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Cooper eyes cloud top spot as NEC cements Intermedia deal p24



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This month's movers and shakers



Flexibility key to channel survival

THE Covid-19 crisis could lead to an unprecedented wave of collaboration, flexibility and innovation which will be key to the channel's future sustainability.

SPECIAL MESSAGE

The ICT channel must seize this opportunity to rethink the future and how we get there, according to delegates at last month's online Business Insight session hosted by Comms Dealer in association with BT Wholesale.

"Flexibility will be massively important to the way we work with customers and channel partners," said Franki Hale, Director of Strategy and Change at Convergence Group. "What is clear is the need for open

discussions with partners and to have some flexibility to move forward. It's about how we arrive at a resolution together."

Adept Technology Group CEO Phil Race commented: "In this stressed world you find out who your partners really are.

"We are having good conversations with all of our top partners on how we make this work, identifying what we can do better and how to make things more efficient. The collaboration and partnership theme is key."

According to BT Wholesale Channel Director Gavin Jones (pictured) Covid-19 has acted as a spur to do things differently and focus more sharply.

"The message is that we need to be more flexible, work together and put trust in each other in the right areas moving forward, leaving no one out to dry," he stated.

"That is the way to succeed. We are using this time to try and get closer to partners and get rid of some of the bureaucracy in the ways we work." See page 16

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

THE future of the comms industry was perhaps at its most unpredictable pre-Covid-19, yet the pandemic has spawned a big population of armchair futurists with a lot of solid information on which to base their forecasts. The lockdown has

actually given us a handle on what tomorrow's working world will look like and the technology that will enable that shift to a more dispersed organisational structure.

The lockdown has also given us insights into the pivoted nature of channel partnerships and the emergence of a far more close-knit ecosystem founded on flexibility and collaboration. It's as if we have accelerated down a time tunnel.

But having a pretty good idea of where your finger should press to feel the pulse of the market does not guarantee long-term sustainability. A detailed assessment of the full impact of 5G and universal FTTP will not be available until after the event, but nevertheless there are telltale signs of what is to come, with 5G use cases already in flow and the potential applications of next generation mobile technology near limitless to the imagination (see page 36).

What do these big determining factors mean? It is a time for empirical analysis and creative thinking to go hand in hand, and those that find the right balance will surely succeed. Finding your creative flair starts now as we seek to build more creative and collaborative ways of working with channel partners and customers. The unleashing of creative minds will drive innovation and light a fire under the entrepreneurial spirit – all spurred by the Covid-19 lockdown which has caused many to reflect, hone processes, come up with new ideas, think beyond the horizon and get on with things without distraction.

To gain more insights into all of the points raised above please read our Business Insight Session report which starts on page 16.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

PPE secured for engineers



Safety first: Vital PPE kit protects engineers

A COMMS infrastructure firm has leveraged its supply chain to donate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to field service engineers working during the coronavirus pandemic.

As well as protecting CHH CoNeX's own team of engineers the equipment has also been shared with other businesses involved in the supply, installation and maintenance of telecommunications networks.

CHH CoNeX has provided hundreds of thousands of face masks and bottles of hand sanitizer to field service engineers across the UK.

Tim Hughes, MD at Birmingham-based CHH CoNeX, stated: "We took the decision early on to leverage our supply chain and access tonnes of PPE equipment to ensure that CHH and our partners can continue

to deliver critical infrastructure services throughout the lockdown period.

"While our managed services team keeps engineers fully kitted out with PPE all year round, we have never had to access quite the quantity that we have recently.

"We take supply chain planning seriously and it is only through a robust, flexible and proven supply chain that we were able to procure and supply such a large scale of PPE.

"The rules in our industry are quite simple. Without the right PPE, engineers cannot do their job. We knew we would have to lean on our supply chain to keep essential services running throughout lockdown."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

AFTER five years working as Colt Technology Services' CEO Carl Grivner is leaving the business, making way for Keri Gilder who steps up from her role as COLT's Chief Commercial Officer. Grivner is credited with leading a period of significant growth and transformation at Colt, especially in advancing its IQ Network. Chairman Michael Wilens said: "In her 18 months at Colt, Keri has brought in fresh energy to the business." See page 20

AN ICT service provider's readiness to prioritise the interests of customers from a flexibility standpoint could mean the difference between keeping and losing contracts. The hospitality sector is one of the hardest hit by Covid-19 and Andrew Evers, Group IT Manager at Red Carnation Hotels, stated. "I hope everyone has had a wake-up call from Covid-19. Mine is that there are 'goodies' and 'baddies'. The latter are unsympathetic and chase on day 31, the former have a vested interest in our survival and our development, as I do in their survival and development. Looking at a crowded marketplace today, the MSP I choose will be the one I think I can help, not just the one I think can help me. It's an interesting revelation."



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NEWS ROUNDUP

MICROSOFT'S acquisition of Metaswitch Networks signals its intention to create 'modern alternatives to network infrastructure' based on cloud native software that delivers greater cost efficiency and lower capital investment. The deal builds on its acquisition of Affirmed Networks in April this year.

PAV IT Services MD Jason Fry has witnessed customers maximise the value from their IT by taking more flexible approaches to working. "We have seen some customers achieving greater productivity since lockdown started," he stated. "But it often means changes in working practices. Businesses and their employees are having to find new ways of working and the underlying tech needs to support that change rapidly."

AVAYA'S move to SaaS and cloud continues with revenues from software and services reaching 88% in its Q2 period. Recurring revenue was 64% of the total, up five points, but overall revenues of \$682m meant a GAAP operating loss of \$597m. Jim Chirico, President and CEO, said: "The company has improved on all key strategic metrics as we continue the move to a SaaS and cloud model."

Telappliant in Amica acquisition

BOURNEMOUTH-based IT services provider Amica Technology has been acquired by Telappliant in what CEO Muhammad Nasim says is a 'key component of our acquisitive growth strategy'.

"Amica adds managed IT services and allows us to offer a wider portfolio of business critical services to UK SMEs and it positions us for further scale and growth," he said.

Tan Aksoy, Director of M&A, added: "We are continuing our transformation strategy into a fully loaded managed services provider.

"The current climate has brought its own challenges, but we are confident that the change in business behaviour will bring with it an increased demand for our services going forward."

Telappliant has over 6,000 business customers and the Amica deal bolsters its presence in the SME space.



Tan Aksoy

Audit blocks legacy return

AUTOMATED data discovery software that removes the need for going on site is being leveraged by Support to Win to help comms providers turn temporary customer switches into permanent migrations, thereby preventing a post-lockdown reversion to CPE usage.

The managed support services firm says its virtual PBX audits have in the past only been deployed in large enterprise projects but now the technology is available for migrations among SME customers.

According to CEO Julie Mills the only way to get full customer migration projects in flight in the current climate is to deploy auditing software that remotely unearths complete PBX settings 'from hardware to hunt groups and everything in between' so that customer transitions go smoothly.

"Free or heavily discounted licences have been used to help firms through the Covid-19 crisis, but now there's a window of opportunity to stop these newly acquired customers churning back to legacy services and on-prem PBXs once the lockdown starts lifting," said Mills.

"Providers and comms partners are eager to convert trial



Julie Mills

customers into real customers and this innovation removes the last obstacle to starting migrations now." See page 26

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NEWS ROUNDUP

VIRGIN Media Business has ramped up efforts to maximise the revenue potential of its SME base via the extension of its voice and UC portfolio following a link up with 8x8. In a joint effort they will configure and roll out integrated cloud services and provide 24/7 support for customers. Virgin Media Business provides comms to more than 50,000 UK businesses which will also gain access to 8x8's API solutions. John DeLozier, Senior Vice President & Global Channel Chief at 8x8, commented: "This partnership will enable us to help thousands of private and public sector businesses communicate more effectively with cloud-based technology."

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Sysconfig set for FMC push

COMMS service provider Sysconfig has linked up with Transatel to provide resellers with fast access to FMC on the EE network.

The 'off-the-shelf' service includes the SIM as an end-point, noted Sysconfig MD Sam Dawkins, who says his company is now defined as a FMC service 'aggregator'.

"Transatel is integrating UC directly into the SIM rather than relying on OTT apps," he said.

"By receiving communications from the UC platform on the SIM, the service becomes a 'mobile desk phone' and offers more call stability, increased seamlessness, no dependence on Wi-Fi availability, better management and tracking of communications, and allows you to be 'always on'."

Commenting on the launch, Alex Tempest, MD of Wholesale at BT, stated: "The learnings from the Covid-19 crisis combined with the progressive withdrawal of ISDN only reinforces the need for easy and instant access to productivi-



Sam Dawkins

ty and collaboration tools to empower a mobile workforce.

"We've witnessed that this is key today and will be even more critical in the years to come."

Dawkins added: "FMC has been something of a legend for many years, but I believe it is to become the norm, enabling one platform for all your communication needs and centralising your communications story."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

INCLARITY'S business telephony service now integrates with MS Teams following the completion of a project with UC integration specialist Qunifi. "Covid-19 has up-ended hundreds of thousands of workers throughout the UK," stated MD Enzo Viscito. "Collaboration tools like Microsoft Teams have been a lifeline to businesses, and this unified solution gives our partners the ability to increase sales and generate revenue."

SANGOMA has added a video and screen sharing capability to its portfolio of comms services with the launch of Sangoma Meet, a multi-party video conferencing and desktop sharing cloud-based service. HD video support is standard along with encrypted password protected video conferences. "Comms systems are at the forefront of enabling this new work from home environment that so many of us are experiencing right now, and video meetings have become more important than ever as a result," said Nenad Corbic, CTO of Sangoma.

Back to basics approach key to netting sales in lockdown

MAINTAINING deal flow during the Covid-19 lockdown could simply be a matter of going back to basics, communication with clients and matching current needs to solutions.

Tiffani Bova (author of 'Growth IQ: Choices that make or break your business', ex-VP and Distinguished Analyst at Gartner, and sales evangelist at Salesforce), stated: "The world is still turning and deals are still closing. It's just that most, if not all, buyers are homebound.

"The litmus test is whether what you're selling will put your customer in a stronger per-



Tiffani Bova

sonal or professional position right now. It's a salesperson's job to make sure they add value for customers at each touch

point. Keeping deals moving might be as simple as letting your customers know you're there if they need you."



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NEWS ROUNDUP

GAMMA is gearing up to launch its Microsoft Teams Direct Routing solution which will be spearheaded by Paul Wakefield, SIP Trunking Product Manager. "For the channel, the biggest opportunities lie in both enabling Microsoft with telephony services and supporting deployment with relevant and timely expertise," he stated.

OPENREACH has stated its intention to no longer sell copper-based products in 118 exchange areas across the UK. In a strategy update on its upgrade of the analogue phone network to all-IP the company said it will cease the sale of such products 12 months from June 2020.

A 67 kilometer carrier-neutral fibre network connecting Bradley Stoke in Bristol to Next Generation Data's data centre near Newport in south Wales has been completed by Nextgenaccess. The joint initiative between Nextgenaccess and NGD utilised DPA/PIA code powers for gaining access to existing Openreach duct and pole infrastructure. The project also entailed the deployment of a 4km fibre section spanning the Severn Bridge (M48) crossing with 864 fibres in two diverse ducts.

Titans unite in megadeal



Mike Fries

A 50-50 JOINT venture deal to merge Virgin Media's fixed line broadband business (owned by Liberty Global) and O2's mobile operation creates a £31bn UK comms powerhouse rivalling BT.

The deal values Virgin Media at £18.7bn and O2 at £12.7bn and the combined group intends to invest £10bn into the UK over the coming five years.

Mike Fries, CEO of Liberty Global, said: "We've seen the benefit of FMC in Belgium and the Netherlands. When the power of 5G meets 1 gig broadband, UK consumers and businesses will never look back."

Jose Maria Alvarez-Pallete, who is Telefonica's CEO, commented: "We are creating a strong competitor with significant scale and financial strength to invest in UK digital infrastructure and give millions of consumer, business and public sector customers more choice and value."

The combination of Virgin Media and O2 will create a nationwide integrated communications provider boasting over 46 million video, broadband and mobile subscribers and approximately £11bn revenue.

The transaction is expected to close next summer.

Voiceflex sets route for Teams

THE launch of Microsoft Teams Direct Routing by Voiceflex is reflective of a seminal change in the communications industry, according Paul Taylor, Sales & Marketing Director.

"The advance of UC&C over the last few months is unprecedented," he commented. "The way we communicate has changed forever."

Taylor cited figures from Forbes which reported that Microsoft had witnessed a 775% increase in the use of its cloud services, more than 44 million daily team users and over 900 million meeting minutes per week in March 2020.

"With new users being added at a rate of four million per month, it is safe to say UC&C has finally been accepted," added Taylor.

"Without Covid-19 it would have taken many years to reach the same levels of MS Teams users now using UC&C as part of their daily life."

Taylor also noted that Voiceflex has introduced applications that migrate customers between Teams and their telephony apps.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

8X8 HAS launched its Express cloud comms solution to the UK micro business market which comprises circa five million small firms. It comes as a pre-configured package and includes dedicated phone numbers, unlimited UK calls, auto-receptionist, voicemail, intelligent call routing, video conferencing and team chat. Samuel Wilson, Chief Customer Officer and Managing Director of EMEA, 8x8, said: "The goal of 8x8 Express is to help eliminate complexity in procuring, setting up and managing a business phone system with no need for additional IT support."

SSE Enterprise Telecoms has secured a £10.5m full fibre deal from Aberdeenshire Council. The project spans up to 200km and will provide gigabit dark fibre out to public sector locations such as schools and NHS sites in a number of towns around Aberdeen. The 18 month project builds on a 20 year partnership and comes under the banner of the Aberdeen City Region Deal, part of a funding allocation designed to improve the region's digital infrastructure. SSE Enterprise Telecoms will also invest in the infrastructure and offer capacity and services to mobile operators and ISPs.

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Jansen opens up on 'radical' restructure

AMONG the impacts of Covid-19 is a sharper focus on the criticality of connectivity which has spurred BT to revise upwards its FTTP roll out ambitions.

The company has revealed a £12bn investment programme to build full fibre broadband for 20 million premises across the UK including rural areas by the mid-to-late 2020s.

Chief Executive Philip Jansen stated: "Recent weeks have shown how vital it is to develop next generation digital infrastructure. That's why we've set out a new target."

The news came as BT published its full year results to 31st March, which saw revenues down 2% to £22,905m with profit before tax of £2,353m.

"BT had a positive year delivering results in line with expectations and completing our £1.6bn phase 1 transformation programme, one year ahead of schedule," added Jansen.

He expects BT's FTTP investment to deliver pre-tax nominal returns of between 10% to 12%; and he noted that it is based on a regulatory framework consistent with Ofcom's preferred policy direction and support for infrastructure investment and competition.



Philip Jansen

Jansen also noted that BT has been impacted by coronavirus challenges. "Covid-19 is affecting our business, but the full impact will only become clearer as the economic consequences unfold over the next 12 months," he added.

"Due to Covid-19, BT is not providing guidance for 2020/21 at this time."

To be better prepared for the future Jansen noted that BT needs to be 'leaner, simpler and more agile'.

"We are announcing a radical modernisation and simplification programme that will use technology to create a better BT for the future," he added.

"This five-year initiative will re-engineer old and out of date processes, rationalise products, reduce re-work and switch off many legacy services.

"This next stage in the modernisation of BT will deliver gross annualised savings of £2bn over the next five years."

In a statement the company noted that it expects business activity to be 'sharply reduced', with rising insolvencies especially in the SME segment.

BT also said that it expects Openreach to face reductions in the volume of broadband and Ethernet upgrades and provisioning due to a lessening of business activity.

Olive sets out plans for Teams

THE launch of Connect4Teams by Olive Communications provides direct routing, PBX integration, voice recording and contact centre capabilities within a MS Teams environment, delivered through Olive's Cloud Managed Service Platform.

Lucy Callaghan, Head of Marketing, stated: "Microsoft Teams has seen success as a remote working and collaboration tool, especially since the unprecedented events we've seen from the ongoing pandemic. As we look towards a post-pandemic workplace culture, Olive is already seeing demand for simplified voice and audio conferencing solutions which are truly scalable."

Nick Beardsley, Enterprise Director, added: "It's time to transform the way we think about voice and collaboration. Just as businesses want agile, robust and flexible solutions, they also want choice, hence our onboarding of Microsoft Teams as a core service."



Nick Beardsley

Strategic support for APAC



Tim Field

PRESSURE from UK resellers has prompted a change in distribution strategy from international call management organisation PeterConnects.

The Netherlands-based business will now distribute its solutions through Australian distributor Voitec with the aim of ramping up support for its UK channel partners with customers in APAC regions.

"We work with a number of resellers in the UK that also have staff and offices based in APAC," said Peter Connects spokesperson Tim Field. "One of their concerns was over the lack of local support and services we were able to offer to their APAC subsidiaries."

"Part of the reason for this expansion was initially driven out of feedback from the UK."

PeterConnects now provides Attendant Console solutions on Cisco, BroadSoft, WebEx Calling, MS Teams and Skype for Business, offering on-prem, hybrid and cloud solutions.

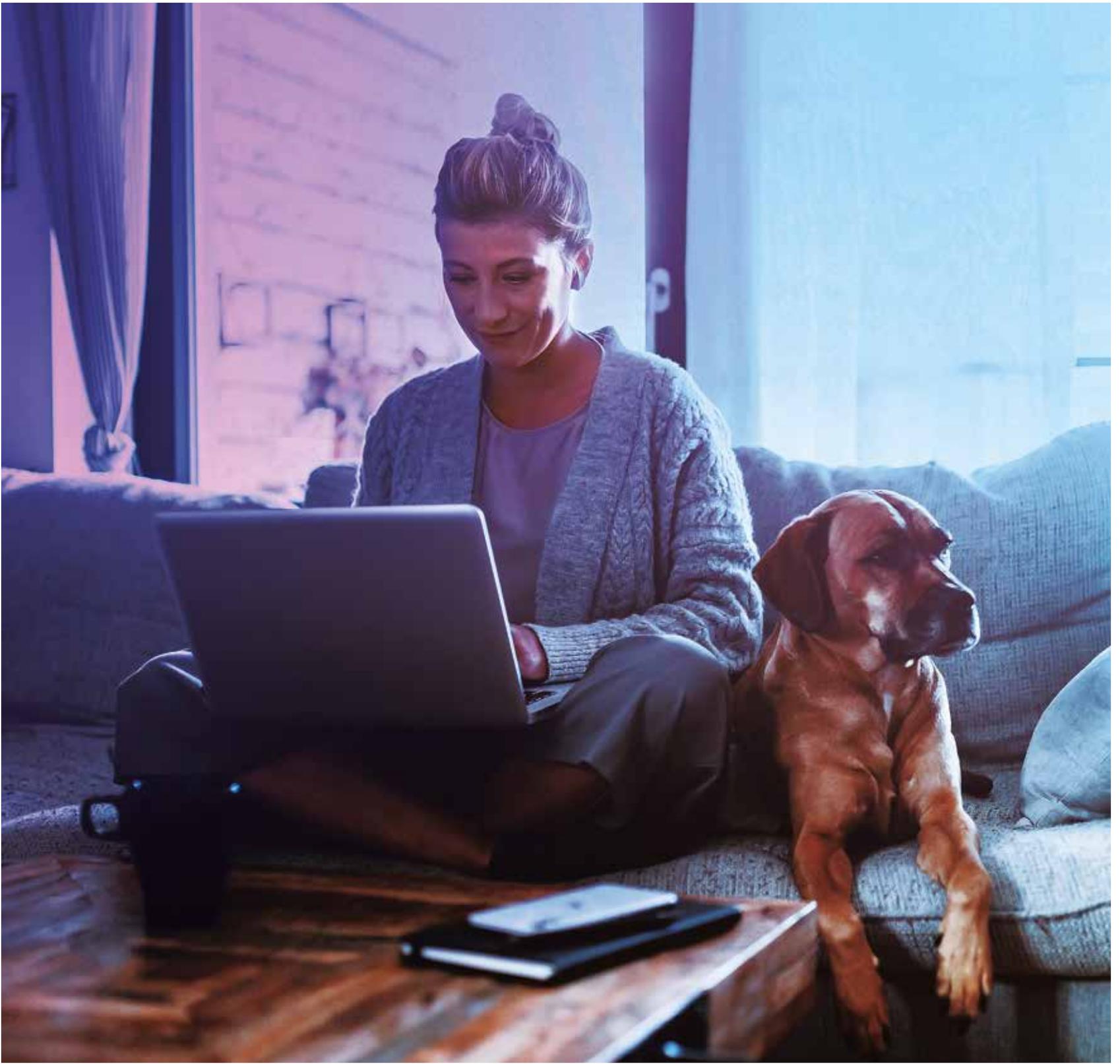


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NEWS ROUNDUP

AN IT SERVICE Furlough package put together by GCI will reduce customer licensing costs to £1 for each furloughed employee per month. The service ensures that furloughed staff are locked out of systems and services, and is geared towards a rapid return to BAU once furloughed employees return to work. Mark Lee, Business Development Director, said: "Reducing licensing costs helps to keep the costs of furloughed employees down and keeps systems functioning so people can get back to work quickly."

M12 Solutions MD Andrew Skipsey is set to scale down the number of office workers and at the same time extend the geographical reach of his recruitment strategy. "I don't think we'll ever have the need for everyone in the business to work under the same roof again, and we should be able to recruit from across the country to make sure that we get the right skilled and motivated people through the door," he commented. "We may think that the last few weeks have been extraordinary. But perhaps this is only a taste of the many kinds to upheavals to come, for all sectors, that will bring both opportunities and threats."

ICT budgets set to go up

THE coronavirus pandemic has prompted nearly a quarter (22%) of IT budgets to increase over the next year, with 20% of ICT buyers forecasting a rise of more than 5% year-on-year.

"Most businesses are now seeing the advantages of working in the cloud and will start to look beyond just what systems like Teams can deliver," stated V12 Telecom co-founder and MD Charles Rickett.

The company worked with Larato to produce the Covid-19 Implications for Business survey, which pointed to a number of priorities occupying the minds of IT leaders.

"With the possibility of the PSTN switch off in less than five years, and with the Covid-19 experience under their belts, IT professionals need greater flexibility moving forward," added Rickett. "It won't be long before many of them extend their entire unified communications structure to the cloud."

Rickett noted that the lockdown and home working stampede was well managed by businesses practiced in dealing with business continuity matters.

"Some were well prepared, with our survey showing that 24% already had the infrastruc-



Charles Rickett

ture in place to easily provision home working," added Rickett.

"Many of our customers had already been using Teams with Direct Routing which enabled them to add homeworkers to their system and carry on without interruption.

"For those businesses that had planned properly and have secure and stable comms, their next goal is to look not just at how to keep teams collaborating productively, but how to ensure the individuals in those teams are managing themselves.

"This human aspect will be a key driver for how organisations assess their needs and make decisions about their ICT requirements in the future."

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Need for managed inventory

DEMAND for outsourced inventory management services is forecast to intensify and is reflective of the lasting shift to home working, says Rob Cunnane, MD of engineering and repairs firm Multimessage.

"It's increasingly clear that WFH isn't going to end with lockdown," he stated. "But the importance of efficient processes remains vital to performance and profitability. One solution that reduces the need for a warehouse, on-site staff and all the associated costs is to outsource to a specialist provider."

Cunnane noted that many of Multimessage's customers have already called on the firm to manage their inventory in its warehouse, while at the same time looking to improve their SLA performance and extend geographical reach.

"Managing inventory to support customer faults is sometimes overlooked, often relying on engineer spares and purchasing urgent parts from distributors or resellers of refurbished equipment," added Cunnane.

Multimessage's professional services include the management of voice, data and networking inventory to support maintenance contracts.

NEWS ROUNDUP

BTT Comms Director Shiv Passap forecasts big changes in how the company will operate in the future following the Covid-19 pandemic. "Traditionally, the majority of our staff would be working from the office with only three members working from home," he commented. "This will change. The pandemic also highlighted areas where we needed to digitise some paper-based exercises, or make certain procedural changes. And we have found ways to make efficiencies through further investment in technology. The coronavirus also brought the wellbeing of our staff to the forefront."

BUSINESS leaders will be much tougher on managing costs and productivity and take a far leaner operational approach following Covid-19, according to T-Tech MD Daniel Teacher. "An enormous amount can be achieved remotely beyond many peoples' expectations," he stated. "No employer has an excuse to say people can't work from home on a regular basis. There will be less office space as a result but the value of IT as a currency has gone up. People need laptops, cloud technology and communication tools. This will only continue to grow."

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HPE takes a Covid-19 hit



Antonio Neri

HPE has embarked on a three year cost cutting programme after posting a lack lustre set of results for the second quarter ended 30th April, with revenues down 16% at \$6bn.

In the same quarter last year the company posted a \$434m operating profit. This time it disclosed a \$834m operating loss. The financials are reflective of supply chains being hit and deployments delayed as a result of the pandemic.

HPE said it will not provide fiscal year 2020 third quarter or full year financial guidance.

“The global economic lockdown significantly impacted our fiscal Q2 financial performance,” commented Antonio Neri, President and CEO.

“We are taking decisive steps to navigate the near-term uncertainty while ensuring we align resources to priority growth areas, so that we are

well positioned to accelerate our edge-to-cloud strategy in a post-Covid-19 world.”

HPE is bringing in a ‘cost optimisation and prioritisation plan’ to refocus investments and ‘realign the workforce’ to areas of growth.

This includes measures to simplify its product portfolio strategy, go-to-market configurations, supply chain structures, digital customer support model and marketing.

HPE expects that the plan will be implemented through to fiscal year 2022 and estimates that it will include gross savings of at least \$1bn through changes to the company’s workforce, real estate model and business process improvements.

The plan is also expected to deliver annualised net run-rate savings of at least \$800m by fiscal year 2022-end (when compared to 2019).

Air IT swoops on sales chief

FORMER GCI-ers Mark Whitehead and John Whitty have reunited following the hire of Whitehead as Air IT’s Sales Director. The firm appointed Whitty as CEO in February when new Chairman Ian Brown kicked off an aggressive expansion campaign supported by investment from August Equity.

The Nottingham-based MSP intends to make bolt-on acquisitions and yield greater organic growth with Whitehead at the forefront of its ambitions.

He commented: “My experience includes introducing new technologies at the right time that are game-changing for businesses. I aim to help new and existing clients transform in the post-pandemic era.”

Along with an accelerated transition to cloud-based

infrastructure Whitehead also noted that Air IT expects future growth to come from its cyber security and business intelligence services.

“As businesses get more data heavy there will be an increased need to consolidate information as well as greater emphasis on data protection due to cyber security threats,” he said.

Whitty commented: “The addition of Mark as Sales Director will allow us to strengthen our service and help clients enhance their businesses as we move into the next phase of our development.”

Air IT employs over 80 full-time staff and has more than 500-plus SME customers. The company has experienced 30% year-on-year growth over the past three years.



Mark Whitehead

NEWS ROUNDUP

CIRRUS has appointed Dean Cook as Finance Director and Bernard Ross joins the firm as Customer Operations Director for the UK and North American operations. The hires come two months after the merger between Cirrus and TelXL. Cook brings more than 20 years of finance experience from PwC, KPMG and a range of SMEs. Ross has over 30 years experience in the ICT industry and moved from Britannic Technologies where he was Head of Operations.

TRITON Telecom owner Dean Billington wasted no time in helping three local organisations overcome pressing challenges amid the Covid-19 crisis. He provided a 4G broadband connection and hardware free of charge to Essentials Delivery, which



provides food, personal goods and household items for the elderly, vulnerable and NHS workers in the Birmingham and Solihull region. Billington also donated 100 full-face shields to Birmingham St Mary’s Hospice (pictured); and donated a Xbox to University Hospitals Birmingham Charity in response to its appeal to kit-out the staff break areas.

Sage sees solid H1: Issues cautionary note over virus impacted H2 outlook

SAGE Group reported a solid first half but cautioned that H2 will be more reflective of impacts due to the pandemic driving licence and professional services sales down.

For the six months ended 31st March 2020 the financial software firm witnessed organic sales growth of 5.7% to £935m.

The company’s operating profit measured £213m, a 3% increase. Meanwhile, recurring



Steve Hare

revenue jumped 10.3% to £826m with more customers migrating to a subscription

model and the Sage Business Cloud. The Northern Europe region outperformed the rest of

the group with organic revenue up 10% to £198m, including a 13% rise in recurring revenue.

Across the full year the firm anticipates organic recurring revenue growth will be below its previous guidance of 8%-9%.

Steve Hare, CEO, commented: “Sage has sustained momentum as we continue to focus on recurring revenue growth and making good progress in strategic execution.”

RECOVERY is under way in the general tech M&A market with targets tending to be the smaller companies, according to Jonathan Simnett, Director of tech M&A firm Hampton Partners. “In terms of how things are looking currently, overall we’re seeing little change in the amount of tech M&A deals being done,” he said. “Tech deal volumes in the first third of 2020 are on a par with 2019 and 2018.” He also noted that the size profile of acquired firms has declined sharply with around 90% of deals being for sub-\$200m turnover companies, up from 60% in January.



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Wyld deploys mesh tech to tackle virus

MESH technology designed by Wyld Networks to deliver services in areas where people congregate has been repurposed to aid the fight against Covid-19 in Scottish care homes.

The tech provides digital access and anonymised social distance monitoring and alerting via a mobile app and mesh wireless network of connected smartphones and IoT devices.

The system creates virtual geozones around the care home and particularly sensitive or quarantined areas to control access, as well as dynamic personal two-metre geozones around everyone with the app.

All staff and visitors will be required to download the mobile app and input Covid-19 test results, and enter any symptoms into a self-diagnostic algorithm embedded in the application to create a risk profile.

Residents without a smartphone could be given electronic wristbands or similar.

Anyone approaching a geozone will be sent a message instantly to let them know if they are allowed to enter. Wyld Networks is working with NHS Highland and Highland Health Ventures to help prevent the spread of Covid-19.



Alastair Williamson

The technology may also have broader applications in helping other businesses get back to work.

Statistics from the National Records of Scotland show that more than half of the recorded coronavirus deaths in Scotland were in care homes.

“Supporting innovation across the healthcare system is more important than ever and will be central to securing transformation and improved care,” said Frances Hines, Research, Development and Innovation Manager in NHS Highland.

“Creating the conditions for more collaborative approaches to innovation and enabling the adoption of new technologies will be key.”

Wyld Networks CEO, Alastair Williamson, commented: “By using Wyld’s real-time data analytics platform, care home managers can contact and advise anyone who has been in close contact with someone who tested positive with Covid-19 or develops symptoms.

“Our mesh technology was designed for applications such as sporting events, music festivals, retail centres and transport hubs to deliver location-aware information. But it quickly became clear that it could play a vital role in protecting residents, staff and visitors in care homes, hospitals and hospices.”

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

Hardware sales take a tumble

THE Covid-19 pandemic has had a bigger impact on market demand for hardware than software or services, but some sectors like computing components continue to do well, according to channel analysis from Context.

The market analysis firm says that enterprise hardware revenues declined from -1% year-on-year in January to -11% in March and -17% in April, while services have increased to 4% in April and software revenues slipped from 10% to 4% over the period.

Of the major categories, those experiencing some of the biggest declines in revenue from January to April were servers (-10%), continuing a historic decline, large format displays (-8%) and disk arrays (-7%).

“While the Covid-19 crisis has impacted sales volumes in March and April, long-term drivers are of greater significance to data centre infrastructure with the move from on-premise to cloud affecting negatively the sales of mainstream servers and storage systems through distribution,” commented Gurvan Meyer, Senior Research Analyst and Head of the Enterprise Team.

NEWS ROUNDUP

COMPUTACENTER has issued a positive trading statement and taken its UK staff off the Government furlough scheme. Its unaudited financials for the four months to 30th April 2020 include the impact of Covid-19. The company said that current trading was ‘more robust’ than anticipated at the start of the crisis, and that business has ‘accelerated’ with important contracts won due to its ability to scale operations. So much so that Computacenter expects the first half of 2020 to be ahead of the same period last year. CEO Mike Norris said the business had used the furlough scheme for one month.

US-BASED security firm Cygiant has entered expansion mode and is targeting the European market from a new office and security operations centre established in Belfast, the sister city of Boston where it is headquartered. The company has a particular interest in the finance, education, healthcare and retail sectors. Invest Northern Ireland, the regional business development agency, supported Cygiant’s expansion into the region by helping to secure office space, foster local partnerships and increase local hiring efforts.

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Emerging from Covid-19

Telltale signs of what will happen when the UK is freed from lockdown were revealed at last month's online round table discussion hosted by Comms Dealer in association with BT Wholesale, where renewal and operational space to innovate and strategise emerged as key factors, along with workplace transformation and developing a collective more flexible partnership approach that will better position channel players for future success.

As the UK emerges from lockdown Covid-19 will still glare at us daily, so we must come to exist in a new reality. Some people think the channel's greatest challenge is getting back to BAU following the eventual release of lockdown. They are wrong. The greatest challenge will be identifying and capitalising on the many new opportunities that exist as a result of Covid-19. One indication of this is the link between the services ICT providers deliver and a business community with no choice other than to undergo a digital transformation. Likewise, there was no option about the jolt to home working environments...

• Our round table delegates have taken strong measures to support employees' wellbeing at home with



Matt Wring

informed and supportive communication a key element of easing staff fears and uncertainty over the future – and in helping them to adapt to working remotely. Maintaining a sense of Business as Usual is also key. Continuity of work is evident in how furloughed staff are being trained in areas that will make them more productive post-lockdown. Our delegates also learned a thing or two....

Matt Wring, Chief Technical Officer, Southern Communications

Staff have had time to think about their lives and what they want to do. Some may want to do something else. We should look at what is happening in our staffs' heads. We learned about the character of our staff and how we can work with them more flexibly in line with their home environment. It's been an eye opener.

Matthew Croxford, Director, CityTalk Communications

We talk to staff regularly. Communication has been key in making sure they are reassured and their mental wellbeing is maintained. We started furloughing when we



Gavin Jones

Now, it's time to think about what we can do differently and how we can focus more sharply rather than get lost on the runway

realised there wasn't going to be a need for staff, and there has been much concern over whether people will lose their jobs. We've learnt a lot about our duty of care.

Stuart Davis, Executive Chairman, Bamboo Technology Group

Good, open and honest comms with staff is key. We have to embrace more trust in our employees. Working from home gave us no choice, but it's been a positive move forward and changes the way we look at

our business and our people. It's people first, and all about looking after the people who look after our business.

Phil Race, Chief Executive Officer, Adept Technology Group

Staff are in various states of uncertainty and fear over the future, so it's important to over communicate. We've done this in different ways via video conferencing, recorded videos and newsletters, constantly reassuring people that the wheels are still turning. Reassurance of BAU

is useful for a lot of people. We've focused on running sessions, projects, team meetings and doing sales reviews. This helps people feel that the business is behaving as we always have done. We just happen to be scattered across the UK.

Steve Warburton, Managing Director, Zen Partner

We've seen a number of improvements from home working, which can also boost staff morale. We've been communicating regularly. Open and honest communication is a lesson learnt for us going forward. We will continue this with all staff.

• It is clear in retrospect that 'old school' thinking on home working is exactly that. Now, all caution about staff working from home has



Phil Race

lockdown with strength

been cast to the winds; and round table delegates were eager to show themselves as favouring the shift to remote working at a time when they need to be more fit for purpose than ever...

Matt Wring, Chief Technical Officer, Southern Communications

Our business and the way we operate is a lot more robust and diverse in structure compared to January. It's been a challenge for some of our customers but the reality is that flexibility is a real positive. We've learnt we can work at home. We didn't think we could, but we pushed almost everyone out of the office.

Phil Race, Chief Executive Officer, Adept Technology Group

It's been amazing to transform the business in a short space of time. We had eight offices, now we



Wayne Cartwright

have 308 – in the form of bedrooms, kitchens and studies. In the future we may rationalise the business in a more elegant way and not plan around offices or physical locations – I don't need them. It's a massive cost burden. Why are we dragging people to an office?

Wayne Cartwright, CEO, Communicate Better

I've been wanting to gain insights into areas of the business in terms of productivity for some time. The move to home working offered an opportunity and as I am more 'old school' I was

surprised that productivity from home workers is the same as in the office. We want to switch to more remote work environments.

Steve Warburton, Managing Director, Zen Partner

We'll see changes in our use of premises. We currently have a head office in Rochdale that houses circa 500 people. We have a premises in Leeds and we are looking at taking some space in London. We may see a move to a situation where we'll be employing people nationwide from home, and potentially utilising more flexible office space anywhere in the UK.

Franki Hale, Director of Strategy and Change, Convergence Group

The transition to home working has been amazing. We already halved the office space in Solihull as people were wanting

less buildings and more flexibility in contracts and how they work. We believe that's where the industry will potentially go, based on people wanting to close offices and work from home.

• What is also clear is that the application of bureaucratic principles long associated with innovation and product development do not apply in lockdown, accelerating product pipelines as service providers take a more 'get it done' and flexible vantage point...

Gavin Jones, Channel Director, BT Wholesale

With more time you tend to be more innovative. We've launched new processes on our service desk which have proved popular for dealing with customers. Without this period it probably would have taken a year-plus to think about the changes, write a few papers and go through committees. Now, it's time to think about what we can do differently and how we can focus more sharply rather than get lost on the runway.

Matthew Croxford, Director, CityTalk Communications

We have an internal development team and platform for all teams and departments which has given us granularity around insights into what is happening in our



Matthew Croxford



Franki Hale

business. It is important to have a development arm in the organisation and make sure that you are innovating technology for the future. We are building a platform that will enable people to be more self-serving.

• Overnight our industry has become more of a science with its key elements needing to be understood before informing strategic choices. With the stakes this high, there had to be a discussion on the issues that will guide more focused strategic business decisions now and in the future...

Franki Hale, Director of Strategy and Change, Convergence Group

With less BAU and things on hold, strategically we have probably done more in seven weeks than we've done in seven months. It's all about strategy and we need to keep the momentum going. If we could bottle what we are doing now and feed it to everyone twice a day we're onto a winner.

Matt Wring, Chief Technical Officer, Southern Communications

We are terrible in this country at investing in our futures. We are driven by the day-to-day. Now, we have an opportunity to take an

Covid-19 trends and trajectories to consider

AS LOCKDOWN restrictions gradually ease it is wise to explore how to manage the impact of the outbreak and identify strategies and courses of action that will ensure ICT providers emerge stronger and with a renewed outlook and clearer sense of purpose. Part of this process involves an assessment of the organisational insights that the Covid-19 crisis has already brought about, and then explore ways to strategise and capitalise on these learnings, which are many and varied. This requires analysis and planning, based on the key strategic priorities that emerged from the round table discussion that will make us stronger than before.

Action points

- Understand the 'new workspace' and drive productivity based on trusting your staff and building on flexibility gains.
- Seek to optimise channel partnerships with greater levels of mutual trust and flexibility, creating the conditions for much needed collaboration.
- Supercharge innovation and product or platform development with a sharper focus on creativity and getting things done.
- Prepare your workforce for the new world with, for example, sales training.
- Leverage your new-found flexibility to ramp up after lockdown. It can help as you transition into the 'new normal'.
- Strategic rethinks are the first step in driving and accelerating operational changes, shifts in focus, the creation of new business models and capitalising on new market opportunities, as well as engaging more closely with staff and customers. So make the most of this time to think and plan.

Emerging from Covid-19 with strength

BT WHOLESALE

Continued on page 17

operational pause and think more strategically. These restrictions will be with us for a long time, so we need to better understand and work out how to live with this new reality. We should be thinking about what entrepreneurs are doing, where the next shift is coming from and how we service the support layer underpinning those trends. That, more than anything else, will drive our industry.

• **The thoughts and actions of our round table delegates suggest they are adopting new approaches to customers and channel partners in delivering digital solutions. There is only one obstacle, inflexibility, but that could soon become a thing of the past...**

Phil Race, Chief Executive Officer, Adept Technology Group

Continuing to get the best out of partnerships is key, and in this stressed world you really find out who your partners are. We are having good conversations with all of our top partners on how we make this work, identifying what we can do better and how to make things more efficient. The collaboration and partnership theme is key.

Franki Hale, Director of Strategy and Change, Convergence Group

We've had lots of conversations with different suppliers and discussions around flexibility on billing and supply for example is key. Flexibility is massively important to the way we



Steve Warburton



Stuart Davis

work moving forward – how we work with the right customers and the right channel partners. You have to be of the same mindset to get things moving quickly. We are speculating at the moment, not completely sure about what our customers will be needing in the future. Commercially we will also do things a lot differently and start to look at offers and services rather than product. We can build on the commerciality of product in a better way. What is clear is the need for open discussions with partners and to have some flexibility to move forward. It's about how we arrive at a resolution together.

Gavin Jones, Channel Director, BT Wholesale

It's about talking to our customers and making sure we are continuing to communicate, and to use some of this time on new ideas, and keeping the momentum up on developing some of those ideas and thoughts for the partner channel. The message is that we need to be more flexible and work together, and put trust in each other in the right areas moving forward, leaving no-one out to dry. That is the way to succeed. We are using this time to try and get closer to partners and get rid of some of the bureaucracy in the ways we work.

• **Strengthening your strategic focus and efficiencies and seeking new revenue streams are not necessarily new priorities, but Covid-19 has provided time and**

space to elevate higher levels of thinking and take faster actions, including the adoption of new sales approaches...

Matthew Croxford, Director, CityTalk Communications

Sales methods in CityTalk have changed. These changes won't just last a few months after we come out of this crisis, they are here to stay. One of the challenges will be upskilling the 'old school' who are used to knocking on doors, filling out paperwork, making friends. We're going to have to provide a lot more training and have been working on training courses with furloughed sales people so when they come back they are more in tune.

Phil Race, Chief Executive Officer, Adept Technology Group

Many of our customers' concerns are long-term – will they still be here in the future? Customers are worried about their long-term

customer needs equate to an opening of the opportunity sluice gates...

Phil Race, Chief Executive Officer, Adept Technology Group

A lot of conversations with customers pre-Covid about updating technology can be lower down the priority list, put off until another time. But Covid-19 has brought to the fore their ICT challenges and difficulties, all of which represent opportunities. People will want to address those shortcomings so they can continue to be resilient at this difficult time. So while we wait for the new world we should make the most of the current one.

Stuart Davis, Executive Chairman, Bamboo Technology Group

Business continuity generally had not been taken seriously enough. Now we are seeing people engage with us and move to a digital infrastructure much quicker than they previously



Mark Cowgill

all still operating but in a different way. We're now seen as the fourth utility, which is recognition of the significance of connectivity and underlines the importance of a good service provider and service partner. Dark fibre gives us a big opportunity. Providing up to 100 gigabit per second gives us an opportunity in bigger markets where we may not have been considered contenders, so we are looking at larger projects.

Gavin Jones, Channel Director, BT Wholesale

We've shown that our networks have got a lot more performance and capacity than we dreamed of. There were questions as to whether we could cope with the nation's demand, especially in broadband and service, between us all we've shown that we can deliver. We are definitely the fourth utility. The response from customers and partners across the industry has been remarkably positive. We can all be proud about how we helped the UK through this challenging period.

Pritesh Gajjar, Managing Director, Aastha

I've been thinking more about our customers, looking at which are profitable,



Pritesh Gajjar

The message is that we need to be more flexible and work together, and put trust in each other in the right areas

viability, their scale, working behaviours and patterns. There is a lot of uncertainty. The sales team needs to dig under the cover and fully understand customer challenges and fears. We typically gear up our business on three year contracts. That doesn't wash now, so we are trying to be adaptable, flexible and creative. We're going to have to break some real standard paradigms and that will require a lot of collaboration with partners.

• **It is time to consider how to capitalise on digital transformations as organisations move to remote working and require tech upgrades. In this, immediate**

expected. The Bank of England forecasts that Covid-19 will fast track investment in digital infrastructure – upgrading systems, improving productivity and greater automation. These are things we can jump on, along with productivity monitoring and reporting which is becoming more important. We have the technology to build platforms that give business owners and managers a better view of what's happening in home working environments.

Mark Cowgill, Director and Co-Founder, Exa Networks

Sales were down against budget by 30 per cent last month but we still did a significant number of new deals. The sales team are

which are vulnerable, which are long-term and placing them into segments. This means I have to perhaps let some of them go to look after others better and make space for more customers. There is an opportunity to capitalise on the fact that people are going to be working remotely and using technology more and more.

• **Familiarise yourself with the big technology shifts because the impact of their longer-term outputs is largely unknown. And scenario planning may help to apply some insight into what is essentially an uncharted landscape – the future of business communications...**

Gavin Jones, Channel Director, BT Wholesale

There are two seminal investment trends: 5G, which has the ability to revolutionise what we do. We think of mobile predominantly as having a handset and being able to download a video, but there's loads more coming during the next few years. And growth of FTTP: Regardless of what BT is doing there's lots of other people out there and the average download speeds are something like 54-55 meg. Just BT alone has committed to serving circa 70 per cent of the population by 2025. It's going to create a bow wave of data, information and opportunities. Yet we don't



Julian Burkill

know at the moment what will drive our businesses. When ADSL emerged, that's when Amazon and Google etc started out. There is a big question about what is truly our future: It's got to be digital, far more self-serve and intuitive. There is

There are so many positives. We can all be proud about how we helped the UK through this period

immense potential just in core telecoms to build out to the future. Imagine 20 million households pushing 300 meg down. It's going to change our lives in many ways and bring new business ideas. We just don't know what it will look like right now. ■

Bites from the table...

What is suffering within the business is a big unknown. Which areas amid the malaise will start to show later on?

Matt Wring, Chief Technical Officer, Southern Communications

Traditional business will diminish, and there will be a lot of requests for disaster recovery and home workers.

Julian Burkill, Technical Director, BDR Group

The key is 5G and the extra bandwidth that will be made available. It will be all digital, and I see a huge opportunity for our industry.

Pritesh Gajjar, Managing Director, Aastha

We've seen productivity improvements. New features on our roadmap are coming out of the door quicker. The lack of distraction has been a benefit.

Steve Warburton, Managing Director, Zen Partner

We needed to furlough the sales function while keeping service people operational. We've been doing installs, fulfilling projects – we are still busy.

Wayne Cartwright, CEO, Communicate Better

We need to think about living with Covid-19 for a long period of time, so the offerings we take to businesses need to be more holistically thought out.

Phil Race, Chief Executive Officer, Adept Technology Group

More points to consider

- Think about how to capitalise on digital transformations as organisations move to remote working and require tech upgrades.
- Get under the skin of your customers and understand their longer-term considerations, challenges and strategic shifts arising from Covid-19.
- Explore opportunities focused on becoming more flexible in customer and partner relationships, arising from uncertainties over the future.
- Assess the resources your company now needs to meet your business and customer requirements.
- It is critical that future planning considers the longer-term market context that you may be operating in. How else can you make the fully considered strategic decisions that will underpin your sustainability?
- Navigate ways to stabilise existing customer bases and make the most of their receptiveness to technology upgrades while preparing for future revenue and profitability mixes, which are perhaps less predictable now.

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Emerging from Covid-19 with strength



Gilder brings new energy

That 'energy' features prominently in Keri Gilder's modus operandi is not only evident in her approach to learning, leadership, diversity, developing peoples' careers and advancing business growth strategies, but also in her music collection where vinyl, heavy metal and Metallica reign. Here's how she plans to rock as Colt Technology Services' new CEO...

Gilder joined Colt as Chief Commercial Officer in November 2018 and became CEO last month following the departure of former Chief Executive Carl Grivner. Not for nothing has Gilder developed a reputation for her leadership skills and bringing energy to all aspects of her career, as she explains...

What got you onto the career path in ICT?

I started my career with a degree in management information systems and worked as a network architect before I moved into sales with Ciena. Coming into sales with a technical background gave me the confidence to speak about a range of challenges a customer may be experiencing. I have a strong desire to keep learning, and as technology moves fast it is also critical to have an open mind about what the future might bring in order to enable a truly connected world. Although it is labelled as a 'soft skill', I believe that it was one of the critical criteria in my CEO selection.

Why did you take the role of CEO and what was your first task?

Becoming a CEO has been a long time career aspiration, and the fact that it has happened in a sector I have worked in for more than 20 years is exciting. In terms



Keri Gilder

My job as a leader is to enable our people to look into the future and plan for it today

of my first task – I will be doing a significant amount of listening and learning to help make the critical decisions.

What are your current priorities?

When you become a CEO the first thing you have to think about is your employees because they are the heart and soul of the business. I will be looking into how I can help them develop and move obstacles. This will enable us to incubate the best ideas and ways of working. We have a solid base, we

have a great strategy and foundation to build upon, so what I'm really looking to do is augment a few areas of the business and elements of the strategy to truly take us into the future.

Where is growth coming from?

The next phase of growth for Colt will be in next-wave technologies and also expanding on our role within the wider technological ecosystem. The technologies that are going to transform our industry, such as

Blockchain, Edge and AI, all need a dense, agile, high bandwidth network to power them and this next decade will change the face of our industry in more ways than one.

Which new technology areas are on your radar screen?

If I look at the trends in the industry right now, one of the major ones is around automation and creating capabilities that enable a reliable, secure, and a fast service for our

customers, and services that are fully transparent in regards to the way they operate. Automation will be a big focus for us moving forward, because we know automation has the power to improve the customer experience and security.

What will be the main strands of your partner growth strategy?

It's critical that we are part of a wider technological ecosystem so that our customers can work with one connectivity provider that can connect them to the data centre, the cloud, the edge and all the other touchpoints they require. We have been ensuring we can do this for some time by expanding our relationships with the key Cloud Service Providers and System Integrators so that however and wherever our customers want to connect, we can facilitate that. In terms of an evolution of this, we are now working with our partners to develop joint go-to-market strategies so we can work more collaboratively to make enterprise connectivity as seamless and effortless as possible.

Where do you see Colt in three to five years time?

We implemented technologies such as SD WAN and on-demand networking before there was even a solid business case for them. For me, I see Colt having the same innovation



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y as Colt CEO

at its core moving forward. To get there, we need to remain nimble, customer focused and also ready for the constantly changing nature of our industry. We are planning for and creating solutions to problems that don't exist yet. Our network and organisation is built to change, and my job as a leader is to enable our people to look into the future and plan for it today.

Looking back across your career, what is your biggest achievement?

Seeing how people in my past teams have progressed their careers, how they have embraced learning and moved into new areas of the industry or even into adjacent industries. I place a high value on personal development as a manager and it puts a smile on my face when I am able to see those that I have worked with in the past shine bright.

As a successful woman in ICT, did you meet any challenges based on gender?

My experiences as a woman in telecommunications have been mostly positive. However, there were times when I was the only woman in the room or the only female network architect. That can be intimidating. It did at times feel like I had to continue to prove why I was capable in order to be considered to lead the project, the team or the region. This has made me want to ensure that all women feel accepted and valued in the sector. This led me to start Women@Ciena – Ciena's global internal diversity initiative, which strives to encourage diversity through motivating and inspiring women at all

levels. Now I am involved in Network25 which champions women at Colt as well as wider Inclusion and Diversity initiatives within the business, because for me, it's essential that everyone can bring their authentic selves to work – regardless of their gender, age, race or sexual orientation. I am also on the executive diversity team for the TM Forum.

How should the ICT sector address the diversity issue?

A big factor for increasing greater diversity in ICT is starting the conversation early. I am a strong believer in getting girls and people from more diverse backgrounds into STEAM subjects. They not only give you the technology and science fundamentals, they also set you up to seek knowledge and to be constantly learning, which is critical for succeeding in this sector. I also think flexibility will be a key factor for increasing diversity going forward and we are already looking to adjust our ways of working to help facilitate this.

Historically, certain people might not have been able to succeed in a typical corporate environment. But in this era of flexibility we might get people into our business who previously felt they could not work in a typical 9-5 job. They could be people who have taken career breaks, people who have to care for others in their lives or possibly people who can't commute or work in a typical office environment. So, I believe as the workplace changes, this could be the perfect opportunity to open up our sector to a wider population because we all benefit when there are more voices in the room. ■

Just a minute with Keri Gilder...

Role model: Marie Curie, a pioneer in technology and science before it was really possible (and cool) for women to be seen as leaders in the sector.

Your main strength and what could you work on? I have a lot of energy and truly value diversity, but I could work on learning quicker as the world is moving so fast.

Best piece of advice you have been given? Prioritise your time. This means blocking time in my calendar and making time for the things that matter most.

If you weren't in communications what would you be doing? A sports coach or a travel photographer – two of my passions.

Name three ideal dinner guests: Peyton Manning, an incredible athlete and he's also hilarious; Bill Gates, not only is he wicked smart, he is also an amazing humanitarian; and a seven-year-old kid, it would be interesting to get perspectives from the generation to come, and I would love to see how Peyton and Bill would interact with them.

What's the biggest risk you have taken? Moving outside of the United States. It didn't just affect me, it affected my entire family.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I love music, particularly heavy metal and vinyl. Metallica is by far my favourite band. I have seen them five times in concert.

What talent do you wish you had? To read very fast. There are so many books that I would like to read.

How do you relax when not working? My kids say I don't know how to relax, but I find taking very long walks and working on tangible projects with an immediate result relaxing and rejuvenating.

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Apalo leaves launch pad

Apalo's Business Development Director Philippe Matos is promising to elevate the current state of UCaaS solutions in the UK with a new platform developed for the channel and launched by the ambitious firm this month.

French born Matos, a man of many tongues, crossed the channel in 1994 to immerse himself in a new language, a new way of life and make England his home. Likewise, Apalo (the brainchild of Eg Technologies) has branched into new territory as it seeks to advance its first channel partner offering having supported other industry players and brands in the past to develop their strategy, business plans and grow their customer bases.



Philippe Matos

"Apalo will change that approach and is a key turning point for Eg Technologies," stated Matos. "Apalo is a new Mobile First Communications Platform where UCaaS, CCaaS and mobile are integrated in a single solution that is accessible any time through any device. We've invested heavily in the platform and have big ambitions for us and our channel partners."

Matos perhaps understates the extent of his ambition when you consider that he wants Apalo to become the number one integrated platform provider for mobile and UC&C in the UK. He says his objective is solidly underpinned by the platform which bristles with 100-plus features and is presented with the appropriate tech back-up and support, and is therefore positioned as an alternative to CSPs.

Key industry figures joined the Apalo team to help

Business communications is evolving at a faster rate than ever with working space becoming more agile along with a greater reliance on UC

develop the platform, including Nick Razey, Simon Taylor and Rob Edwards. Razey and Taylor have led a number of successful ventures including founding Interoute and Next Generation Data Europe. EG Technologies itself was set up in 2011 and has developed the insight it needs to attract and onboard partners wanting to deliver mobile, telephony and collaboration tools, says Matos.

"The time of simply picking up a desk phone in the office has gone, and the paucity of core features such as presence status, IM, file and screen sharing, video and audio conferencing,

CRM integration and the lack of a real all-in-one platform is a growing frustration for end users," stated Matos. "Remote and home worker demand has increased considerably and will only continue to grow, both for core working and business continuity."

Overcoming limitations Matos says that Apalo circumvents the challenge faced by providers that need to engage with several partners to give customers what they want and bring UCaaS under one roof, with services sometimes forced together through functionality-limited OTT applications. Apalo also

provides national and international calls and data, with TLS SRTP encrypted call traffic as standard and SBC management for monitoring and fraud prevention.

"Business communications is evolving at a faster rate than ever with working space becoming more agile along with a greater reliance on UC," added Matos. "The way we communicate has changed and we know that moving forwards having an IP PBX or hosted telephony platform will not be enough. Users want a truly unified collaboration platform and our team is focused on launching Apalo to the channel and ensuring we are ready to onboard partners. Our ongoing opportunity is to build on relationships and industry knowledge and continue to develop our integrated service."

In more good news for partners, enthused Matos, Apalo integrates with MS Teams and Zoom. "Things have changed so much in recent months and every business is finding a new normal and new ways of working," he added. "The Covid-19 period underlines our thinking about never holding back on innovation and always putting the customer first. I love the industry, ensuring people stay in touch through ever changing technology and the new opportunities this brings, which is particularly important when you look at what's happening now." ■

Just a minute with Philippe Matos...

Role model: Alex Rowe, one of the most decorated members of the French Legionnaire (he was born in Newcastle). He didn't make it in the British Army on medical grounds, but never gave up.

Best piece of advice you have been given? Don't waste time, stay focused and always keep learning.

What talent do you wish you had? To be a hyperpolyglot! I love languages and speak French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and English, with more to come.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I held the record for running 500 metres and for rowing 2,500 metres in my region of France for over 15 years.

What do you fear most? Enclosed spaces.

Name three ideal dinner guests: Jean Pierre Rive, a legend of French rugby; Jacques-Yves Cousteau, the oceanographer; and Zahi Hawass to find out the secrets of the Valley of the Kings.

Give one example of something you have overcome: Pain during my youth playing rugby in France.

What possession could you not live without? The picture of my family on the home screen of my smartphone.

What's the biggest risk you have taken? Boasting to my Scottish father-in-law that I was great at golf before playing my very first round with him. I've still never lived it down!

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NEC's gaze falls on global

NEC's heritage and standing in the comms sector makes it something of an industry hero, and its big ambitions in the global cloud market are just as notable, according to Sales Director Andrew Cooper.



Andrew Cooper

Many resellers have a fear of just becoming an agent, especially with cloud solutions. It's important that they continue to own their customers

Cooper started his comms career in the mobile industry, working with fitted 'In Car' telephony, long before the days of the mobile. NEC's origins reach back even further to 1899 when it was formed as a partnership with Kunihiko Iwadare and Thomas Edison. Not surprisingly NEC's UK involvement goes back beyond most of today's

current suppliers. One of the first key systems sold by British Telecom was made by Nitsuko, a part of NEC. With such a rich pedigree, it should come as no surprise that NEC is aiming to take the global top spot across all aspects of communications. And according to Cooper, the vendor's timely entry into the cloud market will write the next chapter or two in the history book of NEC.

In April NEC linked up with Intermedia, enabling it to ramp up its global cloud comms and collaboration services strategy with the launch of UNIVERGE BLUE Connect UCaaS solutions and the UNIVERGE BLUE Engage CCaaS offering. The move comes as NEC builds on its prowess in the global premise market, with the UK in the ascendancy. "With Intermedia joint venture our strategy to

offer choice and our ambition to lead in both premise and cloud is stronger than ever," said Cooper. "This, combined with our 100 per cent channel focus and financial stability, is at the core of our channel offering."

Big move

UNIVERGE BLUE will be sold primarily under private label through a network of reseller partners and IT distributors;

and the follow-on expanded offering will integrate with NEC premise-based systems. The partnership was hailed as significant in the industry by sector analysts, among them Elka Popova, Vice President, Information and Communications Technologies at Frost & Sullivan, who rated the deal as a big move for both NEC and Intermedia. "When you combine NEC's reach and



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relationship with its channel and Intermedia's UCaaS and CCaaS offerings, you have to take notice," she said. "Now, more than ever, this gives NEC a clear path to help its customers with their cloud migration."

It must not be forgotten that NEC offers choice with premise, hybrid and cloud solutions. Cooper added: "The decision is not one being forced upon partners or users of our technologies – that is for each of them to decide what is best for their particular circumstance. I'm old enough to remember visiting Woolworths on a

In our current climate it's all about survival of the adaptable

Saturday morning, when faced with a single tube of sweets or tucking into pick and mix, I knew where my decision lay."

Cooper is pursuing a dual strategy and his priorities are founded on the principle of customer choice. "We are focusing resources on enhancing our premise portfolio alongside building a strategy to enter the world of 'all things as a service' with our UNIVERGE BLUE platform," he said. "We will all see and experience a change in the market as we move through, and hopefully soon, past the current Covid-19 crisis. At the end of 2019 the installed base of on-premises solutions still represented 75 per cent of the total UK installed base, but the

transition to cloud solutions has continued to accelerate with growth of over 15 per cent. Whatever happens next, choice will be the key."

Evolution is key

Also of great significance is the future place of resellers and Cooper has strong views on their role as essential pillars in the ICT ecosystem, and the cruciality of their capacity to evolve with the times and ride the wave of industry changes will be key. "Many resellers have a fear of just becoming an agent, especially with cloud solutions," he commented. "It's important that they continue to own their customers.

"Resellers must continue to evolve and consolidation will also continue at pace and undoubtedly create new challenges. The larger a business becomes the base principles may be the same but the implementation becomes more challenging. Some will thrive and some will fail. The key will be the choices they make in vendor relationships, recruitment of good staff, creating the right strategies and the right environments for success."

As with all business strategies they must be put to the test, sooner rather than later, believes Cooper. "The market is transforming fast," he stated. "The effects of coronavirus and the lockdown will be with us for some time. UK business, and the UK channel will never be the same again. According to the ONS, almost 49 per cent of adults in employment were working from home as a result of the social distancing measures. In our current climate it's all about survival of the adaptable." ■

Just a minute with Andrew Cooper...

Role model: Too many to name. I've been lucky enough to learn from some great mentors over my career and have tried to adopt, adapt and then enact the things I have learned.

What talent do you wish you had? The foresight to pick six numbers on the very week the lottery was at its highest prize value.

Best piece of advice you have been given? Look after your customers and your pay cheques look after themselves.

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? Something outdoors. I'd far rather be working outside than in an office environment.

How would you like to be remembered? As someone who cared and strived to do things the right way

Give one example of something you've overcome: Answering these questions.

Name three ideal dinner guests: The three main leaders of the modern world. Over a beer I'd like to ask them if they'd each consider leaving a better legacy. Just imagine how different life could be for all.

Your biggest career achievement: Being part of peoples' development; and the longevity of NEC's team, resellers and end users as well as the healthy uptake of new ones over the years.

What do you fear most? Leeds United being robbed of their place in the Premier League.

Who do you admire most in the channel? I learnt the most from Rocom's founder Bob Old.

How do you relax when not working? With two sporty teenage children downtime is in short supply.

Top tip for resellers? Choose your supply partners very carefully.



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Mills: Demand for migrat

The diverse nature of customer projects sometimes makes them technologically challenging, difficult to win and hard to control. Enter Support to Win CEO Julie Mills whose support service fed swiftly into ever greater demand, especially for major migrations of all shapes and sizes.

The stumbling blocks for many resellers and channel organisations are what they always have been – a lack of skills and resource to secure and deploy projects of all sizes with a high degree of execution. Support to Win intervenes to remove such blocks, enabling businesses to circumvent big challenges to their growth prospects. “We fill the gaps in the reseller and carrier market, allowing CPs to sell and bill while we do the rest,” stated Mills. “We sit across all vendor technologies and handle major migration projects for operators and service providers, be it from platform to platform, network to network, on-prem to hosted or TDM to IP.”



Julie Mills

Support to Win operates as a change-enabler in the comms and UC market, facilitating the evolution of resellers, operators and service providers, and addressing the tactical need for expert support at all points in the customer lifecycle. “One of the big changes we have seen in the last 12 months is an increase of demand and market opportunity for our migration services,” added Mills. “This is opening doors for us to partner with the leading UK platform owners. To support this need we opened a second office. In just under three years we’ve gone from working in a garden outbuilding to having two office locations. That’s a great feeling.”

In just under three years we’ve gone from working in a garden outbuilding to having two office locations. That’s a great feeling

The leitmotif running through Mills’ career narrative is that determination, tenacity and hard work pays off. She started her career at BT 25 years ago where she was a qualified trainer prior to managing call centre teams. Mills then moved to MCI WorldCom working in the channel followed by a spell in sales with a reseller, from where she joined Nine Telecom and became Sales Director. “I have always worked in channel sales and my role at Nine shaped my career and drove me to

achieve more,” she said. “CEO James Palmer taught me that success comes from one thing – not giving up and working harder than you ever knew you could. I took that attitude into the founding and launch of Train to Win and then Support to Win.”

Expansion

Support to Win has grown quickly in terms of personnel, increasing heads from five to 25 in under two years. Mills’ near-term plan is to hit £1 million turnover within the next two years. The

firm’s customer base is wide ranging and includes large, global UCaaS businesses, national carriers and smaller resellers and platform owners. As well as covering the UK, the company has also started delivering services throughout Europe.

“Our strategy is to continue growing the business and key to this is staying relevant to the changing requirements of the channel,” stated Mills. “We see value in our expertise and understanding of the channel. We are

not selling comms but we have all the experience to support those that are. Teaming up with Tamsin Deutrom-Yue – who was my partner in crime at Nine – has given Support to Win the twin perspectives of sales and delivery. Putting us together was always going to produce a great company. And our portfolio is evolving, such as offering a virtual onboarding service including video and AI.”

The migration strategy advanced by Support to Win

Migrations hotting up

is helping business minds traumatised by Covid-19 focus on the future with optimism. "Migrations have been critical," added Mills. "Migrations is where we really excel and differentiate, and we've developed a separate team, office and culture. We focus on projects of all sizes and are skilled on six UC platforms with broad competence on others."

The first significant migration projects began in 2018, enabling telecom businesses to realise payback from the platform consolidations of M&A, and to enact the long-term evolution of their technology strategies. "Past projects range from enterprise-scale (1,000-plus seats) implementations of cloud PBX and managed SIP services, through to the mass-migration of tens of thousands of endpoints for 6,500-plus SME customers on behalf of a major international cloud comms operator," noted Mills. "We also offer in-life support services to optimise the customer experience and lifetime value beyond the migration process."

Methodology

The migration service provides a zero touch capability to clients from initial data discovery through to virtual onboarding and assisted plug-and-play services. "These are the only ways to do migrations at the moment (under present lockdown constraints) but typically we would also offer an on-site dimension, particularly for larger deployments," explained Mills. "Our 10-stage migration methodology has been perfected to ensure success to appropriate timescales and with minimal

disruption. Even amid the disruption of Covid-19 lockdown and restrictions to gaining onsite access we have continued operating projects during this period."

Platform shifts

Mills has witnessed many channel partners using the lockdown hiatus to take stock of their supply chain strategies and instigate shifts from platform to platform. "Being able to add value to a challenge like that allows us to stand out, and this comes from our understanding of how the market works," she commented. "We have also been investing in our service delivery capabilities with greater automation.

"We are big believers in people, but it is clear that software automation has a part to play in making things like migrations faster and more responsive, enabling our customers to implement their decisions at speed and scale. This has been crucial in allowing providers and channel partners to convert their trial-period customers – acquired 'temporarily' during the coronavirus crisis – into permanent paying customers by facilitating automated pre-migration data discovery on legacy hardware without having to visit the customer premises."

Covid-19 has exposed all that is vital to businesses, and the channel should grasp the gaps in cloud uptake that are being revealed by the pandemic, urged Mills. "Covid-19 has given the marketplace the compelling reason it needed to move into the cloud," she stated. "We are entering into a new world of working and I have total faith that our industry will embrace this." ■

Just a minute with Julie Mills...

Role model: I don't have a specific role model, but people who inspire me are those who do not give in to the low times in life. We all have them. It is how you respond and move forwards that counts most.

Your main strength and what could you work on? My refusal to accept second best is a strong point, and my determination to succeed; but I sometimes I can lack patience and concentration.

Best piece of advice you have been given? From my old boss, James Palmer, who advised... 'Without a positive outlook you will not succeed. And owning a business is a roller coaster – believe in it and you can do it'.

If you weren't in communications what would you be doing? I'd be a criminal investigator.

In hindsight: I would have started a business sooner in my career, but working in fantastic organisations taught me to look forwards not backwards.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: My husband once auctioned me to build a school in Africa!

Give one example of something you've overcome: Grade 3 breast cancer. Ten years on now and still a very big part of my past and present life.

Name three ideal dinner guests: Kurt Cobain, to find out if it was Courtney Love who shot him; Alexander Dreymon, because he is simply the best Viking; and David Attenborough of course.

Your biggest career achievement to date: Train to Win and Support to Win are both massive achievements. And my Sales Director appointment has to be up there too. I worked my socks off for that role.



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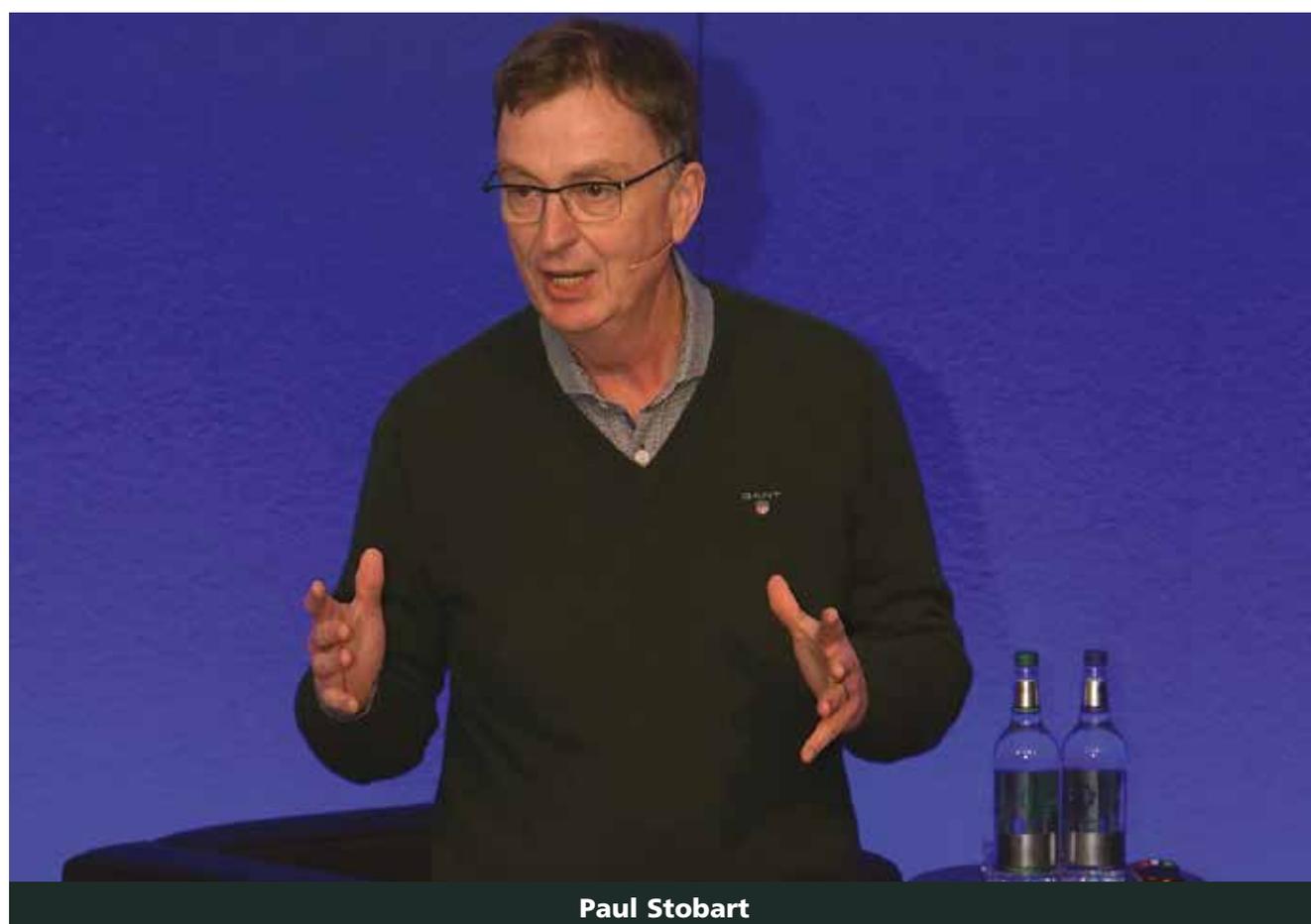
Stobart on leading out of

The application of true leadership principles should apply now more than ever, according to Zen CEO Paul Stobart who says a one-size-fits-all approach flies in the face of any concept of effective leadership – and he shares insights into his own learnings and methods which he believes should be adopted across the board as a priority.

The Living Leader training programme completely transformed my thoughts and ideas around the topic of leadership, and we are rolling the concepts out across Zen. It was at a course about 15 years ago that I started to learn some of the raw truths about leadership, and how, in a crisis, to be the best kind of leadership role model one can be.

The definition of a leader according to the Living Leader programme is anyone who is in a position of influence over anyone else. It's not just about the leaders of organisations, it is about everybody in the business, anybody who is in a position of influence, whether it is someone on the phone supporting customers, whether it is someone in the field trying to sell a new idea, or somebody in the back office trying to collect monies. Leadership is not the preserve of the boardroom. That's an important learning, at least it was for me.

There are two leadership modes. The first of these is what we might call Manager Mode, which by the way was the mode I was in before I went on the Living Leadership course. This is when you are driving other people to perform to the optimum. In that sense it is about control, it is about 'me' telling 'you'



Paul Stobart

Leadership is not the preserve of the boardroom. That's an important learning, at least it was for me

what you're going to do. That mode is very familiar to most of us. There's nothing wrong with Manager Mode because in the right balance it is absolutely fine.

The other mode of leadership is Leader Mode, which is all about inspiring others to do it for themselves. It is about freedom, about me giving freedom to the thoughts

and the concepts that other people might have, and in so doing, through my leadership inspire others to do it for themselves.

Suffocating

I was in Manager Mode on steroids. If you're managing people in that mode all the time, telling them what to do, all of the time, it is suffocating. People never

have time to offer their own ideas or thoughts. If you're in Leader Mode all the time that can also be quite chaotic because there is no leadership, no instruction, and in a time of crisis people don't want to be inspired to do things for themselves, people want to be told what to do... 'this Covid-19 crisis, what am I going to do about it, where am I going to go?'

Communication behaviours

Manager mode is about me, leader mode is about you. Let's take it into the context of leadership behaviours because there's a very good researcher, Neil Rankin, who did lots of research and identified that the best performing people were those that exhibited optimal communication behaviours. These behaviours

of a crisis

come across in a number of different ways: Through your body language, through the written word, most importantly through what you say. What Rankin discovered was that those people who got the behaviours in the right balance were far superior to their peers. And he colour coded his ideas for clarity.

Blue is Manager Mode, all about me and giving information, informing others. Politicians use it at full throttle most of the time. There is nothing wrong

Those who got their behaviours in the right balance were far superior to their peers

with giving information, it is important for information to be shared, it just needs to be done in the right manner. Other Blue behaviours are disagreeing and proposing an idea or a thought which is actionable.

Green denotes Leader Mode, which is all about me respecting others, inspiring through my communication behaviours for others to do things for themselves, and supporting them to recognise the proposal and agree to it, then build on it. If you get these working together you get a really good team. Using words carefully and how we communicate, particularly in an online world, is really important. The same goes for listening. Test your understanding of what's

said, and pay respect to the viewpoint of others. Also, make sure you draw-in those that are quieter in the room, because often it is the quiet people who are the most reflective and analytical and have the very best ideas, so we should never forget them.

Behaviours marked out by the colour code Red should be avoided at all costs. These include shutting out and cutting someone off. We interrupt, we finish their sentence for them, all kinds of behaviours which are verging on assault. We're just dismissing their idea and implying ours is more important, which is demeaning. Also in the Red are defend or attack behaviours that may see leaders take disagreement to a personal level. We get emotional, passionate, frustrated, and we get into a personalised attack.

What Rankin discovered is the 'balance'. If you're 100 per cent Blue you will bore people senseless and be impossible to please. All Green is also a mistake. Rankin believes that the blend needs to be 40/60 or 50/50. Now, for most of us that was a real shock because I was 100 per cent Blue (if you are in a sales role, you want to be 80 per cent Green, 20 per cent Blue).

How do we relate all of this to the current crisis we face? Our communication skills perhaps matter most right now, so get the balance right. Don't be dogmatic, don't tell people what to do most of the time, summarise what others are thinking, ask for ideas, draw people in who've not yet volunteered. Very often they'll be the ones with most to offer. ■

Fidelity Energy's simplicity is The Independent Choice

AS the Managing Director and owner of telecoms reseller TIC (The Independent Choice), Julie Purdie likes to keep things simple, which is why she is so pleased to have teamed up with Fidelity Energy and is now successfully offering energy deals to a loyal base of customers in and around her company's West Midlands base.

"I like easy, simple sales and Fidelity Energy's proposition really nailed it for me," she explained.

TIC has a small team of 24 staff selling NEC, Panasonic, Mitel, Gamma and, latterly, Wildix telephony solutions, but Julie was looking for new services to offer her valued clients which have now become particularly potent in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis.

"I had been looking to expand our portfolio for some time and our partnership with Fidelity Energy is now helping our clients save money as well as increasing our overall turnover and giving us a recurring income."

Julie initially met up with Fidelity Energy Managing Director John Haw at Comms Vision at Gleneagles last November and energy sales under the TIC banner began to take off at the right time, just as the Coronavirus lockdown

began, thanks to Fidelity delivering everything as promised.

"John and his people arranged the training quickly which everybody in our team really benefited from. They were very clear and concise and then they were always on hand if we had any queries. What really impressed me was how fast they turned quotations round. The first one we worked on was for an insurance company client and we came up with a 42% saving on their energy bills which could not have been a better start!

"Initially, we were just mentioning it to a few of our clients, but we recently sent out an e-shot to a larger base of customers and the response was really, really good. They replied to the emails asking for more details and direct contact with our sales team has been really positive, so we are now looking to broaden the offer across our whole field of clients."

So, what would Julie say to any ICT company owner who believes that adding energy to his or her portfolio is a distraction from their core business?

"It's not a distraction, It's a big benefit. It is just such a simple exercise; I cannot believe

anybody would not wish to explore selling energy.

"It is just a matter of getting hold of a client's energy bills, letting Fidelity have a look at them and then sending them back saying here's the savings we can offer you. I also like the fact that if a customer can't switch because they're in a contract with another energy supplier, Fidelity can get all the paperwork signed up and we can put them on to the new rate in a year's time or whatever. It's just a very simple thing to do, which I love."

"We've always been comms centric, so when you start taking on a new product, one which we've never focused on before, support is vital. Fidelity's hand holding experience throughout the whole thing has been exemplary, and they have been very, very easy to work with.

"Another big plus for us with regards to Fidelity Energy is the multiple suppliers they deal with. This means if customer is a bit wary of one supplier, they can go with another.

"It's early days, but we want to help our clients as much as we can, so we definitely see a future with Fidelity. I am keen to work on where we are now and build up our energy base so that a lot more of our clients can benefit."



"It's not a distraction, It's a big benefit. It is just such a simple exercise; I cannot believe anybody would not wish to explore selling energy."

Julie Purdie

Covid-19 brings strategi

While there is still uncertainty about Covid-19 and its impact, there is now perhaps greater clarity than ever on future developments in the channel, according to Eurolink Connect Managing Director Claire Maddox.

In the wake of Covid-19 channel organisations have an unexpected opportunity to take stock and reposition themselves. And for ICT providers like Eurolink Connect the nature of future partnerships will be governed by the strength of responses to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown. Maddox observed some significant differences that will have a telling influence on future partnering strategies...

The most interesting aspect of this for me has been the vast divide in how businesses and/or individuals have reacted to the crisis. For example, we have seen suppliers who have innovated, reacted with optimism and stepped up to provide training and guidance, where others have batted down the hatches and gone to ground. Have a guess who we will be building relationships with moving forward.

• **Covid-19 has produced good predictors of future ICT procurement trends, and Maddox expects purchasing to be governed by a number of new rules...** Future ICT procurement will in part depend on the experience that the buyer has had in the way they themselves moved into remote working. As an industry we face a lot of experts who have specific knowledge. However, the



Claire Maddox

We all know that the business world will never revert back to the way it was at the beginning of 2020, or at least that it shouldn't

art of success will be around effectively joining all the dots in a secure and robust manner. It will be down to our industry to support and guide the innovation, as one of the biggest barriers to implementation is how you brief a new infrastructure if you don't know what is possible.

ICT procurement teams may well know the obvious solutions like cloud systems and video conferencing, but do they have the knowledge to brief a multi-

factor authentication into their networks? Do they know how to blend personal and office-based devices seamlessly? Do they realise you can have desktop phone systems that your team can take and plug in at home seamlessly?

We'll move away from a one-size-fits-all brief or tender and we will no longer be given item by item briefs. Instead, I envisage initial procurement based on a pricing and relationship differential first – are we in the right price

band and can they work with us – before working in partnership to create and maintain the infrastructure that they actually need.

• **The moment the UK went into lockdown all businesses entered a transition period. Attention has now turned to resetting strategies and reinventing how organisations operate...** We all know that the business world will never revert back to the way it was at the beginning of 2020,

or at least that it shouldn't. Businesses will become more flexible and I strongly believe we will see a blend of remote and on-premises working as we move into the post-Covid-19 lockdown world. We have also seen customers pivot and reinvent themselves to serve local communities.

Having deployed our business into remote working we found areas where manual processes were still in place that can be digitalised. Our team and office processes have changed too. During lockdown we have recruited a new sales team member using Microsoft Teams to interview, proving that the process was just as effective as a one-to-one interview. We've carried out a full induction programme across the business and made our new recruit feel very welcome. This couldn't have been done without video calling.

• **Maddox says we must ensure that investment in security underpins the drive to new business and operating models, increasing the strength of remote working solutions...** There is going to be more need for secure remote working and businesses must consider their data. Many companies reacted quickly, as we all needed to, but without a thought about their security at the time and there will be lots of vulnerability in the marketplace, which provides



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us with a great opportunity to deliver the virtual remote working model. Having come from a telecoms background, developed our networking through our ISP model and subsequently moved into the MSP space, we are well positioned to support customers from end-to-end.

• **Maddox noted an appetite for online relationships from customers, and the success of collaboration platforms has prompted organisations to take a fresh look at themselves and establish a virtual approach to doing business...**

Customer engagement is built through relationships, especially within the early stages, and the physical meeting and building of rapport are very important.

We will all adapt and it will bring out the entrepreneurial spirit in levels we have rarely, if ever, seen

But we have proven through these Covid-19 weeks that these relationships can be built across platforms such as MS Teams and Zoom, and they are more efficient and cost-effective. Before Covid-19 there was still resistance to video calling, however people have overcome the taboo and it has proven how useful it is, even to the biggest critics.

Just as we've transitioned presentations to customers to Teams, when it comes to project meetings we can have all relevant stakeholders in the virtual room at the right time. Often that isn't possible in a face-to-face meeting. It

is the most efficient use of time and avoids unnecessary journeys and pressure on resources. Meetings are also more concise and focused with video calling. There is a place for personal meetings as human interaction is important, but not as many as in the past.

• **The channel adapted remarkably well to the unprecedented conditions brought about Covid-19. Having overcome the immediate challenge, Maddox believes that we now face an opportunity to accelerate innovation and growth...**

I'm optimistic about the lasting implication of Covid-19 – not the virus, but how it will prompt a period of intense innovation and an appetite to try and ultimately adopt new solutions. In

the short-term, it's an unprecedented and awful biological incident, but we will all adapt and it will bring out the entrepreneurial spirit in levels we have rarely, if ever, seen.

We've been able to look at ways in which we can help and support those business sectors that are struggling, while showing others how we can adapt to support their new requirements. I'm also looking forward to 2025 when we can look back on this time and consider just how far we have come and just how fundamentally we have changed, how, where, and why we work. ■

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Woodham's giant leaps

Chrome Telecom Managing Director Daniel Woodham has proved over and over again that he is not averse to taking giant leaps into the unknown. His proclivity to try something new led to the formation of his business, and it's a trait that will also ensure its long-term sustainability as he seeks to keep abreast of technology in key markets.

Woodham displayed the entrepreneurial spirit that will ensure Chrome Telecom's long-term success early in his career – on coming straight out of college in fact when he entered the leisure industry and opened his own gym, but financially and professionally the venture fell short of expectations. He then took a low paid sales role in comms with long hours, having identified great potential should he make a go of it. "With one child and another on the way it was time to run headfirst into the unknown and make it work," stated Woodham.

Having started his journey into a career 'unknown' based on a hunch, and having shown true foresight in coming good and realising his potential, Woodham established Chrome Telecom in 2014 with a friend. The origins of the business lay in necessities Woodham had identified, on a personal level and among a business community in need of a telecommunications service boost. "By this point my wife was due our third child, I had worked my way up in comms, going from telemarketing to sales management and finally a field sales position," he explained.

"I had seen enough to learn three important



Daniel Woodham

With one child and another on the way it was time to run headfirst into the unknown and make it work

factors that prompted me to set up Chrome. There was a niche in the market for a telecommunications company with a one-stop-shop portfolio for customers, I was a good salesman and believed in helping people in business, and I was not great at working for people. I needed to go out and build a team with a drive equal to my own.

"Now my priority is for staff to embark on the company's mission, which includes evolving our culture and embracing changes throughout the stages of our journey. I like to see my staff flourish personally

and professionally. This is integral to Chrome as we are a small company, but with a big heart."

Award win

Chrome Telecom quickly established itself as a standout Pragma reseller and collected a partner award last year which reflected company growth of 67 per cent from June 2016 to June 2019. Woodham forecasts growth of 57 per cent on June 2019 with an estimated expansion of 300 per cent to 2023. "I believe in organic growth, but I also have a few tricks up my sleeve in the form of calculated risks with the possibility

of future acquisitions," added Woodham.

Chrome Telecom's primary base of customers are currently within the care and healthcare industry which will remain a core focus area. "We will continue to work within this sector due to a growing need for unified communications," added Woodham. "We are helping to bring the sector into a new era of call management and technology.

"My interest also lies in UCaaS and the ever increasing growth and adoption of teamwork applications. CPaaS is

enabling seamless customer journeys and video will be the new voice. The Covid-19 pandemic – while being a terrible and unsettling time – has highlighted why my interest in video and UC is justified. Technology that delivers multiple means of communication, including video and remote working, has never been more crucial for businesses." ■

Just a minute with Daniel Woodham...

Role models: Tyson Fury. He came from humble beginnings, has a can-do attitude and puts his heart into achieving goals.

Your main strength and what could you work on? I'm intuitive about people and business. I can maximise peoples' potential and identify latent skills they may not see in themselves. But I can be too much of a perfectionist and could work on delegation.

Best piece of advice you have been given? From my mother: 'Keep your word and do what you say you'll do'. If you shake on a deal and it turns out to be bad, honour it and learn from the mistake.

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? I would have followed my family into property development.

One example of something you have overcome: Early in my career, being younger and looking younger (not any more), getting people to take me at my word was a challenge at times.

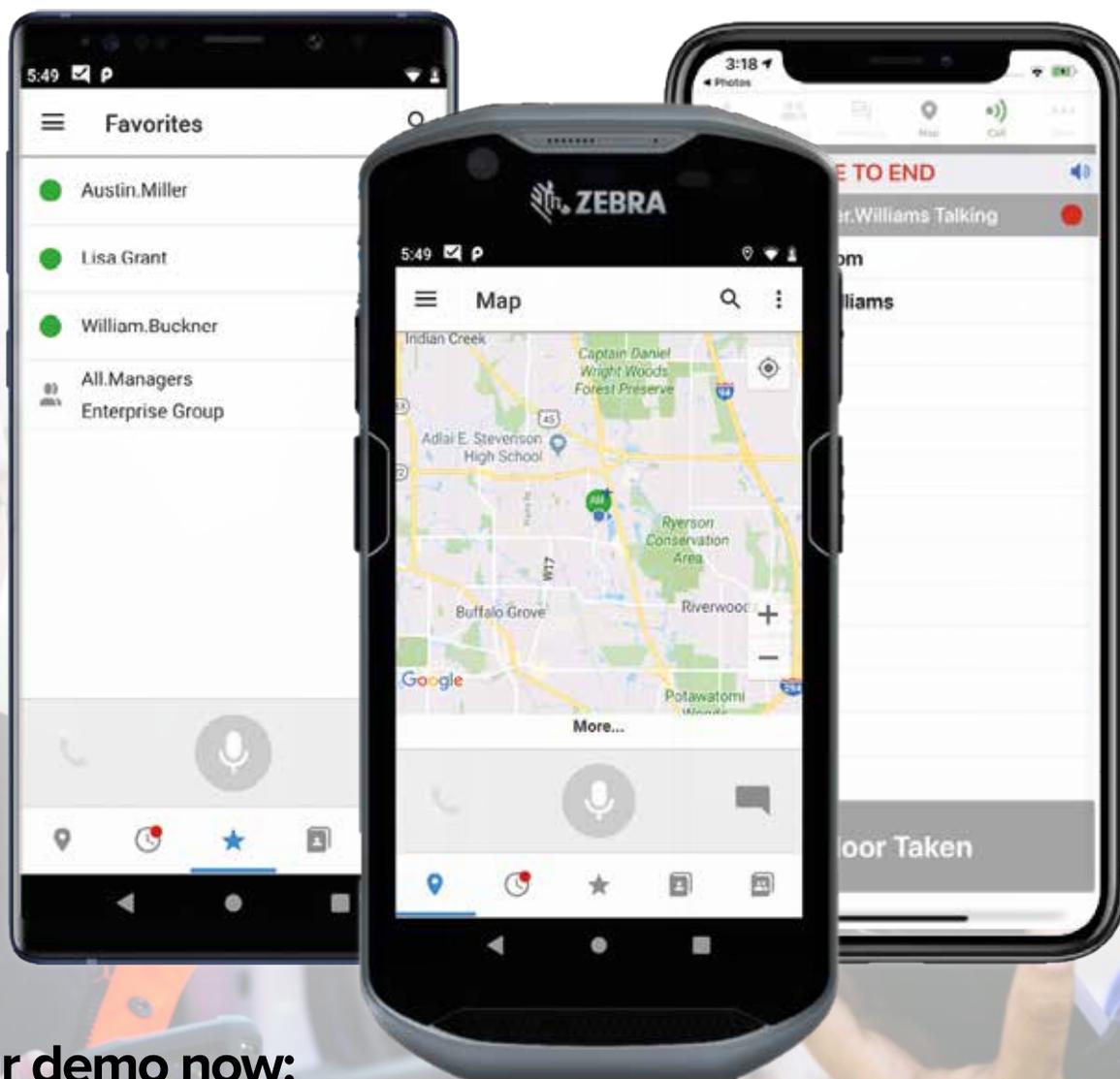
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Yet it can be difficult to achieve instant, concise and flexible communication with team members who are working remotely - which is becoming commonplace.

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TinCan shows true mettle

Having thrived in a highly paid job, TinCan Comms Managing Director Amy Mitchell's decision to strike out on her own shows the depth of her ambition.

How did you get into comms?

By accident. I was working as a travel agent when the person I was booking holidays for asked me to work for him. I started as a fact-finder and data collector making 150 calls a day, before changing to telesales and eventually becoming UK Sales Manager for the business. Corporate sales wasn't really me, so I thought it was time to go on my own.

How risky was the move to strike out on your own?

Very. Walking away from a high salary job I was doing comfortably in to start my own business was made even more difficult thanks to a clause in my previous contract that wouldn't allow me to work in the sector for a long period of time. Undeterred, I had £1,000 in the business account and off I went. TinCan Comms was born in 2016 with a business partner, a relationship that lasted about three months.

What was the biggest challenge you faced?

Losing my business partner within three months of going on our own was a big challenge. What can be a very lonely experience was immediately heightened, but I used the experience to spur me on and achieve what I wanted to do. I persevered and grew the company by focusing on customer service and ensuring we developed strategic partnerships with our clients. Telecoms had started to get



Amy Mitchell

Telecoms had started to get a reputation for behaving like the used car sales or double glazing sectors. I wanted to change that

a reputation for behaving like the used car sales or double glazing sectors, and I wanted to change that.

What have been the main turning points?

Getting our suppliers right was key. We made mistakes at the beginning and went with friends of friends, which led to real issues and we paid for it with customers threatening to leave if we didn't change things.

Now we are surrounded by excellent suppliers and are able to concentrate on growing the business.

How fast is TinCan Comms growing?

We have grown 320 per cent since 2017 and, with ambitious expansion plans in place, we expect to increase turnover by 600 per cent between now and 2023. In the future, we may look to collaborate with or acquire

like-minded businesses to support our growth. We also see expansion coming from understanding our customers and how tailored communications can help them reach their potential. There's lots of new technology entering the marketplace and we will look to grow our business by matching these advancements with the requirements of our clients.

How do you see the impact of Covid-19 on the workplace?

The current pandemic has changed the way people work as we know it. Technology that allows home working, total flexibility and virtual meetings has been around for years, but for some reason has always seemed out of reach for smaller businesses. Overnight this reluctance has changed and cloud-based softwares FaceTime, Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Houseparty are now a fixture of everyday life. Going forward, I think people will be asking for this technology before we can get our sales pads out. They'll be opening conversations with 'does it plug-and-play at home?', 'Can I see my whole team on screen?', 'Do I have to travel to that sales meeting 200 miles away?'

Is the comms sector at a watershed moment?

Key questions have come to the fore: Will the flexibility of hosted and cloud products finally sell themselves over the traditional on-premises telephone system? Is

what was once deemed safe, traditional and a necessity now changed in the eyes of the customer? New collaborations and development projects will be accelerated as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. For TinCan Comms, we have everything we need to become one of the Midlands' leading telecoms service providers. And our close-knit team and agility means we can support customers quickly when larger firms are too slow to move. ■

Just a minute with Amy Mitchell...

Role models: I like people who have a real rags to riches tale, such as Alan Sugar, so I'll go with him.

Your main strength and what could you work on? I have a genuine interest in people and what makes them tick. This is my biggest strength, but it can also be a weakness as my desire to find out more means I can sometimes come across as a little nosy.

Best piece of advice you have been given? If you think you can do something, you normally can!

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? I always wanted to run my own business, but, if pushed, as I went to drama college I'd be on the West End. Or, I always fancied a part in EastEnders.

How do you relax when not working? You're never off duty when running your own business. But overseas holidays are the best way to completely relax, or walking Rosie – you may have seen her on the TinCan social media accounts.

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5G: Start planning now

Despite its technical attributes, 5G alone will not drive the next tech revolution. So which other technologies and factors will combine with 5G to maximise opportunities for the channel, and how will these combinations transform sectors? We asked Dr Arslan Usman, System Architect at Pangea.

A decade ago, the year 2020 was forecast as the year when tech breakthroughs would change the world as we know it. Those predictions weren't far off the mark – 5G is exactly the kind of technology that'll cause a paradigm shift, and considering that 5G roll outs began with 14 countries in 2019, we're close to reaching that transformational point. "What makes 5G so revolutionary is its ability to pair so well with every vertical industry," stated Usman. "It's the combinations with those technologies that'll open up profitable opportunities for the channel.

"Many of those combinations fall under the umbrella of smart cities. Vehicle to infrastructure (V2X) is often seen as the flagship innovation of smart cities (and the future in general), where cellular-connected cars communicate with everything around them to boost road safety, avoid traffic congestion, and of course drive without a driver. V2X itself is a complex tech, but it'll come to life when paired with 5G networks. When that happens, there's going to be a huge market for it."

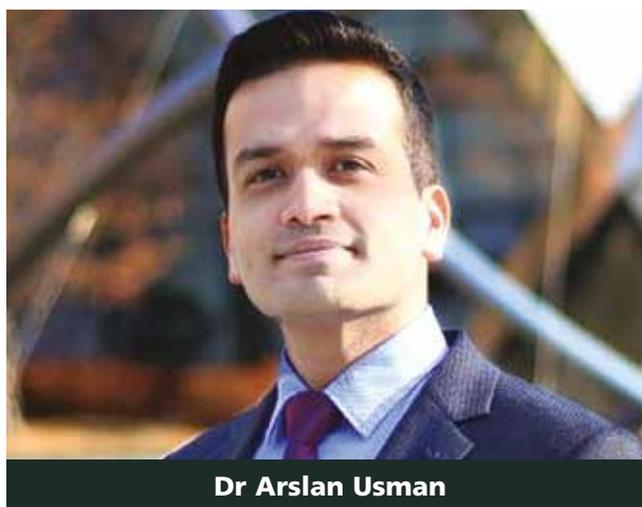
Connected drones are another element of smart cities which can provide game-changing services, pointed out Usman. "Drones equipped with

AI-based algorithms can search and rescue quicker and more efficiently than humans, with their heat and movement-sensing capabilities," he added. "For indoor operations, we all know Google Maps doesn't work in buildings, but drones can scout out floor plans for navigation and reconnaissance. And drones set up for fast, reliable home delivery would come in very handy right now.

"Or take healthcare for example. Ambulance drones can work in tandem with rescue drones and bring first aid supplies to rescue sites. Connected ambulances and care homes will enable remote diagnosis and reduce the strain on hospitals. The catch is that all these technologies require reliable, superfast, or ultra low latency connectivity offered by 5G networks."

Business models

There are three main 5G business models, explained Usman: Enhanced mobile broadband (emBB), ultra-reliable low latency communication (URLLC), and massive machine-type communication (mMTC). All of the 5G-related vertical applications rely on one or more of these three cases. "The current roll outs of 5G draw from enhanced mobile broadband, proven by the lightning speeds reported by those who've had the chance



Dr Arslan Usman

If we're out of lockdown by the end of June, we'll see loads of sudden changes in the 5G world through the rest of 2020

to use them," added Usman. "But that's exactly the challenge right now, because so few have access to the 5G networks, device manufacturers can't tap into profits from 5G-enabled devices just yet. So national coverage is the biggest hurdle. Once 5G networks cover more of the country there'll be a massive customer base for 5G-powered devices like phones, dongles, routers and more. But the onus is on operators to get the networks to that point."

Another challenge comes with URLLC, pointed out

Usman. Network operators already have the capacity to deploy this business model, but there's a lack of preparation in vertical industries. "For example, V2X needs to first work through its security issues to become viable, as nobody wants hackable cars," commented Usman. "Healthcare needs to update its policies to allow for digital automation. And drone-based services need strong regulations that ensure we don't see more scenarios like the Gatwick airport drone incident. URLLC will really come into fruition when vertical industry customers are ready to meet

network operators in the middle. Something we're getting closer to each day."

The most exciting part of 5G is the sheer number of business needs it fulfils, enthused Usman. Between the three business cases of eMBB, URLLC, and mMTC, he says it offers all the key requirements of vertical industries, from ultra-reliable telesurgery to the massive IoT connectivity for thousands of sensors in a smart factory. "This is all down to network slicing, a 5G technology that allows operators to customise resources like data rates, latency, bandwidth and reliability based on exactly what a solution needs," he added.

"Once we're on the other side of the Covid-19 pandemic, network operators will focus on faster 5G roll outs to reach national coverage. They'll also work on the maturity of 5G networks and equip them to standalone without any 4G technology.

"Channel partners need to be ready for when national coverage does take place, as this will lead to a massive influx of end user devices in the market. If we're out of lockdown by the end of June, we'll see loads of sudden changes in the 5G world through the rest of 2020. So make sure you've got your 5G plans in place." ■

Key components of the 5G connectivity era set to combine

5G will become the entry ticket to a new world of technology and applications, unleashing industries from the relative limitations of traditional infrastructure. And according to Gavin Jones, Channel Director at BT Wholesale, it is time to wake up to the coming revolution...

5G is about the integration of business services and we will see multiple different technologies for complementary use cases within a single building, office or campus environment in the future, believes Jones. "The more society relies on mobile connectivity, the more we will all need to focus on improving network capacity, latency and quality," he stated. "This will mean an extensive evolution of the current architecture to address single points of failure and shared fate scenarios, moving content closer to the edge and extending quality of service implementations to full network slicing. Therefore, it is imperative that the channel ensures it is partnering with operators that can help them deliver their end-to-end 5G mission, through a combination of technical knowledge and industry experience."

5G networks consist of multifarious technologies, all working in tandem to deliver a superfast, resilient and intelligent end result. As such, these smart new



Gavin Jones

There is no need to delay. Channel resellers should start planning now

networks will demand a shift in how the whole industry looks to harness the power of these networks. "Dialogue with operators, as well as the manufacturers of 5G-ready devices, will be imperative to maximise the opportunities for the channel and their customers," added Jones. "There is no need to delay. Channel resellers should start planning now."

The expected surge in demand for 5G network capacity, driven by video consumption, augmented and virtual reality, IoT and other new data-hungry applications, is going to change how capacity in high density areas is managed.

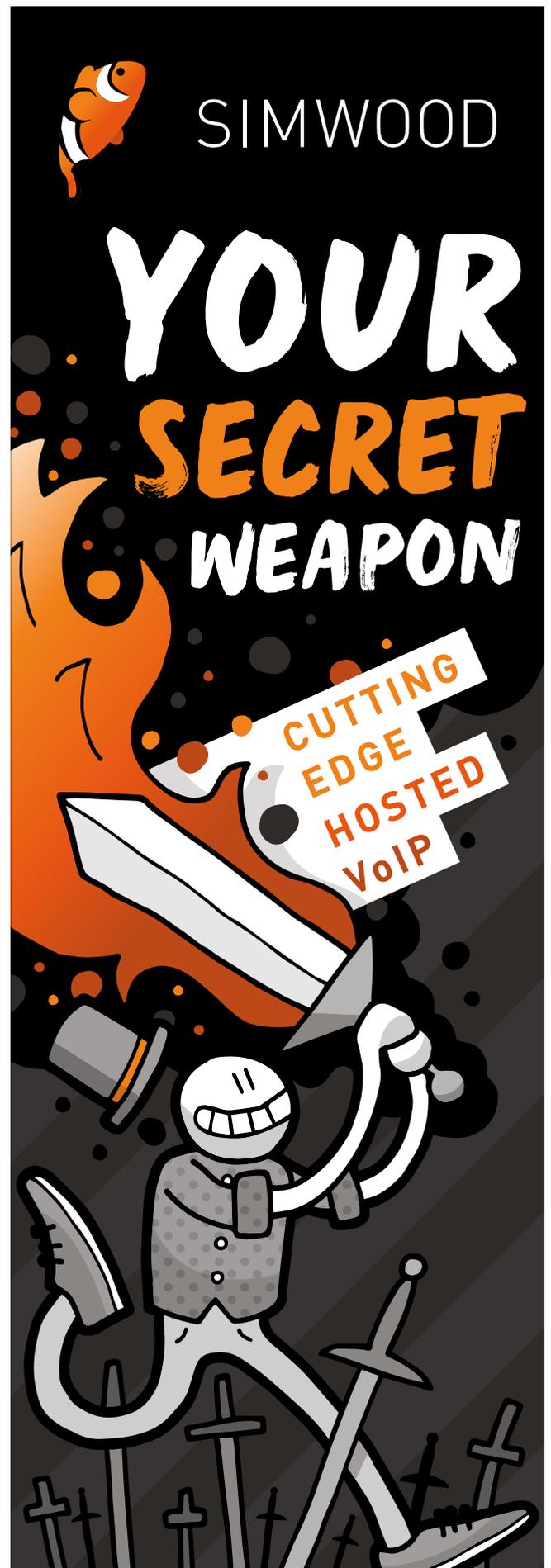
"Small cells technology will be needed to complement 5G and can become the capacity workhorses of the network, providing a more cost-effective approach to managing capacity within built-up areas and buildings with dense populations, such as sports stadia," said Jones.

Knowledge

"Building and maintaining 5G networks is complex, and that's before everyday services are rolled out on top. Therefore, collaboration based on strong partnerships with operators will speed up the development of next generation data-driven, automated, self-healing solutions, all of which help to minimise downtime, create 5G business models and maximise channel opportunities."

In terms of planning, while 5G will rely on some fixed-wireless substitution, fixed networks will continue to play a critical role in mobile delivery, providing capacity through the backhaul and core network, pointed out Jones. "Providers and partners need to continue to deliver on their technologies to ensure seamless services," he added.

"In other areas, the ongoing debate around the Government's 5G auction will need to be resolved to help this technology move forward, and regulatory bodies need to continue to be involved in order to ensure 5G best delivers." ■



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Has the office had its day in



GAVIN JONES
BT WHOLESALE

"There will have been apprehension from partners around how a Covid-enforced decentralised workforce may impact productivity, but the situation has been handled well and had a positive effect in some cases. Equally, the speed with which transitions have taken place with minimal disruption will fuel belief that investment in remote working processes is worth exploring. Given that offices will require social distancing measures, decreasing capacity, we may see partners blending practices, providing a centralised hub but placing less emphasis on its consistent use while also taking advantage of remote working's geographical and flexibility benefits. The promise of agility will become a key characteristic of partners' future efforts. We need to bring products to market that require simple activation, limiting the need for complex reselling and build processes. Covid-19 has driven an increase in demand for self-serve deployments and digital-only selling and these will only become more common within the landscape."



One good thing to come out of the Covid-19 pandemic must be the acceptance of on-line collaborative working. People have become more confident of using video conferencing platforms and something that used to be regarded as a dark art for tech geeks has become a working norm.



PHIL RACE
ADEPT

"In these Covid times you'd be insane not to question the entire paradigm of commuting to an office to conduct work, when work isn't a 'place', it's an 'activity'. However, I think the office as a place to commune, communicate and collaborate will continue to have a purpose and remains important, particularly in the psychological aspects of being an employee. I think ADEPT will adapt its strategy, taking a more holistic view of the companies we serve, where the boundaries of companies include the kitchen table and the home study, as well as the office desk. This changes the security model, the support requirements, the network needs, and the cloud requirements for many businesses. FTTP at home anyone?"



IAN ROWAN
WILDIX

"It will be a long time until we return to the office en masse, if we ever do in the same way again, not just through fear when the pandemic is over, but also acceptance that has been gained during this lockdown that people can work from home, can still be efficient and actually increase productivity. Add to this that there will be a reduction in operational costs from running the office and this rise in the "Smart Worker" mentality will be the new normal for so many. I think we will see a big change in the devices people use at home. People working in isolation won't want a headset and will look at devices that are aesthetically pleasing when located in a shared area of their houses and also provide functions that help with the work-life balance. This is critical to productivity increases for smart workers."

This has given channel players a great opportunity to sell home working solutions to clients and many resellers have reported record revenues in the early stages of the lockdown.



DAN MACKRELL
SHIRE LEASING

"I believe Covid-19 will have a permanent effect on the traditional office space long after the lockdown is over. The ICT channel offers a wide range of feature rich technology which enables businesses to mobilise their workforce to work remotely. Covid-19 has forced us to embrace this technology and now we can benefit from the efficiencies it offers whilst maintaining service levels. During lockdown our dealers have closed business remotely through our portal and completed documentation electronically. Research shows remote workers can be more productive. Coupled with the reduced costs, it would be hard to ignore the case for a mobilised workforce. Whatever businesses decide, we do know future strategies will certainly continue to embrace the technology they've been exposed to and are utilising now."



MYLES LEACH
NFON

"It is an over-simplification to say that the 'office has had its day.' According to YouGov, around 40 percent of Brits had never worked from home before. Necessity is the mother of invention – everyone who can feasibly work from home has now done so. Businesses are seeing the benefits of something they may have been culturally adverse too in the past. As we adjust to this new model, businesses will implement smarter working practices to better enable a more agile workforce. However, many businesses will have existing office lease commitments – so they cannot just 'pull a Twitter' and adopt full remote working overnight. There will be an increase in demand for technologies that enable effective working from any location, which is great news for the channel. The key for vendors is to make sure they are supporting partners, providing the tools they need to successfully sell into any working environment."

On the flip side, for some industries such as retail and manufacturing, staff working from home represents a huge challenge. But the biggest impact could be around the corner. With so many people working successfully remotely, will they ever want to return to an office environment? Are we set to see a rapid decline in city-based offices where communications products and services are the lifeblood of channel businesses?

Brianne Kimmel, a venture capitalist in Silicon Valley believes "there is a place for a physical office to exist,



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Can the new business normal?

but it should be an optional space for employees to choose based on preferred working style”.

YouGov recently questioned 2,000 office workers across the UK and, beyond changes to productivity, the majority said there are aspects of traditional working they sorely miss such as in-person conversations with co-workers and the relationships they have forged in the office. So, will people be hankering to get back to the office water cooler for some good old-fashioned office banter or will they prefer to spend more quality time at home without all the hassle of travelling to a workplace?

For this month’s Kaleidoscope, we asked channel players a simple question: “Do you think the traditional office has had its day?” Predictably, the responses were mixed because, like so many issues surrounding this pandemic, who really knows what the future holds?

One thing is clear. Agile ICT resellers that can respond to customer demands for flexible, robust, and secure solutions that successfully blend remote and office communications will ultimately win through.



ANDREW COOPER
NEC

“It’s clear that the world of business communications will be a very different landscape post-pandemic and many businesses have been looking closely at the costs of office space. To stay ahead of the curve, resellers will need to be agile and adaptable with their approach. Many workers who’ve found quick fixes using free video conferencing apps will soon start looking for more robust and feature-rich business-grade solutions. This is good news for the channel. Security is another factor and there’ll be plenty of IT managers looking to keep a tighter grip on their company data. We’ve already seen a growing demand for call management applications and presence – many businesses with contact centres will look for tools to manage their customer service levels even when their teams are spread across multiple locations or working remotely. The goalposts have moved for resellers, but the opportunities are alive and well!”



GLYN THOMAS
IP CORTEX

“Most businesses have been adopting more flexible working practices, enabled by technological advancements in recent years. With investment in better connectivity we will see a dramatic increase in remote working and reduced office footprint. However, there remains a role for traditional office working as the reinforcement of company culture and the comradery of physically being with colleagues are some things that technology cannot replace. If recent months are anything to go by, then it will only have a positive impact, as we are communicating and engaging even more than usual. Reduced travel and the flexibility of broadening the working day has created even greater ‘presence’ than before. We are capitalising on this opportunity to get even closer to our partners via all UC channels, especially video conferencing.”



ANDY SMETHURST
GAMMA

“Whilst it’s safe to say that the way we work will never be the same again, I do believe that it’s important for employers to not lose sight of the fact that for many staff a home-office environment may not be conducive to a productive day, five days a week. I don’t fully buy into the idea that if given a choice everybody will want to work from home going forward. As humans, we are incredibly social creatures, and we crave the company of others. As someone who works in sales, I feed off the energy that only an office environment can provide. The challenge being, I only need it a couple of times a week, especially when you throw in a commute. For the channel, Gamma see all of this as an opportunity. Businesses will need to arm their employees with the right communication and collaboration tools as well as access requirements for them to work effectively anytime, anywhere.”



JOLINE CRAMOND
FOCUS GROUP

Covid-19 has changed our world and changed our industry! The ICT channel can only assist the landscape of the disruption this pandemic has caused. We would be ignorant to think that we could ever carry on doing business as we were, this is the awakening that was needed. Do we need to go into the office? Probably in some instances for our mental health but there is now an acceptable balance between home workers and office presence. As one of the strongest contributors to the UK economy I feel certain that the diversity in our product portfolios will keep our sector strong. Adapting to the disruption is key to our success. Our product portfolio is stronger than ever, and it will only adapt with the ever-changing landscape of ICT.”



SUSIE WARDELL
EVOKE TELECOM

“The traditional office as we knew it will never be the same again, especially in the upper SME, mid-market and enterprise segments. Whether you look from a commercial, health, wellbeing or productivity angle, businesses have taken giant steps to create the office of the future that can’t be retraced. Using technology to work from anywhere, on any device, work is now a thing you do, not a place you go. Sales strategy for Evoke will focus on creating additional value by maximising the technologies that have already been trialled or invested in, whilst ensuring security of a remotely distributed workforce remains high on every agenda. From a marketing perspective, messaging is no longer about a ‘move to cloud’ or a cost consolidation discussion. We believe future marketing messages should be built on empathy and understanding of vertical specific organisational issues and business challenges, using technology as mere enabler to provide the answers.”



ADAM CATHCART
9 GROUP

“While home working is not new, the crisis has fast-tracked adoption for leaders who have been more hesitant to adapt. The technology is proven, and those who were once skeptical are now singing the virtues of this way of working. Coming out of lockdown, we predict a blended approach, with employers giving those who want to work from home the option to do so. For some, isolated working or distractions at home can be a struggle and these individuals should be given an option to work from a more traditional office environment. The post-lockdown era for sales and marketing will see brands competing for attention in the digital space. Those who have carefully considered their strategy and adapted their messaging and techniques during the lockdown period, will thrive. Staying connected with our partners and maintaining very positive, genuine relationships has been our priority during lockdown, as it always has been.”



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Vapour's top techie



Stuart Hodgkinson

CLOUD and network engineer Stuart Hodgkinson is now the man at the forefront of Vapour Cloud's data centre and infrastructure operations having joined the Elland-based ICT provider from the Salford Royal Foundation Trust where he was a senior network technician. Hodgkinson said: "During my short induction period – before the Covid-19 lockdown – it quickly became apparent that I'll have an environment to thrive in." Vapour Cloud CEO Tim Mercer added: "Stuart has been involved

in managing NHS Trust's virtual infrastructures using VMware hypervisors to virtualise their estates. He's been responsible for implementing the free-to-patient and staff Wi-Fi mandated by NHS Digital; and has held second and third line support roles, which shows the depth of his technical know-how. This degree of insight is exactly what we were looking for."

Also on the move...

DCC Technology has appointed Clive Fitzharris as MD of Exertis International. He was Head of Group Strategy and Development for DCC since 2017 and also a board member of DCC Technology.



Clive Fitzharris

Fitzharris joined DCC in 2009 as Head of Development for its Energy Division which over an eight year period tripled profits and entered ten new countries. In related news, Denis Tobin has been appointed as Finance Director, Exertis International, having previously been Finance Director for Exertis Pro AV (Americas) and Exertis Mobile Living. Tim Griffin, DCC Technology and Exertis Group MD, said: "These appointments reflect the evolution of our business as we continue to increase our global presence."

XELION UK has accelerated its expansion plans with the appointment of Craig Howell in a business development role. His sales experience includes stints at telecoms companies



Craig Howell

and media outlets in the industry sector. Prior to his career in comms Howell was a qualified PGA golf professional instructor working for the Leaderboard golf course group. Xelion UK MD Dave Reynolds said: "Craig's sales ability and account management skills will allow us to expand operations at a faster rate. The pandemic crisis has been a proving ground for home working and many customers will want to adopt remote working on a permanent basis. Craig will ensure that we and our partners are able to manage this window of opportunity."

INGRAM Micro UK has pulled in Gary Lomas as Sales Director for the business and its services arm Comms-care. He brings 30 years industry experience to the role including a 13 year stint at Logicalis UK, and spells at Ultima Business Solutions and Computacenter. "Our partners have never needed to demonstrate their value and relevance to customers more than they do now," commented Lomas.

A BRACE of Business Development Manager appointments have strengthened Abzorb's regional presence in central, south west England and Wales, the territories of Tim Loveday who joins after a spell doing consultancy work. His 20 year sector experience also includes time at Nildram, O-Bit, Cable&Wireless, Coms.Com and Gamma – all channel roles. Abzorb has also bolstered its Scotland and Northern Ireland operations with the hire of Andrew Johnson whose background includes engineering experience and a stint at ISP HighNet.

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