



Sir Clive on discovering the DNA of champions p20


Halpin on building his real world 'cloud cuckoo land' p22



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# Comms Dealer March 2020 Click to open Clock runs down on legacy circuits

BT's withdrawal of legacy analogue and Kilostream private circuits on 31st March 2020 signals the start of far bigger industry changes to come.

### SPECIAL REPORT

BT issued a warning to wholesale customers still wedded to legacy circuits saying that 'time is running out' as it prepares to pull them this month.

"We're urging any wholesale customer yet to migrate away from these legacy products to contact their BT account manager now," stated Clive Quantrill (pictured), Enterprise Migrations Director, BT.

He called for the universal migration to new digital ser-

vices such as ultrafast fibre broadband, Ethernet connectivity, cloud voice and UC.

"Technology has shifted away from traditional telephone and data networking services delivered over copper networks," added Quantrill.

"The majority of our wholesale customers have already migrated across to these new services, but a significant number are yet to take any action."

BT will operate an Overrun Service which will maintain certain legacy private circuit

functions for a limited period beyond the cut-off date.

Guy Miller, Director of Fibre For Everyone at TalkTalk, commented: "This is just the start of an increased period of industry change over the next five years as we embrace the WLR switch off and accelerating roll out of full fibre throughout the UK.

"It is up to the channel to adapt and switch to educating customers about the journey ahead, and support them during the transition to a new suite of connectivity products."

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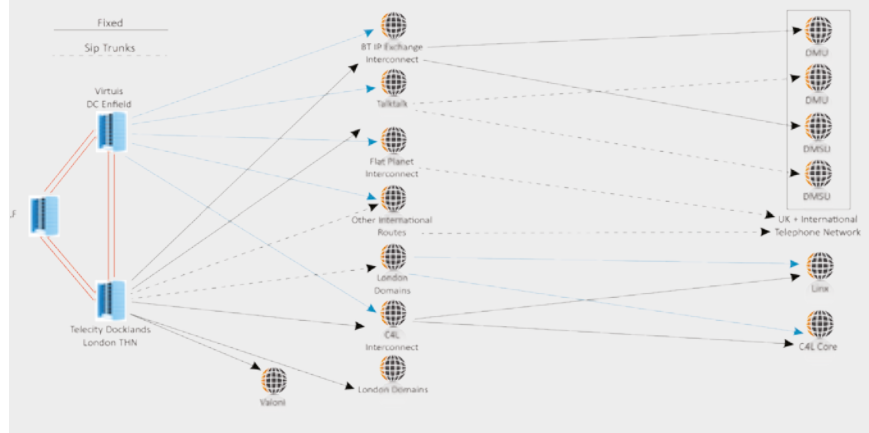
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**WHAT THE HELL  
ARE THEY  
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## EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

THE industry is ever obsessive about new technologies that promise to change the world for business operators. But the more exciting the chatter, the more likely it is that the divide between user uptake and industry hopes for growth will widen. We hear a lot

about 'divides' in general, and specifically to the industry, be they regional (north-south), diversity imbalances within organisations or digital skills gaps, to name just three.

Divides are a fact of life, but they must be countered and bridged if we are to move forwards into the sunny uplands. Spanning the chasm between industry hype and end user adoption of the exciting and creative tech we all trumpet, like cloud, fibre, and all else, is a priority. And a process of 'levelling' may be required as well as bridge building. Levelling in terms of communicating to customers in a way that they truly understand the benefits of cloud and fibre, for example.

The issues are real and many. How do we close the technology and adoption gap? Where is the problem? Is there a residual but telling approach to market that is characterised by legacy? Perhaps there is, when you consider that global giants like Microsoft and Amazon are drawing in ever more customers. For them, adoption rates do not appear to be such an issue as more consumer oriented models hold great appeal, and products like Teams are executed as a natural next step.

In many cases VARs face a far bigger task in attempting to close the comms sector and user divide and compete with tech Titans. The practical transition to digital may not seem such a natural progression for many of their customers, even though they understand their world is changing. A case in point therefore must be the application of sales approaches that tally with the underlying thinking of modern businesses, and bridge the gap between exciting tech and its actual deployment. The present imbalances can only be damaging to the channel's prosperity.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

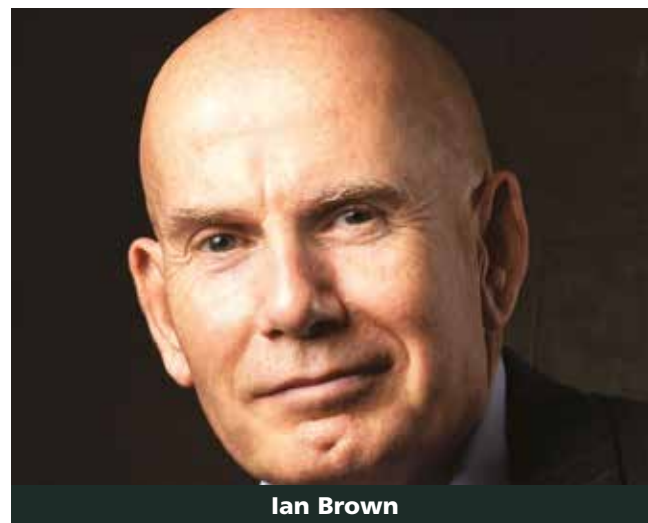
# Cash boost sparks Air IT acceleration

AIR IT has kicked off an ambitious growth campaign led by incoming big guns Ian Brown (Chairman) and John Whitty (CEO), supported by investment from August Equity that will help the Nottingham-based MSP make bolt-on acquisitions and yield greater organic growth. Air IT MD James Healey becomes COO.

The company began its commercial life in 2005, founded by Todd McQuilkin, and provides managed IT support, digital transformation services, cyber security and connectivity to the SME market. It delivered CAGR of circa 28% between 2017-2019 and services almost 500 customers.

August Equity's model has led to seven companies being exited for a value of over £100m in each of the last seven years. During 2019 the exits of SecureData and Wax Digital returned over £100m to its investors. Brown worked with August Equity on the exit of SecureData to Orange; and Whitty has led over 40 acquisitions during his executive career at Solar Communications, GCI and Pipex combined.

The investor's high yield hopes rest on building the



Ian Brown

UK's premier CSP for SMEs, says Mehul Patel, Partner at the PE firm. "After SecureData and Charterhouse, Air IT is the third investment for August in the broader managed services space," he said. "We will use the knowledge and network built over time to assist the management in creating the UK's largest SME cloud provider."

In the lead up to August's backing Air IT invested in people, systems, processes and its product portfolio.

Whitty commented: "To achieve our aspirations we recognised that we needed a proven technology aware financial partner which has demonstrat-

ed experience in supporting management teams to deliver similar growth previously, and August Equity has a track record in this."

Brown added: "I am partnering with August again to build a leading UK IT managed services provider following our successful SecureData venture. And I know John is an accomplished business leader through our time together at GCI.

"Air IT plans to tap into the significant underlying demand for ICT services from SME organisations driven by both digitisation and the major skills shortage throughout much of the UK."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

GOOGLE parent company Alphabet has pegged Q4 revenue at circa \$46bn, up 17% from \$39bn in Q4 2018, with operating income at \$9.27bn and net income of \$10.67bn for this quarter. "Our investments in deep computer science, including AI, ambient computing and cloud computing, provide a strong base for growth and new opportunities across Alphabet," said Sundar Pichai, CEO of Alphabet and Google. Cloud generates a \$10bn revenue run rate.

RIVEN Associates secured a double win in the 2019 Spitfire Partner Awards. The Egham-based business collected The Pinnacle Award for the highest new business sales and the Voice Solution Award for the highest new business SIP sales.

THE expansion of Enghouse Interactive's EMEA partner programme continues with the addition of Dublin-based MJ Flood Technology. Gareth Madden, Sales Director, MJ FloodTechnology, said: "We have built a strong capability in enterprise voice and unified communications through investment in Microsoft Teams, and wanted to work with a contact centre provider that had a strong partnership with Microsoft."

## VAR adds Microsoft specialism

AUGUST Equity-backed Charterhouse Voice & Data's geographic presence and Microsoft capabilities received a boost following its acquisition of Lloyds Business Communications, a UC and Microsoft partner based in St Helens, Lancashire.

The financials of the deal were not disclosed.

Lloyds began its commercial life in 1997 and has 45 staff.

"Lloyds is a technical organisation with strong Microsoft capabilities," said Mark Brooks-Wadham, Charterhouse CEO. "These skills will bolster our team and enable us to provide the full Microsoft suite as part of our portfolio."

Lloyds CEO Ian Allmark said: "We were keen to become part of an organisation that would allow us to offer our customers more choice, greater scale and a wider geographic reach, while supporting Lloyds' core expertise and capability."

The deal comes hot on the heels of Charterhouse's purchase of NETconnection Systems in January, an MSP focused on LAN and SD-WAN managed services.

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# Norfolk buy for Wavenet

WAVENET'S influence in the East Anglia region will be more strongly felt following its acquisition of Norfolk-based Portal Voice and Data.

The financials of the transaction remain under wraps.

The deal comes just weeks after Wavenet snapped up Nottingham located VIA in January, boosting its Office 365 expertise and TeamsLink Microsoft Teams platform.

Portal Voice and Data was established in 1999 and provides telephony, data, VoIP, cloud and maintenance. Its technology partners include BT Wholesale, Openreach, Virgin and Cisco.

Portal MD John Corney said: "This acquisition will boost the potential of all of our customers, giving them access to Wavenet's portfolio of telecoms and technology services, customer and technical support."

Wavenet CEO Bill Dawson added: "Our combined potential and expertise will improve the customer service and maintenance experience, and open Portal customers to Wavenet's portfolio, including TeamsLink, our newly launched Microsoft Teams calling and contact centre platform."



Bill Dawson

Wavenet boosted its acquisition firepower in September 2018 when it refinanced its banking facilities and raised a £75m acquisition war chest.

The shareholders of Portal Voice and Data were advised by Knight Corporate Finance.

NEWS ROUNDUP

EXCLUSIVE distribution partner to Ericsson-LG Enterprise in the UK Pragma bagged three awards at the vendor's Partner Conference staged in Nha Trang, Vietnam. Pragma collected the Global Partner of the Year award (for the fourth time) for driving substantial growth of Ericsson-LG Enterprise's market share in the UK. Pragma also swooped on the Global Cloud Partner of the Year award, while the distributor's techies picked up the Technical Team of the Year gong for the third year running. The Global Cloud Partner of the Year award reflects the 114% growth in cloud seats achieved by West Sussex-based Pragma last year.

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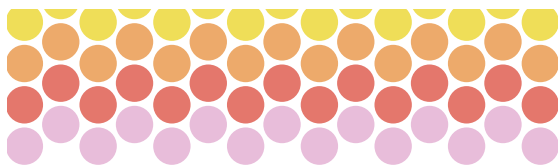
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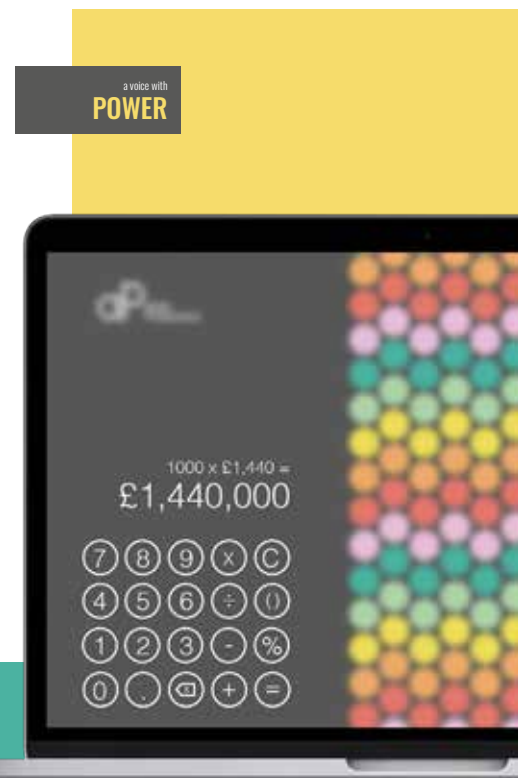


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# Calteq snares networks biz



Nigel Willetts

ROYSTON-based Calteq's bid to extend its portfolio shifted up a gear with the acquisition of cable infrastructure company Blue Cube Networks.

The deal adds cable infrastructure, Distributed Antenna Systems (DAS), Wi-Fi services, CCTV and fibre optic cable solutions, plus a customer base.

"Over the last few years we have been evolving Calteq's service offering to include an extended range of technology solutions," stated Calteq's

COO Nigel Willetts. "We have a long-standing relationship with Blue Cube Networks and it provides us with expertise in a complementary sector."

All Blue Cube Networks staff have moved across to Calteq including former owner, Ellis Hill, who is now Head of Engineering at Calteq.

"The acquisition was a natural next step for both companies," he said. "For Blue Cube, Calteq offers a framework in which it can grow and thrive."

## NEWS ROUNDUP

RINGCENTRAL has accelerated past the \$1bn annual revenue run-rate milestone on the back of a 34% hike in Q4 revenues to \$253m. Subscriptions revenue increased 33% year-over-year to \$229m. "Fourth quarter results were driven by momentum in mid-market and enterprise markets," said Vlad Shmunis, RingCentral's founder, Chairman and CEO. He also cited a 'culture of strategic partnerships, as evidenced by relationships with AT&T, Avaya and Atos' as key to growth. Full year 2020 guidance points to a revenue range of \$1.125bn to \$1.135bn, representing annual growth of 25% to 26%.

MANAGED print firm Arena Group has fallen to Xerox, snapped up for an undisclosed sum. "Building on our success in the SMB market in the US we're now expanding our strategy to Europe," said Hervé Tessler, President of EMEA Operations, Xerox. "With the acquisition of Arena Group we will be positioned to offer workplace solutions in one of the fastest growing managed print services segments in Western Europe."

# Lily positioned 26th in list of best small firms to work for

LEEDS firm Lily topped the comms sector contingent of destination companies for workers with 26th position in The Best 100 Small Companies to Work For 2020 list – its first attempt at gaining a placement.

Lily also netted a 3-star accreditation in the Best Companies 2020 roster.

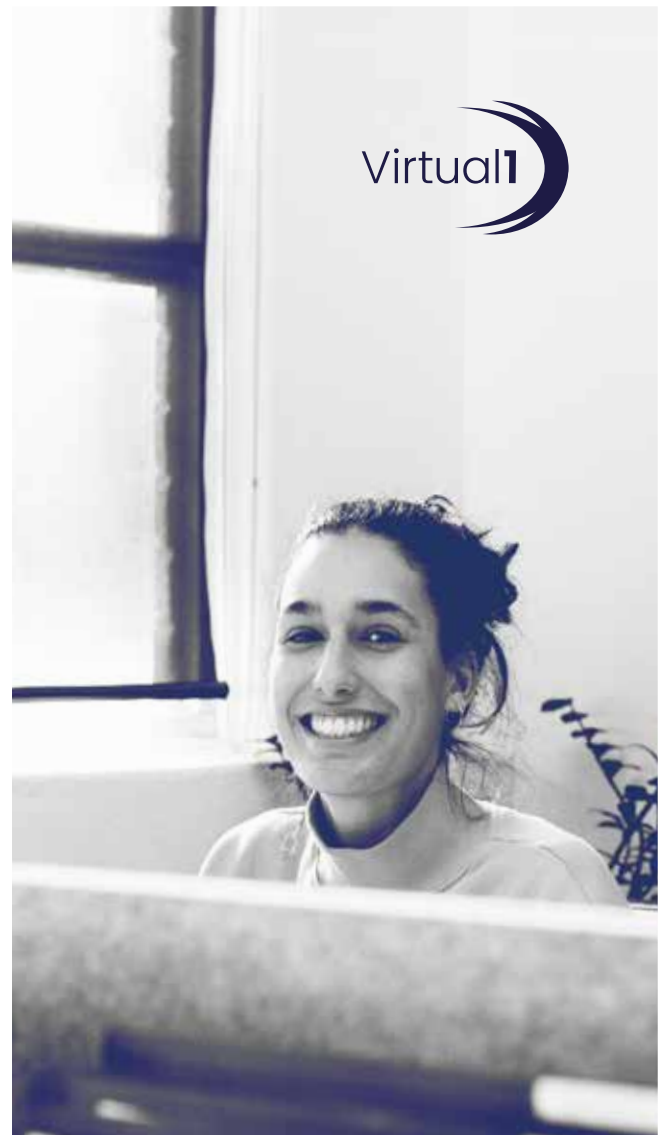
"These awards reflect big investments in creating a culture of high performance, personal growth and employee reward," said MD Chris Morrisey. "Our employees have embraced our vision with open arms and are empowered to achieve it."



Chris Morrisey (centre) collecting the award

In 2019 Lily launched a performance academy for employees developed with John

Stein, founder of the Winning Formula. The company now has more than 80 staff.



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# WellTel picks up Invistech



Ross Murray (centre right) with the Invistech team at WellTel's offices in Dublin City

WELLTEL'S acquisition of Invistech completes the Irish MSP's portfolio, adds scale plus offices in Cork and Limerick.

"We have been looking to enter the managed IT and security market for a while and we are also looking to try and grow our business in the region, so Invistech was a perfect fit," said WellTel CEO Ross Murray.

"The two major drivers of the deal were Invistech's customer base and its product portfolio. WellTel now has another 400 customers that are interested in coming onto our network for Internet and voice services, while the Invistech portfolio of support services, online back-up, security and Microsoft app-

lications completes our SMB technology offering."

The deal is WellTel's fourth acquisition within four years.

The company provides managed services to over 3,000 business customers in Ireland and internationally.

Invistech began its commercial life 11 years ago and provides IT managed services, security, network infrastructure, IT hardware, cloud and communications solutions.

Invistech MD John Feeny commented: "This new partnership accelerates our plans to scale the business."

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# Ofcom bares its teeth with new legislation

LEGISLATION brought in by Ofcom on 15th February bares sharp teeth, warns Aurora's Head of Service Relationship Management Michelle Turner.

The regulator implemented new rules on End-of-Contract Notifications and Best Tariff Information, designed to give end users more transparency and fairness when buying comms, 'and this time they mean business', stated Turner.

The legislation states that all broadband, mobile, home phone and pay TV companies must notify residential and business customers when their minimum contract is coming to an end, and on a regular basis thereafter.

"Ofcom intends to carry out 'randomised control trials' if customer research suggests that providers are not compliant," added Turner.

"As well as informing customers of their end of contract information including notice period, providers must also notify residential customers on the best tariffs available to them when their contract runs out.

"Resellers will need a capable and robust billing system to ensure they can manage their customer contract end dates in one central place."



Michelle Turner

She added that it is a key requirement for billing providers to identify as early as possible the seeds of future Ofcom

rules and regulation that will impact resellers and act quickly to develop modules that match upcoming legislation.



SCOTTISH tech firm Essential Cloud Solutions (previously Edinburgh Computer Services) is set for its next phase of expansion following the opening of refurbished offices in Edinburgh. ECS, which launched in 1991, was acquired and rebranded by Commsworld in 2018. "With any acquisition it's important to feel part of the bigger picture, and refurbishing our outdated offices makes the team feel part of the Commsworld family," said Willie Fairhurst, MD of ECS. Pictured (l-r): David Key, SNP Councillor for Fountainbridge and Craiglockhart, with Willie Fairhurst and Steve Edwards, Business Development Director at Commsworld.

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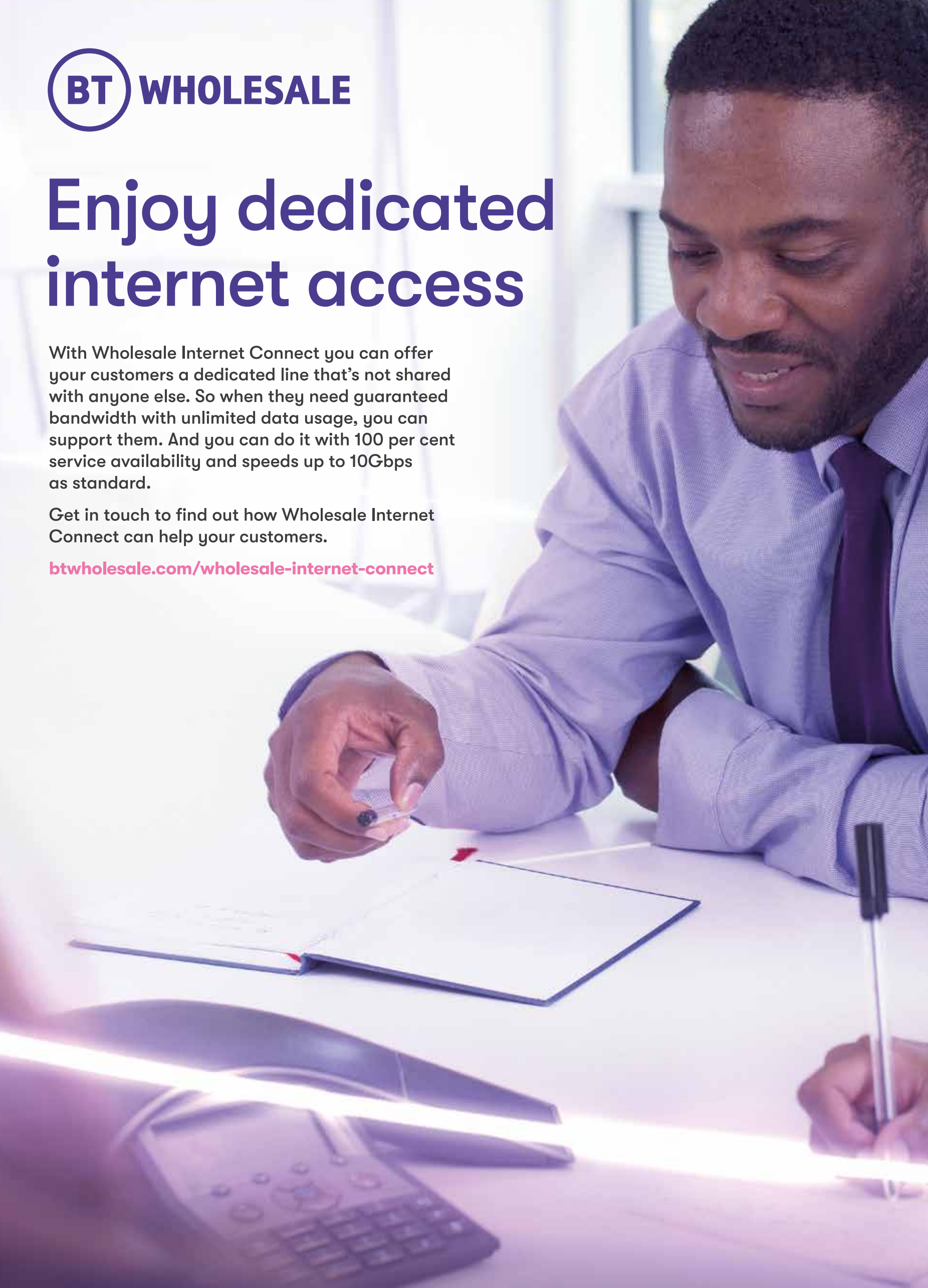


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NEWS ROUNDUP

A FREE auto-provisioning service is among the highlights of Ericsson-LG's new Cloud 3.5 release. Other updates include support for the 1000i IP phones and new features. Andy Herring, Product Marketing Manager at Ericsson-LG's sole UK distributor Pragma, said: "This not only reduces the time resellers spend on site but also enables a smoother transition for end users while guaranteeing minimal disruption." Pragma is currently working on the launch of a new cloud mobile service and cloud-based contact centre solution.

ALLIOT'S play in the smart city space has been boosted by a distribution agreement with Bosch that sees the IoT distributor supply the vendor's smart parking sensor range in the UK and Europe. Paul Hayes, Technical Director at Alliot, said: "The demand for smarter solutions in our cities is huge. We will work alongside Bosch to develop the IoT channel throughout Europe." Klaus Peter Wagner, Head of Sales and Marketing at Bosch, added: "The partnership is an important step as it allows a common market approach for Alliot and Bosch, and generates more value for our customers."

# IT giants link up with 8x8



John Delozier

8X8'S UK channel presence received a rocket boost with the addition of IT sector giants Computacenter and Softcat to its partner programme, building on new partnerships with key players Charterhouse and NSL.

John Delozier, Senior Vice President & Global Channel Chief at 8x8, said: "We're working with the largest and fastest growing partners in the industry, and together we are helping businesses across the UK work more effectively by moving their legacy on-premise communications to the cloud."

"With hundreds of millions of legacy on-premise seats available for migration worldwide, this is one of the fastest growing cloud opportunities."

8x8's latest partner recruitment campaign – spearheaded by UK Channel Sales Director Keith Jackson – signals a ramping up of its efforts to move installed customer bases to cloud-based voice, video and sharing for meetings, contact centres and applications.

Pete Groushko, Technology Sourcing & Software Sales Director at Computacenter, said: "With demand for cloud communications gaining momentum as organisations look to move away from legacy on-premise based technology, we are positioned to help customers achieve digital transformation."

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# Scots firm first to go onto DFX

COMMSWORLD is the first to leverage the new Dark Fibre X (DFX) product from Openreach.

In its initial roll out Commsworld will use 200 kilometres of dark fibre to upgrade the backhaul into its enabled exchanges across the Scottish Borders, linking the region to its national Optical Core Network with ultrafast connectivity.

Commsworld CTO Charlie Boisseau said: "Rural connectivity is only ever as good as its backhaul, and for meaningful competition to thrive in all corners of the country measures such as DFX are crucial."

Katie Milligan, MD Customer, Commercial and Proposals at Openreach, added: "Commsworld has embraced dark fibre and secured an industry first to embed it into its Borders network."

"Access to dark fibre helps to address one barrier to a wider full fibre roll out. An early priority for the new Government should be to remove other barriers like fibre tax rates and access to land and property, and mandate fibre for new build homes. Only by working together as an industry, with Ofcom and Government, can we crack the challenge ahead."

NEWS ROUNDUP

NODE4'S focus on the UC&C space has sharpened with the launch of a dedicated business unit called N4Engage, offering hosted voice, video and team collaboration tools, along with omnichannel contact centre. Richard Buxton, Director of N4Engage, stated: "The shift in the market from on-premises to cloud computing has heralded unprecedented demand for new solutions. Creating N4Engage will help us maximise on this opportunity."

SALESFORCE Platinum Partner Simplus has been acquired by Infosys, building on the purchase of Fluidio in September 2018. Pravin Rao, Chief Operating Officer, Infosys, said: "This acquisition is key to staying relevant to the digital priorities of our clients."

WORK to provide Gigabit connectivity in Wolverhampton will begin in March as part of a £4.9m agreement between CityFibre and the City of Wolverhampton Council. The 20 year contract will see CityFibre design, build, operate and own the network. The project will be delivered by local infrastructure partner Comex 2000.

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# Workplace scheme aids autistic mission

AN EMPLOYABILITY programme launched by national charity Ambitious About Autism aims to get 10,000 young autistic people ready for work by 2022, with TalkTalk taking a lead role in developing the north west region and planning to offer placements this summer.

The partnership will connect employers, educational institutions, local authorities, specialist agencies and young people; and all participants will be offered paid, meaningful work placements, with access to specialist careers advice and work experience to support their transition from education to employment.

TalkTalk Chief Executive Tristia Harrison and Ambitious about Autism's CEO Jolanta Lasota launched the programme at the ISP's Soapworks HQ in Salford on February 5th. Big brand attendees included BBC, ITV and Marks & Spencer.

TalkTalk has a longstanding relationship with Ambitious About Autism, raising £4m for the charity since 2006.

Harrison said: "We are partnering with Ambitious About Autism to enable thousands of autistic young adults reach full-time employment. By show-



Tristia Harrison

casing the capabilities of this programme we hope to encourage other leading businesses to follow suit."

Lasota commented: "Many autistic young people face bleak employment prospects, yet we know they have so much to offer the workplace.

"Neurodiversity and different ways of thinking and problem solving can bring huge benefits to businesses, and we hope our Employ Autism programme will help employers unlock this untapped potential."

Salford City Mayor Paul Dennett noted: "Figures show that nationally just 16% of autistic adults are in full-time paid employment, only up by 1% from ten years ago, so there is a long way to go."

According to a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association Pediatrics in 2014, under 17% of autistic adults are in full-time employment in the UK.

It is calculated that this represents a £32bn cost to the UK economy each year.

# Atos seals SI partner affiliation

RINGCENTRAL has become Atos' first choice provider of UCaaS solutions in a deal that also sees RingCentral acquire IP from Atos including a portfolio of certain patents.

A System Integrator relationship will bring a co-branded UCaaS solution that will form a key part of Atos' Digital Workplace client and partner offer, in addition to its existing OpenScope UC solutions.

"Atos is our first global Systems Integrations partnership and creates opportunities for RingCentral to provide a global cloud communications platform to large marquee customers in Atos' digital transformation practice," said Vlad Shmunis, founder, Chairman and CEO, RingCentral.

Elie Girard, CEO, Atos, added: "With an Atos installed base ranging across large enterprises and governmental agencies, the potential of the new strategic partnership is clear."



Vlad Shmunis

## NEWS ROUNDUP

THE addition of Dropbox Business to Inclarity's portfolio enables resellers to better address the modern workplace, according to MD Enzo Viscito. "With today's evolving business landscape, a workplace is no longer confined to a fixed location, many companies have transitioned to cloud technologies so they can effectively and securely collaborate in real time," he said. "Dropbox Business allows users to work anywhere and at any time, providing a smart workspace where teams, tools and content come together."

M247 has strengthened its presence in Manchester following an investment in a capacious workspace and warehouse in Trafford Park. The move follows the enlargement of its head offices at Turing House in Manchester and Holborn Tower in London. The company has also witnessed international expansion over the last two years, achieving 50% year-on-year growth and with a presence in 24 countries and 28 key cities. M247 currently has over 330 employees across the UK and international sites.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

HOSTED comms provider NTA has released support and integration into Microsoft teams. Channel Sales Manager Justin Blaine said: "Many resellers have been asking for Teams unification. This has been completed and will be sold on an individual licence fee basis." NTA also set the date and venue for its first overseas partner conference which will be staged in Cyprus on 29th April to 2nd May.

TWENTY of Pragma's most incentivised and fastest growing partners were rewarded with an all-expenses paid trip to Cancun, Mexico, in January. Pragma Sales & Marketing Director Will Morey said: "It's great to spend quality time and have fun with the partners who've helped propel our business forward in 2019. With new products and a series of value additions planned for 2020, we're convinced our reseller partners are well on their way to joining us on the 2021 incentive trip to Rio, Brazil!"



# Wildix issues channel alert



Steve Osler

WILDIX has delivered a 'go to war' message to its growing army of European partners saying certain big brand vendors want to 'steal their customers'.

At the firm's UCC Summit in Barcelona last month CEO Steve Osler claimed: "Every year thousands of companies are forced to close their doors due to competition from global brands that bypass installers and bring cloud offerings directly to end users. They have no interest in growing an ecosystem."

Osler and his brother Dimitri now have Wildix certified partners operating in 135 countries committed to the browser-based telephony and UC products developed within the so-called 'Blue Ecosystem'.

The company reported a 32% growth spurt in business in 2019, exclusively through channel partners.

Success has been particularly strong in the UK with 70 partners now onboarded.

Osler also warned that partners must avoid falling into the commodity market and instead become MSPs. Those that don't will 'die out', he believes.

"You cannot stay ahead with similar product features and you cannot compete on price," he added. "If customers look for a cheaper price, walk away, they are not good customers. You must focus on helping customers reach their business goals and you must discover their business value."

"It's not about the money you will make, it's about the money your customer will make because of the solutions you bring to them."

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# Robert in CEO move to Epsilon

FORMER Claranet MD Michel Robert is set to leverage his experience at connectivity and comms service provide Epsilon where he is now Group CEO.

He brings 20 years IT services industry experience and has a remit to advance Epsilon's global strategy and target enterprise customers, via partners and directly, with SD-WAN and interconnection services.

"Michel has played key roles in developing new markets," commented Kuok Khoo Ean, Chairman, Epsilon Global Communications. "His experience in hybrid cloud, networking and cybersecurity, alongside tripling the size of Claranet's UK operation, gives us confidence in his leadership and ability to take Epsilon's global growth to the next level."

Robert takes over from co-founder Jerzy Szlosarek who stepped down after a 16 year spell at Epsilon.

Robert spent over 12 years as Claranet MD, leading the business in the UK, Benelux and US, as well as its global cybersecurity business and group operations function.

Prior to his stint at Claranet, Robert was European Solutions Director for Dimension Data.

NEWS ROUNDUP

AUDPRO is urging resellers to turn up the volume on latent sales opportunities for Music-on-Hold using its just-launched New Partner Toolkit. According to MD Andrew Jones UC resellers will quickly identify new business in existing pipelines and could 'hit the ground running' with bespoke Music-on-Hold solutions. "The toolkit gives resellers the facts, figures and case studies that prove the returns for end users, and includes web, print and email marketing collateral," said Jones. "The calculator tool enables resellers to estimate the potential revenue from their customer pipeline, with 200% mark-ups for each recording purchased by an end user."

CLOUD contact centre provider Difference Corporation – which is a division of FirstCom Europe – has hooked up with Zen Internet as part of its partner programme. "The team at Difference will marry their contact centre expertise to Zen's connectivity and cloud capabilities," commented Zen's Head of Partner Sales Ian Millward. Difference has over 8,000 UK customers and 13 offices across Europe. Zen was founded over 25 years ago and has more than 600 partners.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

**BUILDING** on its December launch of a multi-network eSIM, Jola has rolled out Pay Per Zone eSIMs charged at the rate applicable to the country of use. Sales Director Lee Broxson said: "Pay Per Zone eSIMs are multi-network and can roam globally. eSIMs can be embedded into devices or delivered as traditional removeable SIMs."

**THREE** is to leverage CityFibre's national full fibre network to support its roll out of 5G services. The first phase of the agreement will see CityFibre provide backhaul connectivity to Three's cell sites, with hundreds of sites already planned for connection this year across a number of CityFibre's Gigabit City projects.

A **FIVE-year Openreach Network Services Agreement framework contract (with potential to extend by two years)** has been awarded to Morrison Telecom Services. The firm will support Openreach's network build, maintenance and provision work streams across Norfolk, Lincs, the East Midlands, South Anglia, Lancashire, Cumbria, Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire. The scope of works will include the delivery of civils, poling, cabling and jointing activities.

# Spitfire ups security play



Dominic Norton

SPITFIRE'S MPLS and Ethernet customers have gained access to an 'alternative' Firewall as a Service (FWaaS) solution launched by the ISP.

FWaaS leverages FortiGate firewall technology with security processors and threat intelligence security services from AI-powered FortiGuard labs.

"Spitfire FWaaS is designed as a cost-effective multi-tenancy alternative to a dedicated managed firewall, which Spitfire can already provide," said Sales Director Dominic Norton.

"FWaaS enables Spitfire partners to address multi-site organisations with diverse Internet usage and increasingly demanding compliance issues.

"In particular, it offers significant benefits to schools and

academy groups. The service is designed for any organisation with a need for UTM features or a firewall refresh."

FWaaS can be consumed as an all-managed service by Spitfire, or entirely or partially managed by the customer.

"Cyber security is of paramount importance, with growing threats from a range of criminal and malicious sources," added Norton.

"Our Firewall as a Service provision is a natural evolution of the move to the cloud for all applications. It ensures that customers have all the benefits of a SaaS solution including automatic updates for up-to-the-moment protection and business continuity security without the need for internal IT resources."

# Chief Exec of Ofcom takes over

OFCOM'S appointment of Dame Melanie Dawes as Chief Executive gained swift Government approval ahead of her taking over the reins in March.

Dawes' career includes a circa five year stint as Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

She has also held senior roles across the Civil Service and started her career as an economist, and became Director General of the Economic and Domestic Affairs Secretariat at the Cabinet Office between 2011 and 2015.

Dawes chairs the Civil Service People Board, and is a Civil Service champion for diversity and inclusion.

DCMS Secretary of State at the time, Nicky Morgan, said: "Melanie's experience leading organisations through change will be vital as the Government announces it is minded to appoint Ofcom as regulator for new online harms laws."



Dame Melanie Dawes

NEWS ROUNDUP

**UC INTEGRATION** business Qunifi, which manages a global network of infrastructure running hosted voice services including Office 365 voice integration platforms, has launched Call2Teams, a cloud service that enables SIP trunk integration into Microsoft Office 365 and Teams. "SIP trunk providers can be Microsoft Teams enabled in less than a day without needing any specialist skills or training," said Call2Teams CEO Mark Herbert.

**8X8** has extended its partnership with EveryCloud, which focuses on the north west region, with a push into the south west area. Keith Jackson, Director Channel Sales EMEA at 8x8, said: "EveryCloud is a key strategic partner."

**GUEST-facing technology** provided by hospitality sector whizz at-visions is now available as a network enhanced and tailored managed service via Exponential-e. "Hospitality is notoriously complex in coping with clients' multiple digital interactions, so it can be easy to consider connectivity as an afterthought," stated Exponential CEO Lee Wade. "Working with at-visions we can enhance accessibility."



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# Channel biller bags ServiceMark badge

CHANNEL billing specialist Union Street has been awarded the ServiceMark from The Institute of Customer Service.

During the process regular customer surveys helped Union Street and The Institute identify areas where customer service could be enhanced.

The Institute also conducted a survey of staff to assess whether the culture and values of the company were correctly aligned with its customer service strategy.

“As part of the necessary changes, a new Customer Experience Team was formed which now proactively engages with customers, gathering feedback and driving continuous improvements,” said Operations Director Rob Bristow.

“Gaining the accreditation is no mean feat, particularly having achieved this within a year of joining The Institute. Our support operations were in a great place when we joined The Institute a year ago, but we had to take it to the next level.

“We reassessed all areas of the business without exception, because service isn’t just about the customer facing parts of a business, every department has a role to play.



Rob Bristow

“The final stage of gaining the accreditation required an audit of all areas of the business by The Institute.

“They looked at everything from business continuity measures, to technical support and everything in between. They even assessed our data security processes to ensure we’re managing sensitive data in a way that is secure. The speed with which we earned the accreditation really is a credit to the determination of everyone in the business to make it happen.”

Bristow believes lessons learned and improvements made during the process is helping Union Street manage partner issues better.

“A big part of this process has helped to educate our teams on how to manage and diffuse situations before they escalate,” he said. “It’s also taught us to welcome such situations as opportunities to identify potential areas of dissatisfaction and work with the individual customers to ensure that they get the best possible experience.”

Jo Causon, CEO of The Institute of Customer Service, commented: “To have achieved the ServiceMark within a year is testament to Union Street’s commitment to improve customer service standards.”

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# FluidOne hunts for 50 agents

JUST weeks after rocking up at FluidOne as Head of Channel Lee Rossano has architected a new referral practice and is seeking to add more than 50 partner agents.

In a strategy update the firm said it is ‘rebooting’ its channel programme partly in response to feedback from partners.

“The FluidOne ecosystem is now designed to better equip new and existing partners with training, resources and support,” said Rossano. “Recent management changes and fresh investment signal a sharper, more energised and inclusive focus on the channel.”

Rossano confirmed that partners have access to 30-plus content delivery vendors via FluidOne’s portal.

The company also removes issues around multiple SLAs using a single contract, he said, noting that development work is under way on portal updates and tools, building on the recent launch of a mobile offering.

Rossano joined FluidOne in January this year and has also held senior roles at technology companies Exponential-e, Class Networks, Imtech ICT, SAS Global Communications and Telstra International.

## NEWS ROUNDUP

A COLLABORATION between two comms giants has delivered to market ‘Avaya Cloud Office by RingCentral’, a solution that blends RingCentral’s UCaaS platform with Avaya phones, services and migration capabilities.

“Businesses currently using premise-based or cloud solutions now have a new public cloud option available to them with Avaya Cloud Office, providing integrated Unified Communications and collaboration,” said Elka Popova, Vice President of Connected Work Research, Frost & Sullivan.

IN A BUSINESS update Telford-based Network Telecom reported 2019 revenues up 22% to almost £14.2m (£11.6m in 2018) and profits up by 30%. Staff numbers were boosted by 19%. The company was acquired in September 2019 by Enreach, the European group backed by pan-European investment firm Waterland. Network Telecom launched its NT Cloud hosted solution last year along with developments to its NT Multimedia desk phone. Chris Parkes, Head of Sales and Marketing, said: “2020 is going to be another big year for us with the launch of our new NT Multimedia device along with other plans in the pipeline.”

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# Kini's full fibre mission

Talk of full fibre potential has long been rife among industry players. Let's all stop pretending though, we must make the proposition far more simple and bring an end to the complexity that could stifle its growth, according to TalkTalk Business Managing Director Jonathan Kini.

**T**he comms sector seems unable to escape the stain of being too complex even as we enter the new generation of fibre connectivity variants. Few who have followed the industry over decades will be surprised – jargon and complexity just won't go away – but it's time for the sector to up its game, believes Kini, who is busy putting his words into action. "My number one priority is to enable every business in the UK to have access to full fibre connectivity because it has the power to completely transform the market," he stated. "The Government has set out a clear mandate to roll out full fibre in more areas of the UK and the channel can achieve this if we work together. However, the main challenge is making it simple. Simplicity is hard to achieve, but harder to copy. In the new full fibre world there will be multiple providers working with multiple altnets, offering different versions of full fibre. My first job is to simplify TalkTalk Business' full fibre offering."

Simplifying these complexities would be the outward manifestation of an industry that meant business, he says, and on this TalkTalk is not entertaining half measures. "The future is all about full fibre, it means lower churn, higher retention, long-term lowered cost to serve and a much higher customer satisfaction score," he

stated. "But we must kill the acronyms and make the industry more accessible. We're exploring how to simplify our operations, as well as access to connectivity. The feedback we've received from partners has helped us to enhance the service we offer. For example, we've recently launched a new online billing portal for partners to access all billing information online. Advancements in technology for customer premise equipment and routers will also be crucial to the rollout of full fibre."

Kini joined TalkTalk Business in September last year following the departure of former MD Kristine Olsen-Chapman. He previously held senior roles in Virgin Media and Vodafone across both B2C and B2B, most recently working for Drax as CEO of the Customer Business. He also works as an advisor to the Bank of England. "The TalkTalk leadership team I met during the interview process made me realise that underpinning the company's culture is a desire to achieve," he stated. "They cut through the bureaucracy to disrupt and challenge the status quo. I'm here to develop the next stage in our partner investment."

Kini, who is from Manchester, champions the region as much as he advances the case of straightforward comms, and it is perhaps symbolic that TalkTalk has laid down roots on his



Jonathan Kini

## We must kill the acronyms and make the industry more accessible

patch. TalkTalk joined the Northern Powerhouse Partner Programme last year (after moving its HQ to Salford), an initiative working to boost the northern economy with investment in skills, innovation, infrastructure and culture. "For far too long, business has been centralised in London and the south of England," said Kini.

### Northern potential

"We have fantastic talent in other parts of the country, and I'm pleased that many organisations are realising the potential in the north. As part of the University of Manchester alumni community, I'm excited to be back in my old stomping ground." Another indication that Kini

cannot resist championing important causes – in addition to kiboshing complexity and flying the northern flag – is reflected in the great significance he attaches to climate change. He is Chair of Business in the Community's (BITC's) Net Zero Carbon Taskforce, working with Government, BITC and businesses of all sizes to find simple and effective ways to help companies take action and create a more sustainable future.

"Increasing awareness is a huge passion of mine," he said. "We're working with other carriers to better understand the carbon footprint of the megabyte. It matters to us that we're a responsible business."

There seems to be no headline project Kini has lacked an influence. Today, most industry debate has switched to the subject of fibre and 5G, which he describes as 'best friends'. And the rise of mobile also saw Kini act as a prime mover. "Connecting people as mobile penetration grew from 50 per cent to virtually everyone, and working with the team at Virgin to put the Internet into the hands of over one million customers in the move to smartphone contracts was exciting," he said. "More recently at Drax we helped 10 per cent of UK businesses make the transition to renewable power. I am seeing a similar shift in the market as it transitions to full fibre." ■





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# Sir Clive on finding the D

In preparing for business growth there is no better starting point than priming the Board to be the best they can be both strategically and culturally, according to Sir Clive Woodward, Non Executive Strategic Advisor at Aura Technology.

**W**orld Cup scooping rugby coach Sir Clive Woodward joined Aura Technology as Non Executive Strategic Advisor in July last year, and his goal is to develop a team of Board level champions without peer. He is uniquely qualified for the task, having won the World Cup with England's rugby team in 2003 and led Team GB to Olympic success as Director of Sport from 2006 to 2012. Sir Clive also has experience in the tech sector and had an 18 year business career before becoming England coach, including the founding of a computer leasing business. He is the founder of Hive Learning, an online community where business leaders share technical and commercial knowledge; and a Board advisor to Seat Unique, a London tech start-up which is creating an official marketplace for guaranteed premium access to live events. Here, Sir Clive shares insights that could help unleash your strategic and cultural potential...

**How did you first engage with Aura Technology?**

I met Aura founder Tim Walker at an IT event in 2015 where we shared the same stage and participated in a panel discussion about leadership in the IT sector. After he had set up Aura Technology in 2017 he asked me to join as an advisor to the Board. I quickly realised that Aura stands out in a



Tim Walker and Sir Clive Woodward

**Creating the Winning Culture, of the type found in the most successful sporting and business teams I have worked with, is the critical success factor**

competitive market because of its focus on a highly strategic approach to IT. Aura has grown rapidly since its inception in 2017, and now has a significant mid-market customer base across the UK in the commercial, public and healthcare sectors. Revenues already exceed £10 million.

**What is your role?**

My role is to challenge the Board and add value to the strategic direction and decisions that the company makes. Beginning with the end in mind, and having a

clear picture of what you are looking to achieve is key. Just as important is understanding the steps to get there, and what the DNA of a Champion is. I am working with Aura on this to ensure that we all know the critical success factors for the business and what underpins them.

**How do you help to provide clarity of purpose and direction?**

I am working with the Board as a whole, along with the Board members individually,

to help them understand the most important steps they need to take. When we won the World Cup in 2003 it was as a result of a number of core winning principles which the whole team understood. I am working with Aura to embed these winning behaviours into their business. I am a firm believer in the concept of 'whoever wins in IT, tends to win'. This concept is core to the Aura business, and I am helping the Board maximise the success of taking that mantra out to the business world

to transform organisations' use of technology.

**What are the critical priorities for Boards today?**

I see many business leaders not making the most of the use of technology within their organisations, and at times shying away from truly understanding the value of technology to underpin the achievement of their objectives. It is critical that whether you are running a business in the ICT sector, or whether you are running a business in any other sector, that the use of technology is at the forefront of the resources utilised by a Board.

**How do you describe your style as a Board Advisor?**

I am a supportive advisor to the Boards I work with, helping them develop a strong DNA for success, a Winning Culture, and ultimately to be the best possible leaders that they can be for their organisation. As the name suggests, I am not an executive in the business, nor should I be!

**What is the ideal Non-Exec relationship?**

In my coaching vernacular I talk about Sponges and Rocks. Rocks are people with a fixed mindset, who are set in their ways, unteachable and uncoachable. I need everyone I work with to be a sponge. By that I mean have a passion for learning, for new thoughts and new ideas. But I always stress with any team I start working

# DNA of champs

with that this must be a two-way relationship. I will be putting forward ideas, but I also want the team I am working with to be putting forward their thoughts and ideas to me as well.

## What do you aim to achieve with Aura?

Aura has an opportunity to dominate the mid-market in the private and public sectors. It has achieved a lot in two years, and is already a £10 million-plus business. I

## I am a firm believer in the concept of 'whoever wins in IT, tends to win'. This is core to Aura

want to continue to support its success to become the dominant strategic ICT provider in the UK in the mid-market. Whenever businesses come together in the way that Aura and Amicus ITS have done recently, it is essential that the enlarged organisation's greatest asset – the people – work together, and remain committed players in the company's success. Creating the Winning Culture, of the type found in the most successful sporting and business teams I have worked with, is the critical success factor.

## How do you expect Aura Technology's expansion to progress?

Aura has experienced strong organic growth to date, and we expect that to continue. I have been supportive of the merger with Amicus ITS since I first heard of that

project. I expect the Board to remain similarly ambitious in planning future growth, both through winning new mid-market customers as well as merging and acquiring other businesses in the sector. I will support the Board in remaining ruthlessly focused on identifying the critical success factors that enable them to win, and I will support them in their pursuit of these.

## How do you define the relationship between strategic vision and market engagement?

Aura's approach to strategic engagement is paramount, delivering this through the Aura Technology Roadmap process has delivered a real win-win for customers. Combined with their focus on the mid-market, rather than the SME market as a whole, allows the team to understand the specific issues affecting this size and profile of company. Aura Technology's biggest opportunity resides in utilising the strong and capable senior and wider team to work with the Board members of their customers, building long-lasting and synergistic relationships.

## If you had to pick one key message for MSP leaders, what would it be?

Board member engagement with customers who are not the normal champions of IT is key. Aura will continue to successfully encourage CEOs and Finance Directors to engage more in technology. MSPs need to evolve rapidly in their interactions with customers, to ensure that the technologies they use themselves are able to deliver the same business benefits which they espouse to their customers. ■

## Just a minute with Sir Clive Woodward...

**Role models:** In rugby, Jim Greenwood who was my coach at Loughborough. Outside of rugby I have always admired Sir Alex Ferguson

**What talent do you wish you had?** Golf: I play off six but wish I could get down to scratch!

**What do you fear most?** What kept me up at night as a coach was thinking that the opposition had thought of something we had not. I would fly anywhere in the world if I sensed a chance of learning something that could make me or the team better

**Best piece of advice you have been given:** Capture and keep as much information and knowledge as possible. This is your IP. The old ways are sometimes the best!

**The biggest risk you have taken?** Becoming Head Coach of the England Rugby Team in 1997. I was the first professional Head Coach and gave up a successful business career. It was a huge risk as rugby had just gone professional, but it was a great opportunity

**One example of something you've overcome:** Losing the Rugby World Cup Quarter in 1999 was a big setback. I was only two years into the job and it could easily have ended there. Luckily the players backed me and what we were trying to do and the RFU gave me another chance to take the team on to the next World Cup in 2003

**How would you like to be remembered?** As someone who gave their best at everything

## 'Good Migrations' Unlock M&A Value

2020 looks set to be another busy year for comms entrepreneurs and private equity investors keen to realise value from mergers and acquisitions (M&A) in our industry. According to Support to Win's Managing Director, Tamsin Deutrom-Yue, market consolidation can only happen successfully when its investment case is technically achievable:

"There are undoubtedly big opportunities in bringing different customer bases together onto the same platform, or rationalising onto a new platform altogether. But the reality of making that happen can be very risky and time-consuming if you don't manage it properly – threatening the whole business case."

Support to Win's specialist migration services have experienced a huge spike in demand since their launch last year, says Deutrom-Yue, with many of the enquiries received being attached to potential M&A deals.

"You'd think it would be smaller comms firms looking for extra skills and resources to plan and implement a migration. In fact most of our projects have been with larger service providers and resellers. For them, bringing in a specialist third party to lead a migration project makes a lot more sense than hiring or seconding an in-house team for a set period."

Aside from M&A, the other main catalyst for migrations is the evolution of platform strategy. Support to Win is seeing a renewed desire among operators and the channel community to anticipate potential issues by exercising more autonomy over how services are delivered, long term.

"A lot of people are looking closely at Cisco's takeover of BroadSoft, for example, and what their options are to potentially switch to another platform. A couple of years ago, many might have thought that impossible because of the risk and complexity of migrating customers from one platform to another. Not any more," added Deutrom-Yue.

"Migrations need specialist skills to manage both the



**Tamsin Deutrom-Yue:** Migrations need specialist skills to manage both the technical and human factors of change alike.

technical and human factors of change alike. Because we sit across all vendor technologies, and draw on a strong people background through the parallel Train to Win business, we're uniquely positioned to handle any migration project, be it from platform to platform, network to network, on-prem to hosted or TDM to IP."

Wherever you look, it's clear that the benefits of a successful customer migration can be transformative; minimising churn, boosting competitiveness, enhancing brand reputation and enabling upselling and cross-selling of premium features and services. And for business leaders, good migrations also convert into increased valuations and directly support M&A investment theses.

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# A real world 'cloud cuckoo

Too many enterprises are in the grip of an ICT service famine, claims CloudCoCo Managing Director Mark Halpin who aims to catalyse a power shift towards more responsive MSPs.

**M**anaged service provider Adept4's acquisition of fellow IT services business CloudCoCo – in a £7.2 million deal sealed early last October – strengthened the hand of both parties. But only now is the true nature of the opportunity revealed as its newly installed leaders gather ever more cards to their pack. The transaction saw CloudCoCo Chairman Andy Mills join the board as CEO, and Mark Halpin, the founder and CEO of CloudCoCo, stepped in as Managing Director of the enlarged rebranded entity.

CloudCoCo, which now has offices in Warrington and Leeds, was established in September 2017 by the aforementioned former Sales Directors of Redcentric. The acquisition followed a mixed year for Adept4, with H1 (to 31st March 2019) revenues down from £5.4 million to £4.2 million. Furthermore, for the year ended 30th September 2019, the legacy Adept4 business reported a decline in revenue from £10.2 million in the previous year to £7.3 million. The acquisition of CloudCoCo took place in October 2019 and has resulted in an enlarged rebranded organisation. Now, with a period of strategic course correction complete, Halpin has set fresh targets.

He is not short of objectives nor ideas, which include a boost to sales and cash generation, reducing churn and costs, and a sharper focus on customer



Mark Halpin

## What we are actually offering is responsive, knowledgeable human beings who want to walk through walls for customers

satisfaction – all of which are core to CloudCoCo's culture, its influence now being felt strongly throughout the merged and restructured operations. "I simplified the corporate business plan to build a model of Attract, Connect, Engage & Delight for customer acquisition, retention and development," he added. "I've always been creative and many of those ideas were monetised in prior roles heading up 'everything new business' since 2008.

"In this, customers are the fundamental influence on our approach: What are their problems? How do we

solve them? Where is their business going? How can we get them there? We've now created an enlarged organisation, with 500 customers who are starting to see the CloudCoCo value. But the widened base of key accounts achieved by Christmas meant that time had to be spent on the retention and development of existing clients within our H1."

### Strategic foresight

Not seeking to get too far too fast also enabled strategic foresight to be fully engaged as Halpin pressed ahead with other immediate priorities

such as a full organisational re-brand, integration and the re-setting of a company that had suffered from its previous and public issues. "The next positive change will be the rapid acquisition of new customers, and going up a weight division in H2 to address the needs of the unattended mid-to-large enterprise segment, suffering from inflexible, unresponsive and high cost incumbents," he stated.

The message advanced by Halpin is that giving 'neglected' enterprise clients a get-out-of-jail card would not only liberate them from

a lethargic incumbent but also free up their entire business operations to work more cost-effectively and efficiently based on the right technology fit. "We see all things Microsoft Teams, and its adoption as an enterprise communication and collaboration hub will accelerate, integrating with legacy PBXs and omnichannel contact centre, with mid-to-large enterprises moving away from a blend of landlines, mobiles and conferencing to integrated cloud/IP-based UC ahead of BT's analogue switch-off in 2025," added Halpin. "Our role is to support our customers' journey quickly, securely and efficiently."

CloudCoCo's strategic vendors are Microsoft and Fortinet. Other tech partners include Zen, Mitel, Anywhere365, Nyotron, Mimecast and Oracle Communications. The kit bag also includes mobile solutions. Halpin's managed support (ITaaS) proposition is marketed to SMEs across the north west, Yorkshire and Humber, while mid-to-large enterprises are engaged with specific propositions such as Microsoft-as-a-Service and a Business Security Fabric focused on integrated security for hybrid cloud infrastructure, apps, data, devices and users.

"This is all based on believing that larger IT providers haven't evolved for the new era," claimed Halpin. "We all recognise a world characterised by impatience

# oo land'

and an on-demand culture – Uber, AirBnB, Just Eat, Netflix etc. This is largely not the experience enterprises get when procuring enterprise grade IT services.”

Halpin could have been serving up a very different menu had he followed the family tradition of making cooked foods. But destiny was rewritten by deep grief following the early death of his father, aged 40 when Halpin was 21, which today still fuels his ongoing drive. “I didn’t want to follow five generations of Halpin chefs,” he said. “When my father died I decided to use that pain as petrol on my fire to improve myself, as life seemed very short.

### Life lessons

“My father always said computers were the way to go, which led to an opportunity with InTechnology (now Redcentric). I listened, I learnt and never forgot the values I was taught by my parents, or the generosity of the people who gave time and care to develop someone who deserved a chance. Many of those people now work for CloudCoCo and remain close.”

The catalyst for striking out with his own MSP business was a comment made during a board meeting, which branded the idea of treating employees, customers and partners with kindness, hyper-responsiveness, hard work and loyalty as ‘Cloud Cuckoo Land’. “So, on April the 12th 2018, it was lift-off for CloudCoCo,” stated Halpin. “From the outset, and drawing on 20 years of working within an MSP, we maintained our relationships and supplier contacts and

chose to help early customers any way we could.

“By the summer last year we had 30 clients, a seven figure contract base and was profitable. Within two years we have grown from two to 60 staff with 500 accounts, and we are on the pathway towards £10 million revenue. Our customers span the UK and operate in multiple segments, ranging from five to 40,000 seats.”

Halpin is clearly doing it right, and business rectitude – in how you engage with staff, partners and customers, and how you grow – is essentially a matter of people, he believes. “What we are actually offering is responsive, knowledgeable human beings who want to walk through walls for customers, and then achieve immediate business acceleration without total loss of control,” Halpin explained.

“Giving a voice to employees is key. The answers and ideas sit with those that do the job. Companies should be more appreciative of those that work for them and create environments where people feel safe to speak their minds, and know that they will be helped if they feel vulnerable.”

Whether it’s listening to staff or fashioning a strategy, all of Halpin’s policies show the strength of coalition leadership and reflect his aspirations for all involved. He added: “Building a company where employees know they are safe and cared for, having a base of loyal customers that trust us to help them, and being proud of how we make people feel emotionally about our engagement with them are all key factors in our ongoing development.” ■



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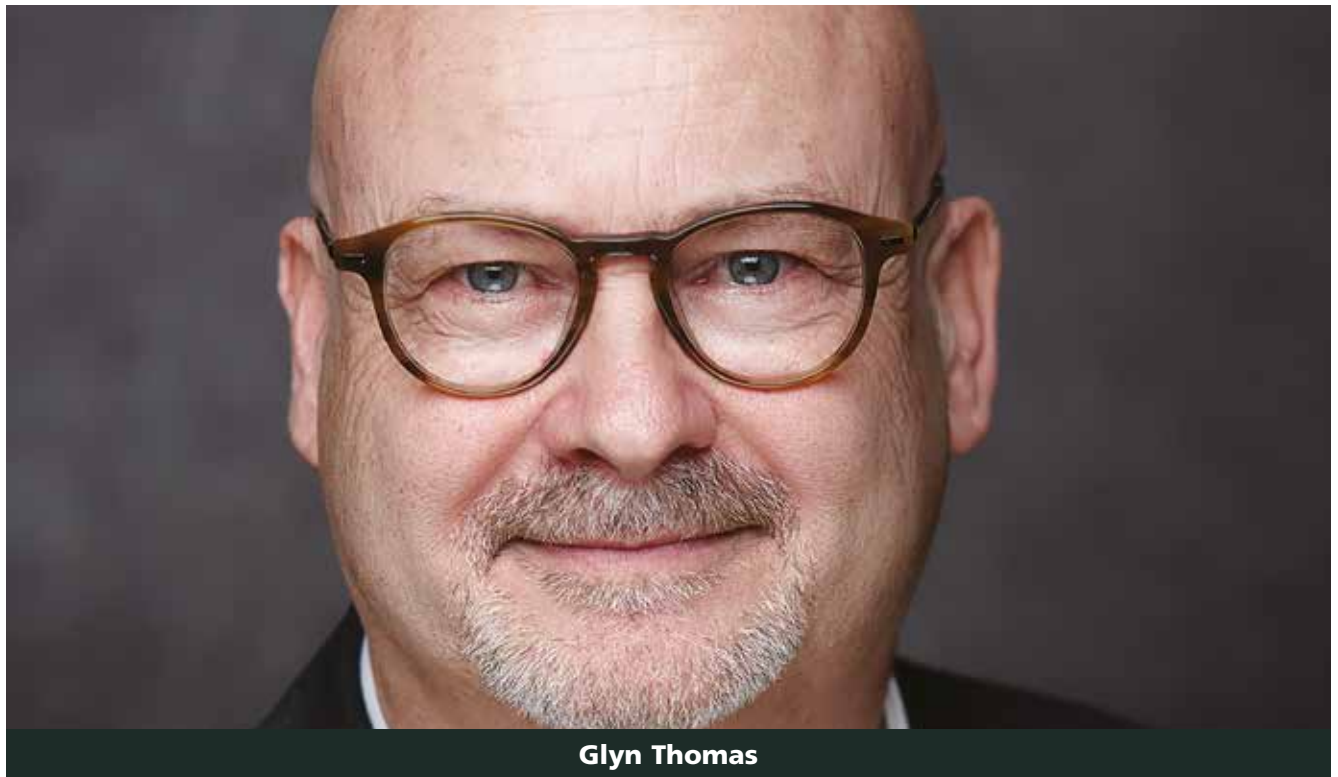


# Surging IPCortex set to

The ICT channel is about to find out how souped-up software developer IPCortex plans to disrupt the market one year after its transformational acquisition by Aerial Direct, according to Managing Director Glyn Thomas.

IPCortex's strategic intent has greatly advanced since its acquisition by Hampshire comms provider Aerial Direct last March. And according to Thomas, the channel must now acknowledge the company's growing presence as he seeks to elevate its status as the 'software solutions vendor of choice'. That IPCortex is a challenger is not in doubt, believes Thomas, because big strides have been taken across the board during the past 12 months, with the parent company bolstering its capacity to execute on growth plans with greater commercial resource, scale and a clearer strategic vision. In fact, Thomas is leading from the front with a 'fresh pair of eyes', and his first job was to ensure that any perceived concerns or fears resulting from the acquisition were swiftly put to bed.

"With Aerial Direct supporting our growth plans we now have the tangible benefits of a substantive telecoms market leader backing us with its skills, knowledge and momentum, helping us to achieve our own business objectives," he commented. "Our development roadmap is full and our partners are engaging with us in beta testing new products and features. I aim to accelerate investment in our product development, scale up our sales and marketing teams and increase brand



Glyn Thomas

**I aim to accelerate investment in our product development, scale up our sales and marketing teams and increase brand awareness within the channel at every opportunity**

awareness within the channel at every opportunity – and drive those opportunities."

#### Going up the gears

From the moment of the acquisition Thomas's focus was on consolidation rather than growth, making sure partners and staff remained in a good place and that relationships were not negatively impacted. "Any fears in relation to the acquisition were short lived and by year-end we had achieved overall growth returning a healthy sales

revenue of £1.2 million, up on the previous year," stated Thomas. "Our 2020 target is 20 per cent sales growth with a focus on generating new business and onboarding new partners. Now, my priorities are to expedite the growth plan, expand on our development capabilities and accelerate IPCortex's go-to-market position, which includes the enlargement of the sales team."

Growth is coming from all quarters, with hardware still the preferred solution

within some verticals, which IPCortex builds in-house. "With cloud adoption being a driver for many, virtualised solutions are at the forefront of conversations and our own cloud hosted solutions are also in demand," added Thomas. "It is here that we currently see considerable future growth, especially with our white labelled Service Provider Platform.

"Simplification of the provisioning, management and billing functions are also key activities in plan. I will

drive as much simplification and automation into our offerings as I can. With that in mind, this year we are improving our cloud-based solutions from a performance and a provisioning standpoint, and our hosted portal will see a number of changes, making it a more functionally rich and user friendly platform."

IPCortex's PABX and UC solutions run on any platform (hardware, virtual or hosted), and a mobile client solution will soon be entering beta

# make waves

testing along with a Teams integration solution which is currently in development. Enhancements to the keevio UC client including feature segmentation and new video conferencing capabilities are in the pipeline. Notably, nearly all the programming and configuration performed via the web front end runs through IPCortex's Open API.

Thomas's career experience is just as comprehensive. He has over 30 years working in the

## My priorities are to expedite the growth plan and expand on our development

ICT sector under his belt and held a number of leadership and management roles across multiple verticals including IT, education, maritime and entertainment industries, most recently within the energy sector for SSE. "My years operating, supporting, managing and running a diverse portfolio of comms and IT related activities gives me a good appreciation of the challenges facing our partners and their customers," he stated.

Thomas has also developed a nose for potential market opportunities and a knack for backing the right technologies. "Artificial Intelligence keeps raising its head, often around call transcription," he observed. "We are exploring the possibilities having already performed R&D in this area. We are also looking at voice-

to-text and ways we can include that in conferences and call recording, giving the ability to search recordings for words or phrases without the need to listen manually to multiple call recordings. Furthermore, we are looking at value add integrations into other web services."

### FMC potential

Fixed mobile convergence is appearing on Thomas's radar screen as another potential and significant catalyst in the market when the conditions for growth are met. "FMC delivering voice, data and video to your favourite mobile device seamlessly between fixed line or wireless network – no matter what your location – could be disruptive," he added. "The UK is behind the rest of Europe here, but it could scale quickly once it hits the market correctly."

Just as widespread adoption of FMC will catalyse an evolution in the way people work, IPCortex expects to hit its own markets with equal impact and reorder the top channel service provider league table as it emerges from a period of transition, claims Thomas. "Almost all of our partners saw the acquisition in a positive light, enhancing their view of IPCortex and our future plans and development roadmap, now underpinned by the extra skills, resources and financial strength of our parent company," he stated.

"Our biggest opportunity resides in R&D, not out there yet, but gaining substance each passing week as our roadmap develops. We have many products and features in plan for 2020 which will underpin our organic and channel growth strategy." ■

### Just a minute with Glyn Thomas...

**Role models:** Elon Musk, Richard Branson and Ellen MacArthur

**What talent do you wish you had?** To be a talented writer, ideally a best seller!

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

In my early 20s I played keyboards and saxophone in a rock band called The Choice. We got to No 1 in the local charts with a song called Just Call Me Joe!

**In hindsight:** I would have ignored my school career advisor who told me that there was no call for a marine biologist in the small town that I lived in, dashing my teenage dreams and aspirations

**One example of something you've overcome:** Fear. It is nothing more than an emotion fuelled by my imagination

**Biggest career achievement?** Winning the IBM Cambridge Programme award in 2000. It was given to the top 38 IBM first line managers worldwide

**Your greatest strength and what could you work on?** I am a good listener, but making personal to-do lists way beyond the realms of the possible needs attention

**If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing?** I'd be a marine biologist, swimming with manta rays and whale sharks

**The biggest risk you have taken?** A zero visibility drift scuba dive in the Solent. It was a challenging 20 minutes of disorientation

**Name four ideal dinner guests:** Sir David Attenborough, J K Rowling, Neil Armstrong and Leonardo da Vinci

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# Gamma's Taylor-made platform

Gamma delivered the first key component of UCaaS with the launch of Horizon Collaborate in 2019, but CEO Andrew Taylor's says that's just the cornerstone of his mission to help resellers build on fast-developing converged opportunities and mitigate threats in the months and years ahead.

Speaking at Gamma's London headquarters, where the company's brand refresh is much in evidence, Taylor set out his UCaaS roadmap for channel partners and also delivered some incisive assessments on the state of the UK ICT channel, the impact of consolidation and the 'spiders web' he believes some resellers are being drawn into.

"The channel asked, and we delivered and moving into 2020 we have already invested heavily to continue building out our UCaaS proposition during the next 12-months and beyond," he said.

And he hopes an evolving alliance with mobile network Three, announced at Comms Vision, will be music to the partner's ears because, as he readily admits, Gamma's mobile strategy has been muddled for some time.

"It may not be fully launched until the autumn, but it aims to be a first-class service and very disruptive" he said.

"This is a long-term strategic play. We could have gone with one of the incumbent mobile operators, but it would have been second class and our resellers just couldn't compete with that offer. And we based our decision on the fact that Three will be one of the winners in 5G because they've got the highest



Andrew Taylor

quality spectrum compared to anybody else, which means they will deliver an excellent customer experience with best in class quality of service and network speed. And that's all going to be available to Gamma partners.

"We will give our partners the best possible commercial flexibility to challenge the incumbents and move them to Gamma Mobile. And we will put all of the service and commercial controls in their hands. They will own the contract. They will have full access to the portal so they will do all the provisioning, the authorising, all the customer management and the billing. In typical

Gamma style, we will give all of that to them, so they can build value in their businesses.

"It all means they can move away from the current very tight and onerous dealer type arrangements they've got with incumbents. And we know and appreciate it is difficult for some of them to extract themselves from these so we're going to help them with that."

As Taylor stressed, the offer is predicated solely on Three delivering their side of the bargain but confirmed Gamma mobile is already being moved onto the new Three MVNO platform.

"Probably at the back end

of Q3, we'll start to deliver, and we can start taking new customers onto that platform. And then it will take us about six months to do the full upgrade.

"The agreement that we have established with Three means that the partner and their customers get full access to the network services such as 5G and VoLTE, to improve network coverage inbuilding and when roaming."

With the mobile piece set to fall into place, Gamma's ambition to build a full UCaaS enablement strategy for the channel is taking shape and will be supplemented by a new Cloud Contact Centre package, to be previewed at this month's Gamma Roadshows, which is being developed by the team inherited via the purchase of UCaaS specialist Telsis last November.

This new CCaaS solution, according to Taylor, will enable resellers to give smaller businesses a 'big company' status.

"I envisage a world where small businesses in the UK have got the same requirements as very large businesses in terms of how they interact with their staff and their customers. Collaboration is not just about how you collaborate internally, isn't it? Cloud contact centre is about how you collaborate externally.

## Gamma UCaaS pocket roadmap

**Data Connectivity.** Strategic deals with TalkTalk, Virgin and BT in place. Ethernet, fibre and broadband connectivity volumes up 25%.

**Collaboration.** Launched last year and growing. 9000 paying seats to date sold by resellers.

**Subscription Management.** Launched to the channel on request nine months ago to fuel UCaaS deployments.

**Voice recording.** Rebuilt and now fully integrated into the Horizon UCaaS platform, all stored in the Cloud.

**Cloud Contact Centre.** New package in development to sit at the core of Horizon UCaaS. Set for deployment Q3/4 2020.

**Mobile.** New disruptive offer in development with Three. Commercial flexibility and customer ownership promised.

These days, whether it's via WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Webchat, or Facebook, you need to be able to communicate across B2B and B2C omni-channels and this is becoming very important for our channel partners' customers.

"The requirements of a small business have literally changed overnight. So, we're going to deliver a cloud-based contact centre product around our cloud-based phone service

# Plan for UCaaS expansion

Horizon. It will be fully integrated and will be easy for resellers to provision and sell. We've selected a whole load of features through some deep research we've done with end customers and we've worked out the key features we believe will be important to them.

"It's in the Cloud, and it's easy to consume and it's packaged. And it means the resellers get something great to sell, literally at the click of a button. They've got the basic voice service, they've got their collaboration internally if they want it, they've got the cloud contact centre and Omnichannel features all built into our portal.

"I described it to one of our partners in Ireland and he said, 'Andrew, if Gamma delivers that you will enable the channel to really differentiate and clean up against the competition!'

"That's why we bought Telsis. For us, it's really exciting. We'll confirm the roll out at the Gamma

roadshows, but it will be fully available at the back end of 2020 with all the bells and whistles. The Telsis team need to build some additional functionality, but it's coming."

Taylor's belief that resellers have a great future by addressing the shift away from legacy to Cloud based solutions – especially in the micro space – is tempered by his strong conviction that some vendors have not built the long-term ambitions of partners into their own expansion programmes.

"The way things are evolving, there needs to be an element of competing sometimes. But that doesn't mean that's acceptable in a wholesale model. I think resellers need to partner with somebody who's got a clear wholesale proposition. What we saw a couple of years ago was new entrants coming into the market who do not have an equitable relationship with the channel. They're going over the top to end customers because their

business models demand it, and this presents a real risk to the channel and their business models.

"It means they want to do the fulfilment on sales, do all the billing and own the customer because that improves the value of their business. What's driving this is partly driven by the ownership structure of those companies. Every reseller has a motivation eventually to sell their own business. So, it's all about building value in the business. How do you build value in that business if you don't own the customer?

"This will ultimately cause price and margin pressure, which we must collectively resist and build real value in our customer propositions, otherwise it will be a race to the floor. This type of behaviour will be disruptive and will negatively impact value in the channel, so we should be wary of who we partner with and ensure that our partners enable us to build real long-term value in our businesses". ■

## Andrew Taylor's swot analysis on the channel

### Strengths

"The quality emerging in the maturing UK channel and the investment and support resellers are now getting. They are high quality, professional people organising themselves better and thinking about the way they operate and the service they offer. The move to the Cloud is better in the UK than anywhere else."

### Weaknesses

"There is very little diversity in the channel. There are a lot of over 50s. But there's a new breed coming through. That creates some risks, but also opportunities. There's a bit of a bubble in terms of valuations and at some point, that will come to bear. There's only so many strategic acquirers in the UK market."

### Opportunities

"There's lot of disruption around new technology on the voice side and on the data side. I don't think that the opportunity has ever been greater. The penetration levels for hosted is still relatively low at 25%. We've still got a lot of ground to fill and the opening up in the mid to enterprise space around Cloud and contact centre is a massive opportunity. With the ISDN switch off there's also a big opportunity in the micro space. Not quite SOHOs but anything from five seats."

### Threats

"Data is a high growth market because of what's happening with fibre. But it's displacement, and the economics of it have been driven to the floor. That's worrying and I'm not sure that we can stop it. The notion of providing somebody with a higher quality service which is more resilient, more reliable and faster at a significantly lower cost is a difficult one for companies like Gamma, aggregators, carriers and resellers because we all have to make money at that."

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# Bring on HR visionaries

From technology, the environment to demographic trends, winds of change are transforming the concept of workforce agendas, according to Zen Internet HR Director Ayshea Robertson.



Ayshea Robertson

**A**s custodians of the workforce agenda, HR leaders are becoming ever more important authors of their organisation's narrative. Central to Robertson's narrative are three themes – the first is advances in technology and innovation. "Automation and advancing technologies like AI and robotics are going to change the nature and the number of jobs available, and this will mean increased agility, speed and efficiency for businesses," she explained.

"As the advances in technology begin to remove the need for certain roles, there will be an increase in demand for differing skill sets. So we need to look at up-skilling and re-skilling the workforce to accommodate this. It is likely that there will be more focus on innovation and people who are creative. As HR Director at Zen, I need to think about how technology and people can work together to achieve the best of both, and enable the business to grow."

Climate and environmental change could potentially devastate the planet, and moves to address these critical issues can now be waged from offices around the world. This matter is a top priority for Robertson – and her second theme in Zen's workforce agenda. "There are many reasons why environmental change is impacting the workforce and beyond," she stated. "As we are experiencing extreme

weather conditions more frequently across the globe, we look at how equipped we are in communities and businesses to cope with this. And how can we be more prepared in the future.

"There are also increasing demands for energy. We have more tech, more machinery, but we have the competing pressure for organisations to consume less energy and to become more carbon neutral and carbon negative even. This will influence decisions made in business and how we structure our ways of working. I expect new roles will be created to focus and specialise on environmental

opportunities may be not as readily available as people in senior roles work longer. "This will also lead to the necessity to re-skill people," she added. "For example, at Zen we understand the speed of technological change, so we constantly need to keep the skill set of our people up-to-date and relevant. This will be the same in other areas of an organisation too, not just technology."

The three macro forces identified by Robertson as reshaping workforce dynamics are having a global impact and affect all types of organisations. "They are also interlinked which is why we

## People are far more environmentally savvy now, so they will want to work with, and use, companies that care about the environment

change in business and industries. It will also change consumer demands. People are far more environmentally savvy now, so they will want to work with, and use, companies that care about the environment. Corporate responsibility is no longer a nice to have, it is absolutely fundamental."

Demographic change, Robertson's third prime mover, is also reshaping the workforce. The ageing population will have an impact on the flow of talent in organisations; and career

have to bear each of them in mind in today's business environment, and we need to be doing something about them now," she added. "Zen is constantly thinking about advances in technology. We have an environmental steering group, and we have started to think about the ageing population impact.

"These topics will continue to evolve and we must keep an eye on them for a long time to come. It is important for the channel to think about these areas immediately and start preparing now." ■



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# Mobile data matters

It's not the simple fact of mobile's popularity that makes it a market worth unlocking, it's the data element that really counts, according to Jola Managing Director Andrew Dickinson, who argues that the key lies in unseating the MNOs.

**W**ith mobile being the natural device of convergence and trends in workplace flexibility and mobility increasing, making the move to mobile will become unavoidable for resellers, so what steps should they take now? "Most resellers avoid traditional mobile – the handsets and airtime – because it's low margin, high risk and dominated by specialists and the MNOs," stated Dickinson. "But mobile data is completely different and far more aligned to the products they currently sell. With 4G/5G integration into products like SD-WAN and Ethernet (pre-Ethernet and mobile data backup) every reseller will soon be selling mobile, even if only indirectly. Now that a layer 2 product is available, all the ISPs will soon be offering 4G/5G back-up on DIA as standard. And to get into M2M/IoT directly, resellers should look for a true mobile data aggregator, with an MVNO, eSIM capability and a focus on the channel."

For its part, Jola has invested in becoming an eSIM MVNO and its product roadmap this year will develop this capability. eSIMs solve a number of problems for end user organisations, and therefore represent a significant opportunity for resellers looking for a magic mobile data bullet to compete with a MNO in M2M and IoT, believes Dickinson. "An eSIM MVNO

with network agnostic, un-steered or steered, embedded or plastic triple-cut SIMs, gives resellers significant advantage over the retail MNOs," he explained. "eSIM MVNOs buy mobile data wholesale, from massive global data aggregators, so rates are attractive and reseller margins are good. eSIMs are invisible to individual MNOs so, unlike with consumer eSIMs, these MVNOs don't need permission from MNOs in each country. Breaking the model where the MVNO simply gets a discount off the retail MNO's list price is critical to enabling the channel. Especially when MNO enterprise sales teams are given so much flexibility on RRP."

#### Uptick in IoT deals

Breaking mobile market moulds is important for a number of reasons. Among the top priorities is the IoT which has received much industry commentary predicting its potential impact. "IoT is not the future," stated Dickinson. "It's now and growing rapidly. Resellers have bid many big IoT contracts recently, but successes are rare because they are usually up against a retail MNO that will drop their data price at the last minute to win the business."

It is difficult for end customers to switch out SIMs as MNOs seek to make money over the entire term and beyond. So mobile data



Andrew Dickinson

## Breaking the model where the MVNO simply gets a discount off the retail MNO's list price is key to enabling the channel

aggregators need to break their direct dependence on MNOs to give resellers a differentiated product and a fighting chance of winning some of these huge deals, says Dickinson. "Resellers also need to add IoT capabilities beyond just mobile data," he said. "My advice would be to specialise in a growth sector they are already familiar with, and partner for aspects like management portals, gateways, sensors, and maybe even intelligent truck-roll."

Adept at targeting its own growth sector, Jola doubled

in size last year, and since it only sells through channel, that means resellers have won some big contracts.

"Most of their success has come from selling 4G data for back-up and primary connectivity, supported by products the MNOs can't or won't offer, like data pools and back-datable bolt-ons," explained Dickinson. "This year Jola partners are also going to win some significant IoT contracts. The number of IoT devices deployed worldwide will at least quadruple in the next three years."

Dickinson is mindful that the torrent of upbeat research and predictions about IoT and 5G don't mean anything unless there are practical applications that meet the needs of the market. "Our roadmap this year is based on what we know about the end user business market and the channel ecosystem," he commented. "For example, there are over 200 ISPs in the UK all looking for a simple and affordable 4G/5G back-up service. Using domain knowledge gleaned from Griffin, we have built a layer 2 (L2TP) service into our eSIM multinet MVNO platform. It works without the need for additional CPE or significant router config changes. True fail-over backup has a high perceived value with enterprises and so ISPs and their resellers can make great margins."

The question now is where the best mobile data opportunities for resellers reside. Dickinson cites retail as key (especially when growing sub-sectors are identified), along with construction, logistics and transport, physical security and the public sector. "The MNOs are prioritising big manufacturing, logistics and drone deployments so avoid these," he advised. "Resellers should be modelling monthly ARPU's of around £1 in IoT and £10 in M2M and 4G/5G back up. Every reseller has at least one significant IoT/M2M opportunity in their client base. The right supplier will help them find and win it." ■

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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.



## Qualified voice, mobile and data reseller delegates will be able to take advantage of:

- An educational seminar programme
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- A fun networking evening dinner
- Overnight accommodation
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**Joline Cramond**  
Focus Group



"Focus Group is excited to be part of Margin in Mobile for the first time this year. Mobile technology is a fundamental component to solution-based offerings in the IOT environment and utilising these technologies to maximise margins is where we add value to our Channel Partners' revenues."



**Dan Cunliffe**  
Pangea



"As Channel-only providers, we're delighted to sponsor Margin in Mobile again; it's the go-to platform for partners who want a head start on new opportunities in the industry. Through intelligent IoT connectivity and 4G Multi-net, we'll help you pinpoint those opportunities, win them, and generate profitable revenue."



**Dan Makrell**  
Shire Leasing



"We are delighted to be supporting the Margin in Mobile event, an excellent chance to meet existing and prospective clients and an opportunity to share details of our unique financial products and FinTech solutions with distributors and resellers. We currently fund most equipment and soft assets provided by the ICT channel."



**Vincent Disneur**  
Union Street



"Mobile presents a massive opportunity for CPs and, with 75 percent of mobile retail revenues coming from bundled services, creating innovative and competitive bundles is clearly the key to differentiate and succeed in this marketplace. We're looking forward to attending MiM and discussing how our aBILLity™ system can help CPs do just that whilst ensuring profitability and maximising control."



Gold sponsors



Hospitality sponsors



**MARGIN IN MOBILE EDUCATIONAL SEMINAR AGENDA****9.30am: Speaker – Garry Grows, Sales Director**  
DWS**SELLING MOBILE MADE SIMPLE**

Kicking off the 'Exploration of new opportunities in mobile' theme, Garry Grows 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.

Gold  
Sponsor**10.00am: Speaker – Mark Lomas, Head of New Business**  
Gamma**DISCOVER THE 5G OPPORTUNITY**

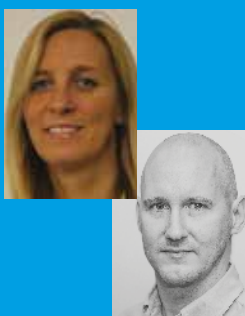
Mark will explain how Gamma can help resellers win mobile deals by offering flexibility in their choice of networks. A senior spokesman from '3' will then look at how the networks will deliver spectrum and the opportunities for resellers that the technology offers, such as IoT.

Gold  
Sponsor**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!

Gold  
Sponsor**11.00am: COFFEE BREAK****11.15am: Speakers – Adrian Sunderland CTO and Lee Broxson, Sales Director**  
Jola**WINNING BUSINESS WITH eSIM'S**

Mobile data is the fastest growing connectivity product in the UK, but the channel has been frustrated by Retail MNOs undercutting them at the last minute. With eSIM, resellers have the ability to beat the competition on price, however it has enough value-add for them not to have to focus on this. We will explain how resellers can find, bid and win large-scale IoT and M2M mobile data rollouts, within their customer bases. We will also talk about what other elements of the IoT ecosystem they will need to develop in order to build a sustainable IoT business.

Gold  
Sponsor**11.45am: Speakers – Mandy Fazelynia, Operations and Business Development Director and Rob Foster, Head of Channel Sales**  
Zest 4**ADDING VALUE TO YOUR BUSINESS**

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? Mandy and Rob will also examine how such a portfolio can help resellers build their valuation multiple on exit.

Gold  
Sponsor**12.00pm: Key Takeaways and Panel Debate**

In this closing session, ICT journalist Will Garside will summarise the market opportunities and key takeaways from the Keynotes and will then chair a debate on the subjects presented.

## Silver sponsors



## Mobile Zone



# The smart city builder

As a boy, Connexin founder and CEO Furqan Alamgir relished deconstructing computers to uncover their component parts and learn how they interacted, before upgrading them into something greatly improved. Today, he does the same but with whole cities.

Connexin is showing the way to connect smart cities with a new logic that holds them together like never before. But it's the company's hometown Hull that displays its full influence, and shows why we must reassess our understanding of the term 'programming'. That's because Connexin's pioneering local project has been credited with kicking off the age of the 'programmable city'. The tech company turned Hull into what it claims to be the first smart city of its kind following the deployment of an operating system that pulls together data that sits within separate council computer systems, enabling the management of the city's public assets in real-time.

"We have helped to implement a true smart city approach focused and driven by outcomes centred around people," stated Alamgir. "They are innovating with Connexin's CityOS and implementing a fully-fledged platform that can be agnostic with any system, so the possibilities are endless. I look forward to showcasing to the world what a programmable city is capable of; and our focus for 2020 will be replicating the success of Hull with other cities across the UK."

Most domain specific smart city solutions do not easily integrate with other systems, so Connexin took a different approach. "To address this

issue a smart city operating system or management platform is key," added Alamgir. "Connexin provides a full end-to-end partner based approach and works with cities from planning and preparation to delivery and operation."

Connexin's system is built around the Cisco Kinetic for Cities platform which aggregates data from a range of IoT sensor types into a certified set of urban service domains such as waste, lighting and parking. Hull City Council is leveraging Connexin's CityOS platform to integrate, view, manage and respond to information from a range of council services, sensors and systems. Information from current and future data producing deployments, such as smart lighting, parking, traffic, waste management and Wi-Fi deployments, are to be integrated into the single pane of glass software platform.

"Smart technologies have now come of age, but the truth is no single organisation can make smart cities happen on its own," added Alamgir. "Much of the information brought together will become available, on an open platform, for the public to use to drive new ideas and solutions to directly benefit the local economy. With open APIs, local and global independent software vendors and city application developers can plug into the management



Furqan Alamgir

## I completed my medical degree and trained as a doctor while launching and expanding Connexin into a million pound business

infrastructure and provide public service capabilities."

### Key investment

In addition to launching its own infrastructure networks Connexin secured a £10 million Series A investment. This year the company is forecasted to achieve almost 300 per cent revenue growth. Its primary customers are local authorities, municipal

service suppliers and manufacturers, central Government, universities and the NHS. Among the company's achievements is an IoT Breakthrough award for Smart City Deployment in recognition of a smart road pilot in Newcastle.

Alamgir's early curiosity about how things function led to an interest in anatomy and

how the human body works, so he studied medicine and trained as a surgeon. "I completed my medical degree and trained as a doctor while launching and growing Connexin into a million pound business," he stated. "I left medicine and my career as a surgeon to embark on an entrepreneurial journey in a field I had little to no experience."

Connexin was founded in May 2006 by Alamgir and Alex Yeung. "Our determination led to us learn how phone systems worked and how calls were carried," added Alamgir. "The further we looked into it, the more we felt the technology was outdated and that things could be done greener and better. We took matters into our own hands and built our own platform that could carry voice from one device to another anywhere in the world using the power of the Internet.

"Before we knew it, Connexin was born. We needed to ensure our customers had reliable broadband connectivity, so we started building our own broadband infrastructure before pivoting the use of our infrastructure to connect 'things' as well as people. This led to the development of our smart city and Internet of Things services. We are focused on becoming the UK's leading smart city operator, and passionate about improving the world through technology." ■

# Catching the big trends

**T**ony Martino, CEO of Tollring, explores the three trends he says are shaping the future workforce – the customer experience, remote working and the cloud...

## The customer experience

Companies that already understand the value of a CX-first approach know that it requires a mindset of continuous improvement across the whole business. Ultimately, everyone in a business influences customer experience, even if they aren't a designated touchpoint for the customer. A CX-focus will re-shape the workplace in almost every aspect. Customer service moves from agent-first to customer-first. Both strategic and tactical activity is driven as much by feedback and customer

data as it is the bottom line with cross-functional teams now working collaboratively where management conduits once stood.

For all these changes to provide incremental value, they need to be underpinned by insight and understanding. Channel partners are the gatekeepers, providing the means to marry up the data from different systems and provide guidance on the actionable insights that result. Whether they do this by delivering analytics systems that report from the phone system, or by connecting internal systems such as CRMs to provide context, the channel is best placed to deliver the digital transformation needed to make a CX-focus realistic – especially for the mid-



Tony Martino

market and SME where there is rarely a CX leader within the business.

## Remote working

Remote working is a massive enabler for businesses. It enables them to source the best talent without logistical restriction, create teams that can service customers in multiple time zones, or simply offer greater flexibility in order to attract quality candidates. It's changing the shape of the workplace and extending the ability

for companies to complete on a global stage.

Enabling remote working with quality collaboration tools is only half the opportunity. Managing teams, understanding overall business and departmental performance, and KPIs, is a challenge for the mid-market. The channel can provide unparalleled advice on this, showing how using tools such as analytics and call recording can make operations smooth and high performing, no matter whether team members are in the office all, some, or none of the time.

## The cloud

With the cloud, the way that businesses expect to purchase and use solutions is changing. They want

simplicity, self-sufficiency and ease of use. The cloud facilitates accessibility of data to remote teams anywhere in the world. Departments can select the tools that suit them, test them, and deploy them – often without ever needing to consult their IT department, or wider management. This means that sales cycles are often shorter, and decision making becomes more agile. Departmental leaders have the freedom to make real change, quickly. So it's another great enabler for increased competitiveness.

A consultative sell is essential, but the cloud removes many of the barriers to adoption. Not only does it de-risk purchasing decisions, but it can often provide the means to try before buying. ■

## LOOKING TO SELL?

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# Video promo pays off

Former band vocalist William Copley knows a thing or two about putting a video together, but believes any comms providers scared of the process should think again if they want to upgrade their brand image.

**M**arketers will tell us that adding a slick, professional video to a company's website is essential in a world where content is king, but few resellers have taken the plunge after weighing up the cost and time involved against ROI. On the flip side is Copley, CEO of Worcestershire-based Armstrong Bell, who once fronted indie rock band Fretblanket. The band had substantial success in the nineties, recording three albums and releasing two on the Polygram label before folding when the big hits eluded them, and family life took over.

Copley identified comms as an industry that was

## Did you know?

- The world reportedly watches one billion hours of YouTube social video per day
- 97% of marketers claim that videos help customers understand products
- 80% of all traffic will consist of video by 2021 (source: Cisco)
- 81% of businesses are now using video for marketing (source: Hubspot)
- 90% of consumers claim a video will help them make a purchasing decision (source: Social Media Today).
- 74% of people who get an opportunity to see a product in action via an explainer video will buy it (source: Wyzowl)

going places and set up Armstrong Bell in 2001. The company now boasts a turnover of £2.5 million and has 18 employees focused on selling hosted comms to enterprise and mid-market clients across a variety of business spectrums. With his background and confidence in front of a camera it was inevitable that Copley's thoughts would eventually turn to producing an Armstrong Bell video to differentiate his website in a crowded market. But his motives were not only to boost his SEO ratings, as he explained.

"When customers go onto a reseller website and see an MD or owner talking about how wonderful his or her business is on a video, they know it'll often be that person who answers the phone and does the installs," said Copley. "My strategy has always been to show customers and potential employees that we're not a one man band, but a team of professionals and a well run organisation."

Music videos are specialist and not cheap to produce, so instead of calling on old contacts Copley turned to Philippe Ingels, owner of Wakster, who he met at a local BNI networking event. Ingels has a background in video games and social media marketing, but for the last six years has specialised in producing 'explainer' videos and counts Microsoft, TalkTalk, SAS, Workspace,



## Animation, storytelling and life video, when utilised correctly and creatively, are all brilliant tools

Kickers and The History Channel, among others, on the expanding list of companies he's done work for. Ingels firmly believes that some facts can only be effectively explained, and some stories persuasively told, through animation and his 3D imagery brings those stories to life.

### Understanding value

"It's all about what gets people to make a positive decision, and a key part of that is helping customers understand the value of the products and services a company provides and what that value means to their business," he

stated. "Selling on features without focusing on value never works. People make decision based on emotions supported by reason to give it context. Animation, storytelling and life video, when utilised correctly and creatively, are all brilliant tools for creating those emotional trigger points and explaining the facts in a clear and engage way."

Copley briefed Ingels on the fundamentals of hosted communications, which Armstrong Bell sells alongside MyPhones and Wildix, and a story board was developed based around 'connecting spaces'. In collaboration with

Studio 8, a video production company in Oxford, Copley performed on camera in front of a green screen, moving and pointing as directed. A team of professional actors were also recruited via a London casting agency and Copley and the actors were then edited into a 3D animated environment. The result was a premium quality, highly engaging but simplistic portrayal of what Armstrong Bell does – enabling people to collaborate successfully on a 'plug and play' communications platform.

Three months after Copley's original brief the video was completed and its quality speaks for itself (see [www.armstrongbell.co.uk](http://www.armstrongbell.co.uk)). The entire production cost £10,000 and when compared to say, corporate hospitality or a national newspaper ad campaign, Copley is convinced it's money well spent. "We are very much in a 'me too' industry so the video is all about showing people we mean business and we have fun doing it," he said.

Would Copley advise other resellers, perhaps with less confidence in front of a camera than him, to look at the benefits of video? "Undoubtedly yes, but firstly you must find a professional to work alongside," he said. "Secondly, it's all about preparation. I have done many videos in the past and my experience has taught me that if you don't prepare it won't work." ■

# Put your astounding teams in the spotlight for heroes!

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

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

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

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



Digital Wholesale Solutions CEO  
Terry O'Brien

forward to witnessing another bumper entry from channel businesses

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

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

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

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

**Reseller Awards**

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

**Service Provider Awards**

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

**Distributor Awards**

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

**Vendor Awards**

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

**Special Awards**

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

**DEADLINE EXTENDED TO MARCH 16th**

**Event Details**

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

**Table Booking**

The Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards provides a fantastic opportunity to celebrate the success of your 'superheroes' in style at the glamorous Grosvenor Square Marriott Hotel in London's Mayfair. For table booking details please contact Simon Turton on **07759 731134**; email [sturton@bpl-business.com](mailto:sturton@bpl-business.com)



# Can you really make money o



help customers interact directly and indirectly with everything in the store and give them a unique and personalised experience in the store. By using IoT applications in manufacturing, companies can reduce their costs and improve safety in their workplace. Aside from this, they are also able to produce customised products in volume, making their production time lesser.

There are countless other applications, not least in healthcare where IoT applications have changed ordinary medical devices by collecting invaluable additional data.

Unsurprisingly, there is a growing number of channel-facing organisations lining up to help ICT solutions providers understand and grasp the IoT opportunities that are emerging across private and public sectors, which should easily dovetail into 'as a service' business models.

According to this month's Kaleidoscope contributors, there is money to be made from the IoT and this will be driven home at Comms Dealer's Margin in Mobile event in Northampton on May 26th.

**A**s a potential revenue generator for the channel, The Internet of Things has been regarded with a large dose of scepticism on many levels.

Firstly, many still feel the investment in time and resource to get in-house teams – both technical and sales - up to pace with the opportunity just doesn't stack up against the revenue models.

Secondly, IoT has always raised a lot of privacy and information security concerns. Cyber criminals can attack the device as well as the network that is used to transfer the data, at various levels. IoT security challenges have become a question of highest concern although applying security measures at all levels of IoT product development reduces the risk of these attacks.

Thirdly, the lack of generally accepted IoT standards limits the potential of this technology and prevents companies from connecting their products and services into a larger

ecosystem and taking more advantage from IoT business.

Finally, IoT has been perceived as a bit of a 'fad' that would go the way of the 3D television.

People may be unaware that IOT is not a recent innovation. Its roots can be traced back to 1982, when computer science grad students at the Carnegie Mellon University connected a Coca Cola vending machine to the internet. The programmers coded an application that would check the availability and temperature of the drink.

Now, with the 5G high speed mobile network on the horizon, IoT has entered the mainstream. It is predicted that by 2020, there will be 28 billion connected units globally and the market for IoT solutions will top £5.6 trillion.

Indeed, at its recent partner conference, network provider Spitfire was talking about farmers being able to calculate the best harvesting time via 'Smart'

potatoes that can monitor growth, ground temperature and moisture.

IOT devices can control household appliances, door locks and streetlights and the data they provide can save energy, manage traffic flow and make people's lives safer.

In retail environments, IoT solutions can

“ Add one IoT roaming SIM to complement a fixed line service to every customer on your base and you are instantly making money in IoT whilst solving future problems. ”

*Anton Le Saux, Zest 4*



NEW

TeamsLink PRO

Secure and efficient external voice calling from within your Microsoft Teams client.

# out of the Internet of Things?



ANTON LE SAUX  
ZEST 4

"Yes, you can make money out of the IoT. The opportunity is here now, and our partners are actively monetising managed connectivity. The perception may still be that you need to be selling tens of thousands of SIMs at low value to succeed, but it's not the case. Take fixed line outages as an example. Businesses without connectivity means customers are unable to contact them and undoubtedly results in losses in sales and consumer dissatisfaction. An IoT roaming SIM will solve this problem. If it can't find a network, it will automatically connect to another, simple. Add at least one of these SIMs to complement a fixed line service to every customer on your base and you are instantly making money in IoT whilst solving future problems for you and your customer."



GRAHAM WILKINSON  
BEYOND

"When IOT first emerged, it was viewed as a mass manufacturer sector, very much consumer based. But that's not the case today as mainstream consumer trends will hit the business market in quite a significant way. Whether that's this year or not remains to be seen. The full roll-out of 5G will be the main catalyst. It could be 18 months away. I think when you combine 5G and Fibre to the Premise, that's when IOT will come into its own. IOT will become more mainstream and more affordable and therefore more sellable. It could be smarter ways of working such as knowing how many spaces are free in a car park and where they are located. Energy saving is another sector where smart devices can dim the lights or switch them off along with PC's at the end of a working day. CCTV and remote monitoring can help with building management through IOT. A whole new world is dawning when IOT becomes reality."



ANDREW DICKINSON  
JOLA

"Resellers have bid for thousands of IoT data SIMs, often to existing customers, but with little success. MNOs view IoT as their own domain. They are reluctant to give resellers a wholesale price to compete, and they discount to win deals direct at the last minute. A recent innovation, global multinet eSIMs, give the channel a big advantage in IoT because they offer a product the MNOs cannot - all the networks on an un-steered SIM, that can be re-programmed remotely over-the-air. With eSIM, resellers can beat MNOs on price and still make a reasonable margin. This is because eSIM MVNOs buy direct from massive global data wholesalers, not local MNOs. Using multinet eSIMs means end customers don't need expensive site surveys and they can't be locked into uncompetitive commercial terms by individual MNOs. eSIMs can come on a reel ready for manufacturers, or a standard triple-cut plastic SIM card."



DAN CUNLIFFE  
PANGEA

"IoT has gone from strength to strength, to the point where it's now a household term for businesses and decision-makers. And no wonder! Right now, the tech is at its most potent and secure. Solutions are easier than ever to deploy, and uptake is growing across the board. But most of all, data—that digital gold gathered by IoT solutions—is one of the most valuable assets any business can have. How do you tap into that value? Adaptive, intelligent, resilient connectivity. Businesses are actively looking for the data-driven decision-making, automated processes, and game-changing efficiencies brought by IoT. And partners who equip them with the intelligent connectivity solutions to do so will be first in line to reap the benefits."



DARREN GARLAND  
ALLIOT TECHNOLOGIES

"There is no doubt there is cynicism in the channel about IoT, I hear it often. The opportunities within IoT are virtually endless and in some ways that is part of the problem, it does not take a genius to realise a level of focus is essential, be that by vertical or application. The key thing to understand is that IoT is not just selling data SIMS, data transfer is an essential part of the solution, but harvesting the data and then more importantly making sense of it to give the customer value is key. In my experience ICT providers and resellers will broadly fall into two camps, those that have the desire, experience and resources to build their own IoT solutions and those that want to bolt existing solutions into their portfolios. Either way there are good upfront and recurring incomes to be had from selling these solutions to their existing customer base."



ROB DOWNES  
9 GROUP

"The initial scepticism around IoT may have dissipated but this has been replaced with a degree of uncertainty around how this will manifest. The first iteration of 5G is fast becoming a reality in many parts of the UK but it's difficult to predict the impact it will have until its full capability is rolled out. 5G doesn't just deliver speed, it opens the door to extraordinary possibilities for mobility. What we do know is that the world will be driven by data connectivity and if partners want to stay relevant for end users then they must be involved in that discussion now, whether it's around fixed line, 5G or IoT. IoT forms part of the mobile revolution and is driven by innovation in the enterprise space, there's no doubt that the customer demand is coming. It's essential that service providers and partners are prepared, ahead of when the technology matures, and the opportunity presents itself."

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# A new taste for comms

Having sniffed the telco pie more and more IT resellers are following their noses into comms channel territory, writes Nathan Marke, Chief Digital Officer, Digital Wholesale Solutions.

**C**onfession: I love the telco industry and I love the telco channel. Our industry is a brilliant place for the restless mind. No time for boredom. Here, a career requires constant reinvention. I started off in PBX 25 years ago, then got involved in DECT which took me in the early days into Microwave and Wi-Fi, which led to structured cabling, LANs and WANs. Convergence fell upon us and we started 'muxing', bringing telco and IP networks together to save money on calls around the world. This tech was the precursor for the big IP revolution that now brings us all the wonders of UC, omni-channel, Teams, G Suite and bots.

And the channel? For me it is an incredible force for good and an essential feature in the UK landscape. We are a cohort of entrepreneurial businesses formed to go where the Tier 1 telcos and vendors can't. We help small and medium sized businesses to connect to the Internet, to talk, to text, to message, to collaborate. And we make all of this work for customers, securely and reliably. That's a pretty important job.

In 2020, the pace of change shows no sign of letting up. I can't see one area of telco immune to disruption. The PSTN switch off, 5G, FTTP, Microsoft, Amazon, and Google – all incredible innovations motivating our customers to throw away the old and make

buying decisions for the new. And, as befits our fabulous peer group, I don't see telco resellers 'doing the ostrich', heads in the sand, clinging on to 'legacy' revenues in the hope that customers don't notice. I see a community motivated by change, diversifying and reskilling, capitalising on the disruption, capturing growth.

There's plenty of evidence to back this up. Data from strategic advisory firm Larato shows how in the last four years the percentage of resellers in the UK identifying as telco has shrunk from 30 per cent to 10 per cent. The rest haven't disappeared – they have changed – with 28 per cent of all resellers now identifying as ICT resellers, up from 15 per cent over the same period. They've skilled up, organically and through M&A, equipping themselves to continue to earn the right to take customers on their technology journey – PBX to UC, ISDN to SIP, copper to fibre, and taking a bite out of IT resellers' pie while they are at it.

Pie threat warning! Please watch out for IT resellers. You see, IT resellers need to do something. They have a big problem. Although operating in what they seem to view as a far more attractive market than the dull, untechnical world of telco, on average IT resellers make a lot less money than we do. According to Megabyte, the average EBITDA margin of an IT reseller ranges from 2-7 per cent. Telco resellers



Nathan Marke

## IT resellers are on the hunt for new a feast, and our telco market is a tasty looking pie

manage 11-12 per cent. Telco resellers also average more than 90 per cent recurring revenue, whereas IT resellers struggle (if they are lucky) into the low 30 per cent region. All of this is making it hard to make money running an IT practice.

### Appetising market

IT resellers are on the hunt for a new feast, and our telco market is a very tasty looking pie. It's a massive, profitable market, worth £10 billion a year. And because of all the disruption and convergence, it is starting to look more and more like a market accessible

to IT resellers. Microsoft and Google aren't helping, spending their dragon eggs to advertise their latest UC and collaboration wares on primetime TV. No surprise then that IT resellers are getting a sniff. Let's hope not too many of them notice.

We're passionate about helping our partners to grab the amazing, unprecedented opportunity ahead of us with both hands, embracing the convergence of telecoms and IT. I find it hard to see how you can help your customers and provide a truly valuable digital

transformation experience without embracing the change and skilling up for the future. It's our job to educate and enable the channel.

You will already know all about the opportunities in telco - the PSTN switch off, 5G, the fibre roll out and the Microsoft/Google opportunity. What you may not be thinking about is the wider telco opportunity stimulated by IT projects. In medium sized businesses, customers need resellers to bring them converged solutions. For example, behind the big trends of re-platforming into hybrid cloud comes a need to restructure networks to cater for the new demands of cloud traffic. That's telecoms, right there. And don't get me started on SD-WAN, IoT, Edge...

And in the UK's five million SMBs we are seeing strong demand for more mobile, more fibre and more cloud technologies. Start-ups are no longer building their businesses on premises. They're gunning straight for the cloud, creating virtual, agile operations. Comms resellers have a huge opportunity to provide them with a one-stop-shop for all their IT and telco needs, allowing them to consume their technology in one easy to manage monthly subscription. So come on, my telco friends. Let's step up and sort this out. It's our pie. It's tasty, it's steaming, it's hot, and there really is no need to share. ■

# Why every business needs a customer retention strategy

**K**eeping hold of customers is as important as adding new ones, and a retention marketing strategy will also determine how a business is perceived, writes **9 Group Marketing Director Mark Saunders**. It is a long-held belief that a five per cent increase in customer retention can improve profitability by as much as 55 per cent. And it is a fact that creating and maintaining customer engagement should be the definitive strategy for preventing customers going AWOL. Marketing is the key weapon in any retention armoury.

## Why do customers want to leave?

To answer this question start with a short brainstorm exercise to see why you think customers might want to jump ship. You may conclude that a poorly handled or unresolved service matter is motive enough. A personality issue or negative PR about your business may deter certain customers from being loyal. The lack of a CSR strategy might not go down well with some clients. Market changes, regulatory shifts, new technology and cost may also come into play. Meanwhile, a competitor may offer a compelling alternative.

## How can marketing help?

Prevention is better than a cure, so the answer is 'engagement'. The in-life care of customers is crucial if you want to avoid them being spoilt for choice by your potential 'reasons to leave'



**Mark Saunders**

list. In the consumer world loyalty schemes are key, but in the B2B space adding real value to the relationship is more important. So keep communicating, use the right channels and personalise these interactions.

## Rules of engagement

Share relevant information and insights with customers. Inform and surprise them, understand their business, ask about their issues – and listen. Make yourself easy to reach using the communications channels that your customers use. Why not use some free software to conduct a short survey? Everyone likes to release their inner Trip Advisor, so you might learn something that can stop you losing that one customer.

## Make your positive presence felt

Your website and social media activities are your shop window, so make sure they are enticingly merchandised and welcoming. Customers can still behave like prospects and will look next door if

they don't like what they see, or can't find what they are looking for.

## Use marketing to improve customer interactions

Marketing's ability to simplify and optimise customer facing processes can also have a significant positive impact on retention. This is not just about deploying leading edge design and impressive language, it is about defining all the touch points you have with your customers and tapping into marketing peoples' ability to think 'customer first'.

## Delving into your customer data

A Salesforce level CRM may not be commercially sensible for everyone, but whatever system you use, interrogating your data to hunt for opportunities and identify customers who may have been relatively neglected can improve your retention overnight.

## Referrals and retention

If you rely on referrals for some of your new business, you can't afford to lose your source material. Investing in marketing to increase retention can produce additional benefits from increased advocacy among your customers.

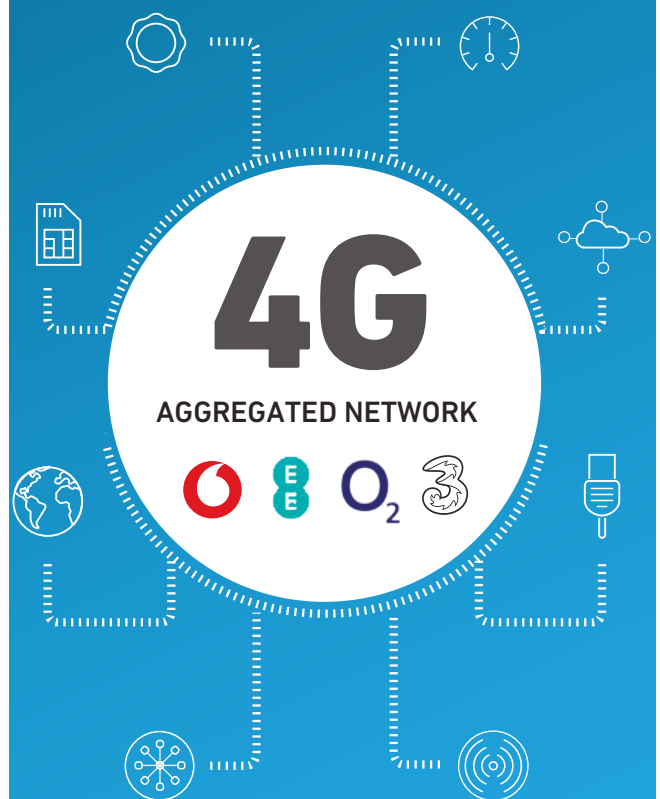
## How to start?

Kick off with at least one change, and because measuring retention by volume and value is relatively straightforward you will quickly see what is working and what needs a rethink. ■

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# Graham moves up



**Carl Graham**

9 GROUP long-termer Carl Graham has been promoted to the role of Partner Business Manager with a remit to develop channel relationships and stay abreast of industry changes as an advisor to resellers. He joined 9 almost 15 years ago from Club Communications (which was acquired by 9) and has 18 years channel experience under his belt, including a three year stint at reseller Data Comms. "The hot

topic at the moment is the 2025 network closure," said Graham. "We support partners daily by providing regular updates and advice, as well as educational material and marketing campaigns designed to educate customers and drive sales."

9 Partners MD Adam Cathcart added: "Carl has seen many changes throughout the years, from the days of dial-up to the transition of WLR and the growth of hosted voice. His experience made him an ideal candidate for the role. His product knowledge is extensive and he talks authoritatively about the WLR switch off and the opportunities this presents."

## Also on the move...

CISCO'S VP for the EMEAR Partner Organisation David Meads is to lead the vendor's UK&I business as CEO. Cisco has over 4,000 IT partners in the region. Meads will leverage his 30 years ICT industry experience



**David Meads**

and steps into the role previously held by Scot Gardner, who now leads strategy and sales on the Global Specialists team across compute, cloud, IoT and service provider. "The UK represents an important market for Cisco and is at a pivotal point in its digital transformation," stated Meads. "Technology has the power to help the UK and Ireland accelerate its digital future to advance cultural, economic and social development."

ZEN Internet's strategic focus has been sharpened with the appointment of former TalkTalk Commercial Director Jon Perkins as Strategy Director. Perkins will also sit on Zen's Executive Committee. The move reflects Zen's intention to



**Jon Perkins**

become a 'true challenger brand' to the big telecoms providers, according to CEO Paul Stobart. "Our ambition is also to establish Zen as a pioneer in ultrafast connectivity, cloud communications and cloud computing," he commented. "Jon will make an invaluable contribution to the development

and delivery of our evolving strategy." Perkins added: "I look forward to playing my part in helping Zen become a challenger brand in the markets we serve."

**DISTRIBUTOR ScanSource has appointed Marcus Ollenbittel as Senior Vice President of Digital Distribution for its business in Europe. This division includes the recently acquired intY CASCADE platform and ScanSource Cloud Services businesses. He joined ScanSource in 2013 as a team leader for the UK and progressed to the role of Vice President of Merchandising for ScanSource POS and Barcode in Europe.**

**ALEX Thurber has beaten a path to Pulse Secure where he is now Chief Revenue Officer responsible for global sales strategy, management and team development. He brings**



**more than 20 years of international leadership experience across**

**the technology industry in security and channel development. Thurber previously served as SVP, GM, of Blackberry's Mobility Solutions Business Unity. He also held sales leadership roles at Tripwire, McAfee and Cisco Systems.**

# Brown covers northern area

FIBRENATION'S UK expansion bid received a boost with the hire of Chris Brown as Regional Development Manager for the northern area. He joins from E.on where he helped launch a commercial electric vehicle scheme and worked on smart city projects.



**Chris Brown**

Paul Crane, Head of Engagement and Rollout

at FibreNation, said: "Chris brings experience that will enable us to bolster the company's expansion over the coming years. We have big plans in place to deliver the full fibre network to as many homes and businesses in the UK as possible." Brown added: "I'm keen to work within communities, speaking to local authorities and businesses about the benefits that full fibre will bring."

**GLIDE has posted Richard Jeffares as CTO. He brings 25 years experience in the global finance, Internet and infrastructure sectors, and held exec roles at UK Broadband, Ultrafast Fibre and Collinear Networks. Jeffares said: "We will grow our fibre footprint rapidly as the UK broadband market undergoes a period of seismic change."**

# Ferry cruises into ITS as chief biz developer

FULL fibre network operator ITS has pulled in Dave Ferry as Business Development Director. He joins from Virgin Media Business where he was Head of SME. Ferry said: "ITS' approach to reusing infrastructure to build networks plays well to my strengths and the relationships I have nurtured with local authorities."



**Dave Ferry**

ITS was boosted by a New Year £45m investment deal with Aviva Investors. CEO Daren Baythorpe added: "Having recently secured our investment, we have the fire power to deliver on our business plan at pace, connecting more premises to future proof full fibre connectivity. Dave will be joining the business development team to help deliver on this strategy."

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