions are customers looking for?
- How your team can sell mobile and IoT more effectively?



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A F F I N I T Y

 **Aurora**

Big innovations in Wi-Fi

Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning have ushered in a new age of intelligent Wi-Fi networks, and the integration of Bluetooth and emergence of Wi-Fi as a Service are game changers for the industry, according to Mist co-founder and CTO Bob Friday.

Intelligent Wi-Fi is shaping the next chapter in connectivity, providing a new level of automation to improve performance and efficiency, along with far greater insights and granular visibility of the network and user experience. "But we are still using manual processes based on dashboards, devices and logs to manage most Wi-Fi networks, from configuration and capacity planning to real-time incident response and dealing with user experience issues," commented Friday. "With the increasing number of phones, tablets and other mobile and IoT devices and apps now in service, these manual processes are not good enough. That's why the Wi-Fi industry is starting to address these challenges by harnessing new AI and ML technologies, along with cloud systems and big data analytics to deliver a new breed of Wi-Fi systems."

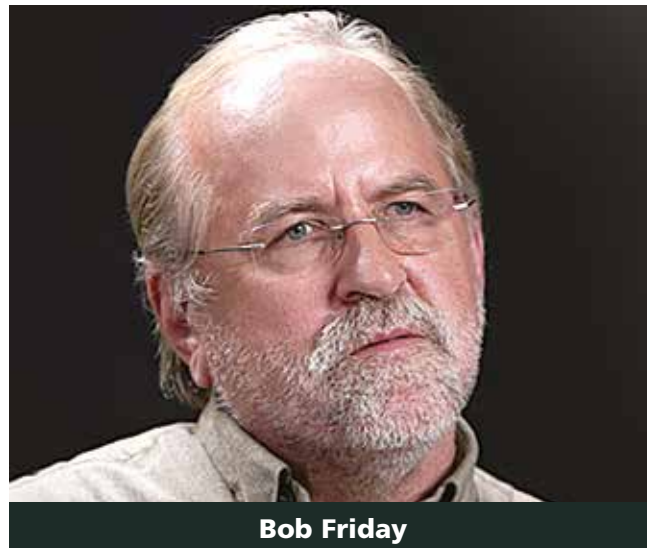
Intelligent Wi-Fi is about the quantity and quality of data. For example, Mist (a Juniper company) has access points that collect over 150 user states from each connected device every two seconds to show exactly what is happening in the Wi-Fi network in real-time and understand individual user experiences. Processing and computing this level of big data requires a cloud-based architecture capable of analysing the information and running complex algorithms to do things such as dynamic event correlation,

anomaly detection, service level monitoring and control.

"Harnessing the power of AI and big data also helps to facilitate another exciting innovation for Wi-Fi – the use of AI controlled virtual network assistants which help to manage and automate network optimisation and remediation," commented Friday. "These assistants allow system administrators to ask the network questions verbally using natural language processing. This means that many wireless network problems can be resolved by an automated help desk without the need for human Tier One or Tier Two intervention, to reduce downtime and provide an unprecedented insight into the behaviour of customers and networks."

Connectivity expectations continue to soar, so reliability and the level of bandwidth provided are crucial. "Using ML and AI technologies on such a massive data set will enable network providers to be proactive, gain better insights into customer participation and allow them to troubleshoot and optimise their networks to generate a new level of end user experience," added Friday.

"Network providers can make more informed decisions and prioritise zones with higher density to guarantee enough range and bandwidth. The end game is to stay one step ahead and identify any issues before they occur."



Bob Friday

We need a new level of automation to improve performance and efficiency, along with far greater insight and granular visibility of the network and user experience

Bluetooth technology is not new but the cost and complexity of deploying multiple beacons has held back widespread adoption. However, by integrating a Bluetooth antenna array inside the access point it is possible to create virtual software controlled beacons that define zones with up to a meter accuracy, explained Friday.

Personalisation

"This Virtual Bluetooth LE (Low Energy) makes it possible to deliver location-based wireless and personalised services including access control,

route guidance, information delivery and environmental management such as temperature and lighting control," he said. "It can also be used for asset management and the location of valuable equipment."

Key markets for this technology include retail and healthcare. For example, by facilitating a physical IoT port, Bluetooth and Wi-Fi open up new opportunities for IoT applications. In healthcare, dementia patients can be given the freedom to roam, but with monitoring and access management for

their own safety controlled via simple BLE wrist bands linked to the Wi-Fi and Bluetooth access points. "This functionality, flexibility and control that was not previously available with Wi-Fi networks allows resellers to tap into new markets and applications, transforming what was once an infrastructure expense into a powerful productivity, services and marketing tool to generate additional revenue," said Friday.

It is a well known fact that Wi-Fi has rapidly become another necessary utility along with water, electricity and mobile cellular services that we rely on. "So it makes sense for Wi-Fi to follow the trend and migrate to an as-a-service model for those organisations that prefer to pay on a subscription model, outsourcing the provision and management of the network and services," stated Friday.

"Reducing upfront investment also removes the barrier to entry for smaller organisations, while open APIs allow channel partners to develop their own applications. Also, with unprecedented levels of data, network insight and automated control, it is possible to set SLAs for Wi-Fi. What's more, virtual BLE lets resellers add new services and personalise the wireless experience for greater network value. In the future we can all enjoy a great user experience with more reliable and seamless connectivity." ■

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Channel heroes assemble: It's time to get rewarded!

Does your sales team smash through walls to make sure your company meets its revenue targets? Has your marketing team put together punchy campaigns to supercharge your brand and generate red hot leads?

Don't let your company teams go unrewarded for the magnificent work they carry out for your business. Acknowledging the success of your sales and marketing teams should never be underestimated and the opportunity to give them the recognition they deserve has come around again.

Now in its 9th year, the Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards will once again give ICT channel businesses a unique opportunity to showcase the skill, determination and success of their sales and marketing teams. The 2020 Awards will once again ensure that effort and quality throughout channel engagement processes are recognised (see award categories).

Specifically aimed at teams rather than individuals, the Comms Dealer Sales and Marketing awards will this year be fully supported by Digital Wholesale Solutions which takes up its position as lead sponsor and is looking



Digital Wholesale Solutions CEO
Terry O'Brien

forward to witnessing another bumper entry from channel businesses

DWS CEO Terry O'Brien, commented: "Over the years, we've been fortunate to win multiple Comms Dealer Sales and Marketing Awards, so we have

experienced first-hand the positive impact it has on a team. Entering the awards can be a huge incentive for your teams as they want to win and celebrate their accomplishments."

"Winning, or even being shortlisted for these awards, brings a huge uplift in morale as everyone feels valued and they can see how their hard work is paying off. Last year, our IP Specialists team won the Sales Support Team of the Year Award for the hands-on support they provide to our partners. When they were announced as the winner, it was clear to see how much it meant to the team and it was a fantastic opportunity to recognise their contribution to not only our business, but the wider channel as well."

"We're proud to be the headline sponsor of the Comms Dealer Sales and Marketing Awards for the first time, and we encourage channel businesses, both large and small, to enter the awards and celebrate their teams' hard work and successes."

Award Categories



Reseller Awards

- Sales Team of the Year – (up to £2.5m)
- Marketing Team of the Year – (up to £2.5m)
- Campaign of the Year – (up to £2.5m)
- Sales Team of the Year – (£2.5m to £7.5m)
- Marketing Team of the Year – (£2.5m-£7.5m)
- Marketing Campaign of the Year – (£2.5m-£7.5m)
- Sales Team of the Year – (£7.5m+)
- Marketing Team of the Year – (£7.5m+)
- Marketing Campaign of the Year – (£7.5m+)

Service Provider Awards

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

Distributor Awards

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

Vendor Awards

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

Special Awards

- Best Partner/Customer Event
- Best Sales Support Team
- Charity & Fundraising Award
- Best Social Media campaign
- Best PR campaign
- Best Company to Work For
- Best Apprenticeship Scheme

Event Details

Thursday May 21st 2020: 12:30pm - 6:00pm

Table Booking

The Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards provides a fantastic opportunity to celebrate the success of your 'superheroes' in style at the glamorous Grosvenor Square Marriott Hotel in London's Mayfair. For table booking details please contact Simon Turton on **01895 454603**; email sturton@bpl-business.com

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Plenty of optimism and big



ADAM CATHCART
9 GROUP

ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?

Really confident. The accelerating growth in migrations to SIP and hosted IP telephony presents a fabulous opportunity for our partners. Having seen thirteen consecutive quarters of growth in this area, we have good reason to be bullish.

WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES REALLY EXCITE YOU?

We are seeing real opportunities for partners in mobile add on sales. Whether this be hardware as a service, mobile device management or M2M solutions.

WHAT WILL GIVE YOUR BUSINESS AN EDGE IN 2020?

We can work side by side with our partners to explain how to sell new technology solutions, tap in to new revenue streams and underpin this with our award-winning marketing support so they can uncover new opportunities.

WHAT'S YOUR 'BIG IDEA' FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?

We see a real advantage in being able to offer structured business planning support to help partners plot how they can maximise their chances of success.



FOLLOWING the landslide election victory for Boris Johnson the ICT industry will have breathed a collective sigh of relief that free broadband and Openreach nationalisation is no longer on the political agenda.

Inevitably, post all the euphoria the doom-mongers are predicting a world recession and Brexit may indeed lead to a UK slowdown, but whatever happens in the year ahead the flow of investment into the digitisation of technology will continue unabated.

We are at the forefront of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and technology is evolving faster than ever. Companies that don't keep up with some of the major tech trends run the risk of being left behind. Understanding these will allow channel businesses to prepare and grasp the opportunities.

So, what disruptive technologies should you be looking at as we kick off a new decade? We have identified five we feel will make a big impact in 2020 and our Kaleidoscope contributors generally concur with these thoughts.

Microsoft Teams the cloud-based team collaboration software that is part of the Office 365 suite of applications. The core capabilities in Microsoft Teams include business messaging, calling, video meetings and file sharing.



TERRY O'BRIEN
DWS

ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?

I do believe that the innovative and converging landscape of IT, telecoms and cloud is a huge opportunity for us all.

WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES REALLY EXCITE YOU?

The emergence of Microsoft Teams as the new desktop operating platform for business, plus the opening up of voice on that platform with the emergence of Direct Routing.

WHAT WILL GIVE YOUR BUSINESS AN EDGE IN 2020?

Our continued investment in sales and service. We are also using new strategies to become a data driven business and we're proactive in giving partners information that helps them grow and create value.

WHAT'S YOUR 'BIG IDEA' FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?

Our big idea remains simple and very consistent. We will continue to broaden our portfolio throughout this year and I'm very excited about our new webstore service this year. It could be very disruptive and brilliant for our partners.



STEVE MCINTYRE
NIMANS

ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?

We are very optimistic as there are many opportunities for customers to grasp especially through our new security division, a market which is set to double in value over the next five years.

WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES REALLY EXCITE YOU?

CCTV, including facial recognition and redaction is set to flourish in 2020. It's not just about surveillance. There's body worn cameras too. This is going to be a huge across many different environments.

WHAT WILL GIVE YOUR BUSINESS AN EDGE IN 2020?

Our 40-year trading pedigree, trusted advisor status, exceptional logistics, unrivalled expertise and huge breadth of products will continue to give us an advantage this year.

WHAT'S YOUR 'BIG IDEA' FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?

The continual Microsoft Teams journey. As more and more resellers and their customers become familiar with the UC platform, any device that is certified for Teams is flying out the door.



ANDREW WILSON
CITYFIBRE

ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?

Extremely confident. Backed by a £2.5bn investment, we're fibre-ing up the UK. In July we reached the first 1% of our target to reach five million properties by 2025 in 18 months, the second 1% was achieved just four months later.

WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES REALLY EXCITE YOU?

Smart technologies are driving better housing, healthcare and business innovation. This requires a future proof network that can meet the increasing need to share more data at faster speeds.

WHAT WILL GIVE YOUR BUSINESS AN EDGE IN 2020?

Our approach of building a network that serves whole cities, from street lights and classrooms to offices and homes is designed and built for the channel to profit from.

WHAT'S YOUR 'BIG IDEA' FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?

In 2020 our focus is on supporting our partners to become our City Champions. This involves partners actively promoting the take up of full fibre services.



AXEL KLOESSNER
FONTEVO

ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?

Absolutely. We are going to see a lot more countries transitioning from ISDN to SIP and this creates a fantastic opportunity for the industry, our resellers and their customers.

WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES REALLY EXCITE YOU?

The advancement in behavioural technology, smarter working environments and advanced AI applications. These will change the way we communicate thus opening up greater collaboration opportunities and 'real life' unified solutions.

WHAT WILL GIVE YOUR BUSINESS AN EDGE IN 2020?

The ISDN to SIP switch has already taken place in Germany. The knowledge gained will help our UK resellers capitalise from this migration.

WHAT'S YOUR 'BIG IDEA' FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?

To provide our resellers with an outstanding portfolio of communication solutions from on-prem PBX through to Hosted Telephony and our unique Private Cloud Hosted solution that will enable them to do valuable business with their customers and increase their company value.



Don't forfeit your potential to maximize margin.

The future of calling is Microsoft Teams. Engage your customers before they do. Wavenet simplifies the transition to Microsoft Teams with the introduction of TeamsLink.

ideas for roaring twenties

Businesses of all sizes can use Teams.

It is predicted that during 2020, there will be wider adoption of AI and a growing pool of providers that are likely to start offering more tailored applications and services for specific or specialised tasks. This will mean no company will have any excuses left not to use AI and AI-as-a-service will be added to many partner portfolios.

2020 is likely to be the year when 5G really starts to fly, with more affordable data plans as well as greatly improved coverage.

Blockchain is essentially a digital ledger used to record transactions but secured due to its encrypted and decentralized nature. Continued investment is likely to start to show real-world results and could quickly lead to an increase in adoption by smaller players.

Super-fast data networks will provide stable internet access anywhere. The increased bandwidth will enable machines, robots, and autonomous vehicles to collect and transfer more data than ever, leading to advances in the area of the Internet of Things (IoT) and smart machinery.

Whatever happens with the economy, we are now entering the 'era of the possible' and forward-thinking channel players are poised to benefit.



ENZO VISCOTI
INCLARITY

ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?

Absolutely. Firstly, with around two thirds of the UK market yet to adopt cloud telephony, the market is buoyant. Secondly, our current channel recruitment campaign continues to bring new reseller partners to work with us; exciting times!

WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES REALLY EXCITE YOU?

Our continued adoption of collaboration technologies. We are exploring some exciting new cloud collaboration services, including integrating with the MS Teams platform. These services will be pre-launched to our channels at our Partner Day in March 2020.

WHAT WILL GIVE YOUR BUSINESS AN EDGE IN 2020?

Our plans to launch new cloud services over and above our traditional Hosted Voice. Watch this space!

WHAT'S YOUR 'BIG IDEA' FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?

We'll continue to provide new and existing channels with market-leading, ultra-resilient cloud services, and a choice of technology stuffed bundles which come with winning commercials backed up by our superior customer support.



DARREN SALISBURY
INFORM BILLING

ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?

Confident and excited! There are always uncertainties, but we're going into the new year off the back of our strongest ever year in terms of sales growth and major new enhancements to our offering.

WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES REALLY EXCITE YOU?

Digital Britain is still in its infancy; the concept of super-fast, low-cost data connectivity anywhere will be revolutionary - making the digital world even more accessible.

WHAT WILL GIVE YOUR BUSINESS AN EDGE IN 2020?

2020 will be a major year for Inform billing, as we reach our 10th anniversary in February. The extensive experience and expertise that we have built up over the past decade, alongside key channel relationships will see some exciting collaborations to benefit mutual customers.

WHAT'S YOUR 'BIG IDEA' FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?

Inform Billing will be focused on further improving our software's workflow and efficiencies, offering greater integration capabilities.



ANDREW DICKINSON
JOLA

ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?

Jola almost doubled in size last year and this growth will continue. The channel is buoyant and valuation multiples are high for companies that solve real problems and improve productivity.

WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES REALLY EXCITE YOU?

eSIM will disrupt the mobile data market, especially in IoT/M2M - where resellers have customers and opportunities but have lacked a channel product to compete with the networks. Microsoft's Business Voice will create both a threat and an opportunity for resellers.

WHAT WILL GIVE YOUR BUSINESS AN EDGE IN 2020?

Product and software development keep us ahead of our competitors. Jola launches, on average, two products every month, capable of being ordered by 600+ partners simultaneously, and aligned with sales, marketing and support. Also, culture - the hardest thing to copy.

WHAT'S YOUR 'BIG IDEA' FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?

Don't tell your competitors all your Big Ideas!



DARREN GARLAND
PROVU

ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?

We certainly are! 2019 has been another record-breaking year for ProVu and we don't see it slowing down.

WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES REALLY EXCITE YOU?

IoT has been spoken about for a while, but it's really gaining momentum now. Our sister company, Alliot has done incredibly well in its first year of business.

WHAT WILL GIVE YOUR BUSINESS AN EDGE IN 2020?

ProVu has lots of advantages, but I believe our main edge will continue to be the quality of service we deliver to our channel partners. As we further expand, it is vital we do not lose this edge.

WHAT'S YOUR 'BIG IDEA' FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?

I have too many big ideas! ProVu was built on the principle of easing the deployment of VoIP hardware, and we're dedicated to making our customers' lives easy. The main theme for 2020 will be to further expand these services.



VINCENT DISNEUR
UNION STREET

ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?

Very confident. During 2019 our market share has continued to grow, our CP customers are prospering, and the channel is presented with enormous opportunities thanks to infrastructure upgrades, changing consumer habits and the transition to IP telephony.

WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES REALLY EXCITE YOU?

Blockchain and cryptocurrencies have potential to change the world. For 2020, the arrival of 5G is a game changer.

WHAT WILL GIVE YOUR BUSINESS AN EDGE IN 2020?

CPs need a billing provider with knowledge and expertise they can depend on for this vital service. Providing feature-rich software that's backed with robust service and support is what's given us our edge.

WHAT'S YOUR 'BIG IDEA' FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?

Our latest product, NxTier, will give CPs unprecedented control over WLR3 conversion and VoIP services. We'll also be rolling out an amazing new feature for our aBILLity software which offers all the features our customers know and love.



JUSTIN BLAINE
NTA

ARE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE YEAR AHEAD?

Absolutely. Our industry is buoyant, adaptive and very resilient. I am sure they will be some turbulence because of the political situation however we are confident of another solid growth year.

WHAT NEW TECHNOLOGIES REALLY EXCITE YOU?

I really am intrigued by AI and when this becomes more capable and affordable, this really will be everywhere in our homes, work, car, public transport performing a number of tasks currently unthinkable.

WHAT WILL GIVE YOUR BUSINESS AN EDGE IN 2020?

The continued development of our platform and commercial offering, our staff's dedication to help our partners and how we engage with prospective ones, will continue to give us the edge.

WHAT'S YOUR 'BIG IDEA' FOR THE YEAR AHEAD?

A conference in Cyprus in April where new features on our platform will be released particularly around collaboration plus a HaaS model for our range of handsets which is unique.

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Making the Summit

Jonathan Sharp, Sales and Marketing Director at Britannic Technologies, is a past master at putting on customer events and the company's latest Convergence Summit again showcased the advantages of rallying clients to the Britannic flag.

In a fast-moving technological world, maintaining high touchpoints is becoming crucial for ICT providers who must continually keep customers educated, motivated and fully aware of all the new products and services they can offer. Newsletters, e-bulletins, webinars and the like are all well and good, but do they offer that face-to-face engagement that can be so valuable? And can any sales leader justify to their financial manager hundreds of miles on the road and hotel overnights spent by sales teams in a bid to keep 'in touch' with customers?

Since 2003, Sharp has solved this conundrum by reversing the paradigm and running an annual event for customers which brings them to him and his sales teams and hits the motivation and education buttons at the same time. It's a good branding and PR exercise too, and with suppliers funding a large element of the cost it represents a sure-fire win-win strategy.

This year, Britannic's 16th Convergence Summit was staged at Mercedes Benz World in Weybridge and Sharp's ability to field a high quality line up of diverse speakers combined with some high octane race track experiences once again gave customers the best of both worlds and 'something different'. Speaking to Comms Dealer

just minutes after his event wrap up, Sharp explained the genesis of the Britannic Convergence Summit and how it has stayed successful and relevant for 16 years.

"I joined Britannic just over 22 years ago from a business which ran a big event for BT," he said. "What that taught me was the benefit of coming to market with a differentiated offering and going wider than telecoms. So, I started running seminars and workshops designed around helping people to communicate. Rather than talking about the technology we focused on business change and how enablement can be achieved through new technology.

"We invited a lot of customers, then their salespeople and, over time, we created an audience. In 2004 I was at a meeting with our account manager at BT who said, 'this is working well, but maybe we should look at scaling it up a bit?' He got on the phone and after a minute or so he said, 'right, six weeks from today, could you put on an event at BT Tower? If you can do it and you want to do it, we'll pay for the lot'.

"Of course, I said yes. He walked out of the room and then I thought, what have I done? But we got some great presenters lined up and closed the deal. So, there I was opening our event at the top of the BT Tower and for some reason



Jonathan Sharp

You can't underestimate the effort that goes into the event and that it's an investment

I said welcome to our annual Convergence Summit and the rest is history."

Finger on the pulse

After 16 events how does Sharp and his team keep the summit fresh and potent? "We're never short of ideas," he added. "We're close to the market and do a lot of research to get a feel for what's going to be the next trend to keep customers one step ahead, and ultimately the event determines our direction for the coming 12 months. It now marks the start of the next step in our journey. This year's theme around workplace integration is as much about the modernisation programmes customers are undertaking.

Instead of pushing water uphill with acronyms from our industry, we said let's listen to the customers and give them what they're after. There's a lot of tech out there and our role is about how we blend that technology together to underpin four things – solving problems, enabling improvement, supporting the change forced upon people and outlining the opportunities for transformation and growth. With a £15 million turnover we're a strong business, but we have to be different by continually adding value to customers."

Would Sharp encourage other providers to take the plunge into running

their own customer event? "You can't underestimate the effort that goes into it and the fact that it's an investment," he explained. "But if you get it right, you'll see the dividends. It's one of those projects you have got to commit to. You've got to plan it out, build it and link it in with other activities.

"We also run a series of other seminars throughout the year. And, working with partners, we do approximately six to eight additional events a year. We've built up a following and have developed long standing and strong customer partnerships, so we tend to see people coming back year after year." ■

Tiger
[Panthera tigris]

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Purple in key hire



Gavin Patterson

FORMER BT Chief Exec' and Salesforce Executive Chairman Gavin Patterson has rocked up at Purple WiFi as a Non-Exec Director, joining the board alongside Sir Terry Leahy and Bob Willett. The developer of Wi-Fi platforms and analytics is seeking strategic advice to grow its guest Wi-Fi platform, which enables businesses to monitor guests' movements and habits to provide more targeted messaging. Patterson's previous roles include President of the Advertising

Association and Non-Exec Director at British Airways. Purple founder Gavin Wheeldon commented: "Given that Purple's go-to-market is channel-based and a large component of that is through telecoms, Gavin's expertise will be invaluable in helping us to scale up our existing relationships and attract new partners around the world."

Also on the move...

CHRIS Brown will leverage his 20 years experience in contact centres, CX and business transformation across the telecoms and utilities industries as Head of Technical Operations at



Chris Brown

Pragma. Tim Brooks, Managing Director, said: "Chris will bring fresh perspectives and approaches to help us continue our trajectory of growth." Sales and Marketing Director Will Morey added: "Chris's experience and support will enable the successful launch of one of our most exciting product roadmaps this year." The roadmap includes a cloud update, the launch of cloud contact centre and the introduction of a new handset range.

FORMER MLL Telecom Regional Director for Scotland Craig Scott has rocked up at Edinburgh HQ'd Commsworld as Public Sector Business Development Director. He brings over



Craig Scott

20 years industry experience including almost ten years working primarily in public sector sales for Udata Infrastructure and Boston Networks. Commsworld founder and CEO Ricky Nicol said: "Bringing someone with Craig's insight and expertise into the business is going to be valuable as we continue on

the path of development in the public sector. Our involvement in these contracts in recent years has significantly boosted the growth of Commsworld."

MICHELLE Roberts is getting to grips with key functions across the Exertis business following her appointment as UK Head of Health & Safety and Facilities Management, reporting to Operations Director Sion Wineyard. "Effective facilities management is key to our productivity, sustainability and the well being of our employees," said Wineyard. "Safety first is our company philosophy and Michelle will play an instrumental role in driving our strategy in this area."



Roberts brings almost 20 years experience working in senior facilities management with a variety of companies in different markets, most recently at MKS Instruments. Previously she worked at ALD Automotive, Broadcom and STMicroelectronics. Roberts added: "Facilities management is an important area for all organisations, particularly one that has grown at the pace of Exertis."

Harris enlisted as sales mogul

IT SOLUTION provider Datto has appointed Justine Harris as UK&I Sales Director. She moves from Vodafone Business where she was Interim Head of Global Sales, Cloud, and Security. Her prior experience also includes Regional Vice President EMEA at Akamai Technologies, and senior sales positions at CA Technologies. Mark Simon, Managing Director



Justine Harris

for EMEA, said: "Justine's experience in the areas of software, SaaS and cloud computing are a perfect fit for us." Harris added: "The world of IT is moving fast. Small and medium-sized enterprises are increasingly looking for an expert partner to help them navigate the complex challenges of data protection, cyber attacks and critical business processes."

BITTITAN has pulled in James Clifford as EMEA Sales Director. He has 20 years industry experience in driving sales strategies for tech brands including Microsoft, Salesforce and Ingram Micro, and his new remit is to help BitTitan build its presence and meet the rising demand for cloud adoption.

RingCentral signs up Massey to EMEA role

FORMER Fujitsu Head of Strategy for UC and CC in EMEA Richard Massey has joined RingCentral as Regional VP of EMEA Channel tasked with growing partner business. His experience also includes a spell as Sales Director at BroadSoft, and he spent ten years working for Mitel in engineering and



Richard Massey

sales roles, and as an engineer for Orange. EMEA Managing Director Sahil Rekhi said: "Richard brings the blend of engineering and sales expertise that's needed to understand both the technical and business value of our products. He also has channel experience." Zane Long, SVP of Global Channel Sales, noted: "The UCaaS market opportunity is huge and it is still early days in terms of market penetration."

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