



Tomlinson primed to recast Windsor Telecom p20

Commsworld CEO lays groundwork for UK expansion p22



VOL 24 ISSUE 9 FEBRUARY 2020 [www.comms-dealer.com](http://www.comms-dealer.com)

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**3-18**  
**Industry News**  
Catch up with events in comms

---

**24**  
**Interview**  
Modha spells out Luminet's big plans

---

**26**  
**Business Insight**  
Roos on Cirrus' high altitude goals

---

**30**  
**Company Profile**  
Inform Billing set for next ten years

---

**34**  
**Strategy Interview**  
Vaioni Wholesale raises the bar

---

**44**  
**Comms People**  
This month's movers and shakers



# CityFibre ties up FibreNation deal

**CITYFIBRE'S acquisition of FibreNation from TalkTalk Group for circa £200m positions the altnet as the third national digital infrastructure platform.**

### SPECIAL REPORT

The closely watched deal crossed the finish line in January having been stalled by Labour's proposed free broadband policy. The acquisition has boosted CityFibre's roll out target from five million to up to eight million premises in an investment programme that amounts to approximately £4bn. The deal also adds TalkTalk as a long-term wholesale partner. FibreNation was founded in 2018, four years after a joint

venture between TalkTalk, Sky and CityFibre was launched to deploy full fibre infrastructure and services across the City of York. TalkTalk held a two thirds holding in the JV. CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch (pictured) stated: "The UK is a service-based economy, and this runs best on full fibre. Ensuring national coverage is critical and this can only be achieved by driving infrastructure competition at scale. This deal demonstrates the appetite from industry to see it established."

TalkTalk CEO Tristia Harrison commented: "Our investment over the last five years and the work delivered by the FibreNation team, combined with CityFibre's platform, will support the wide geographical reach of full fibre and drive competition and customer take-up in the market." CityFibre calculates that as many as 7,000 construction jobs outside London will be created at the height of the project. The deal is expected close in March/April 2020. **Cont' p3**

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## EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

HOW quickly hot debates rise in temperature and then cool off as fast as they boil over is a pertinent point of consideration. Take parliament and Brexit: The rowdy and raucous exchanges around our departure from Europe fizzled to the point of

Brexit climaxing in more of a whimper than a bang, with barely a word spoken in the run up to January 31st.

And Labour's free broadband policy and brilliant idea to nationalise Openreach literally blew up in our faces and caused apoplexy throughout our shellshocked industry in December. What a bombshell that was – but it now seems like ages ago, and all is quiet and almost forgotten. Such is the nature of head-to-head clashes: Whether win or lose, the resolution of a burning issue takes the stuffing out of arguments for and against.

Pre-election, the sense of urgency to 'get Digital Britain done' suddenly intensified, lit by Labour's vision for British Broadband. Thankfully, this manifesto masterplan succeeded only in focusing private sector minds on what should have been done quicker, what should have by now been achieved practically to create the conditions for full fibre growth, and ask how best we can steam ahead. Now, the hotness of these important matters must not be allowed to cool, as if nothing happened in December 2019.

Last month CityFibre once again proved the fire in its belly with the acquisition of FibreNation, a deal which reaffirms that scale and greater competitive power is key, and that FTTP market acceleration matters now more than ever before. The UK's full fibre fire must be energetically stoked by all movers, shakers and competitors every month if not every week if Digital Britain is to be realised with a bang rather than a whimper. But how we achieve that as Ofcom continues to 'dither and delay' over its latest set of consultations is today's big question.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

• IS OFCOM'S latest consultation on full fibre too little too late? (p32)

## Continued from page 1

The acquisition of FibreNation and the addition of its team will be a boost to CityFibre's design, planning and deployment capabilities as it continues to scale, enabling the expansion of the Gigabit City Investment Programme across more than 100 towns and cities.

To support the expansion, CityFibre plans to establish a Northern Centre of Excellence, increasing its design and build capabilities in the north.

As well as York, FibreNation has network construction projects underway in Harrogate and Dewsbury and is mobilising in Knaresborough and Ripon, with plans to make full fibre available to up to three million homes and businesses.

As part of the wholesale agreement, TalkTalk has made long-term commitments across CityFibre's existing and future network roll out.

CityFibre has also struck a wholesale agreement for business services.

TalkTalk and CityFibre are undergoing systems integration in preparation for the launch of TalkTalk's full fibre services.

Megabyte Chief Analyst Philip Carse said: "It seems to be a good outcome for TalkTalk, simplifying the business – moving from a fibre network builder/funder/operator to pure fibre resell – and reducing debt.

"The up to 4x return on investment (based on March 2019 values and excluding York) is also fairly decent, with



Philip Carse

comparable multiples ranging from an estimated 1.3x for CityFibre's take private to 2.1x for the InfraCapital-Gigaclear deal, and an estimated circa 2x for the October 2019 KKR Hyperoptic deal.

"TalkTalk intends to retain the £200m to improve its leverage (pre IFRS16 net debt of £830m at September 2019). This would reduce the current 3.1x expected 2019/20 EBITDA of £269m to around 2.3x."

CityFibre also announced a revamped agreement with FTTP partner Vodafone that sees it open up its networks to other consumer ISPs sooner than planned (see page 14).

Vodafone restructured its existing deal with CityFibre to encourage it to build its fibre infrastructure more quickly and to more places.

The addition of other anchor tenants for CityFibre is expected to bolster its ability to provide wholesale competition to Openreach and speed up the deployment of FTTP networks.

## NEWS ROUNDUP

**TECH Data's** play in the comms space is ramping up as it brings telephony services for Teams, offering three options that enable resellers to add enterprise voice calling to the collaboration platform. Nick Standliffe, Business Development Manager, Microsoft Cloud Solutions, stated: "With these voice calling options customers can extend the functionality of Teams and turn it into a fully fledged telephony system."

**INVESTOR Insight Partners** is to acquire Veeam Software for \$5bn. The deal is expected to close during Q1 this year and boost Veeam's evolution into hybrid cloud and expansion into new markets. William Largent becomes CEO. He was previously EVP for Operations.

**MICROSOFT'S EMEA President Michel van der Bel** is heading for the exit following a 21 year stint at the business. Between 2012 and 2016 he was UK MD and plans to leave in March when he will be superseded by Ralph Haupter who is currently President of Microsoft Asia. Bel's Microsoft career can be traced back to 1999 when he was GM of the Netherlands region. He went on to become Microsoft International's VP for Public Sector before serving as COO in the Greater China Region.


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NEWS ROUNDUP

CLOUD vendor Vonage has launched a new channel programme in the UK and appointed Adam Wilson as UK Channel Lead reporting to Mario DeRiggi, SVP of Channel Sales and Business Development. Wilson brings more than 20 years industry experience and worked at Telstra prior to the Vonage move. DeRiggi said: "Now is the time for dedicated international leadership as we expand our presence in the UK."

ALLVOTEC has boosted its networking, Wi-Fi and physical infrastructure capabilities with the acquisition of Egham HQ'd ISG Technology, adding £25m and taking the enlarged business to over £120m annual revenues while bolting on 175 staff across the UK and Bulgaria. The financials of the deal were not disclosed.

BARRIE Desmond has returned to Exclusive Networks as SVP Marketing & Communications following a year-long sabbatical. Prior to his break Desmond spent seven years as Group Marketing Director and latterly COO. His latest appointment was made alongside other key hires including Gerard Allison, SVP for EMEA; Brad Gray, SVP for APAC; and Scott Lewis, SVP for the Americas.

## Cirrus and TelXL tie up merger

THE merger of cloud contact centre biz Cirrus and intelligent network solution provider TelXL puts the enlarged group on course to double revenues within a year and boost headcount by 60% as it seeks to drive forward a fast growth channel strategy.

TelXL acquired 51% of Cirrus in 2015 and the two companies have worked together for over a decade during which time Cirrus leveraged the TelXL carrier and solutions service, which has been boosted by Cirrus' omnichannel capabilities, conversational AI, in-call language translation and secure payment solutions.

Jason Roos, CEO of the merged business (which will be known as Cirrus), said product development is a top priority along with speed to market for new products. "The merger increases our development capacity and allows us to bring more products and solutions to market quicker," he said.

TelXL founder Nigel Fox added: "The merger is the natural next step in a long-term relationship. We have traded as a Group for many years and merging brings us closer together."

Inside story: See page 26

# VIA scoop bolsters Wavenet's MS skills

BEECH Tree Private Equity backed Wavenet's snaring of VIA strengthens its Office 365 expertise and Microsoft Teams platform. The financials of the deal were not disclosed.

VIA began life in 2012 and became one of the UK's main Skype for Business providers, a capability which naturally transitioned to Teams.

The deal also adds scale, broadens Wavenet's geographic reach, strengthens the management team and brings enhancements to Wavenet's UC and Teams services, including the Teams Calling solution.

The acquisition also gives VIA's customers access to Wavenet's telecoms partnerships and engineering skills across the group portfolio.

Wavenet operates its own automated platform which provides multiple connectivity and cloud-based services to direct customers and resellers. It confirmed that VIA's platform will be integrated into its platform to provide their combined 8,000 business and enterprise customers with UC&C solutions.

"VIA brings expertise and a passion for innovation that we are always looking for," commented Wavenet's Chief Com-



Philip Grannum

mercial Officer Philip Grannum. "VIA's combination with the wider Wavenet Group will also

accelerate the growth of our TeamsLink product."

VIA co-founder and Sales Director Alex Tebbs added: "Since starting VIA we have driven the business through several years of Microsoft UC evolution, from Lync to Skype for Business and now Teams.

"The acquisition is the next stage in this journey and provides customers with an opportunity to get more out of MS Teams by leveraging the additional products and services."

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**Circulation** 01635 588 869

ISSN 1366-5243

## bpl. | A BPL Business Publication

**BPL Limited**  
Highbridge House, 93-96 Oxford Road, Uxbridge, Middlesex, UB8 1LU, United Kingdom  
T: 01895 454542 F: 01895 454413

**Subscriptions**  
Subscription rates for 12 issues: UK, £65; Overseas: £80 (incl p&p)  
Back issues can be obtained: UK £6 (incl p&p), Overseas £10 each (incl p&p)  
For subscriptions please call 01635 588 869

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Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations ABC total average circulation 15,487 (Jan-Dec 2018, 12,480 print, 3007 digital)

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# Calligo picks up Irish MSP



**Julian Box**

THE purchase of Dublin-based DC Networks is Calligo's sixth acquisitive step on the pathway to international expansion.

DC Networks specialises in the provision of IT support, comms, networking and managed Microsoft Azure services.

During the past three years Calligo has pocketed five other acquisitions, targeting three in Canada and two firms in Guernsey and Luxembourg.

"Ireland is a rapidly growing market, particularly in its appetite for innovative technology,"

said Julian Box, founder and CEO of Calligo. "It is populated by a high proportion of ambitious, data driven businesses eager to explore how they can make the fullest use of their data and make it work harder for them. Ireland was the logical next step for Calligo's international expansion."

Robert Doyle, Director of DC Networks, added: "The wider portfolio of data services, including data privacy, automation and AI, are exactly what businesses across Ireland need."

## NEWS ROUNDUP

**CONTACT** Centre supremo Enghouse Interactive's play in the enterprise video and UC market has received a boost following its acquisition of software biz Dialogic Group. The \$52m deal adds multimedia processing applications to Enghouse's portfolio and brings partnerships with mobile operators, system integrators and technology developers. Dialogic's revenue over the next 12 months is projected to be between \$58m and \$63m.

**CANCOM** CEO Thomas Volk has exited the business after a clash of minds over strategy. COO Rudolf Hotter has been appointed Chief Exec. In a statement the company said: "CEO Thomas Volk has reached an agreement to leave the Cancom Group prematurely as of 31st January 2020, due to differing opinions on the future strategic development of the company." Cancom re-entered the UK market in 2018 with the acquisition of OCSL. The Munich HQ'd cloud services firm then bagged Irish MSP Novosco for circa £70m last year.

# Stone Group claims record Skype deployment for DWP

IT SOLUTIONS provider Stone Group is claiming to have delivered one of the UK's largest Skype for Business deployments having tied up the first phase of a comms upgrade project for the Department of Work and Pensions, bringing a digital meeting capability across 160 locations in 280 meeting rooms for 90,000 users.

Stone won the contract through a CCS tender process and as well as providing flexibility for DWP staff Stone's strategy to reduce its overall carbon footprint also proved a deal winner.



**Simon Harbridge**

"Stone's e-waste recycling services managed the disposal and recycling of all legacy conferencing equipment," said Stone CEO Simon Harbridge.

"The Department will also benefit from reduced travel payments and efficiency in employ-

ee time now that workstreams, particularly those across county and country borders, can be completed as digital meetings."

Harbridge noted that the second phase of the deployment will be completed within the next nine months.



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# Maintel falls short in FY19 in as Simwood NED



**Ioan MacRae**

MAINTEL has revised downwards revenue expectations for the year ending 31st December 2019, blaming project delays and hold ups in securing new contracts, including those delayed by uncertainty in the lead up to the General Election.

Maintel also saw MSP revenues dip due to two partners losing four contracts.

The company forecasts circa £123m revenues and adjusted EBITDA of around £10.8m.

For the year ending 31st December 2020, Maintel anticipates low single digit organic revenue growth underpinned by the improved order intake in Q4 and a return to healthier levels of activity in the public sector.

“While our anticipated overall results for 2019 are disappointing we are encouraged by the progress against our strategic aim of becoming a cloud-first company,” stated Chief Executive Ioan MacRae.

“In FY19 the number of contracted seats on our ICON platform grew by 25% year-on-year, including winning our first channel partner contract for our cloud services.

“An increase in public sector business coupled with a strong performance in order intake during Q4 2019 provides us with a good degree of confidence for 2020, when we expect to return to both revenue and EBITDA growth.”

THE task of setting the strategic direction for Simwood Group’s UK and international operations has in large part fallen under the auspices of former LINX CEO John Souter who has joined the Bristol-based comms firm’s Board as a Non Exec Director.

“John will play a key role in the delivery of Simwood’s expansion plans, providing independent analysis of, and input to, the company’s activities in all territories,” stated Chairman Grahame Davies.

“This appointment is an essential step in strengthening top level oversight and adds experience in implementing controls befitting a larger multinational business. John will bring a fresh and uninhibited approach to our strategy.”

Souter joined Simwood following an 18 year stint as Chief Exec of LINX, the London Internet Exchange.

He is credited with expanding LINX to the USA and supporting activities globally, helping to create what is claimed to be the world’s largest member-owned Internet Exchange Point with over 900 ISPs and carrier members in 80 countries.

Souter said: “I have respected Simwood’s attitude, approach



**John Souter**

and ethos for many years and will bring a focused and diligent approach to its business.”

Simwood Group comprises the wholesale arm Simwood

eSMS, its operations in the USA and the hosted voice platform Sipcentric. The firm was founded in 1996 and has over 200 wholesale customers.



ITS Chairman Kevin Gaskell (pictured centre) along with four other oarsmen, known as the Ocean5, smashed the Atlantic rowing world record for a team of five by almost 24 hours. They set off on December 12th from the Canary Islands and arrived in Antigua on January 17th having rowed 3,000 miles. The epic journey, which took 35 days 19 hours and 50 minutes, raised more than £100k for the Plastic Soup Foundation, a charity that fights against the build up of plastics in oceans. Gaskell stated: “The guys rowed around the clock, living within the confines of the 28ft x 5ft wide rowing boat. It wasn’t all plain sailing, we encountered sharks, storms and capsized!”

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NEWS ROUNDUP

GAMMA has set the dates and venues for its football themed 2020 Roadshow which runs over two weeks in February and March. Events will be held at four soccer stadiums – Hampden Park in Glasgow (26th February), the Etihad Stadium in Manchester (27th February), Villa Park in Birmingham (4th March) and Stamford Bridge in London (5th March).

JOLA Sales Director Lee Broxson has reported strong demand for the firm's MS Teams Direct Routing service, which he says should come as no surprise given that Teams is Microsoft's fastest selling product with over 20 million daily active users. "We have been blown away by the demand for this product from the channel," he stated.

COMMS infrastructure services provider Magdalene has secured a five year framework deal with Mobile Broadband Network (MBNL), the EE (UK) and Three (UK) joint venture responsible for the management and network deployment of telecoms sites owned by its joint shareholders. Magdalene will support the delivery of MBNL's Notice to Quit and Towers and Antennas operations. Both projects are set to kick off this month.

# Murphy hails pivotal year



Scott Murphy

INGRAM Micro is riding the wave of 50% year-on-year growth for 2019 across cloud, UCC and cybersecurity; and there's more to come with the UK&I tipped as a hotspot following a revamp and build up of the regional team which has grown by a third – plus the expansion of Ingram Micro's partnership with AWS to the UK&I market.

Technology sweet areas include Microsoft Azure/AWS, Microsoft Modern Workplace, cybersecurity, UCC, SaaS and Dynamics 365.

Other top picks on the ICT services menu include UCaaS bundles with Microsoft Teams, Zoom and Cisco as well as

Microsoft Teams-as-a-Service managed offerings.

The company also announced the global availability of the Go-to-Market Hub for partners and the Go-to-Builder for vendors, which is designed to automate their cloud businesses.

Scott Murphy, who is the Director for Cloud, Cyber, UCC, UK&I at Ingram Micro Cloud, stated: "2019 was a turning point. Our development of UC&C and cybersecurity builds on the value add for partners. There's an opportunity to continue to differentiate and expand on our offerings."

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# Hull telco invests in fibre rush

KCOM is to invest circa £100m to extend the roll out of its full fibre broadband network beyond its Hull heartland.

The firm completed a full fibre broadband roll out to circa 200,000 properties across Hull and east Yorkshire last year and has switched its attention to pushing beyond traditional geographic boundaries.

Chief Executive Dale Raneberg commented: "This new programme will more than double our investment in FTTP.

"The first phase will bring broadband to many more homes and businesses in east Yorkshire and north Lincolnshire."

KCOM's expansion plans are the first phase of a wider programme of investment to increase regional fibre accessibility, supported by its new owner, MEIF 6 Fibre, a wholly owned subsidiary of Macquarie which acquired the company in August 2019.



Dale Raneberg

NEWS ROUNDUP

JABRA has secured top spot in a 2019 ranking of Nimans' supply partners. The distributor's Sales Director Richard Carter handed over an award to Joel Hamon, President (EMEAR and CALA) at Jabra, to mark the vendor's ascendancy from third place to number one in just 12 months. The award follows Nimans' designation as Jabra's Distributor of the Year for the second year running.

F5 NETWORKS' acquisition of Shape Security for over \$1bn in cash more than doubles its addressable market. Fraud and abuse prevention specialist Shape boosts F5's portfolio with protection from automated attacks, botnets and targeted fraud. "Shape's ML and AI capabilities will scale and extend F5's portfolio of application services," said F5 President and CEO, François Lochon-Donou.

IT FIRM OGL Computer has appointed Wildix as its voice provider partner. OGL Computer has been in operation for more than 40 years and remains privately owned. It focuses on the SME market and holds accreditations with IT industry powerhouses including HP, Microsoft, VMware, WatchGuard and Kaspersky.

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# £50m boost hones Arrow

FOLLOWING its £50m raise from MML Capital Partners, Arrow Business Communications CEO Chris Russell moves into the Chairman role while Richard Burke, who joined Arrow in 2017, steps up as CEO.

The MML deal follows a three year partnership with PE firm Growth Capital Partners which saw eight acquisitions, earnings nearly triple, the doubling of employee numbers, and added scale and capabilities in cloud telephony, energy and IT services markets.

The rationale for the latest fund raise is to prepare Arrow for a new phase of acquisitive growth, during which it plans to on board more skills to underpin product range expansion.

Russell will steer the business towards its strategic objec-

tives as Burke presses ahead with operational leadership.

Luke Jones, Partner at MML, said: "Chris, Richard and the team have delivered strong growth and we are backing them to do more of the same."

Russell added: "The acquisition of BTL Communications on 19th December gives us a great start to 2020."

Alantra advised MML Capital on its investment into Arrow, shortly after LDC's acquisition of Onecom which was also advised by Alantra.

James Chapman-Andrews, Partner at Alantra leading the UK TMT sector team, said: "We are seeing a strong pipeline of deals involving B2B communications service providers and expect to see a rise in the number of M&A deals in this space during the months ahead."



Chris Russell

# Aviva deal expedites ITS roll out

WHOLESALE network operator ITS is to fast track its full fibre roll out plans across a broader footprint following a £45m Aviva Investors deal.

ITS will continue to reuse public and private infrastructure to accelerate the roll out of its networks, and will also collaborate with its partner network to pin point pools of deepest demand for full fibre services, leading to priority areas in its build plans.

CEO Daren Baythorpe said: "I took over the reins in early 2018 and focused on reshaping the business, creating a strong foundation for this next phase of growth. Working with Aviva allows us to connect more customers to full fibre far quicker than the industry norm."

"With BT's public switched telephone and copper network switch off plans now in progress, the race to build alternative future proof full fibre IP-based networks is on."

Sean McLachlan, Senior Director, Infrastructure Equity, Aviva Investors, added: "There is a clear and growing demand for this essential infrastructure."

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# Sabio set for Spain advances

SABIO'S acquisition of Madrid-based contact centre CX whizz Team Vision adds scale and presence to the Horizon Capital-backed MSP's Spanish expansion campaign.

Team Vision was set up in 2003 and is a Genesys Partner.

Sabio Group CEO Jonathan Gale said: "By combining Team Vision with our existing business in Spain we have established critical mass in enterprise and CCaaS technologies."

"The move supports our objective to combine our own technology with that of our partners, bringing AI powered self-service and channel agnostic customer engagement solutions to our clients."

Sabio's bid for greater geographic coverage includes the acquisitions of Rapport and DatapointEurope in 2017, Bright UK and Singapore biz flex-Answer Solutions the following year, and Spain-based Callware in 2019.



Jonathan Gale

## NEWS ROUNDUP

DIALLER and cloud contact centre management software specialist Connex One has linked up with Difference (a Firstcom Europe company) which will resell the SaaS Connex One platform. The CCaaS solution is used by over 650 firms in five continents and processes more than 14 million interactions daily.

THE first phase of ClearlyIP's European expansion campaign was completed with the signing of UK distributor VoIPon and the hire of Richard Smith as Director of Sales for Europe. ClearlyIP has offices in the US and Canada and launched its range of IP phones and PBX appliances into Europe ahead of plans to expand beyond phones into other software and cloud solutions later this year.

PROVU has pressed the go button on a new partnership with VoIP desk phone manufacturer Fanvil. The agreement sees ProVu offering the H series of Hotel phones alongside the X series of desk phones. ProVu MD Darren Garland said: "Fanvil is a brand that has been on our radar for some time. Over the last year we've seen interest gain momentum from our partners and we are now able to fulfil this demand."



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NEWS ROUNDUP

FOR any customer experience strategy to succeed it must have a full-blown CRM capability at its core, according to Sailwayz MD Joshua Eze. He argues that comms firms can only unlock their full potential by optimising and automating their business processes and reporting capabilities, and by holding a 360-degree view of the customer. Sailwayz is a Salesforce.com partner and Eze has embarked on a campaign to boost the role CRM plays in the comms channel.

A TWO year spell of stand out work has secured Westcon International COO David Grant the Presidency. The move consolidates his leadership and caps a ten year spell at the centre of the distie's transformation. Grant, who joined the tech distribution division of Datatec in 2007 when it acquired Crane where he was CEO, is credited with playing an integral role in the remodelling of Westcon, for which he has held a number of senior exec roles – now the dual titles of President and COO. Jens Montanana, Executive Chairman, stated: "This promotion is recognition of David's instrumental role in reshaping the business over the past two years."

# Babble bags Diva Telecom



Matt Parker

LDC-backed Babble Cloud has followed up its purchase of Arden Group in 2018 with the acquisition of Leeds-based Diva Telecom for an undisclosed sum.

The move forms part of Babble's ambition to become a £50m revenue business following a MBO in 2017 and the launch of a buy and build strategy led by CEO Matt Parker.

"The Diva deal is another step on Babble's journey," stated Parker. "Babble is committed to maintaining the service and relationship levels to which Diva's customers and partners are accustomed."

Diva Telecom was established in 2006 and serves over

1,000 customers. Its growth was reflected in a move to larger offices in 2018. Although retiring from the company MD Erica Lewis will remain involved as a strategic advisor.

Lewis added: "After 14 years of building Diva Telecom we have found an organisation that thinks about things the same way that Diva always did."

Knight Corporate Finance advised Diva Telecom shareholders on the deal.

Paul Billingham, Director at Knight CF, commented: "It is always nice to see a great outcome for someone who has put so much into building their business over many years. Babble and Diva are well matched."

# Lightfoot steps into CEO role

CHESS founder and Chief Exec David Pollock has moved to the Executive Chairman seat making way for CFO Mark Lightfoot who marches forward to take his place. Lightfoot joined Chess 11 years ago as Financial Director.

"Mark has consistently been an example to us all on the merits of hard work and attention to detail," stated Pollock.

"He drives outstanding performance across his team, ensuring great financial control, and has a proven track record in building external relationships and securing financial support."

In another high level appointment Chess MD Stephen Dracup becomes Chief Growth Officer with a remit to focus on product strategy and acquisitions. And Oliver Lofthouse joins the Alderley Edge-based firm as Partner Sales Director, moving from Vodafone.



Mark Lightfoot

# More buy and build at Radius

RADIUS Payment Solutions' buy and build strategy in the comms space took a leap forward last month with the acquisition of Macclesfield-based Reliance Networks, its seventh deal in seven weeks, three of which were in telecoms.

Radius began life in 1990 when owner Bill Holmes set up the firm as a fuel card company. It now provides fleet management solutions including telematics, telecoms and insurance to over 300,000 customers.

Radius is said to be one of the UK's largest private companies and ranked 19th in the 2019 Sunday Times HSBC Top Track 100 list, having seen turnover grow to £2.5bn in 2019.

Reliance Networks was established in 2009 and now forms a key part of Radius' broader group telecoms strategy, according to Holmes.

"The acquisition of Reliance Networks supports Radius' ambition to grow the telecoms division," he commented.

"Reliance has technical capacities which complement those of other companies that have joined this division."

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# Diversity champion Lamprell gets OBE

AN OBE awarded to Vodafone UK's workplace equality champion not only recognises her great work in promoting diversity and inclusion – the high profile award also helps to push such important matters towards the top of the channel's agenda.

Helen Lamprell, General Counsel and Director of External Affairs of Vodafone UK, received an OBE in the New Year Honours list in recognition of her efforts across a range of areas, such as raising awareness of vulnerable people and helping those who have raised a family, or cared for someone, to return to work.

She was instrumental in the UK launch of Vodafone's ReConnect programme in 2017, which provides networking and training to parents and carers (mostly women who have taken time out to raise a family), to help them rebuild confidence and skills and develop opportunities to continue their careers.

Vodafone UK CEO Nick Jeffery commented: "Businesses can ill afford to ignore the difficulties and the financial penalties imposed on people who for good reasons need to take extended maternity leave or time off to care for someone."



Helen Lamprell

Lamprell added: "Typically, fewer than one in four women return to work within the first year of giving birth.

"Often this is not through personal choice, and the gap in their résumé leaves them at a disadvantage when applying for work."

Lamprell has been a member of the Women's Business Council for five years and also champions ways for businesses to drive forward positive change through the use of technology and the treatment of mental health in the workplace.

Her activities include raising awareness of the psychological and financial damage associated with domestic violence, and she worked with Mencap to help people with learning difficulties to become more independent.

Vodafone has also partnered with the Women's Business Council and the Government Equalities Office to publish a toolkit of best practices to help other employers set up their own returner programmes.

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## VAR buys more LAN capability

IN A BID to boost its networking skills Charterhouse Voice & Data identified the opportunity for greater LAN capabilities in Croydon-based NETconnection Systems which it snared last month for an undisclosed sum.

The IT services provider specialises in LAN and SD-LAN managed services and operates primarily in the public sector.

NETconnection was established in 1998, has over 30 staff and more than 100 customers.

Charterhouse CEO Mark Brooks-Wadham commented: "NETconnection's LAN capabilities complement and develop our existing product and services offering."

NETconnection CEO Tony Brar added: "Our customers were increasingly looking for a consolidated approach to solutions through a single partner.

"We wanted to find an organisation that would allow us to offer more of what our customers required. This would provide greater scale as well as a strong presence in the private sector, while preserving NETconnection's core expertise and capabilities.

"Charterhouse will strengthen the service and support we provide to our customers."

## NEWS ROUNDUP

VAPOUR Cloud's expertise in Avaya solutions has secured it a managed service partnership with Stockport-based ICA in a deal which ICA Director Pam Blanchard says is also a meeting of minds. "Vapour has quickly become an extension of our team because shared values are driving both of our business propositions," she said. "The addition of Vapour's technical expertise and advice now means clients can adopt the right technology at pace."

THE terms of Vodafone's deal with CityFibre have been revised so that it retains exclusivity on a rolling 12 month basis for the first phase of CityFibre's FTTP rollout covering one million homes. Previously, the period of exclusivity hinged on the total time taken to roll out the network in each city. In related news, Vodafone is backing a new trial in Salisbury where Openreach will replace every copper-based phone line within the catchment area with optical fibre cables. This project builds on Vodafone's agreement with Openreach to bring fibre to 0.5 million households in Birmingham, Bristol and Liverpool, in addition to the 12 towns and cities already under construction with CityFibre.



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NEWS ROUNDUP

COMMSWORLD has secured its first wholesale partnership south of the border, linking up with Ethos Voice & Data having unbundled the Derby telephone exchange. Commsworld Partner Manager, Dietmar Wand, commented: "Access to our business and public sector network will drive further investment and job growth which are critical during times of uncertainty." Ethos Voice & Data CEO Matt Hill added: "This network is going to raise the bar in terms of what business in Derbyshire can achieve." See page 22

OPENREACH has lowered the free FTTP threshold for housing developments from 30 to 20 new builds. The infrastructure provider estimates that approximately 13,000 homes per annum nationwide will benefit from the freebie, so long as developers register with Openreach. So far 99 per cent of plots on sites of 30 or more homes have registered for FTTP. Kim Mears OBE, MD Strategic Infrastructure Development, said: "We hope these new measures will provide the necessary incentive for house builders to adopt this future proof technology across smaller developments so that no-one's left behind."

# US VAR sets up in the UK



Donovan Hutchinson

PARAGON Micro's launch into the UK sees former PCM MD for UK & International Donovan Hutchinson installed as the man at the vanguard of the US VAR's first foray into international territory.

Paragon Micro will declare offices in Yorkshire and London operational in April.

As PCM UK head honcho Hutchinson in 2017 led the firm's expansion into the UK and the European market including the acquisition of Provista UK and The Stack Group. PCM itself was bagged by Insight in June 2019.

Hutchinson joined PCM from CDW where he was responsible for executing collaboration programmes and extending service offerings from North America based cli-

ents into the UK, Europe and Asia Pacific markets.

Paragon Micro President and CEO Jeff Reimer said the UK move is the 'first milestone in an aggressive expansion into critical international markets'.

As Paragon Micro's MD for UK & Europe Hutchinson plans to build partnerships based on the VAR's operational blueprint in the US.

"Donovan's experience makes him the right partner to introduce Paragon Micro to the UK and Europe for the first time," commented Reimer.

"Our expanding global footprint has attracted new clients that operate in both the US and abroad, and we continue to have an active pipeline for growth as we gain momentum beyond North America."

# Rally boss increases car quota

THE last ever Twin Town Challenge reached bursting point when demand for places outstripped the conventional limit on numbers, prompting the organiser to revise upwards the quota by 20 more cars.

"With nearly 100 cars booked for the starting grid already, interest in the event continues to gain momentum and the extra places will enable more teams to take part," commented Brendon Cross, MD of Witney-based STL Communications and organiser of the rally.

The fourth and final Twin Town Challenge (which is held in aid of Charlbury charity SpecialEffect) takes place between 1st-4th May when cars costing less than £500 travel to Witney's twin town of Le Touquet, undertaking challenges on the way. The event is expected to boost the total amount raised to over £1m.

"We're looking forward to seeing people dressed as Abba, Village People, the Spice Girls and Queen, driving around France in London taxis and stretched limos, as well as more ordinary vehicles," said Cross.

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# DMC nets print biz hat-trick

HORIZON-backed DMC has bagged three managed printing services companies, picking up Condor Office Solutions, Systems Technology and CSL Business Machines.

Both Condor and Systems Technology are southern UK Canon Platinum partners, and CSL is a Konica Minolta Elite partner serving customers across the midlands.

Horizon Capital invested in DMC in July 2018 since when the group has made five acquisitions, diversified its offering and expanded its geographic reach across England.

London-based DMC acquired managed print provider United Carlton last June.

The group says it now supports more than 10,000 customers across the UK and generates revenues of £65m.

"DMC has a clear strategy to consolidate the fragmented MPS sector," stated DMC CEO Simon Davey.

Luke Kingston, Partner at Horizon Capital, commented: "DMC was the first investment made by Horizon. We will continue to support DMC in supplementing organic growth with acquisitions in what is a highly fragmented market."

## Do you want to click with the Channel?

In another industry first, we are delighted to publish an ABC (Audit Bureau of Circulation) certificate for Comms-dealer.com showing that between January and December 2018, the website attracted a monthly average of 21,083 unique Browsers.

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# Top execs join Content Guru



Martin Taylor

FOUR senior executive appointments completed by Content Guru will drive geographic expansion as the contact centre business seeks to build on 25% growth in 2019.

Paul Emery has been pulled in as Sales Director for UK&I, moving from distributor ScanSource. He brings over 15 years experience in the IT, UC and SaaS industry across sales, product management, technical and service roles.

Former RingCentral Head of Channel Sales Robinder Koura joins the company as Global Partners Director, bringing more than 20 years technology sales experience.

Graeme Walker is Sales Director for Scotland & Northern Ireland with stints at TransUnion

UK, Vodafone and Virgin Media Business under his belt.

Roeland Van Wezel has been appointed Sales Director for the Benelux region.

“The contact centre is going through a period of transformation in terms of its move to the cloud and becoming a key part of a more sophisticated customer experience and engagement environment,” said Martin Taylor, Deputy CEO at Content Guru.

“As we continue to expand our business globally, the combined experience of our new sales leadership team will help us support our customers in making this transition.”

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## £500m hit for BT

THE cost to BT of the Government’s decision to limit the use of Chinese vendor Huawei’s equipment to 35% in the UK’s non-core 5G network will be circa £500m over the next five years, according to BT Chief Exec Philip Jansen.

He revealed the blow as BT announced results below expectations for Q3, with revenues down 2% to £17,246m, mainly due to headwinds from regulation, competition and legacy product declines, said the company in a statement.



Philip Jansen

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# Spitfire takes wing in security and IoT

SPITFIRE partners are on track to unlock security market potential following the launch of Firewall as a Service (FWaaS), a unified threat management proposition created out of Spitfire's link up with Fortinet.

The hosted service can be managed by partners or Spitfire and was launched during the network provider's annual partner event staged at The Institution of Civil Engineers in Westminster, London.

"FWaaS enables partners to address multi-site organisations with diverse Internet usage and increasing compliance issues," stated Spitfire's IT Interface Manager Andy Duncan.

"The service is designed for any organisation with a need for UTM features and those requiring a firewall refresh."

Duncan noted in particular that Spitfire receives regular enquiries from schools and academy groups.

The conference also outlined partner opportunities in IoT and mobile data access, and Duncan said Spitfire is expanding those



Andy Duncan

opportunities by introducing ruggedised business grade SIM cards that withstand high and low temperatures.

To underscore the range of connected opportunities Duncan cited a 'smart potato' application in the agricultural sector, where SIMs inform farmers on the best time to harvest crops.

He reeled off many other IoT applications in retail, transport and health. "This is the tip of the iceberg," he stated. "It's all about how you use the data."

Spitfire has joined forces with EE and BT to bring a range of IoT solutions to partners, which Duncan claims will 'transform our industry'.

## New apps and sales skills vital

TRAINING, knowledge and skills development for sales staff is as critical to growth as the innovation that goes into the applications and services they are tasked with selling, evangelised VanillaIP Sales and Marketing Director Iain Sinnott.

"Growth in new apps and sales knowhow is vital," he said. "Any successful business cannot have one without the other."

During the firm's Partner Day (on January 21st at London's Mortimer House) Sinnott urged delegates to make the most of a new demo tool launched at the event, called Virtual Innovator Pack and worth £1,000 per year per sales person.

"The intention is to motivate sales people to embrace training and ensure they are familiar with the key revenue products, enabling them to discuss benefits and bring theatre to meetings by demonstrating them in action," explained Sinnott.

"We believe the best investment is in the potential and performance of our partners' front end sales people." See page 40

## NEWS ROUNDUP

**MEDIACITYUK** HQ'd Vaioni Wholesale's staff recruitment activity is shifting up the gears as the network provider seeks to increase headcount by 25% this year. The move builds on the firm's £5.5m fundraise with Panoramic Growth Equity and is the first phase of a people strategy that will help facilitate a boost in revenues to £30m within four years. New roles have been created in product management, software development, sales, service delivery, engineering and technical support. See page 34

**NFON's** capacity to innovate received a boost following its asset deal with Mannheim-based Onwerk which includes the transfer of eight developers and software architects. The move helps to expand NFON's R&D capacities in the areas of mobile, web front and backend as well as client/server. CTO Jan-Peter Koopmann said: "In a competitive labour market we have succeeded in strengthening our development team with a well-rehearsed group."

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## Irish UC firm Blueface snared by US comms giant Comcast

PHILADELPHIA headquartered comms giant Comcast's acquisition of Dublin-based global UC provider Blueface will spark a period of job creation in Dublin as the firm hires across software development, engineering, programme management and sales.

Blueface will become a business unit within Comcast Business but continue to operate as normal. The financials of the deal were not disclosed.

"The addition of Blueface's UC solution to the Comcast Business portfolio will provide customers with access to audio



Bob Victor, SVP, Comcast Business; Foy and Stemper

and video tools, connecting employees across devices and locations," stated Bill Stemper, President, Comcast Business.

Blueface CEO Alan Foy said: "We will work with the Comcast team to invest in and scale our technology roadmap."



RADIUS marked its 30th anniversary with a star spangled mega-show including dinner and a concert for over 1,000 people from global offices, staged at the Manchester Central venue on January 18th. Dermot O'Leary hosted the evening and Jamie Cullum headlined the bands which included local artists Schwing and The Earth Lights. Radius CEO Bill Holmes (pictured far left) commented: "It was great to celebrate this occasion with employees and many of my original partners. Dermot, Jamie and all of the artists did a fantastic job of making the evening one that will never be forgotten. It's heads down now and back to work – roll on the 40th!"



# 4 guaranteed ways to protect your margins and boost your bottom line

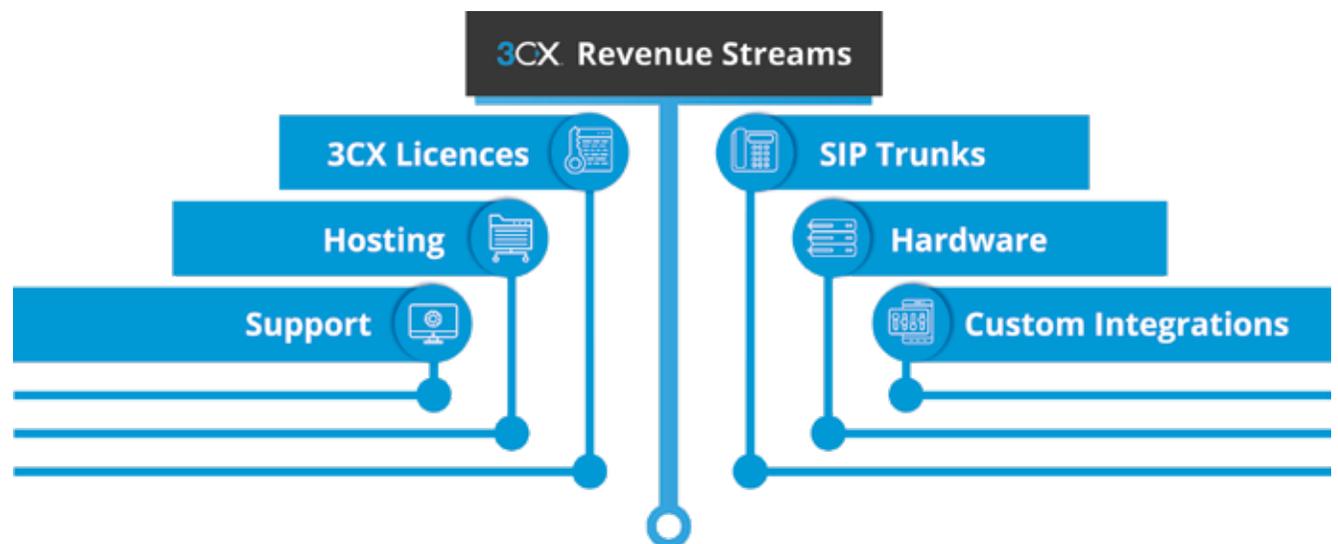
With the market value of Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS) expected to exceed \$96bn by 2023 there's never been a better time to take a piece of the pie. Yet this growth brings its own challenges for resellers, and your business needs to be prepared to face them head-on. Namely, how do you protect your hard-earned margins and continue to increase revenue in a market that is rapidly proliferating?

The answer lies in partnering with a vendor whose solutions offer generous rewards through subscription-based licensing whilst also facilitating the creation of additional revenue streams. Gone are the days of your profit being dictated by the vendor—the new era of UCaaS is all about partner choice, flexibility and control. Read on to discover our top 4 ways to protect your product margins and boost sales:

## 1. Seek out Subscriptions

Consumer attitudes towards B2B purchases are changing. Thanks to the rise of subscription-based solutions in the private sphere (consider the likes of Amazon Prime, Microsoft Office Home and Netflix), decision-makers are expecting the same conveniences within their work environment and this is brilliant news for both sides of the buying chain. For the end-user, subscriptions ease cash flow and budget demands. For the reseller, the recurring revenue evens out monthly fluctuations in turnover and accelerates growth as each sales year builds upon the previous, rather than becoming a race to repeat.

Look for a solution that combines a subscription-based model with generous margins and you'll be set to boost your bottom line. 3CX enables resellers to build up a recurring revenue base by providing three simple editions for its market-



leading PBX. Licences are offered annually so there's no upfront payment and they can be easily combined with additional services to encourage co-adoption.

## 2. Choose Choice

Alongside favourable commercials, you need a vendor who encourages flexibility and choice, therefore enabling you to generate revenue from custom integrations and earning commissions from integral system componentry. Why settle for a vendor who charges above the odds for a branded device when you can go straight to the manufacturer and negotiate your own preferential rates? 3CX enables you to do exactly this and offers partners the widest selection of supported SIP

trunks, devices and hosting providers in the market. This allows you to create a communications solution that works best for you and your customers, unlike leading competitors who lock resellers into a full wrap solution.

## 3. Soup Up Your Support

Aside from licensing, offering a support package alongside your UCaaS solution will be your most valuable revenue stream. Typical costs range between £10-30 per user per month depending on the level of support required! Try combining your monthly subscription with a fixed hour support package to offer customers a hassle-free, managed solution. Recent studies from PwC have

shown that consumers will pay up to 52% extra for the added peace of mind. Seems like a no brainer? It is, providing you have the flexibility to build your support package in-house. However, many UCaaS providers control end-user support directly, which prohibits resellers from capitalising on this profitable revenue stream. With 3CX, partners are able to offer their own support package, knowing that free technical support is right behind them should they need it.

## 4. Disrupt & Differentiate

Last but most certainly not least, if you're aiming to protect your margins and see consistent year on year growth, you're going to need a solution that stands out from the

crowd. 3CX is known for it's out of the box approach to communications and this innovative thinking resulted in YoY growth of over 40% in 2019. Whether it's being the first software-based, open standards IP PBX in the market, the first to utilise WebRTC conferencing or the only provider with prices based on call volume rather than users, 3CX is always ahead of the curve when it comes to their innovation chain.

Deliberately disruptive and designed with resellers in mind, it's easy to grow your business with 3CX. You can find out more about the 3CX Partner Programme and get your hands on a free trial at [www.3cx.com/partners](http://www.3cx.com/partners) or email us via [partners@3cx.com](mailto:partners@3cx.com)

# Tomlinson tees up Windsor

Windsor Telecom has a golden opportunity to re-strategise, branch out and blossom, according to CEO Pete Tomlinson who's pressed the button on plans to recast the Inbound supremo as an all encompassing bespoke solution provider.

It is on Tomlinson's strategic planning and experience that Windsor Telecom's transformation in large part relies, and his appointment as CEO in September last year marked the effective end of the comms provider's near exclusive traditional market focus – Inbound. It remains a fact that Inbound is critical, but no longer sacred. Thus Windsor Telecom has a window of opportunity to spread its wings, supported by winds of change drafted in by Tomlinson's broad business plan. Notably, he will seek dividends in product and service diversification and more bespoke solutions that are simple to source and deploy. In this approach, says Tomlinson, lies a long-term strategic advantage. This is true transformation.

He has strong foundations upon which to build. Windsor Telecom generated circa £8 million revenues in its latest financial year, achieving £3.5 million EBITDA. The company serves over 5,000 customers, mainly small businesses, but deal wins in the larger SME sector and corporate space are becoming more commonplace. Windsor's reseller base is also growing substantially.

It is remarkable that all of this has been achieved with a primary focus on one core specialism, Inbound voice, for which Windsor has almost become a byword. But now it's time to move into



Pete Tomlinson

**Over the past three months we've developed a clear vision of the role Windsor can play for our customers, all based on making technology easy and enjoyable**

additional technology and market areas, and Tomlinson is champing at the bit.

"Leading the kind of pivot needed to diversify and grow, to reach a whole new level of ambition and move away from a narrow product focus to a far wider technology play is something I have

plenty of experience in and enjoy," enthused Tomlinson.

**Experience**

He came to the Windsor Telecom with an admirable career back story, based on 20 years experience in transforming and scaling telecoms and technology

businesses. During his time at Eclipse (prior to its integration with KCOM), Tomlinson faced a similar test to Windsor's challenge. "With Eclipse, we took a traditional ISP with a great service ethos and doubled the size of the business by refreshing the brand and

rapidly diversifying into new product and customer markets," he commented.

Tomlinson also held leadership positions at Cable&Wireless and telecoms infrastructure pioneer Fibernet – and prior to his appointment at Windsor



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# or for biz transformation

he was Managing Director of TalkTalk Business Direct. You would be forgiven for thinking that such an illustrious CV would reflect an all-time and exclusive interest in comms. But things are not always as they seem. Tomlinson began his career journey working for a company that ran team building events during the dotcom era. Many of its clients were flourishing tech businesses not shy about displaying their wealth, which made an impression on Tomlinson who was at the time near penniless with a pregnant wife. "Being broke and having figured out how much kids cost, when I saw the cars some customers turned up in I twigged that a job in technology would take care of nursery fees!"

Tomlinson's volte-face career change was a decisive reaction to a real need. He had captured a moment of opportunity that proved life changing. It was a practical response that is reflected in his work as a business transformer, as he seeks to match strategy to potential. "In Windsor I saw the opportunity to build a very different type of tech business," he commented. "Over the past three months we've developed a clear vision of the role Windsor can play for our customers, all based on making technology easy and enjoyable."

As a successful provider of Inbound services, the obvious next step for Windsor Telecom is to diversify, and the main task for Tomlinson is to release its latent value by going down the route of specialisation. He says his strategy precipitates a grand project for Windsor to reinvent itself, and he pointed

to two big drivers of change that are influencing his thinking. "There are now five generations of customers and colleagues in the workplace who all want differing things from technology and their work environments, such as flexible working, a myriad of devices and integrated communication channels," explained Tomlinson. "These all need to be supported seamlessly through today's technology solutions.

"On the supply side we're seeing ever greater levels of innovation from both hyperscale and niche software-led originations that

more friendly alternatives, believes Tomlinson, who said the need for simplicity has become a magnet. "We will be taking the principle of making technology easy and enjoyable to a far larger market and across more areas of the rapidly converging comms and IT landscape," he added. "We should all work together to take out the complexity and focus on the customer experience.

"Consumer brands do this much better than B2B providers. People in the workplace rightly expect the same simplicity they experience with personal

## There are some amazing new technology vendors, but they don't always make it easy for their customers

are at last opening up APIs into their core platforms, which enables Windsor's software and development team to integrate deeply and create our own propositions."

### Beware the giants

All channel players need to be aware of how the hyperscale providers like AWS and Microsoft add value, believes Tomlinson. "They are stepping up, as are niche software-led businesses which are doing well out of creating unique IPR, and investing to develop a sales and service model that truly adds value and makes it easy for customers to consume their services," he added.

If there is a customer bugbear that cries out for a solution it is over complex products and services. The issue is bad enough to snap bonds of loyalty as customers seek

technology. If you're going to roll out collaboration tools, they'd better be as easy to use as Facebook; or if people move from email to IM, it has to be as intuitive as WhatsApp. The big trend is in the consumerisation of IT."

Tomlinson's business transformation programme is reflective of this consumerisation, and the bespoke paradigm of his plan demands a new and more thorough approach to sourcing technology partners. "There are some amazing new technology vendors out there, but they don't always make it easy for their customers," he added. "That's where we come in. A big part of our strategy is identifying and building relationships with the best tech vendors, those with platforms we can use to create our own portfolio

and service model, that allows customers to properly take advantage of new communication, connectivity and collaboration services."

### Integration

More and more organisations with a mix of legacy and newer cloud-based services want to integrate how they connect, communicate and collaborate. But achieving this is a different matter due to the complexity of the task. "This is where we're also helping, with straightforward solutions, service and guidance," added Tomlinson. "The core of our growth strategy is built around our sales and service model and developing a set of properly integrated communications and IT services for SME and corporate customers. Furthermore, while I am a big believer in organic growth, it also makes sense to accelerate this with a good mix of acquisitions that can add both capability and scale."

According to Tomlinson, there is no better time to drive Windsor Telecom's business transformation and expansion, and no better starting point than the people dynamics of the business. "The team is incredibly diverse, full of digital natives with an average age under 30 and with a 50:50 gender balance," he said. "We can relate to customers in a totally different way than more traditional resellers. Our objective is to realise the full potential of the market opportunity, our culture, our sales and service model, and repeat our success with Inbound by making technology easy and enjoyable across a full range of new IT and communications services." ■

### Just a minute with Pete Tomlinson...

**Role model?** John Legere, the king of growth and transformation. We first met when he was CEO of Global Crossing having acquired Fibernet. More latterly, his turnaround of T-Mobile USA is pure class

**What talent do you wish you had?** A photographic memory

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I'm left handed, dyslexic and colour blind. It makes me very creative!

**Your greatest strength, and what could you work on?** I'm good at creating a vision that people value being a part of; but I probably swear too much

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** I'd enjoy being an after dinner speaker

**How would you like to be remembered?** With a Comms Dealer Lifetime Achievement Award of course. But I'm not ready for that just yet

**Who do you admire most in the channel?** That's like asking me to pick my favourite relative

**The best piece of advice you have been given?** You can do anything if you do it fast enough... said my driving instructor

**Name three ideal dinner guests and why you'd invite them:** Boris Johnson, he has an opportunity to support our industry but I'd like to give him pointers on how not to screw it up; PT Barnum, the original greatest showman and an interesting businessman who helped end slavery; and Kylie!

**Top tip for resellers:** If you're enjoying it, you're doing something right

# Commsworld CEO eyes L

Few, if any, would contest the viability of Commsworld CEO Ricky Nicol's ambition to build the equivalent of a Scottish Telecom, and the signs are that he could achieve his objective sooner rather than later following an investment boost from PE house LDC.

**N**icol's life and career journey shows clearly that the road to success may not be smooth, and that in business, strength of character counts as much as an entrepreneurial spirit, while morale boosters might be needed along the way. As you'd expect from someone who beat cancer, Nicol experienced moments of doubt, but banished them. He dwelt not on thoughts of exiting, but followed a course of leadership in part spurred by the inspiration of a role model. "I often felt like giving up, but Chris Van Der Kuyl, the co-founder of Minecraft and Scotland's top entrepreneur, would inspire me to keep going," stated Nicol. "I give this advice to anyone, not just in business: Life is not a rehearsal. When you look back, you're more likely to regret the things you did not do than what you did do. So be decisive. The time is now, go for it!"



Ricky Nicol

Acting on his own advice Nicol spent almost two years weighing up his options to grow the business and decided that PE would be key to realising his growth ambitions. Wasting no time, Nicol secured an investment with mid-market PE firm LDC that puts the comms provider on track for UK expansion and another year of double digit growth. "LDC's investment is a sign of our intent to invest further in our capacity to disrupt the market," stated Nicol.

## LDC's investment is a sign of our intent to invest further in our capacity to disrupt the market

"Our expansion plans are to keep doing more of what we have done. We've built our own carrier grade network with UK and international reach, delivering highly complex and critical digital infrastructures, including UC, to some of the largest and most high profile organisations across the UK. We've done this without fail, on budget, in time, and in

the words of each customer, better than the incumbent."

### Strong heritage

Commsworld began its commercial life in 1994, co-founded by Nicol and his close friend David McKenzie. Today, the company has 110 staff based across offices in Edinburgh, Glasgow, London and Aberdeen. For the financial year to December

2018 Commsworld recorded revenues of £20 million, a 41 per cent increase on the previous 12 months. For Commsworld's 2019 financial year Nicol forecasts £25 million revenues and expects circa £3 million operating profit.

The role of acquisitions in Commsworld's strategy has been significant, and Nicol

ranks the firm's purchase of Scotia Telecom in 2000 as a milestone for the business. In another strategic move Nicol then bought out McKenzie and evolved Commsworld into an ISP network centric business. The 2008 financial crisis almost put the brakes on, but Nicol nevertheless pressed the accelerator and in 2012 acquired Fluency Communications

# UK expansion

which enabled him to build from scratch a Next Generation Network, which between 2013 and 2019 was funded in-house.

Nicol positions Commsworld is an innovator and disrupter, and as being sharply focused on core business. "We're 'fibre freaks', delivering full-blown FTTP services by utilising dark fibre in its purest form," he said. "We're agnostic when it comes to fibre and network

## The market accepts that copper-based tech has reached end of life

providers, partnering with numerous operators including Openreach, CityFibre and Zayo. We also partner with Cisco, Microsoft, Juniper and Mitel."

Commsworld built its first PoP in Edinburgh in March 2013, now there's around 100 across the UK, a proliferation that speaks volumes about the times. "The market accepts that copper-based technologies have reached end of life," added Nicol. "The rapid growth in data consumption and a reliance on cloud and hosted services is bringing an acceleration of new opportunities for our business, particularly – but not exclusively – in the public sector."

Commsworld bid for and secured three of the largest public sector WAN and IPT contracts in the UK, with Scottish Borders Council,

Edinburgh Council and Glasgow Council. This resulted in developing more than 1,000 sites and over 30,000 IP end points, along with large contact centres. The entirety is hosted and delivered from Commsworld-owned and managed cloud infrastructure. "We have many long-term multi-year contracts across public and private sector clients, including a FTSE 100 customer in England," commented Nicol. "We have around 3,000 sites across our base."

Nicol also positions Commsworld as being enthusiastic in its approach. "We're fibre freaks, delivering full-blown FTTP services by utilising dark fibre in its purest form," said Nicol. "We're rapidly moving towards a subscription-based cloud-fulfilled world and the days of the traditional VAR are numbered. Products and services will become more self-serve."

Against this backdrop of business transformation, says Nicol, the exponential growth of IP cloud-based solutions and the appetite for 5G and IoT is creating a 'stampede'. What's more, an age of 'openness' has flung open the flood gates. "An 'IBM' scenario has hit the market," emphasised Nicol. "Once, everything had to be IBM compatible. But when IBM lost its assets the world changed and became more open and accessible. For IBM and the largest telecoms providers their owned network assets have been superseded by the Internet and more open technologies. We can now genuinely compete on a level playing field, which is important at an enterprise level." ■

### Just a minute with Ricky Nicol...

**How did you get into comms?** I joined GEC Reliance straight from school in 1978 and I've worked within the telecoms sector ever since

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

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

When I co-founded Commsworld I looked like one of the Chuckle Brothers, today I look like Harry Hill

**One example of something you've overcome:** Cancer

**Your greatest strength, and what could you work on?** My strong point is social skills. My greatest weaknesses is lacking attention to detail, and I can be gut-driven

**What do you fear most?** Heights

**How would you like to be remembered?** As the oldest living person in telecoms

**The biggest risk you have taken?** I came back from a year out following cancer treatment. I decided to roll the dice and go for my goal rather than take the easy way out, lift some money off the table to add to my life insurance pay out, and sulk

**In hindsight:** I would have been more ambitious much earlier and actively looked for growth opportunities, as opposed to plodding along and not lifting my head up

**Who do you admire most in the channel?** Former Gamma CEO Bob Falconer

**Biggest career achievement?** Building a brilliant business with brilliant people, and making a difference to peoples' lives

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COMMS DEALER | FEBRUARY 2020 | 23

# Modha sets out channel

Luminet's Head of Business Development & Marketing Bimal Modha shows little interest in camouflaging his strategic intentions as he lays bare big expansion plans that speak volumes about his channel ambitions and the opportunities that lie ahead.

Nothing could be more calculated to drive growth, and repeat the trick year-on-year, than Modha's well thought out business plan, the details of which he will stick to like glue. He joined Luminet last September and wasted no time in fashioning a progressive corporate strategy that will see him play a significant role in delivering market expansion and influence at scale, fully leveraging his impressive channel experience. And on matters of execution Modha's approach will be to think broad and big about every opportunity. "I am focused on everything from SEO and sales enablement to building pipeline and growing the team to service the bow wave of opportunity coming our way in 2020/21," stated Modha.

Cocked and loaded having completed a new round of funding Foresight-backed Luminet is targeting eye watering growth over the coming two years as it seeks to duplicate in scale and double market penetration. In its 2019 financial year the business generated circa £5.8 million revenues and for the current year Modha forecasts revenue to close out at £6.5 million, increasing 30 per cent to £8.5 million by 2021. His longer-term strategy is to continue pushing hard and double current EBITDA on targeted £17 million revenues by 2023 and, remarkably, double



Bimal Modha

## A wireless connection to the roof together with traditional fibre into the building truly means always-on

up on this growth during the following two years.

Of course he has a cast iron plan and the immediate priority is to complete the build and launch of a channel portal which will enable partners to order Luminet's products and services and traditional fixed line fibre 24/7, 365 days a year. "With around 70 per cent of our business coming from the channel we are focused on providing partners with the tools and capability to self-serve, check if we are on-net, price up our solution and place an order," stated Modha. "This, together with regular surveys of

our partners to develop and evolve our products and services, keeps us constantly innovating."

### Bridging the gap

According to Modha, Luminet is plugging a gap in the market for channel partners unable to realise revenue until a circuit starts billing. "We can significantly reduce their jeopardy or stalled delivery schedules by getting a wireless connection installed quickly," explained Modha. "As we sell into a wider spectrum of verticals we find that, where fibre is not viable or has wayleave issues or an extended delay, a wireless solution

deployed in most cases in 10 working days allows that site to operate."

Thus, says Modha, Luminet 'gives wings to fibre', providing wireless microwave connectivity based on line-of-site (LOS) from a multitude of base stations in London, which will increase in number during 2020. This capability is augmented by supplier partnerships with Siklu, Radwin and Cisco, which in sum enable Luminet to deliver an alternative network in the sky. "A wireless connection to the roof together with traditional fibre into the building truly means always-on, hence the

100 per cent SLA and uptime guarantee," stated Modha.

Luminet's Wireless Lite product is an alternative to EFM and can provide up to 50Mbps of throughput. Moving up the bandwidths, the firm's kit bag includes the Wireless Pro service that offers guaranteed speeds from 100Mbps up to 5Gbps, with a view to launching 10Gbps services in the new financial year. "We control all elements of the install and, due to the nature of our wireless solutions we can pretty much deliver 90 per cent of them to our customers in 10 working days," reaffirmed Modha.

Growth will be achieved by landing larger opportunities across all markets, he explained, noting that Luminet in particular has 'great traction' in the serviced offices sector. Its customer base is generally made up of finance sector firms, media organisations, professional services companies and the usual spectrum of clients. But an especially important market right now is addressing multi-tenanted (MTI) high rise buildings.

"There is a move towards smarter buildings where, post refurbishment, MTI locations need to have a high wired score and be pre-wired with diverse connections," explained Modha. "This means a new tenant can move in much faster without having to wait for the fibre

# growth plan

to be installed, which can take several months. It also means that any new tenant can have their mobile, Wi-Fi and LAN infrastructure integrated so they are ready to focus on what they do best – their core business.”

Luminet’s market reach extends far beyond the niche nature of its early days when it was seen as an emergency service supplying wireless microwave links when fibre was stuck in wayleave or not feasible. “We’ve come a long way – we’re now viewed more as either a pre-fibre provider or acting as a truly diverse alternative to fibre,” added Modha.

Opportunities in multi-tenanted buildings are reflected in demand for diverse connections in the finance sector, most notably since the advent of MIFID II. And in the hospitality and hotel markets Luminet has seen increasing demand for

all-encompassing connectivity from international clients at some of London’s top hotels, because they want to offer 10Gbps guest Wi-Fi as the norm rather than the exception. “It’s a big selling point, especially for conferences, streaming and bandwidth intensive services and corporate events – it’s something we’ve seen picking up in 2019 and now 2020,” added Modha.

It is universally accepted that today’s employees and organisations need an Internet connection, and while 4G and 5G are useful, coverage remains an issue. It is in this problem area that Luminet continues to provide remedial solutions. “We’re one of a few wireless microwave connectivity providers meeting demand in the marketplace,” said Modha. “And we plan to launch a ‘10Gbps in 10 working days’ campaign in the latter part of 2020.” ■

## Experience counts...

**M**odha’s 20 year industry experience includes a ten year stint at BT ranging across BT Retail, BT Exact and BT Global Services in marketing, strategy and satellite sales in Asia, and BT’s indirect operation working with partners. He then joined Tiscali (later acquired by TalkTalk) to head up marketing into its channel base, a move that preceded an eight year spell at Virgin Media Business where he led channel marketing and worked as an Account Director managing Entanet and Redcentric among others. He took Entanet from five circuits a month to over £5 million between January 2013 and December 2014.

Then, an opportunity to create a retention management division and launch a renewal portal at network operator Virtual1 proved irresistible. “Having delivered against those objectives I was persuaded by Luminet to head up its business development and marketing functions,” explained Modha. “My first job was to look at how we marketed our products and services and how we could on-board a number of key partners. With that task now completed I’ve started to look at the bigger picture and explore how Luminet can enable partners to drive volume and promote our wireless portfolio.” ■

### Just a minute with Bimal Modha...

**Role models:** The Dalai Lama and Steve Jobs. They never gave up and pursued their dreams with passion, inspiring a whole generation

**What talent do you wish you had?** To occasionally extend the day or stop time so I can savour the moment

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Barack Obama, an inspiring statesman who came from humble beginnings; Groucho Marx for his comedic value and unique perspective on life; and Graham Norton to help quiz Barack Obama and keep Groucho on his toes

**Best advice you have ever been given:** Draw out a plan on a piece of paper, look at it every three months and, if you keep focused, 80 per cent of what you’ve committed to will happen. Having a plan is half the battle

**If you weren’t in ICT what would you be doing?** I’d be a pilot

**Lesson learnt:** To be less accepting of the status quo, don’t just kick the can down the road, always fix the fundamentals, create a plan of action and stick to it

**Industry bugbear:** Mobile contracts – they are designed to confuse people

**How do you relax when not working?** Summers in Sicily

**What do you fear most?** Forgetting to write down a killer idea during a creative session

**Top tip for resellers:** Getting the right team around you can create an ecosystem that will drive exponential growth



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# Roos on high altitude strategy

Within the next three to five years the answer is due on whether Cirrus Chief Executive Jason Roos will realise his ambition to become the UK's top CCaaS provider and rank among the top five in America. The signs are it's a foregone conclusion.

**W**hat Roos has put in train with Cirrus speaks volumes about his determination to continue advancing a contact centre strategy first conceived a decade ago. In 2010 while working for a BPO Roos was tasked with leading the procurement of a new contact centre platform. It soon became clear to him that there was an opportunity to transform how contact centre technology works. "Before the development was even finished we had customers signing up," stated Roos.

In 2013 he spun out of the BPO and set up Cirrus as a separate business, and to deliver a 99.999 per cent service level contracted with penalties Roos partnered with intelligent network solution provider TelXL to run the voice network. As the partnership grew, TelXL invested in Cirrus and last month's merger provides a boost to their product development capabilities and enables the enlarged entity to accelerate its channel growth campaign.

Last year Cirrus transitioned to a channel-only model for the UK market and forged a partnership with Gamma Direct and Gamma Wholesale. Cirrus provides the contact centre overlay for Gamma's Horizon UC Collaborate service launched in March 2019. "In 2020 we have a series



Jason Roos

## The agreement between Amazon, Google and Apple to work together to build an open source smart home standard is a sign of how consumers will interact with businesses

of expos and events where we will co-exhibit with Gamma and launch new developments," stated Roos.

### Channel-only

He said the shift from a direct to an indirect go-to-market model was a 'transformative moment' for the organisation. "When the company was formed we believed that the channel was

the route to market, where the shift from premise to hosted voice and now the shift from hosted voice to UCaaS was a gap we filled," he stated. "This strategy has been absolutely the right one, and last year we finally switched off direct sales and went all in with the channel. Our approach is to work closely with a select number of partners

via an immersive period of accreditation training."

Roos spent between 2013 and 2019 waiting for the channel opportunity to mature. In that five year period he nearly changed tack and gave up, but persistence rarely goes unrewarded. "During the past six months we have seen the pipeline increase 10-fold

through our channel partner relationships," he added.

"The remaining 80 per cent of voice yet to migrate to hosted is about to enter the mass market phase. For the right providers, the next 10 years will be about riding the crest of the wave, trying to keep up. We also expect to see significant growth from our US operation based in California, opened in 2018 to service the growing TAS market."

Following the TelXL merger Cirrus generates double digit millions in revenues and employs 100-plus staff growing to 150 by the middle of 2020. The enlarged group is on course to double revenues year-on-year for the next three years, and this projected period of expansion will be facilitated in part by the relocation of its UK headquarters to Epsom which offers room to grow with more office space and training facilities.

Roos has also been busy launching notable technology developments. These include Cirrus's omnichannel offering, the introduction of Conversational AI (CAI), API integrations to over 30 applications and the roll out of Cirrus Link Pay+. Now, AI and personal assistants are top of the tech development agenda, and their impact on the contact centre will be dramatic, Roos believes. "Cirrus is developing capabilities to bring Alexa,

# strategic goals

Siri and Google Assistant into our customers' environments, allowing them to offer their customers frictionless access to service via the personal assistant platforms already on their phones and in their homes," he explained.

## Imminent impact

"The technology lifecycle is getting shorter, and the impact of AI and personal assistants like Alexa and Google Assistant will come rapidly and at a relatively

## Our channel partners are taking us into new sectors such as legal

inexpensive price point. The recent agreement between Amazon, Google and Apple to work together to build an open source smart home standard is a sign of how consumers will interact with businesses."

Amid all this innovation Roos has resisted becoming technology-led. "Many like myself have been at the coal face, so we look at how we can apply new technologies to our customers' business challenges to get them the outcomes they need," he stated. "We like to be disruptive with products like our Link Pay+ PCI compliant omnichannel payment solution, our on the fly translation service CirrusTranslate, and CAI, our conversational AI tool."

Cirrus won a UK Contact Centre Forum award for supporting Clarks' entire contact centre transformation with AI solutions to tackle the

'back to school' avalanche of queries, enabling the shoe seller to process refunds on the spot through a call to video channel swap. "Our customer base is broad because customer experience is a topic that impacts every business," added Roos. "Traditionally, we have been strong in retail, government, energy and insurance. However, our channel partners are taking us into new sectors such as legal, and we are constantly seeing new applications in the market and learning from our customers.

"We have an Innovation Group which holds regular forums with end users to explore new technologies, gauge demand and prioritise development. We know that customers' use of speech interfaces to initiate self-service interactions is accelerating. The question is how we build this into a useful contact centre application."

It's the kind of question that only a company like Cirrus could ask, says Roos. "The focus of all vendors in the UCaaS channel tends to ignore the CCaaS element," he explained. "There are some specialist SIs and resellers who understand contact centre, but many shy away from it.

"Cirrus will capitalise on the seismic shift that's about to happen in the UCaaS space by providing an integrated CCaaS solution that works with any UCaaS offering including BroadSoft and Microsoft Teams. Strong partnerships with flexible vendors that can deliver frictionless new CCaaS technology to their customers will be the winners." ■

## Just a minute with Jason Roos...

**Role model:** Steve Jobs for the way he saw the world

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

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and Nelson Mandela

**What do you fear most?** I'm not a big fan of spiders

**Your greatest strength and what could you work on?** My strong point is decisiveness, which in equal measure is also my weakness

**Give one example of something you have overcome:** I quit smoking on the 31st of October 2005

**The best piece of advice you have been given:** Borrow money when you have it, not when you don't

**The biggest risk you have taken:** Starting Cirrus, by far

**Cirrus company high point:** The dozens of Comms National Award nominations and wins over the years

**Industry bugbear:** Procurement: The commercial evaluation of RFPs often completely misses the value delivered by SaaS and CCaaS solutions

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** Spending time with my kids while my wife blazes a trail

**How do you relax when not working?** As the father of a one year old and a four year old, what's 'relaxing'?

**Top tip for resellers?** Don't shy away from complex deals. With the right partners you can be very successful

ENERGY UPDATE  
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## Energy offering simple to Evoke

EVOKE Telecom are an award-winning provider of cloud, on-premise communications and connectivity solutions, founded by directors David and Susie Wardell in September 2013. After many years working for some of the biggest names in the telecommunications industry, it became clear that genuine customer care and a true commitment to customer experience was missing. This they thought, was an opportunity to start a business that would put best-in-class solutions at the heart of everything they do, which is why they only partner with innovative, world class and best of breed companies.

"It was apparent at a very early stage that energy was a logical addition to the services we provide. We felt that Green Energy was becoming an important consideration for all businesses across the globe and that if we were to promote a move to Green Energy, we would also be helping to make a positive environmental difference. It was almost like adding Green Energy was a Corporate Social Responsibility. That was when we decided to approach the team at Fidelity Energy," explains David Wardell, Managing Director and Founder of Evoke Telecom.

"Fidelity had first come onto our radar following their amazing work with the Kia Oval and we have been watching their exciting growth and development ever since. Once we realised that they were attending Comms Vision at Gleneagles, it was one of the first meeting requests on our list.

"Following an initial meeting, the response from the Fidelity team has been amazing. We were met by a member of the team and went live with energy literally within days. The launch was so smooth, and we had our first customer within a couple of days and have not looked back since. We now

introduce both clients and prospects to the opportunity of energy review as a matter of course".

Helping to make the running of a business easier by providing innovative ideas at prices that don't compromise the delivery of excellent service is high on Evoke Telecoms list of priorities. This level of customer care mirrors what the directors at Fidelity Energy instil in their team, which has made for a perfect marriage for the partnership, as David explains:

"Our background allows us to add value to your business, rather than just focusing on telecoms. Whatever service you choose, the one thing that you can be assured of when working with us is that we are 100% customer centric and we will always put our customers and partners first. Therefore, energy is a very logical addition to the 'services' conversation. Typically, companies wait until their contract is up for renewal and then hunt down the best deal that they can find. Fidelity enables us to have much earlier conversations and lock in future deals, which is incredibly powerful in a rising market.

"For us, ease of doing business and delivering simplicity for our customers is of utmost importance. Fortunately, this would appear to be a similar ethos for Fidelity Energy's Managing Director, John Haw, and his team too. The result is an intuitive and very user-friendly self-service suite that our team find very easy to use. This has quickly made energy a seamless part of our day to day business, rather than a distraction. And of course, it is wonderfully 'light touch' without the need for technical support or engineering input, leaving our tech team to get on with the day to day delights of telecoms and connectivity. Looking back, I don't see why it took us so long to make what is now such an obvious decision!"

"For us, ease of doing business and delivering simplicity for our customers is of utmost importance. Fortunately, this would appear to be a similar ethos for Fidelity Energy."

David Wardell



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# Discover 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 help resellers discover and understand 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.



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### Graham Wilkinson

Beyond Connectivity



"Beyond Connectivity is delighted to be part of MiM 2020 to explore and discuss mobile opportunity. It's a great forum to engage with new partners and to share how we are looking to support resellers in maximising margin through the roll out of 5G."

**Beyond**

Mobile Zone

### Mark Riddell

Abzorb



"At a time where it is key to add true value and differentiate yourself in the market, Margin in Mobile gives us a great opportunity to learn as well as educate the channel in how to achieve exactly that."

**abzorb**

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### Shaun Bodsworth

Inform Billing



"With a strong background in mobile and IoT billing and extensive functionality in our solutions, we will be on hand at Margin in Mobile to provide advice and guidance on the intricacies of billing for these growth opportunities."

**INFORM BILLING**

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### Justin Blaine

NTA



"The NTA team is looking forward to meeting with mobile partners looking to add value to their businesses and the solutions they offer. With NTA's White Labelled Hosted Telephony platform resellers report margins of 80% Gross Profit and can enhance their mobile solutions sales by also connecting the mobile device to our network."

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## MARGIN IN MOBILE EDUCATIONAL SEMINAR AGENDA



**9.30am: Speaker – Garry Growns, Sales Director**  
DWS

### SELLING MOBILE MADE SIMPLE

Kicking off the 'Exploration of new opportunities in mobile' theme, Garry Growns will look at how DWS can help resellers easily gain entry to the mobile market. In particular, he will look at how the DWS portal can make it simple for resellers to provision mobile solutions and provide online leasing approval, thus removing hardware barriers to entry – all whilst retaining ownership of the customer.



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**10.00am: Speaker – Mark Lomas, Head of New Business**  
Gamma

### DISCOVER THE 5G OPPORTUNITY

Mark will explain how Gamma can help resellers win mobile deals by offering flexibility in their choice of networks. A senior spokesman from '3' will then look at how the networks will deliver spectrum and the opportunities for resellers that the technology offers, such as IoT.



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**10.30am: Speaker – Iain Sinnott, Sales & Marketing Director**  
Vanilla IP

### MOBILE SOLUTIONS – THERE'S NO LIMIT!

In his session, Iain will look at how VanillaIP's cloud management platform UBoss enables resellers to control their mobility proposition build for their customers. Looking at a variety of different consumption and product choices (including both in-house and external options). Resellers need not be limited in their choices!



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### 11.00am: COFFEE BREAK



**11.15am: Speakers – Adrian Sunderland CTO and Lee Broxson, Sales Director**  
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### 11.45am: Speaker TBC



**12.15am: Speaker – Mandy Fazelynia, Operations and Business Development Director and Rob Foster, Head of Channel Sales**  
Zest 4

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As will have been demonstrated during the course of the morning, there are a vast array of mobile products, services and opportunities available. So how can resellers manage an expanded portfolio and scale without using multiple portals? Anton will also examine how such a portfolio can help resellers build their valuation multiple on exit.



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# Bodsworth gears up for

An impressive head of steam has built up in Inform Billing's channel expansion campaign, as it marks its tenth anniversary moment with an affirmation that innovation, investment and opportunity diversification remain the very essence of its Eclipse NG platform, according to Managing Director Shaun Bodsworth.

**S**teeped in ambition, Bodsworth feels that Inform Billing's ten year milestone this month signals the dawn of a new chapter of innovation, diversification and technology partnerships. As well as his annual let-rip of hefty investments in the Eclipse NG billing platform, which has been refashioned for the age of automation, subscription models and the march of wider integrations, Bodsworth has sprung into action as he seeks to forge vital technology partnerships. "Our main focus is on developing partnerships and integrations with complementary applications to offer more joined up solutions," he stated. "And we will continue to develop automations to simplify the billing process."

Kicking off 10 years ago with sub-10 customers, Inform Billing's client base today is populated by almost 300 organisations operating across diverse sectors and ranging in size from start-ups to £100 million turnover businesses. Its financial figures are impressive, and are the telltale of an accelerating growth agenda. In its 2020 financial year Inform Billing expects to hit £1.7 million revenues, reflecting a 24 per cent increase in turnover on 2019 and a 49 per cent hike in profit. This builds on 25 per cent growth on the last financial year, bringing

Inform's three year growth rate to 103 per cent.

"We have achieved this without external funding," said Bodsworth. "The focus has been on tightening up processes, collaboration, knowledge sharing, increasing professionalism and generally growing up as a business. Our investment over the past seven years in cloud-based platforms enables us to apply the same level of flexibility and functionality to bill new technology services. We eagerly anticipate the advent of full fibre, 5G and digitalisation."

#### Pivotal award wins

Inform Billing has also been spurred by notable Comms National Award wins, scooping the Best Billing Platform gong in 2017 and 2019. According to Bodsworth the first award was as much symbolic as it was deserved, representing a turning point in how the business saw itself and was perceived by others. "Until then we had always been seen as a challenger," stated Bodsworth. "It meant a lot to be externally recognised as a serious and respected player in the channel."

It is a fact, says Bodsworth, that the extent and nature of a billing provider's investment and platform development is of upmost strategic importance to resellers. Inform Billing, for



Shaun Bodsworth

## Billing has become much more of a service package than a software requirement

example, has so far invested over £2 million into its Eclipse NG billing platform and continues to plough 45 per cent of revenues into the ongoing development of the software in line with the demands of the market.

"Subscription-based services are gaining traction across the business world, with requirements to bill more complex consumption and event-based services such as Office 365, data back-

ups and other IT related subscriptions," added Bodsworth. "While relatively straightforward, these have traditionally either been billed as a one-off or annual fee, or directly from the vendor rather than on a recurring wholesale model."

Inform Billing also supports subscription billing outside of the traditional telecoms space. Its software is used in a range of sectors including IT, mobile, IoT, security,

utilities, waste management, banking and even hospitality. "We continue to develop partnerships in diverse markets relevant to the subscription economy, opening up future opportunities for Inform Billing and the channel," added Bodsworth.

Expectations also continue to build around integration. When resellers are looking to integrate two or more complex systems, such as billing and CRM, the complexity of implementing any meaningful integration should not be underestimated, warned Bodsworth. "Rather than having integration for the sake of it, this is where we can offer advice, support and recommendations," he added. "In addition to integrations, mobile and IoT is another growth area attracting new entrants, but having the right billing capability to offer flexible tariff packages and options for pricing and bundling, as well as self-serve options, is critical to transforming the mobile and IoT space."

These trends mean that billing providers must ensure their wrap around support, advice and expertise matches up to their physical product offering, pointed out Bodsworth. "Billing has become much more of a service package than just a software requirement, and we are seeing a huge

# next ten years

increase in how resellers value experience and expertise, which has driven a 400 per cent rise in demand for our managed services over the past three years," he stated.

But despite such a vibrant and advancing value market, there is one aspect of billing that must feature near the top of the comms sector's industry bugbear league table. The issue resides in the disparity between what is plainly required by billing providers and the current modus operandi concerning CDR formats. "One area that remains a thorn in our side is the sheer number of different formats of CDR, despite industry wide efforts to move to one standard format," said Bodsworth. "As an independent provider with customers billing products and services from well over 100 different suppliers, it can be resource draining to deal with all the flavours of CDR files and their last minute changes."

On such frustrating matters not much has changed in a decade, from the time Inform Billing began its commercial life. Back then, it was the acquisition of intellectual property rights for Eclipse and a small customer base that precipitated the launch of Inform Billing on 1st February 2010. With one contracted developer on board, Bodsworth and co-founder Darren Salisbury set about refocusing the software back onto the channel prior to a bold relaunch.

Salisbury was previously Managing Director of Pan Telecom which created a billing platform for in-house use, and was made available to a handful external customers including

Bodsworth who was then Commercial and Operations Director for a telecoms dealer. After GCI acquired Pan Telecom the billing software ticked along for many years, as GCI did not see billing services as part of its strategy. This enabled Bodsworth to acquire the software and partner with Salisbury on a new venture.

### Rich pedigree

Their combined knowledge of billing and the channel must rank among the most insightful. Bodsworth had previously established a mobile and fixed line consultancy business, providing contractual and commercial guidance to large corporates as well as billing analysis and validation services. Salisbury also worked as a Billing Manager prior to running Pan Telecom, overseeing billing and building the first iteration of the Eclipse software from scratch. Together, said Bodsworth, they will ensure that Inform Billing is ahead of its fast moving and expanding markets for another ten years and beyond.

"The telecoms landscape is changing at pace, and as an experienced billing specialist with flexibility within our software applications we can support new technology areas where billing systems are vital," said Bodsworth. "These include cloud and subscription services and more inclusive package style propositions, where multiple products and services are essentially bundled into a total solution and billed in that way. The bill remains simple, but our software provides the critical detail for revenue assurance and supplier invoice validation." ■

### Just a minute with Shaun Bodsworth...

**Role model:** My first manager in retail. At the age of 18 he instilled in me the importance of being honest in business

**What talent do you wish you had?** To remember everything, particularly the late nights at channel events!

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I once had lunch with Boris Johnson

**One example of something you've overcome:** The fear of failure through trial and error

**Your greatest strength and what could you work on?** I am an analytical thinker with good attention to detail, so generally I'm well prepared; but I can sometimes read too much into situations

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Nelson Mandela, Alan Brazil and John Bishop

**The biggest risk you have taken?** Giving up a well paid job with benefits to start my own business. I could never go back

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** I went to catering college so I'd be a chef

**Best piece of advice you have been given:** Trust your gut. Sometimes it's all you have to go on

**Name one thing you could not do without in your job:** My notepad for jotting down and remembering important details

**Top tip:** Ensure your billing provider can demonstrate the market knowledge, experience and expertise sufficient for your business. Keep an eye on the margin, and don't be afraid of healthy profit

# voioni

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# More delay over fibre

The Government's target to roll out full fibre infrastructure nationwide by 2025 raises the question of whether Ofcom's latest consultation on the matter is a case of too little too late.

Ofcom's Supercharging Investment in Fibre Broadband consultation launched last month closes on 1st April and the watchdog plans to publish its decisions in early 2021, less than four years ahead of the Government's target date. Ofcom says it wants to speed up the roll out of fibre yet it could achieve the opposite considering the timescales involved in bringing its latest set of ideas to conclusion, almost slamming on the brakes with a year-long perusal of proposed options, which take the form of a four point action plan.

Firstly, Ofcom plans to improve the business case for fibre investment. In more urban areas, where there is likely to be a choice of networks, Ofcom will set Openreach's wholesale prices in a way that encourages competition from new networks, as well as investment by Openreach by giving it the opportunity to make a fair return.

The scheme's next stated aim is to protect customers and drive competition. So Ofcom will seek to cap Openreach's wholesale charges on its slower copper broadband services; and to prevent Openreach from harming competition it would be restricted from offering discounts that could stifle investment by rivals.

Thirdly, in rural areas Ofcom proposes to allow Openreach to recover investment

costs across the wholesale prices of a wider range of services, reducing the risk of its investment. Last but not least, Ofcom proposes to remove regulation on Openreach's copper products in areas where full fibre is built to support it in switching customers to the new fibre network.

The proposals form part of Ofcom's review of wholesale telecoms used for residential and business services. It also maps out how Ofcom will regulate BT for the period from April 2021 to March 2026. Ofcom emphasised that it intends to vary regulation for different parts of the country to 'ensure nobody gets left behind'.

The announcement was quickly followed by industry calls for Ofcom to prioritise competition, ensure a level playing field, speed up momentum and do what it says quicker. CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch urged Ofcom to inject urgency into its planning if the Government's 2025 deadline for national coverage is to be met. "The target is possible but only achievable with bold and affirmative action," said Mesch. "The direction of travel Ofcom is taking to ensure national coverage and help establish the at-scale competitors essential to a healthy infrastructure market for the long-term is right, but we would like to see it move further and faster.

"We are encouraged by Ofcom's recognition of the risks of volume discounts



Greg Mesch

## The target is possible but only achievable with bold and affirmative action

and geographic pricing to damage competition before it can scale, but we would like it to be even more proactive in addressing these issues."

### Competition is key

Tristia Harrison, Chief Executive of TalkTalk, says it is essential for the regulatory environment to allow competition and investment to thrive. "Ofcom must avoid raising wholesale prices too early and only do so when competition has been established," she commented. "This is the best way to encourage investment from new entrants, support retail competition and protect consumers from higher charges before they have access to faster, more reliable services."

Evan Wienburg, Truespeed CEO, believes that Ofcom must take account of the

work that providers such as Truespeed and others are doing in rural areas and not muddy the playing field by allowing Openreach to waste money on overbuilding projects in these areas. "We urge Ofcom to ensure a fair and level playing field between private and part public funded infrastructure providers as the industry ramps up to deliver on the promise of full fibre broadband for all, regardless of postcode," he stated.

An anonymous statement from Openreach went like this, 'We'll consider the range of proposals carefully and continue to work with Ofcom and industry on getting the conditions right to help achieve the Government's ambition of rolling out gigabit capable broadband across the UK as soon as possible'.

### Analysis and comment

What do Ofcom's proposals tell us? They tell us that the UK still has no overarching strategy to get the nation fibred up pronto, and that speed of action and completeness of execution cannot even be entertained until the right 'conditions' to really move forward have been established. Perhaps also, the proposals underestimate the work done by altnets and downplay their potential to significantly drive the fibre agenda.

In regulatory terms, we have barely moved forward a yard. The reality is that 2025 will not be achieved by words; and in all of this the revelatory term is 'consideration', a euphemism for sitting on hands. After closing the consultation in April Ofcom will spend many months in a state of consideration, reflecting Openreach's contemplative mood in the run up to April – it too will 'carefully consider' the proposals.

Despite all that, the full fibre market is wide open for anyone wanting to take the initiative by the scruff of the neck. Let us now 'consider' something important and telling: Consider the go-get spirit of entrepreneurialism which characterises the channel, and how that contrasts with the badge of 'dither and delay' pinned on the weak chest of a stick in the mud regulator, and a ponderous incumbent. The channel should now punch the air and cry, 'Let's get Digital Britain done!' ■



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A F F I N I T Y

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# Vaioni raises the bar

The ongoing ascendancy of fast growing network operator Vaioni Wholesale is inevitable, and Sales & Marketing Director Mark Curtis-Wood has a solid plan for it.

If Curtis-Wood sticks to his plan he will drive Vaioni Wholesale's annual revenues to £30 million within four years. How? By introducing new products and services and adding more customers through organic expansion and acquisitions. "The sales strategy is also the foundation of that growth plan along with the right team of people," stated Curtis-Wood. "I have taken time to rebuild the wholesale team, bringing in a new Sales Manager and three experienced account managers who know and understand the channel. We have to recruit well. One of my targets is to have the best trained salesforce in the industry."

Curtis-Wood joined Vaioni Wholesale in April last year and wasted no time in strategising a business plan that received a big boost when the company secured a multi-million-pound investment from Panoramic Growth Equity in August. "Our greatest asset is our cloud-ready National Ethernet Network," he added. "We are using this to build out the next generation portfolio that will enable our partners to take voice, UC, security, 4G and 5G products all built on the same infrastructure."

Vaioni Wholesale generated double digit growth over the last five years and achieved a 23 per cent hike in its latest financial year. These figures are surely a feather in the cap of Managing Director Sachin Vaish who, prior to

Curtis-Wood's appointment, ran sales, marketing, product and commercial himself. Vaish also kicked off operational improvements such as automating systems alongside investments in taking the software development function from one person to a team of five. "This will allow us to remain agile," said Curtis-Wood.

Key technologies occupying Curtis-Wood's thoughts are next generation mobile networks, 5G and Artificial Intelligence. "5G will pose a threat to the lower level connectivity market by offering low latency, higher bandwidth connectivity that can be rapidly deployed," he commented. "That's why we have mobilised our network and embedded the technology to offer 4G and 5G and give our customers the same benefits of our fixed network anywhere on any device. The move to SDN is another key shift. Customers have more control and by leveraging AI, Machine Learning and automation we can give them the flexibility they need."

#### Key insights

Analytics tools that provide an understanding of the data points that drive a business are also in demand. In response Vaioni Wholesale has incorporated Insight as a Service into its voice offering. "Voice is no longer about who can offer the cheapest seat price or biggest bundle of minutes, but how you can give the customer real-time access to what their users are



Mark Curtis-Wood

## One of my targets is to have the best trained salesforce in the industry

doing so you can increase efficiency and profitability and win more business," added Curtis-Wood.

He holds the strong belief that there has never been a more vital moment for resellers to ensure that they own the pipe into their customers' premises. "But they will have to evolve to be the trusted provider of several core products and services, and some of these they may never have sold before, like firewalls, UTM and security for example," he said. "It is critical that a partner's supplier provides a full support programme to take them on the journey of digital transformation."

Just as Curtis-Wood joined Vaioni Wholesale with an ambition to realise its growth objectives, he left school at 16 propelled by a similar drive to achieve his own career potential. "My maths teacher told me I would never make anything of myself," he stated. "I used this as fuel to prove he was wrong."

At 17 Curtis-Wood sold £1,000 vacuum cleaners before setting up his first business two years later, importing electric cable from Italy. Fluctuations in the price of copper prompted a move into B2B sales working for Granada TV selling advertising, before spending most of the 90s

recruiting and building sales machines for various companies as a consultant. Still not ready for the comms market, Curtis-Wood sold cars until grey imports rocked the boat around 2000.

Then he joined Genesis Communications in 2001 at the start of the mobile phone boom. It was one of the few companies recruiting people with no telco experience. "Genesis was a heavily KPI led environment which was a great fit for me," said Curtis-Wood. "I don't believe in leaving results to chance and am focused on success through definition. I quickly moved from Business Advisor to Manager to National Sales Manager, before leaving in 2004 to head up sales at Chess Telecom. After rapid growth over a three year period I left to be captain of my own ship again in consultancy before joining Nimans to lead the Network Services division."

During his eight year spell at Nimans, Curtis-Wood was responsible not just for sales but the operations, billing and back office side of the business – all valuable experience that is reflected in his role at Vaioni. "I was keen to focus on sales and marketing again and use my commercial and product development skills in a technically-led business," explained Curtis-Wood. "Vaioni is a key player in the connectivity industry and I knew there was huge growth potential to take the business to a new level." ■

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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."



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- Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year

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# Get set for a sonic boom

For workplaces to be fit for purpose, emergent technology in audio such as voice assistants, AI, ML and biometrics must be fully embraced, urges Jesper Kock, Vice President Research and Development at Sennheiser Communications.

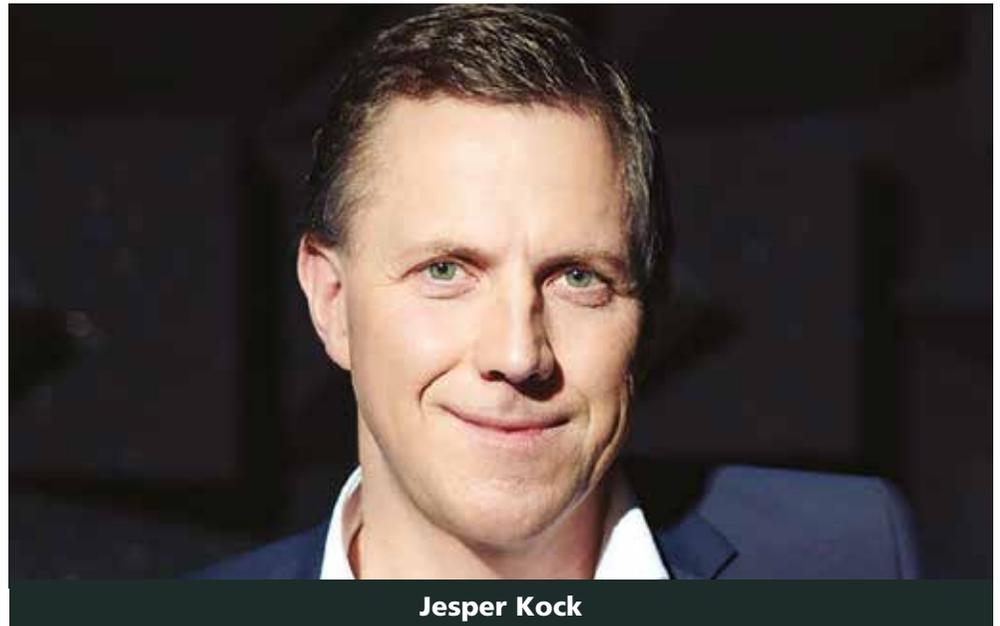
**V**oice assistants have burgeoned and emergent audio technology continues to drive the evolution of the workspace, with developments moving at pace as AI, voice assistants and biometric technology become more widespread. "Our workspaces and the way we work have undergone a dramatic transformation, from an increase in open plan offices to developments in technology, most notably UC and voice assistants," stated Kock. "Millennials and Gen Z will soon make up the biggest part of the global workforce, and this segment requires more flexible working options and technology that will suit their lifestyles. By 2022, almost half of the workforce will be more mobile. It is also clear that audio technology will play a crucial role in facilitating a more flexible working environment for workers."

That voice assistants have become a powerful lubricant of workplace convenience and ease of connectivity is a given, observed Kock. "Research indicates that by 2023 there will be eight billion digital voice assistants in use, up from 2.5 billion at the end of 2018," he added. "It's clear that more and more enterprises will be focusing on integrating their own sonic strategies, adopting voice assistive technologies across B2B touchpoints. This in turn

will catalyse productivity, efficiency and connectivity."

Satisfaction at being able to do most tasks with the sound of your voice has already rendered conventional working practices obsolete, according to Kock. "Long gone are the days of being stuck to your keyboard, staring at your computer screen for hours on end," he said. "This scenario has been replaced by a world where you can work anywhere, and do most tasks with the sound of your voice. The potential for AI voice assistants is endless, they'll be able to control everything in the office, from reminding you of meetings, organising calls via your contacts and call history, record your calls, initiate a video call, read case notes – the list goes on. These emerging technologies are already driving efficiencies."

It would be a big mistake to underrate the wider trends around audio solutions using AI and ML technology, believes Kock, and in proving the point he nodded towards the introduction of audio software that recognises environmental changes which, he says, will become essential to employees in open plan offices, for example. "This means audio tools will be able to recognise environmental interferences such as disruptive noise and deliver responsive solutions," he stated. "The audio tools will also be able to learn which sounds we might want to



Jesper Kock

## The benefits of biometrics will dramatically improve people management and HR systems in all sectors

omit, such as background noise, and which sounds we need to hear, such as traffic during a commute."

### Balance matters

Although these technologies enable employees to work remotely and on-the-go it must be remembered that in the age of an always-on culture employees need to know how to switch off to maintain their work-life balance, observed Kock. "The emergence of biometric technology in the market could be the solution," he stated. "Biometrics will help employees become more comfortable in the tech driven future workplace. Biometric monitoring could be used for anything

from ensuring people are sufficiently active during a working day, taking breaks from their desks and taking long enough lunch breaks, to monitoring their tone of voice and stress levels in conference calls. These solutions will help both employers and employees intervene and react before stress impacts the quality of performance and encroaches on their work-life balance. Ultimately, a happy workforce is a strong one and the benefits of biometrics will dramatically improve people management and HR systems in all sectors."

It holds that 2020 will catalyse a 'trailblazing decade' in terms of

technology in the workplace, according to Kock. He believes that innovation to date and its integration into day-to-day life will burst through the gates next year. "These developments will not only enhance work performance and productivity but also radically improve employee health and wellbeing, which is increasingly becoming the differentiator for employees in this competitive landscape," he stated. "The innovations we're already seeing in audio AI, voice assistants and biometric technology are in their infancy, but they are already providing solutions to the demanding requirements of the modern workforce." ■

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# Why show and tell is key

Despite modern technology, it is traditional ideas of demonstration, education and use cases that are key to cloud and mobility sales success, according to VanillaIP Sales and Marketing Director Iain Sinnott.

**T**he age of traditional comms is waning, replaced by the age of mobility and the cloud. But the channel's sales approaches are yet to adjust fully to the upheaval of digitalisation and mobile. Not surprisingly, as technology advances at pace, and 5G beckons, traditional sales techniques have lost their glamour, yet they will be needed now more than ever if we are to avoid a slow creep towards realising what is possible. In issuing a wake up call to the channel, Sinnott has descended on this subject and on what it means for the channel's trading status with customers.

It is perhaps an irony, he says, that to unlock the market for hot new technologies, such as those with a mobility flavour, a reversion to long-held tried and tested tactics is required. Just as significant, the steady stream of new products with the capacity to change the world of work continues to flow. How this will play to the current sales approaches of many resellers is clear – they too need to change. But the market's floodgates will only open through the practical application of communication and education by knowledgeable resellers. "We see that happening through informative demonstrations of useful new tools," stated Sinnott.

For workers, the attraction of mobile devices, or a PC-mobile mix, will become

ever irresistible and will surely, over time, catalyse the shift to a 'mobile majority' environment. For resellers, this evolving dynamic presents a challenge – how best to capitalise on the opportunity at hand. "For resellers in the mobile space, retaining the core mobile voice service and building on smart cloud communications could be the most profitable route for them to follow," commented Sinnott. "For those who don't currently own the mobile fleets, selling a 'one number' solution through OTT UC apps, working on staff-purchased smartphones could give them the advantage. But education is key."

## Digital natives

That said, the evolution of the workspace is falling short of expectations in terms of speed of change, but as more digital natives take management roles, or as recruitment challenges make the environmental package more important, we will see demand for workplace flexibility tools and virtual collaboration increase, believes Sinnott. How well a reseller responds operationally to these market trends is an important point of consideration, and pushing sales training and customer education towards the top of the agenda is imperative.

It is a fact that most SMBs are not familiar with the tools that can deliver big increases in staff productivity and advances in customer



Iain Sinnott

## The longer resellers wait to join the new world, the less likely they are to be seen as a trusted advisor

experiences. Sales staff not only need pertinent knowledge, they must use their knowhow effectively. To that end, VanillaIP is arming reseller staff with a virtual tool demo kit, which is worth circa £1,000 per annum per sales person. "Show and tell is a vital part of the LEAD (listen, educate, advise, design) sales technique we promote, but unless the sales person has the tools we can't guarantee the right impact," added Sinnott.

It is calculated that 20 per cent of staff in SMBs deliver a higher performance when boosted by mobility tools. "Account management,

sales of soft phone, mobile call control and mobile SIM extensions are enhancing the effectiveness and revenue commitment of existing bases," commented Sinnott. "Resellers who have committed to this cross-sell and up-sell strategy are seeing the results, and we have added two new training courses this year to help staff in this space sharpen their skills and become real profit generators."

In terms of the biggest opportunities, there are two wins on offer, noted Sinnott – increasing the value of existing cloud customers and winning a

higher percentage of new business pitches, delivered and supported by trained sales and account manager staff with the wherewithal to inform customers and identify productivity and cost benefits. "Mobility in all its forms are some of the easiest benefits to introduce," added Sinnott. "Mobility can be delivered in a number of ways, the key is to make it appropriate to the user, not the profit model. Profit is a long-term strategy these days, so we stick to the mantra of delivering a 'feature appropriate' service at user level.

"The longer resellers wait to join the new world, the less likely they are to be seen as a trusted advisor. You become a well-meaning friend but business is business and a good sales person with a great portfolio will tip your customer over the edge – as might a freemium product like 365."

Another industry game changer, observed Sinnott, is the much anticipated arrival of 5G which will make 'almost anywhere' as effective as 'at my desk', he believes. "Resellers can't rely on customers finding their way from the old world to the new," said Sinnott. "They need to inspire them through demonstrations and case studies. A brochure simply does not cut it. If you are promoting true cloud UC then you must demonstrate it live effectively, either face-to-face or virtually, anytime, anyplace, anywhere." ■

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# Accelerated fibre roll-out v



Fibre laying in Newcastle

CT professionals will be fully aware that growing customer demands for unified communications can only be effectively delivered with a high bandwidth digital network infrastructure.

Labour's moves to nationalise Openreach and provide free broadband have been quashed by Boris Johnson's thumping election win, but one thing the proposals did do was focus business minds on the slow pace of Britain's fibre roll-out and the desperate need for acceleration across the entire country, including of course rural areas.

The Prime Minister has called for full fibre across all the UK by 2025 and, responding to Ofcom's call to "supercharge" British investment in full-fibre broadband by encouraging more competition in cities and supporting BT to roll out faster speeds in remote areas, Openreach has announced plans to start rolling out ultrafast full-fibre broadband to 227 rural communities across the UK in the next 14 months.

Meanwhile, with the shackles of Labour's plans undone, TalkTalk has pressed ahead with the sale of its loss-making FibreNation business to City Fibre. According to, Chief Executive Trista Harrison this is "good news for Britain and its full fibre roll-out ambition, supporting wide-geographic reach of full fibre and further driving competition in the market".

City Fibre CEO Greg Mesch, believes the deal to be "completely synergistic", as it would bring the company's offering to new cities at lower cost. The company is now targeting 100 towns and cities across the UK in a bid to bring full fibre broadband to the whole country by expanding from large metropolitan areas into smaller population areas.

There can be now doubt that economic and political pressure is paying off and the full fibre roll out is accelerating, but over time what will it mean to you and your channel customers? Our Kaleidoscope contributors this month broadly agree that it will be a much-needed shot in the arm for channel business.



BEN KNIGHTS  
9 GROUP

"Full fibre will democratise digital services for UK plc. Businesses will no longer make buying decisions based on the performance of a variable copper service and be able to choose the best solution for them on offer and just dial up the bandwidth on the fibre to suit bandwidth requirement. Ubiquitous access to bandwidth will drive new ways of working and new opportunities for the channel to deliver not just telephony and collaboration services, but a multitude of innovative converged services enabling a full digital transformation. To date, fibre has mainly been the preserve of those willing to invest in an Ethernet option, but with Openreach plans plus the huge number of new network builds underway by both regional and new fibre providers, the options will become extensive. Maybe the main challenge will become guiding customers through all the options available to them which will not be a bad problem to have!"



SUSIE WARDELL  
EVOKE TELECOM

"High speed connectivity is the UK's communication lifeblood and with just 10% availability currently we're simply stifling access to new technologies. Investment in infrastructure is critical. A political pledge of £5bn and the Universal Service Obligation might be the answer, especially for those expensive to deploy rural areas. With City Fibre, Gigaclear, Glide, KCom and others rolling out in towns and cities, there might at last be the funding combination to get this done. We have a channel sales force ready and waiting to take these new products to market, armed with value added bundles, promising an attractive return for all. The ability to deploy IoT devices, artificial intelligence, WebRTC, augmented reality and virtual reality will help businesses improve service and insights. By powering digital transformation for a digital workforce and workplace, we can realise an estimated economic boost of £1700 per employee. That's an extra £59bn to the UK economy by 2025."



DAVID ALLDRITT  
HIGHNET

"The growth of full-fibre networks and the reach of FTTP (and leased lines) in the UK has never been in better shape. However, that's coming from a really low starting point, so the industry shouldn't be overly full of self-congratulation. We should give credit to the UK Government's fundamental change of policy back in October 2016, which would never have happened without great lobbying work from the AltNets. The challenge now is to maintain the momentum that has built recently, and to keep the pressure on policy makers to remove barriers and incentivise investment and competition. In the channel we have another great responsibility - to educate our customers. Too many business owners are struggling to make the most of digital, and using copper-based, asymmetric connectivity is not helping them. As service providers our businesses benefit from greater reliability and simplified provisioning (hopefully!), so let's make it happen, right now!"



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# will boost channel business



FRASER FERGUSON  
KUBENET

"Nationwide full fibre is key for businesses as it's the foundation that drives employee productivity and business operations. As published, the average UK employee loses 21 working days per year due to slow internet, costing the UK economy £8billion in 2018 alone. From KubeNet's experience, the current fibre rollout has been frustrating and misleading for customers, from lack of capacity to no FTTC being present in the city centres. It has severely impacted the opportunities for SME's to take advantage of cloud and hosted telephony which are hugely important for growth and in the lead up to the WLR switch off. FTTP provides high bandwidth affordable connectivity to which businesses can future-proof their telephony via SIP or hosted and our industry should continue to work with carriers, local and national Government to ensure that continued investment and importantly access to ensure the full fibre roll out continues."



CHRIS MORISSEY  
LILY COMMS

"The push to move to full fibre broadband is a much-needed change in the UK to improve communication and efficiency. Latency and legacy infrastructure have slowed down connectivity, causing frustrations for both businesses and residents who live in hard to reach areas. The announcement by Ofcom to propose new regulation to ensure that the future for the UK is full fibre is welcome and will help drive the ambitious 2025 deadline. Being able to provide FTTP for our customers aids in our message of digital transformation; helping organisations build technical infrastructures that are future proofed and optimised for speed and performance. As we move more and more of our customers to a true unified communications solution, FTTP will be an imperative part of ensuring its success."



GRAHAM WILKINSON  
BEYOND CONNECTIVITY

"For me it's not just the speed of adoption but the commercial element around financial viability which is the biggest obstacle. We all have to be realistic. It's ok to say we will all be running full fibre by 2025 but that involves billions of pounds worth of cost. Where does that funding come from and what is the ultimate end game and benefit especially when 5G is around the corner as well? I think faster broadband and 5G go hand in hand and it's important to bring the two together. There's a lot of fog out there. We are all up for it, we all want it and can see the benefits. But do the commercials fully stack up? There's not just Openreach but other providers with their own fibre networks and they can only roll-out at a certain pace. ROI is key. It's not like piping water and gas to every home. It's a commodity at the end of the day. There's huge investment going on and I'm sure we will get there in the right way."



ADAM SANKEY  
OPUS

"The fibre roll-out couldn't come fast enough! Unfortunately, the existing network in the ground is hard to upgrade. Much like the rail network, it was built for a different age. Delays are to be expected however frustrating they are. Will 5G have an impact on the uptake of FTTP when finally rolled out? If I was living in a rural area that could get 5G, why would I want to replace that with an FTTP connection? Openreach are in a race against the mobile networks, the longer they take, the less customers they will get and the less cost effective the roll out will be. There needs to be real change to allow the roll out to progress at a much faster pace so that everybody can take advantage of the investment."



SHARON MCDERMOTT  
TRENCHES LAW

"Full-fibre broadband will provide unmatched speeds and reliability, but this transformational time will not be without its challenges, particularly when it comes to negotiating with freeholders and/or leaseholders to support effective network expansions. I'm of the opinion that the targets are ambitious but achievable, if landlords and tenants are encouraged to cooperate with wayleave processes. The communication – and arguably the education process – however, must start now. Proposed changes in the electronic communications code will help operators build their network and deliver broadband at a quicker rate. This means that it will be cheaper, more efficient and faster for operators to provide broadband to occupiers, including tenants, in multi-dwelling units (and other types of property) in the UK – particularly London. By using the court system as well as talking to landlords about the benefits of full-fibre broadband – including an increase in property value – the process should be much more streamlined. Tenants are much more likely to choose a property to rent where broadband speeds are ultrafast and reliable."



TIM MERCER  
VAPOUR CLOUD

"With a collaborative approach, I'd say 90% full fibre coverage is doable by 2020 in cities, towns and major conurbations. But not everywhere, and not without multiple challenges. Vast wayleave changes are required, for example. Councils and landowners need to be encouraged to think differently. There are multiple carriers, all cost comparable, so service levels are what will make them stand out. Vast market potential exists, but it's all dependent on the ease and speed of delivery. A common goal is also essential in regarding what the market wants to achieve, as carriers are currently operating in silos. It feels like the wild west and reminds me when cable players were all being bought. Will this happen to the carriers too? As a tier 2 carrier, to a certain degree we're in the hands of the tier 1 providers, so it will be interesting to see what happens. Of course, FTTP would improve our business prospects but if the carriers make it available for commercial entities, they'll be cannibalising their own networks. It will be interesting to see what happens."

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# Vapour promotes



Alec Stephens, Carol McGrotty and Tim Mercer

THE promotion of key staff helps position Elland-based Vapour Cloud for a 'pivotal year', according to CEO Tim Mercer, who has elevated Operations Manager Carol McGrotty to Head of Operations and Compliance. She was a former colleague of Mercer at Virgin Media Business and joined Vapour Cloud in 2013. "Carol has helped to attract the three biggest ticket projects since the company

was established in 2013; and in 2019 alone she oversaw the delivery of all client contracts, that's over 4,000 cloud licenses and more than £10 million of deal revenue," stated Mercer.

In another promotion, Alec Stephens becomes Sales Manager following a strong 11 months in the position of Account Director. He has more than 15 years tech sector experience and began his career as an inbound contact centre agent, employed and trained by Mercer while at Virgin. "2020 will be a pivotal year," added Mercer. "Our eyes are set on as much as 50 per cent growth in turnover, so having the right team in place has never been so important."

## Also on the move...

THE hire of comms veteran Martin Charlton by IP Office adds 20 years ICT sector experience and brings a sharper focus on long-term strategy. His appointment as Business Development Director



Martin Charlton

will leverage experience gained while working at Cisco, Mitel, Avaya and Ricoh. Charlton also held board level roles and Director positions at Counterpath, SAS Global and Videocall. Charlton said: "Twenty years ago I brought an Avaya FIFA World Cup Technology roadshow to IP Office's doorstep at the start of its journey into telecoms. I now look forward to shaping the future and growing the business organically and through acquisitions."

EXERTIS has pulled in Liz Greenwood as UK IT Director, reporting to COO Richard Hinds. She brings 20 years experience in delivering global digital transformations and



Liz Greenwood

cultural change across IT and business functions in a variety of industry sectors, and joins Exertis from Royal Mail Group where she was IT Director for ParcelForce Worldwide. Part of her remit is to be a lynchpin in defining Exertis's SAP roadmap. "From an IT perspective, this presents exciting opportunities to help transform and

modernise key aspects of the business," stated Greenwood. She also worked at Fujitsu Services for seven years in senior IT and business roles, and at Siemens for five years.

JUNIPER Networks has recruited Gordon Mackintosh as Worldwide Vice President of Channel and Virtual Sales. He was previously Global Head of Channels and Distribution at Extreme Networks where he deployed new partner programmes and initiatives. Prior to joining Extreme Networks Mackintosh held a number of positions at Cisco Systems, developing partner GTM programmes and leading direct and indirect sales teams for cloud and software solutions.

AVAYA'S European channel lead Steve Joyner has switched his focus to the UK&I following his posting as MD of the region, reporting to Ronald Rubens, VP



for Europe. Joyner has held various engineering, sales and channel roles in the UK and Middle East and joined Avaya when it acquired Nortel in 2009. He supersedes Ioan MacRae who left in October to become Maintel CEO.

# Mitel signs up product whizz

MITEL has installed Silicon Valley vet Tarun Loomba as EVP of UC Products and Solutions. He was previously EVP of Products and Solutions at Polycom, now known as Poly. Loomba held prior senior leadership roles at Seagate Technology, ParAccel,



Tarun Loomba

Armanta and SanDisk, where he led the \$1 billion client storage solutions business as VP & GM of Client Storage and Custom Flash Solutions. He has also held senior roles in product management, marketing and engineering at Cisco.

"The world of work looks very different today than even a few years ago," commented Mitel President and CEO Mary McDowell. "Increased mobility, the cloud and other emerging technologies are enabling new, more seamless ways for teams to communicate and collaborate with each other and their customers. Tarun brings a breadth of technology experience and a deep knowledge of how to successfully navigate markets in transition."

COHESITY'S swoop on ex-Commvault Distribution and Channel Lead for EMEA Martin Gibbons delivers a boost to its data management knowhow, says Dirk Marichal, EMEA VP for Sales. "Martin has deep knowledge of the data management sector and will have an immediate positive impact on our business," stated Marichal.

## Rossano drafted into FluidOne channel role

LEE Rossano has joined FluidOne as channel chief, reporting to CEO Russell Horton. Rossano takes over from Director of Channel Henry West who leaves the business at the close of Q1 2020 following a one month transition period. Rossano



Lee Rossano

has held senior roles at Exponential-e, Class Networks, Imtech ICT, SAS Global Communications and Telstra International. He has particular expertise in connectivity, cloud, SD-WAN, security, data centre, UC and SIP.

Horton said: "Henry has done a great job, aiding the management buyout backed by Livingbridge in February 2019 and building FluidOne's brand in the channel. He has helped put in solid foundations upon which Lee can build our next stage of channel growth, giving best advice to resellers and supporting them with their business growth plans."

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