



Charterhouse CEO eyes £100m as buying spree kicks off p22



Dowd on adjusting to, and harnessing Covid-19 p28

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Keynes NHS emergency

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...n plans weren't we demonstrated value adding res- n fit into an organ- urement strategy." dler, Head of IT at MKUH, added: massive step for- proving access to proven invaluable patients safe during pandemic." is rolling out a l fibre network in es as part of its t City Investment

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Comms People

This month's movers and shakers



Boxx solves NHS fibre emergency

AN URGENT call to Boxx prompted an emergency response that provided Milton Keynes University Hospital (MKUH) with full fibre in superfast time.

SPECIAL REPORT

The CityFibre partner installed a five Gbps connection in 14 days followed by an upgrade during lockdown.

"We typically have more time to deliver a project like this but after being called in at the last minute the timescales were more than ambitious," said Dean Burgin (pictured), co-owner at Boxx Communications.

"By working collaboratively we delivered the connection in time ensuring MKUH's digi-

tal migration plans weren't delayed; and we demonstrated where, as a value adding reseller, Boxx can fit into an organisation's procurement strategy."

Ollie Chandler, Head of IT Infrastructure at MKUH, added: "This is a massive step forward in improving access to care and has proven invaluable in keeping patients safe during the Covid-19 pandemic."

CityFibre is rolling out a city-wide full fibre network in Milton Keynes as part of its £4bn Gigabit City Investment

Programme. The Milton Keynes investment amounts to circa £40m. Jean Gowin, CityFibre's City Manager for Milton Keynes, said: "Stories like this bring to life the immense value digital connectivity plays in our lives."

"Nothing is more important than our health and wellbeing, and digital technology can help to streamline service delivery, ensure the right people have access to the right data at the right time to improve outcomes, and even provide new models of care delivery."

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

FOR the comms channel, fears of potential recession and economic collapse may be less concerning than for most other sectors. In fact, the time to come could be described as 'opportunity rampant'.

So it would be wrong to label our

market as 'constrained', and there is little benefit in doing so when you consider that the current climate of uncertainty represents an unprecedented market hotspot for technology we've been extolling for years, that has until now, in the main, not been taken as seriously as it should have been.

The link between Covid-19 and the vertical ascent of UCaaS will never be eradicated. That is not all: The industry sits at a watershed moment and it's sink or swim. In other words, resellers already geared up for recurring revenues and doing cloud business are far better positioned to thrive than those who perhaps sat on their hands in the past and now face their own, potentially painful transformation to a new operating model when the pressure is on to give users what they really want – total flexibility.

This wrench from tradition may be too much for some, fuelling a fresh phase of M&A in the sector as larger organisations capable of meeting the needs of the market seek greater scale and to extend their regional influence, such as Charterhouse Voice & Data (see page 22).

Our industry has always been critical, but it is becoming ever more important and at last being recognised as key to underpinning economic growth and helping to keep Britain working, and safer from the effects of a deadly pandemic. It's not surprising that interest from investors hardly waned amid lockdown disruption.

The pages that follow are rampant with insights into the many opportunities that lie ahead, and we explore the various positive outcomes experienced by reseller businesses during what has been a tragically created set of life-changing circumstances.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Connectus in EdTech deal



Paul Ruocco

AN EDTECH project to revamp the educational system is being supported by Connectus, which has been appointed a technical partner for Eduu.school.

Connectus will support Chester-based GLUU which built a network of global educational leaders and industry experts in the areas of online learning, curriculum creation, publishing, mental health and teacher personal development.

Eduu.school content will be used in online lessons, and the platform is supported by a technical helpdesk team led by Connectus CTO Duncan Shaw.

GLUU MD Sean Gardner said: "We're living in a different world and the new system needs

to do two things: It needs to create a national EdTech platform to deliver one response to the challenges faced post Covid-19, rather than via the 50-plus different platforms being used by schools before now.

"Secondly, the curriculum today is not built to support home learning with parents acting as a coach. We're building a curriculum that's suitable for home and in-school learning."

Commenting on the partnership, Connectus Chairman Paul Ruocco said: "Via our Connect-Protect-Collaborate model we will provide and maintain a high availability hosting environment, cyber security and endpoint protection."

NEWS ROUNDUP

THE addition of new staff to boost Jola's software development, product management and sales operations is reflective of record breaking partner recruitment efforts in April and May, according to MD Andrew Dickinson. All candidates were interviewed using MS Teams and the new employees were inducted virtually. "We were keen not to put our recruitment drive on hold," said Dickinson. "We embraced a new way of recruiting which has worked well. It may even influence our recruitment policies moving forwards."

FORWARD thinking resellers that have made the move to cloud revenues have proved well-suited to the Covid-19 crisis and stand to gain most as organisations enter Phase Two of lockdown – emergence and taking stock, according to Keith Jackson, EMEA Channel Sales Director at 8x8. "Many customers will now be reflecting on remote working and asking whether what they moved with is fit for purpose for the next two years," he commented. "The partners that grow significantly now are the ones which can adapt and respond to this opportunity." What does Phase Two mean to you? See page 16



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NEWS ROUNDUP

TALKTALK Business MD of Partners Richard Thompson has broadened his remit in a new role as the firm's Director of Partners, taking on Carrier and SI alongside the marketing and partner sales teams, thereby encompassing all indirect channels to market. Former Director for Carrier and SIs Ruth Kennedy is tasked with building a new team focused primarily on business development activities across all business units. CEO Tristia Harrison commented: "We want to create a new team that will work across the business to explore all of the opportunities that a fibre future will bring." TalkTalk Business MD Jonathan Kini reaffirmed: "We will remain focused on a full fibre future."

IN A financial update Video firm Zoom posted Q1 2021 revenues of \$328.2m, up 169% year-over-year. The company added 265,400 customers with more than 10 employees, up 354% year-over-year. "We were humbled by the accelerated adoption of the Zoom platform around the globe in Q1," said Eric S. Yuan, founder and CEO. "We also supported an unprecedented number of free participants, including over 100,000 K-12 schools around the world."

TNP bags key assets from K3

THE NAV People (TNP) has completed the acquisition of certain UK NAV-focused assets from the administration of K3 Business Technology Group's MS Dynamics business unit.

The transaction was funded in cash at completion from TNP's balance sheet.

Since FPE Capital's investment in 2018 TNP has doubled customer numbers.

FPE Capital Managing Partner Henry Sallitt commented: "This transaction accelerates the revenue growth being achieved by TNP as customers upgrade legacy business applications and migrate to the cloud."

Paul White, Executive Chairman of TNP, added: "The transition to the cloud creates real challenges for our smaller competitors, and a significant opportunity for those who have the depth to deliver the services that customers require."



Paul White

Deal trio reaffirms channel's resilience

A STRING of deals completed by Knight Corporate Finance reaffirm the channel's resilience and value proposition as investment and funding continues despite the lockdown, affirmed Director Adam Zoldan.

The technology and telecoms adviser has completed three deals so far during the Covid-19 restrictions. Its latest transaction involved advising IT managed service provider EACS on its multi-million funding package with Shawbrook Bank.

"All credit to the EACS management team who were able to deliver at a challenging time for a fund raise," commented Zoldan. "I am sure the channel as a whole will take heart from this success story."

Zoldan noted that the ICT sector has been critical in keeping the UK open for business and 'deserves recognition'.

"The buoyancy of the sector is reflected in the strong deal flow and continued commitment from buyers, sellers, funders and investors," he added.

"Our view is that a combination of recurring revenue model and compelling growth opportunities will ensure that value creation prospects will remain strong for some time."



Adam Zoldan

Zoldan also pointed to negative commentator speculation about the channel's prospects

during these testing times, which he labels as 'misinformation'. "We saw first-hand how the channel took stock of the situation and worked tirelessly to ensure that their customers had the solutions and tools to deliver effective remote working," added Zoldan.

"It felt obvious to us that this huge positive impact on businesses would be appreciated by funders and investors. This has been reflected in the continued deal activity."

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Circulation 01635 588 869

ISSN 1366-5243



Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations ABC total average circulation 15,300 (Jan-Dec 2019, 12,380 print, 2,920 digital)

bpl. | A BPL Business Publication

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

Subscriptions
Subscription rates for 12 issues:
UK, £65; Overseas: £80 (incl p&p)
Back issues can be obtained:
UK £6 (incl p&p), Overseas £10 each (incl p&p)
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Bamboo's big college move

BAMBOO Technology Group has put a new spin on the concept of attracting local talent by moving to the centre of technical skills development in its region. The company is planning to relocate its HQ to new premises at Gloucestershire College in September.

More specifically, a 9,500 square foot office space at the College's Cheltenham Campus close to GCHQ and the Cyber Business Park development.

The move will double Bamboo's current capacity and place it on the doorstep of increasing new talent, skills and services, according to MD Lorrin White.

"Collaboration and education are key elements in attracting new talent into our industry and driving innovation, and the college has afforded us an opportunity to work with it in a technology hot spot that will nurture and educate a critical talent pool," she stated.

"We will ensure our own teams take advantage of the increased cyber courses becom-



Lorrin White

ing available and hope to provide reciprocal education opportunities as our respective focus on technology, cyber and digital develops."

Andy Bates, Chief Financial Officer at Gloucestershire College, added: "With Cheltenham Campus forming part of the town's growing reputation as the cyber capital of the UK, thanks to the recent launch of our cyber degree apprenticeship, it makes sense for Bamboo to make the most of our location, facilities and services."

NEWS ROUNDUP

LAN3 founder Steve Thompson has set up a new cloud solutions and services provider business that he claims meets the needs of post-Covid-19 businesses. "I loved the journey at LAN3 but it was time to move on to a new challenge," said Thompson. "The technology world was changing. The way organisations were consuming IT was changing. And the way that technology buyers wanted to be sold to was changing. That's why I founded XTECH IT, a new generation of IT reseller for the intelligent cloud era."

TECH funder Lease Group has kicked off a partner recruitment campaign and sent a stark message to the market – 'now is not the time to be complacent'. "The impact of Covid-19 has left many businesses reeling and a good cash reserve will be absolutely paramount for getting 2020 back on track," said Group MD James Phillips. "But businesses can't simply put technology upgrades on hold. As such, leasing is set to be the go-to method for funding equipment and technology."

Calligo builds Irish presence following Itomic acquisition

CALLIGO'S Irish presence has received another boost following the acquisition of Cork and Dublin-based IT managed services provider Itomic Voice & Data, which specialises in Microsoft 365 and Azure services.

The deal is Jersey HQ'd Calligo's seventh transaction in three years and follows January's acquisition of Dublin's DC Networks.

"With the addition of Itomic Voice & Data we are now one of the largest IT service providers in Ireland with a sizeable presence in both Cork and Dublin – Ireland's two largest



Julian Box

economic regions – and the capability to serve businesses throughout the country," commented Julian Box, founder and CEO of Calligo. "We focused

our current expansion strategy on Ireland because of its growing number of innovative businesses developing new data-reliant tools and services."



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NEWS ROUNDUP

AIM-listed cloud firm iomart reported revenues up 9% to £112.6m and adjusted EBITDA up 3% to £43.5m in its full year to 31st March. The company also noted profit before tax rose 4% to £16.8m. CEO Angus MacSween said: "This is the twelfth consecutive year of growth since the transition of the business to cloud services in 2008. As we look forward to the next stage of growth, we do so with our teams all working remotely and the world around us considerably changed due to the impact of Covid-19. The switch to remote working has only accelerated the move to the cloud which will be a growth driver over the longer-term."

CLOUD and SaaS-based automation helped Blue Prism to drive a significant H1 70% increase in revenues to £68.5m. The company witnessed in particular a number of customers shift to a cloud or SaaS intelligent automation delivery mechanism. "Covid-19 has intensified the strategic focus on transitioning to more dynamic and scalable operating models," commented CEO Jason Kingdon. "We've seen a big shift towards cloud and SaaS delivery models over the past few months."

MSP pulls in eminent vet



Alistair Fawcett

DISTINGUISHED army vet Alistair Fawcett has joined MSP OryxAlign as COO.

While in the Armed Forces he developed, deployed and protected networks and information systems; and has since undertaken many other important assignments including being Deputy Head for Strategy of a capability branch responsible for the UK Defence's Joint C4ISR portfolio.

"While the environment and context are different, there is a degree of familiarity between my appointments in the Armed Forces and my role at OryxAlign," stated Fawcett.

"I've spent my career focused on achieving a range of mission sets, overcoming chal-

lenges and developing capabilities using both technology and strong, dedicated teams – not too dissimilar from that of a Chief Operating Officer.

"Well crafted and developed building blocks are there for OryxAlign to realise its vision and I'm playing a role in helping the team realise it."

Carl Henriksen, who is the founder and CEO, commented: "Alistair brings a wealth of transferable experience, fresh ideas and a new perspective on operational effectiveness."

OryxAlign hopes to achieve a top 5% placing in the UK MSP sector by 2023.

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Inflexion sells Glide to Alinda

US INFRASTRUCTURE investor Alinda Capital has acquired Glide Group from Inflexion. Glide provides broadband, networks and utilities for student accommodation, house-sharers and SMEs.

The firm was called Cable-Com at the time of Inflexion's acquisition, and in June 2018 rebranded to Glide having acquired WarwickNet in January 2017.

Alinda is an alternative asset manager focused on mid-market and infrastructure investments in North America and Europe. Jim Metcalfe, Managing Partner at Alinda, said: "Digital infrastructure is a priority area of focus for us."

The sale follows a six year period of growth for Glide which designs, installs and manages fibre networks reaching 100,000 premises and approximately 250,000 customers.

Tim Pilcher, who is CEO of Glide, stated: "With Inflexion's support we were able to complete two transformational strategic acquisitions."

Simon Turner, Managing Partner at Inflexion, added: "That Glide attracted strong interest at this time is vindication of its transformation."

NEWS ROUNDUP

EXTREME Networks is partnering with colleges and universities around the world to deliver an academic curriculum designed to educate IT students and professionals on networking, security and cloud fundamentals, along with Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning. The scheme works by integrating with existing curriculums – alternatively the courses can be taught alongside current studies. Students who complete the courses gain an Extreme Networks Associate level qualification.

MAINTEL has embarked on a partner recruitment campaign following the launch of its cloud and managed services ICON platform to the channel. The platform provides remote working solutions, UCaaS, CCaaS, managed network services, mobile device and application management, security services and Microsoft Teams calling plans. The firm is recruiting cloud partners in the UK and managed services partners internationally. "Maintel is vendor agnostic so can help channel partners design bespoke offerings that aren't confined by technology partners," stated Chris Bain, Partner Services Director at Maintel.

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Union Street goes mobile

Take gradual steps in BAU plans says Mills



Vincent Disneur

BILLING firm Union Street Technologies has produced a new mobile app (for IOS and Android) for its aBILLity billing platform, available for download in the App Store and Play Store. aBILLity is used by 600-plus CPs.

Head of Sales and Marketing Vincent Disneur commented: "During consultations with our user community, one thing that repeatedly came up was a desire for on demand access to certain information held within aBILLity's database.

"Similar to how banking customers can use an app to quickly check the balance of their accounts and manage pay-

ees, we've developed our app to provide access to contact information, customer data and management reporting that can give a snapshot of how billing operations are performing.

"This enables staff that may not be directly involved with the billing process to access the information they require from anywhere at any time without the need to access a PC or to contact billing personnel.

"It also offers business continuity advantages which are particularly relevant in light of current events."

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MANAGED support services company Support to Win is providing flexible 'wraparound' access to its comms support services ahead of the Government's new rules allowing companies to utilise furloughed staff on part-time hours from July 1st.

According to CEO Julie Mills, comms partners could face certain challenges in their return to BAU and she claims that Support to Win's new service will de-risk the process, enabling resellers to bounce back in sustainable steps.

"Returning to normal has to be a series of interim steps, safely reintroducing employees back into the workplace and taking stock of changing business priorities," said Julie Mills, CEO at Support to Win.

"Economic restrictions are starting to lift, but with it begins the steady withdrawal of the Government furlough scheme.

"The signs are we will see new pockets of demand met with potential gaps in staffing, and we are on hand to fill-in and help channel businesses on their road to recovery."

For communications and IT resellers targeting rapid growth in a bid to catch up on 2020 sales targets, Mills argues that



Julie Mills

outsourcing non-sales functions can be a positive step forward. "Many partners are getting into sales mode like never before and could look to outsourcing

support so that standards are kept high, customers stay happy and key staff don't get distracted away from revenue," commented Mills.



HATS off to swcomms Group Engineering Director Sean Doyle (pictured left) who passed the 25 year service milestone in June. Group Company Secretary Harry Langley (pictured right) marked his 20th year in the same month. MD Brian Lodge said: "These milestones mean most of our board members have been formally meeting every month for over 20 years! Harry and Sean are key members of our business and have seen it change and grow from a purely telephony-based company to a multifaceted communication, connectivity and cloud solutions provider. They are friends as well as business colleagues and I look forward to celebrating properly with them when we can." ICT Director John Holdstock celebrated his 20th year in February. swcomms has two other 20-year-plus-ers on the Board.



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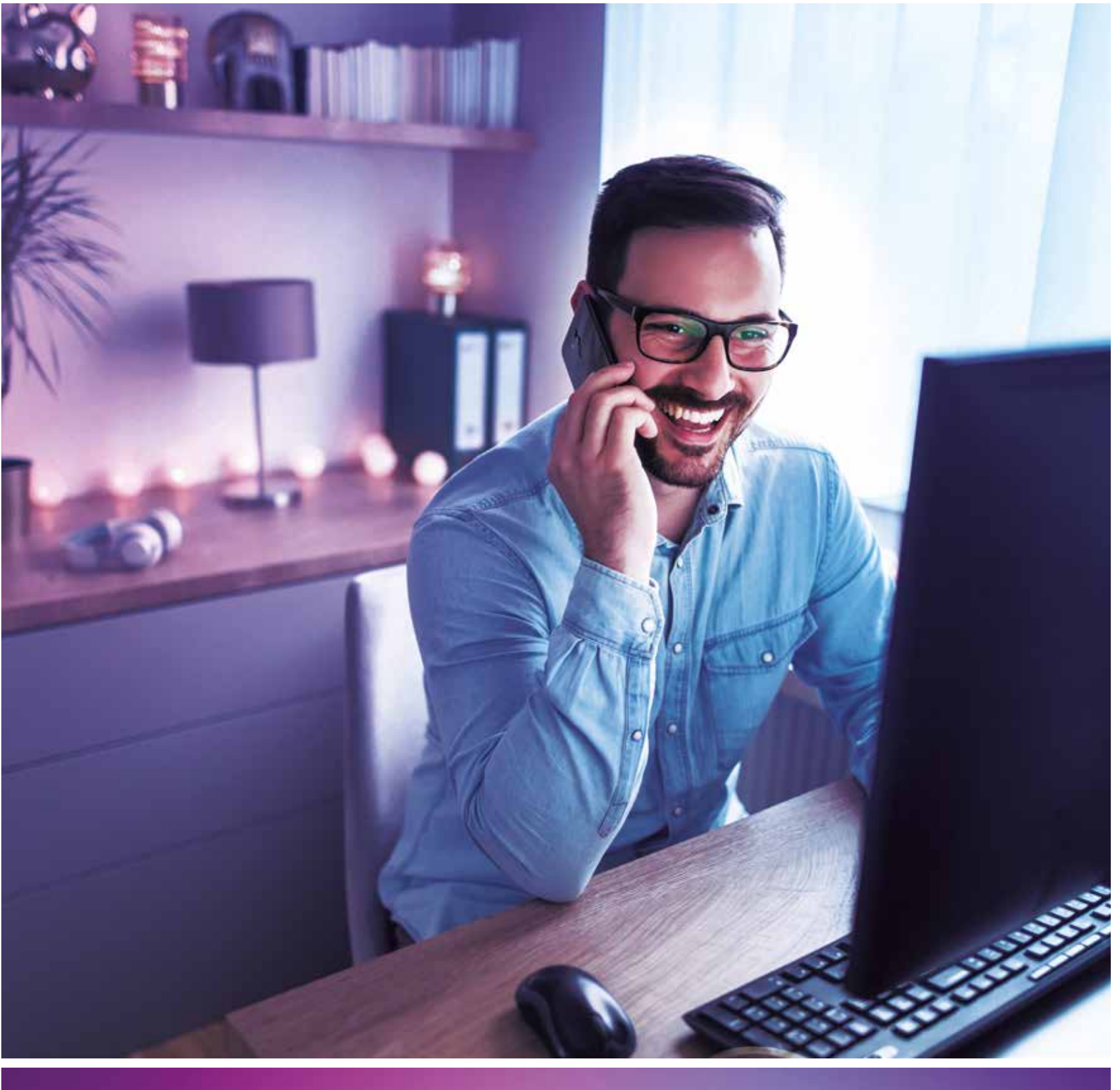
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Connectivity key to home worker shift

THE launch of a Homeworker Package by TalkTalk Business brings business grade connectivity to employees working from home, providing a number of business-specific attributes that are over and above a regular residential connection, such as security, more flexibility, speed and greater reliability.

The roll out is reflective of greater numbers of businesses that will make home working a more permanent feature of their organisations following the Covid-19 lockdown.

TalkTalk Business cited analysis that suggests 25-30% of the workforce will be working from home multiple days a week by the end of 2021.

Data-driven industries such as the finance, technology and IT sectors have seen the greatest shift to remote working.



Jonathan Kini

TalkTalk Business MD Jonathan Kini stated: "Britain has seen a rapid rise in homeworking over the last few months and the need for reliable connectivity has never been greater.

"TalkTalk Business Homeworker offers medium and enterprise-sized businesses and

their employees the opportunity to benefit from business-grade connectivity in their homes, with the necessary security, reliability and speed needed to meet business demands."

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CEO says he's back to buying

CHARTERHOUSE Voice & Data CEO Mark Brooks-Wadham has kicked off an acquisition campaign to boost capabilities, scale, geographic reach and accelerate the firm towards £100m revenue.

"In 18 months we have taken the company from £24m to just under £50m," he said. "Now we are looking towards the £100m milestone. Forget batten down the hatches – but this is not about scale for its own sake.

"Now, it's very much back to the original plan in terms of growing the business organically and through acquisition, with some tweaks around people, approaches and technology."

In February Charterhouse snapped up Lloyds Business Communications just weeks after picking up NETConnection Systems. See page 22

NEWS ROUNDUP

GLEMNET'S capabilities in the security threat landscape have been boosted by the acquisition of Cyber Secure. The expanded business will serve circa 800 companies and public sector clients mainly across the south east region. Cyber Secure partners with Sophos, Eset and Kaspersky to provide security and risk mitigation to SMEs. "Cyber Secure offers an opportunity for Glemnet to strengthen and expand its service offering in end point security products, services and training, GDPR provisioning and Vulnerability and Penetration testing," said Neil Linter, founder and CEO of Glemnet. Jorge Geddes, founder and MD of Cyber Secure, added: "Glemnet's acquisition provides a growth opportunity for both businesses through the expanded service offerings for our clients." Geddes joins Glemnet as IT and Cyber Security Sales Manager.



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You'll struggle to ace UC with Teams if you can't get telephony over the net

I miss Wimbledon, though I'm no tennis player. It's like implementing and supporting comms solutions, rather than selling them: you get prime courtside seats at an elite tournament where global champions and local heroes go head to head.

From this privileged vantage point at Support to Win, it's been fascinating to see new opportunities unfold around UC, and MS Teams in particular.

It's far too early to award Teams any grand slams, but what with demand increasingly being drawn to it – arguably because the dominance of Microsoft as the desktop environment of choice makes it logical for enterprise customers to go that route – it has to be a top contender.

And while other UC solutions have their virtues, none possess this kind of foothold in the market.

Deploying Teams isn't all strawberries and cream though, as anyone involved in a large-scale deployment will tell you.

Speaking from considerable direct experience of Teams projects, the major sticking point is often telephony. Understandably, this is a source of pride among comms partners who benefit – unlike their IT-centric brethren who they increasingly compete against in Teams RFPs – from home field advantage. After all, it's comms partners who are uniquely grounded in how phone systems work, and can easily identify which PBX functions are critical to organisations and which cannot be satisfied via the native Teams PBX functionality.

But like the grass-court expert who takes their talents onto clay, comms-centric partners are equally at risk of weakness; typically being far less proficient on executing IT integrations, and lacking experience in managing wider technology dependencies related to enterprise software investments and digital transformation strategy.

The last 3 months have been a massive proof-of concept



Tamsin Deutrom-Yue

for UC in British businesses; a product trial of epic proportions. As the economy bounces back from lockdown, we are seeing the natural consequences of a successful UC POC: a surge in UC demand – especially for Teams.

Partners who want to focus on revenue rather than the thorny issues of implementation and support are flocking to Support to Win to deliver these projects in full, or augment existing professional services capability.

Let me leave you with 5 quick tips to help you with any Teams projects you're working on:

1. Be certain of dividing lines between Teams PBX and any separate PBX. Do this first, and cover off necessary maintenance and BCDR plans while you're at it.
2. Understand all technology refresh interdependencies and the wider context for the project. What might slow down/speed up progress?
3. Get full visibility of the current state via a thorough audit. Use this opportunity to cleanse data and challenge what does/doesn't need to be carried across.
4. Be ready to absorb change. Large Teams implementations are invariably rolled out in stages. Ensure plans can accommodate change where necessary.
5. Settle who owns which systems integrations. Don't assume anything about third-party relationships or interoperability. Look out for related infrastructure upgrade requirements that may add cost and delay.

teams@supporttowin.tv

Preparation key to R&D credit claims

CLAIMING tax credits for research and development could save channel companies much needed cash after the Covid-19 lockdown, and there's now free advice on hand for those keen to explore the opportunity.

R&D specialist DataFox has set up a knowledge hub for telecoms business owners where they can talk to experts about the projects they are currently working on and seek guidance on how they should plan claims.

"This is important, as the costs that qualify for an R&D claim need to be properly apportioned," stated DataFox founder Jonathan Leefield.

"We set telecoms businesses up with a system where they can apportion costs monthly, knowing they can get a proportion of them back if the claim is accepted by HMRC.

"Budgeting is critical in these difficult times so companies can prepare by including a credit on monthly figures, showing what R&D means to them in terms of rebated costs which effectively means lower costs."



Jonathan Leefield

Leefield believes many innovative companies still face some of the same challenges when it comes to organising their R&D claim. "Some accountants given the task don't understand R&D enough in terms of project eligibility and often under-claim," he commented.

"This happened to a telecoms plc we now represent whose prior claim through their accountant was a tenth of what it should have been.

"Also, telcos that work with R&D consultants can end up doing a lot of the work themselves and suffer because claims are left to the last minute at the end of the financial year.

"This creates problems for companies with tight resources and directors without much time who end up putting a claim together in a rush."

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

Tupman swoops on IVR app development specialist ICR

CONN3CT'S ambition to humanise and unify contact centre interactions took a big step forward with the acquisition of ICR Speech Solutions & Services, an app development firm specialising in IVR and speech bot technology.

"IVR is a critical technology in contact centres, providing the initial response to a customer caller before they reach an agent," said Alex Tupman, CEO at Conn3ct.

"Dramatic advances in technology and the introduction of AI and ML have driven IVR from basic call steering towards



Alex Tupman

a more context-aware, personalised customer experience.

"We want to move away from rigid, linear applications to something that is more human and satisfying to the customer's experience. We want to distance

ourselves from individual channel bots to a single conversation AI engine that supports voice and chat channels.

"ICR is a great strategic fit. It adds important IP and capability to Conn3ct's proposition."

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Postcard from MiVaD

Margin in Voice and Data Virtual, the online version of Comms Dealer's summertime annual event staged last month, laid bare the dynamics of a new Covid-19 market reality and the unprecedented opportunities facing the comms channel. Here's a snapshot of insights from event speakers...

The most potent strategic planning must now include hosted and UCaaS, which have everything to do with growth and nothing to do with recession. According to Paul Taylor, Sales & Marketing Director at Voiceflex, the lead technology is now UCaaS as many organisations will want to make sure they are better prepared than pre-Covid-19. "UC and collaboration is a massive opportunity for the channel," he stated. "The market has changed and the channel must accept that change to move forward. For example, Teams is a big door opener for many organisations and new clients."

The launch of MyPhone's new brand is a sign of its strong intent to stay ahead of these remarkable times, affirmed Paul Gibbs, Sales Director. "Users are driving change," he said. "They want to flex up and down as required, and there is a big opportunity for the channel to help clients



Paul Gibbs



Andrew Cooper

on their cloud journey. The responsibility lies with us to give users a full suite of business grade applications."

Choice matters

Post-pandemic, there will be a clamour for stability, reliability and value, and NEC fits the bill, according to Andrew Cooper, Sales Director. The vendor's UK PBX business grew 40 per cent last year and Cooper argues that having choice between delivery mechanisms empowers resellers to have the right conversation with customers. "The PBX is not dead," he stated. "Post-pandemic, customers will not all flow in one direction."

A link up with Intermedia has enabled NEC to ramp up its global cloud comms and collaboration services strategy as the tech partners launched the Univerge Blue Connect UCaaS solutions and the Univerge Blue Engage CCaaS offering. The roll out combine NEC's reach and relationship with its channel and Intermedia's UCaaS

and CCaaS offerings. "With Intermedia we have a born-in-the-cloud partner that provides a fully integrated suite of UCaaS and CCaaS solutions," added Cooper.

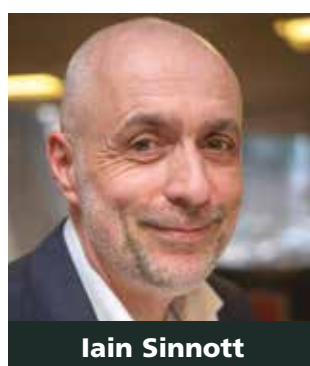
It is fair to say that Covid-19 has exposed the historically slow uptake of UCaaS, and shown customers' dither over when to migrate to the cloud as bad strategic planning. Now they are rushing towards UCaaS, says Daryl Pile, Managing Director for Channel at Gamma. "We've had three years of digital transformation in three weeks, and your base is looking around," he stated. "Embrace change and the

Now we can do our jobs properly because there is a massive market to unlock

demand for UC, Teams and conferencing. We've pivoted parts of the roadmap towards Teams. Take a look at your suppliers and ask if they have been there for the channel."



Daryl Pile



Iain Sinnott

Despite hot demand for UCaaS solutions, elevating their appeal further is a top priority, believes Iain Sinnott, Sales & Marketing Director at VanillaIP. "We have talked about the benefits of cloud for years," he commented. "Now we can do our jobs properly because there

is a massive market to unlock in the new world. But it is critical for sales people, when capitalising on this tragically created opportunity, to master the virtual meeting environment.

"The first interaction between sellers and buyers must get the engagement onto fertile ground. Good product knowledge and good questioning techniques will be most successful. And sales people need to bring products and services to life by selling with confidence

and belief. Be enthusiastic about value, not price."

Bringing energy to sales pitches is John Haw's day-to-day activity. The Managing Director of Fidelity Energy noted that the firm now has 450 active partners and recruits 10 a month, which is not surprising when you consider that most organisations generally spend four-times as much on energy as they do on technology. "We've seen partners cross selling energy into their existing base," he said. "They leverage customer relationships and ask a few more pertinent questions to solve client problems. The energy market is complex and comparing apples with apples is difficult. Customers trust their ICT partners and respond well to them."

Increasing the resellers' presence within a customer organisation is vital, and according to Shaun Bodsworth, Managing Director at Inform Billing, a



John Haw



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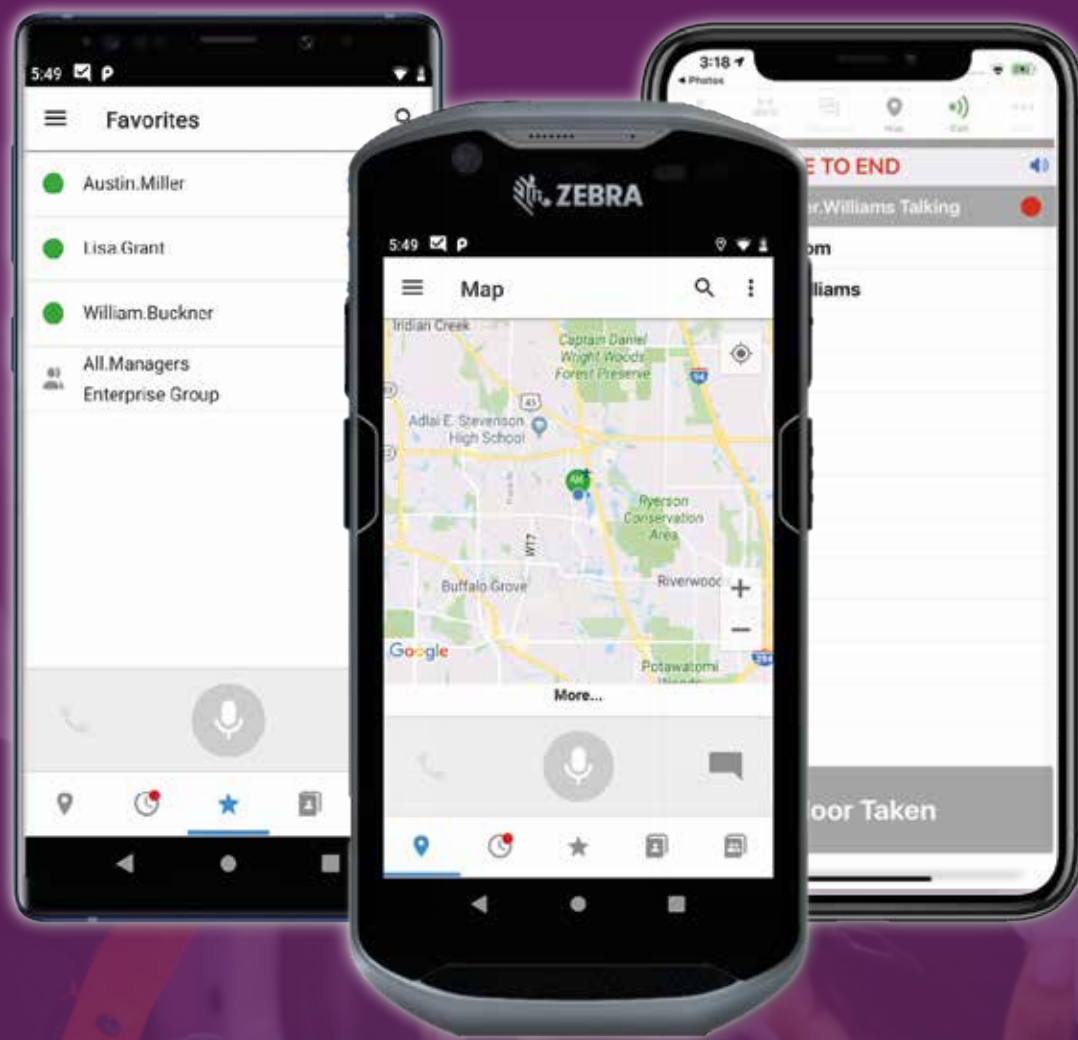




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UCaaS potential unleashed

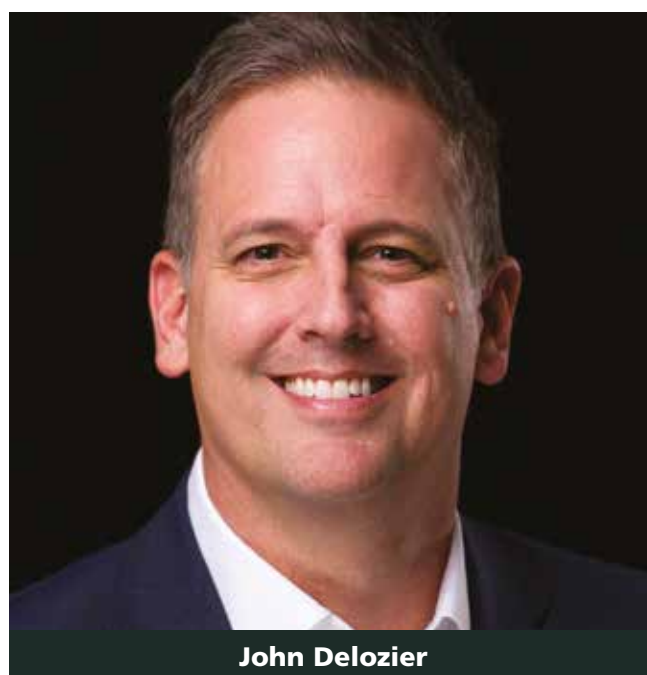
UCaaS has been the subject of much runaway industry hype in the past, but now we can justifiably leverage the heightened narratives of an unprecedented opportunity, according to delegates at last month's Channel Insight Session hosted by Comms Dealer in association with 8x8.

The stark reality is that UK plc has abandoned its addiction to office spaces following the introduction of lockdown measures, and the need for remote working technology and UCaaS will not diminish over the coming years. Business leaders seeking a pathway through the many UCaaS options at hand may find some sense of steerage from ICT providers that were well prepared for the impact of Covid-19. Their message now makes as much sense to cloud sceptics as cloud evangelists. So much so that Covid-19 has dramatically reversed intransigence to cloud migration, prompting stick-in-the-mud organisations to double-down on UCaaS as the model that will serve them best over the long-term.

"We've seen huge adoption and usage of our virtual office desktop and mobile apps, and reached 20-plus million video meetings monthly active users worldwide," stated John

Delozier, SVP & Global Channel Chief at 8x8. "Now, the first consideration for users is a communications system – I've never seen anything like it. With many providers in the marketplace now, partners have the opportunity to remove complexity and guide their customers."

In the current climate of confusion over the number of UCaaS offerings in the market, not being able to give customers clear direction is a distinct disadvantage as organisations seek to make their next moves. "Our customers are thinking a lot differently now and we are having to think differently ourselves to adapt," added Alex Larcombe, Sales Director, AdEPT. "What's Phase Two going to look like? We have a big contact centre customer asking how to make the remote model permanent. This conversation would not have taken place three months ago. Customers are thinking differently. We also have to deliver services a lot quicker. We were able to



John Delozier

Now, the first consideration for users is a communications system – I've never seen anything like it

respond fast through various 'Covid-19' resources', but that has set a precedent for customers who now think they can get a 70 day lead time circuit in 25 days. It's about adapting, being flexible and keeping expectations real."

The UK is passing through a moment of extraordinary social and industrial change, and it is notable that what has been accepted as a new reality first surfaced only months ago. "We have seen a reaction from

have not had a workplace or comms strategy and are taking more short-term tactical services. Phase Two will be interesting in how we convert those more tactical audio and video conferencing solutions into something strategic which links into more valuable parts of their organisation."

Strategic moves

Heads of IT will not be clear on what the future holds for some time – but that should be no bar to extending the current tactical solutions into an immediate opportunity, agrees Phil Race, CEO, AdEPT Technologies. "Executives faced the challenge of shifting to a home working environment, which brought our topic into the boardroom," he added. "Business leaders don't want to get caught out again, they want to adapt how they work. Sales people need to have that conversation at board level and talk about solutions not commodities. This is a real opportunity to solve some problems for customers."

customers which has not necessarily played into the most optimum engagement," commented Ross Pedder, Head of Cloud Services Sales, CDW. "Some organisations



Alex Larcombe



Ross Pedder

ed by lockdown crisis



Phil Race

AdePT conducted a survey which showed 71 per cent of companies implemented digital transformation projects in weeks rather than months during the Covid-19 lockdown. "These statistics point to a raft of tactical implementations across our entire customer base," said Race. "They have put their finger in the leaky dike, stopped the immediate crisis, but there is a lot of strategic work still to be done."

"In response, we created AdePT Consulting which brings together point experts from across the business. Customers want to solve more joined up problems than point issues, so we are taking the customer on a journey rather than simply selling a point solution. That will be the big difference for us in the coming months and years."

As ever, the channel is far from being in lockdown

mode when it comes to meeting an opportunity, but after servicing the jolt to home working, it is time to drive a more considered conversation, albeit in the fast lane. "The acceleration of digital transformation has been phenomenal following the immediate rush to remote working," commented Jude Mott, Product Director, Agile Workspace, Six

Business leaders don't want to get caught out again, they want to adapt how they work

Degrees. "Now, people are understanding the limitations of those moves and suddenly we have their ear, and the IT manager has more attention from their business leaders. So we've taken a more consultative approach to talk about the cloud journey and how a seamless user experience is key to adoption."

In his approach to clients and their tentative move to UCaaS, Mark Stephens, UCaaS Sales Director at Charterhouse Voice & Data, prioritises the message that not all UC solutions are the same, and he believes that 'hand holding' is necessary from the outset. "We're talking to all of our customers about UC and how one size does not fit all," he stated. "Some customers told us for years they are not ready to migrate. We understand that they have a critical need today, and do not try to sell them the whole solution from day one."

Destination UC

"UC will be where everybody goes, but many customers are fearful of jumping into something too quickly."

So we are a listening sympathetic ear as we steer customers on the journey."

Clearly, the comms sector is experiencing a remarkable phenomenon... a surge in demand for services in the middle of an economic meltdown. This craving has seen delegates witness soaring business, with UC the catalyst for sales and Microsoft Teams gaining greater popularity. "Business with any cloud-based solution is increasing, and all of us providing technology in that environment should see opportunities," noted Richard Betts, Chief Revenue Officer, Charterhouse Voice & Data. "As a group we are over target against the budget we set pre-Covid-19. We are recruiting more



Mark Stephens

sales people, doubling down on marketing efforts and pursuing acquisitions. We want to forge ahead as quickly as possible."

Even as the British economy faces ever more contraction, UCaaS and collaboration technology makes more sense than ever and demand will continue to boom — yet meeting this demand involves sales people selling in a new and perhaps more engaging way. "We've focused on sales teams and how they engage with customers online, how they manage a sales cycle online, do a demonstration and not call in specialists," commented Betts.

"If we can engage early and well, and show the solution to the right audience, we will continue to see calls that start with two or three interested people, then draw in other participants and before you know it you're demonstrating to the CEO

of the business because he has 15 minutes to spare.

"Enabling our teams to work better online and to manage a relationship and sales cycle through an online environment professionally has been the challenge. Much effort has gone into training our 65 sales staff to adapt to this different way of working. I don't think it's going to change. The process is efficient, as sales people can do five appointments a day."

If we can do without going to offices now, why go back, especially when you consider that the old CPE versus cloud argument has been settled for good? "This compelling event has dissolved the inertia among people who were previously frightened to experiment with hosted solutions," observed Graham Kedzie, Business Development Director, 8x8. **Continued on page 18**



Jude Mott



Richard Betts



Graham Kedzlie

Continued from page 17

“Phase Two will be CIOs and CTOs looking at the overall estate and asking who they are going to partner with. The lockdown has speeded up digital transformation discussions. Our combined UCaaS and CCaaS solutions have increased by 45 per cent, which was unheard of historically. It was previously about buying point solutions, but the move is towards one single open platform that can deliver both. There is a trend towards buying from one provider.”

Thus, the trickle of UCaaS uptake has become a flood, as has the number of UCaaS providers which continue to multiply, making it difficult for users to discern their future technology path. “UCaaS will be ubiquitous, but you have to differentiate your services,” commented Damon Crawford, Director

Agile Workspace Practice, Six Degrees. “As well as just selling UCaaS we’re looking at change management to help people adapt to different ways of working. We are bundling together ranges of services that are appropriate to each of our verticals, and placing these services into the context of their industry and at the particular stage they occupy in their recovery. That really shows value for people starting to think about where to go next.

Cultural change

“No one knows what the future is going to look like so there also needs to be contractual flexibility. Organisations will undergo cultural change, so part of the service we need to offer is to allow them to cater for that cultural shift in terms of how they work. On security, the footprint of attack has expanded and

organisations are concerned about what they may have been exposed to by switching their operational model.”

We have been quick to label home working as the ‘new normal’, but the pathway towards the sunny uplands of a UCaaS centric world still requires much navigation. “It is now about working with customers to put those more stable solutions in place,” noted Paul Wiltshire, Director of Specialist Sales, Virgin Media Business. “It’s not just about technology, it’s about the physical environment people operate in. There is also a tremendous opportunity to access a new workforce – people who can only work flexible hours, for example. This could give the

UCaaS will be ubiquitous, but you have to differentiate your services

industry good skill sets that physically could not get to the office, and were locked out of the workforce.”

Resellers will only continue to bring peace of mind to organisations by leveraging information as reassurance, and by taking a helicopter view of the bigger picture, which means a rethink of how clients are approached. “Stop leading with technology,” urged Pedder. “Otherwise you end up with a narrow sell and unable to position yourself as a value partner. Lead with the outcome and the challenge.

“We are focused on transforming the conversation away from product and technology to something more holistic and more expansive, which includes solutions that sit around the periphery and drive additional value.”

As we have emphatically seen the coronavirus crisis has exposed the strength of ICT partners able to talk about



Damon Crawford

what matters most to end users right now – their cloud-based and digital future. On this point Rob Merhej, Channel Sales Director at Avant, noted: “We are not

leading with a product, but talking about plans around digital transformation, and delivering a message that covers many of the challenges customers are going to face. Start with UCaaS, then think about security, WAN, SD-WAN, optimisation, content delivery, everything that will accelerate users. Having this all-encompassing ability is where you will get clients.”

A ‘live’ business is about interaction, and it seems

organisations now have the potential to display more communication, collaboration, tightness and productivity as dispersed entities. But to achieve this happy state, monitoring the user experience is paramount (which could count as a post-lockdown Phase Three operation), according to Larcombe.

“We all have conversations with customers around ‘as a service’, decreasing TCO, RoI, flexibility and efficiency,” he stated. “But, with any deployment you are only ever as good as end user adoption. If users are not using the functionality, the business is not getting the most out of the solution. It is important to go back to check that everything promised has come to fruition. That way we see real customer value and long-term stable relationships.” ■



Paul Wiltshire



Keith Jackson

More Session Insights...

We have more customer facing time through video, with directors being a little less busy not having to travel.
Alex Larcombe, Sales Director AdEPT

What was the role of one IT person is now being discussed at board level. That drives forward the move towards a cloud-based and more agile capability.

Wynand Botes, Head of Voice Services,
Virgin Media Business

Many customers will now be reflecting on remote working and asking whether what they moved with is fit for purpose for the next two years.

Keith Jackson, EMEA Channel Sales Director 8x8

We've seen teams that we thought couldn't work at home become more effective and more productive. I don't think we'll see those teams coming back to the office in a permanent environment.

Paul Wiltshire, Director of Specialist Sales, Virgin Media Business

There is much happening in the macro environment: Looking ahead to 2025 and the voice switch off, people need to move to something else and transform quickly.

Alex Larcombe, Sales Director AdEPT

Educate your sales force to become more technically astute and not reliant on pre-sales. From the outset, you have to understand what the customer wants and have the ability to demonstrate online at that particular point.

Mark Stephens, UCaaS Sales Director,
Charterhouse Voice & Data

The partners that grow significantly now are the ones which can adapt and respond to this opportunity, as the UC market becomes more fragmented and complex.

Keith Jackson, EMEA Channel Sales Director 8x8

There is a lot of opportunity in turning tactical solutions into strategic ones.

Phil Race, CEO, AdEPT

The drive to digital and cloud has to be the priority. It needs business and IT infrastructure agility.

Paul Wiltshire, Director of Specialist Sales, Virgin Media Business

Challenge your customers. If they think they know what they want, ask them why.

Rob Merhej, Channel Sales Director, Avant

Consultative selling is more important now, and getting to understand problems means having the patience to sit down with customers.

Graham Kedzlie, Business Development Director, 8x8

There are so many providers talking about UCaaS it has created confusion in the market. So helping customers navigate the market and the pace of change is where most partners will also see success."

Rob Merhej, Channel Sales Director, Avant



Rob Merhej



Wynand Botes

Demand hotting up for mission-critical remote connectivity

Winchester-based Cloudcell Technologies has responded to the coronavirus crisis by accelerating a connectivity roll out programme designed to support organisations in the Covid-19 world. According to Managing Director Kevin Boyle, this is the moment for resellers to address what has become a true market hotspot – mission-critical remote connectivity.

"With lots more businesses required to work from home there have been questions about whether domestic networks would be able to cope with the additional demand placed upon them," he stated. "Cloud-based applications have also become even more prevalent for many homeworkers through the coronavirus, but these solutions use much more bandwidth than tools like emails, voice and video calling.

"Therefore home working networks need to be robust, reliable and flexible enough to deal with additional traffic. For businesses with a fully digital working environment, loss of connectivity can be catastrophic. For any business, even a small loss of productivity caused by digital resources becoming unavailable can still be very damaging."

The sudden shift to lockdown and home working in March



Kevin Boyle

serves as a true measure of the market opportunity currently in the channel's hands, believes Boyle. "We see this changing climate as an opportunity for us and our partners to pivot into new Covid-driven markets, and ensure remote working and increased demand for connectivity does not disrupt business productivity," he reaffirmed.

Always connected

The key to unlocking this opportunity lies in selling products that support today's connectivity requirements, says Boyle. "Built in DR ensures that the customer is always connected, unlike traditional fixed line services that will have several single points of failure," he explained. "These flexible, quick to deliver solutions are where we see us helping to ensure businesses stay connected in these changing times."

In the case of business networks utilising MPLS, they still face considerable challenges when it comes to flexibility, reliability and

cost, believes Boyle. "With the current climate, CIOs and their teams are being forced to reconsider such network architecture," he added. "These businesses can be better supported with SD-WAN solutions, allowing the customer to utilise different bearers (DSL, FTTC, Cellular) to deliver reliable, high bandwidth connectivity."

With the stakes so high, Covid-19 has prompted many organisations to review their strategic direction, including channel partners. "We are seeing some partners start to change their focus and pivot connectivity solutions into other services such as cellular and security," observed Boyle. "Additional areas of opportunity include superfast wireless connectivity LTE-A in places where it is available. We are seeing speeds of up to 130 Mbps along with the roll-out of 5G."

Boyle, a former Sales Director of fast growing reseller companies, established Cloudcell Technologies five years ago in response to the convergence of connectivity and cloud services. "The time is ripe for disruptive forces to make their influence felt and create new revenue opportunities by introducing solutions that address the ever inherent and continuing issues with traditional forms of connectivity," he commented. "These solutions include the latest in SD-WAN technologies and the connectivity services that support remote working." ■



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Powering your potential

Continued from page 14

modern day billing solution gives end users more reasons to be sticky. "It's not just about voice any more," he said. "There is a requirement to bill for connectivity, cloud services, a range of recurring revenues, and tracking, reporting, validating, with the capacity to scale."

Nor is that all: Modern billing systems add real value to businesses. "For resellers looking to exit, part of the process is putting numbers on elements of the company – margin and revenues – and there will be a focus on whether the business is scalable," he added. "Having a robust and flexible billing system is key to preparation, scaling up and keeping a finger on margin and profit – which drives value in a business and increases competition among buyers."

In his many conversations with comms sector firms Philip Carse, Chief Analyst at Megabyte, noted that most cash positions are better than expected. "Flat is the new up," he stated. "The profit outlook for the current year highlights the resilience of the comms sector."

He noted that telcos are seen as ever more mission critical and that remote working will become a permanent feature, creating a need for cloud and connectivity. "Covid-19 will accelerate the drivers for FTTP, and people now know the value of proper broadband," he said. "There is also demand for fewer suppliers that offer best-of-breed, which reinforces the role of the channel."



Shaun Bodsworth

Digital transformation and next generation networks are driving the sector, and the move to home working will accelerate that shift, observed Carse. "The challenge is to make sure you have diversification in connectivity and cloud-based services, and to bring in the specialisms for this new world, such as MS Teams skills," he added.

Targeting demand

Glide, which has been rolled into a bigger business following its acquisition by Alinda, allows partners to

build, opening up areas for partners where there is no competition," stated Daniel Alvarez, Head of Wholesale, Glide. "Covid-19 has given a real life business case for why we need the cloud and fibre connectivity."

Perhaps the biggest business case has been the ascent of home working. But according to Ian Rowan, Senior Channel Manager at Wildix UK, the term 'home working' is outdated, it's about 'smart working', he says, enabled by collaboration solutions that increase productivity when away from the office and promote social wellbeing.

"As well as UCaaS being a massive opportunity we will see buying habits change with 30-day rolling contracts, and we will see hardware as a service take off based on usage," he commented. "Partners



Ian Rowan



Rob Loakes

with Tower Leasing. "We are in an in-demand industry and opportunities are bubbling for solutions that allow smart working and business continuity," he said.

According to Adam Zoldan, Partner at Knight Corporate Finance, the ICT channel excelled itself in helping the UK to stay afloat, providing continuity of service as the nation suddenly jolted to a home working model where possible. Despite the disruption, for Knight it's been BAU over the past three months, but 'not business as normal', noted Zoldan. "Initially, we saw some investors and buyers hunker down," he commented. "That has relaxed now, buyers are back at the table and transactions are taking place – we've done three deals since lockdown."

In planning for the post-Covid-19 world, Zoldan said that resellers should be crystal clear about their strategic vision and how to advance it. "Understand what you want to achieve and articulate your ambition," he advised. "That's the starting point for your strategy. Be prepared, because you never know who might come knocking on your door."

As well as UCaaS being a massive opportunity we will see buying habits change, 30-day rolling contracts and usage-based hardware as a service take off

The challenge is to make sure you have diversification in connectivity and cloud-based services, and bring in the skills for this new world

enter areas that don't have hosted comms. One of its specialities is accessing hard to reach areas like business and science parks, for instance. Glide's network and penetration is growing and it is now ranked the eighth biggest UK ISP.

"We work with partners to identify areas of demand and potentially meet that demand with an infrastructure

can't put themselves in a position of liability."

Smart incentives

Rob Loakes, UK Channel Manager at Wildix, noted that the company offers smart working incentives for partners and holds weekly sales training sessions. Partners can also sell through the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) following a link up

Key points...



Andrew Smethurst

CUSTOMERS are better served by hosted comms and flexibility. There is a real opportunity over the next 12 months, so resellers need to be clear about their marketing strategy.

Andrew Smethurst, Channel Director, Gamma



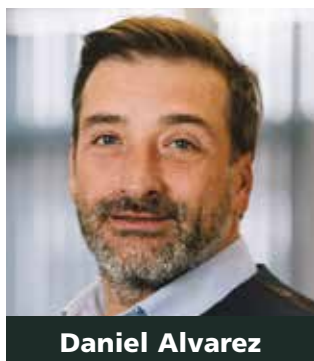
Matthew Worboys

THERE needs to be contract flexibility in commercial propositions so partners don't take the full risk.

Matthew Worboys, Business Development Channel, Gamma



Philip Carse



Daniel Alvarez



Adam Zoldan



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A man who fuses foresight

Probably the first comms company to lock down is also out of the blocks ahead of the pack as Charterhouse Voice & Data CEO Mark Brooks-Wadham kicks off an acquisition campaign that will accelerate the business towards £100 million, based on a fusion of scientific thinking and strategic vision.

That Brooks-Wadham is a man of foresight and 'gut feeling' is without question. But he is also a man of science, with fact-finding, executed wherever possible, and a weight of gathered evidence always key to decision making. It's an approach that led to the pre-emptive lock down of Charterhouse's offices way ahead of most, and it's a strategic capability that holds particular appeal for company owners considering an exit. So when Brooks-Wadham embarks on a growth campaign that could lead to Charterhouse becoming one of the sector's greatest expansion stories in modern times, you would be doing yourself a big favour by taking note.

Charterhouse was established in 1993 by Brooks-Wadham and David Doherty. In 2018 the company secured PE investment from August Equity, creating a platform for acquisitions that enabled the business to target up to £100 million revenues and become a nationwide operation. "In 18 months we have taken the company from £24 million to just under £50 million," noted Brooks-Wadham. "Now we are looking towards the £100 million milestone. Forget batten down the hatches – but this is not about scale for its own sake."

Brooks-Wadham's sweet spot is £5 million to £20 million



Mark Brooks-Wadham

Forget batten down the hatches – but this is not about scale for its own sake

firms, ideally located in the south west and the north, but he does not discount a transformational deal that could double the size of the business overnight.

In February Charterhouse's regional influence and Microsoft capabilities received a boost following the acquisition of Lloyds Business Communications, a UC and Microsoft partner based in Lancashire. The deal came just weeks after Charterhouse augmented

its LAN capabilities with the acquisition of Croydon-based NETConnection Systems, which specialises in LAN and SD-LAN managed services and operates mainly in the public sector, a market that is key for Charterhouse.

Strong platform

The Lloyds deal delivered geographical reach and a strong platform to build other businesses into in the north. The NETConnection Systems acquisition also added capabilities and notable

customer relationships which were properly assessed prior to the acquisition. Brooks-Wadham doubled down on due diligence, surveying a select group of customers which served as reference points on how they had been supported, what they thought of the technology roadmap, how implementations had gone, and their view of partners that worked with NETConnection Systems, among other metrics. This all points to a scientific

approach that underscores Brooks-Wadham's *modus operandi* across the board. "For us, it's all about getting the proposition right to take to market," he said.

When Charterhouse acquired NETConnection Systems it was 92 per cent public sector orientated, the remainder corporates. "Having public sector customers has been imperative," added Brooks-Wadham. "They have longevity, and during the lockdown we have secured two multi-million five year managed service contracts in the health sector, with more in progress."

Brooks-Wadham's policy on expansion is clear to see as he goes 'flat out' on the acquisition trail. But, as mentioned, it's not about scale. He wants to build on the MS capabilities offered by Lloyds and is immersed in a number of acquisition opportunities where businesses are structured around Teams. He is also looking to acquire capabilities in cyber, which forms another of the firms three pillars, alongside Collaborate for UC and Connect for fast reliable connectivity.

On UC, Brooks-Wadham sees another opportunity to acquire. "Many businesses need to consider the transition to cloud and UC and absorb the hit to revenues," he said. "This involves a transformation in

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ht and strategy

approaches to market. It's not just about the proposition, it's about the managed services support which, combined with the challenging financial pressures facing many organisations, may produce some interesting acquisition opportunities over the coming months."

As lockdown eases, the variation of impacts on ICT providers is not altogether measurable now, but will become more apparent further down the line, prompting some to weigh up their options as the full effect

to them, what they want to buy from partners and who they want to buy from, both now and in the future," added Brooks-Wadham. "This gives us an overview on how to shape the business. Users want less suppliers, so covering all requirements in one portfolio is an important differentiator."

Vital planning

To say that shaping future strategy now is absolutely vital would be to understate its importance, according to Brooks-Wadham, because he says the sector is in the

The need to re-learn sales processes became apparent to Brooks-Wadham before most people knew what was coming. "When Covid-19 hit we went into lockdown ourselves before the Government's instruction," he said. "We assessed the situation, its potential impact on business lines, and modelled for all eventualities. Three months on we are seeing upticks in parts of the market. Now, it's very much back to the original plan in terms of growing the business organically and through acquisition, with some tweaks around people, approaches and technology."

The fusion of Brooks-Wadham's visionary leadership and empirical approach has set a benchmark for others to follow; and the build out of an impressive senior management team also serves as a marker of the ascent of Charterhouse. The top level recruitment drive came to fruition with the appointments of CFO Joe Roffey, CMO Nadine ter Meulen, Head of People Denisa McKiernan and CRO Richard Betts (who owned Datapulse and Arc Solutions, both sold to Enghouse in 2011).

"This team has deep experience working in big organisations and will be key to helping us identify and integrate great businesses in the future," added Brooks-Wadham. "A combination of the Charterhouse platform, support from August Equity and our leadership team, along with the full integration of the three businesses, enables us to embark with strength on the next phase of Charterhouse's growth journey." ■

Employees are now trusted to work remotely and technology is advancing at pace. Put the two together and we have a massive dynamic shift

emerges over time, believes Brooks-Wadham. "There has not been much carnage in the sector as companies went into lockdown in a relatively good position," he added. "They are working their way through the first few months, which is the same for most of their customers, with no significant impact of bad debt just yet. It's going to take longer to occur."

He stressed that any growth strategy requires a continuing focus, especially in these unprecedented times, with considerations around long-term sustainability becoming ever more critical. "We are talking to different businesses in our own base about what they are looking for from their partners in this new world, to establish the technology they see relevant

amidst of a 'mini-industrial revolution'. "What has happened in the past three months would have taken ten to 15 years to achieve," he stated. "Employees are now trusted to work remotely and technology is advancing at pace. Put the two together and we have a massive dynamic shift.

"There will be fundamental change coming out of this, impacting people, habits, ways of doing things – and we have to challenge that. For example, we are reskilling sales staff, developing their abilities to create and build rapport on a video call, to take a consultative approach and get the sales message and proposition across. This requires different skill sets, and therefore demands a re-education process."

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Race on why becoming a

How resellers play their emergence from the Covid-19 crisis could ultimately decide their fate, but for progressive MSP AdEPT Technology Group a future-proofed game plan was strategised and established long before lockdown.

The appeal of fully fledged MSPs to end user organisations is now more obvious than ever; and a robust ICT provider should be able to do far more than handle the stresses of lockdown, reflecting instead on opportunities rather than challenges. In AdEPT's case, firm ground was prepared long ago with deft strategic planning and a string of acquisitions that proved transformational for the business and its sustainability.

Phil Race took the CEO role in early 2018 when the founder and former CEO, Ian Fishwick, became Chairman. Fishwick formed the company in 2003 as a calls and lines business. Today, AdEPT delivers seamless converged IT, networking and telephony solutions. "Hence our mission, 'unifying technology, inspiring people'," stated Race.

AdEPT is also a dab hand in the acquisition space, having done 25 transactions so far. "Since 2014 and the acquisitions of Atomwide, OurIT, CommsGroup, ShiftF7, ETS and most latterly ACS in Doncaster, the company has broadened to become a provider of the full suite of ICT capability," added Race.

The most recent strategic pivot is the One AdEPT initiative, he pointed out. Prior to 2019 the company operated as a group of smaller entities. Since then



Phil Race

A clear set of defined roles, supported by specific qualifications, would be a massive step forward into professionalising this amazing industry

it has integrated to become a single organisation with a clear mission. "We have almost completed the unification process and benefitted during the Covid-19 lockdown as a result of this strategy, with Teams, Microsoft 365 and a service

management platform all deployed," noted Race.

AdEPT employs over 300 staff, targets double digit revenue and margin growth, has 12,000 customers, eight UK offices and a near even split of revenues between

public and private sector. AdEPT's figures show a revenue increase of 11 per cent to £51.3 million, with underlying EBITDA up to £10.8 million (its latest results are due July 14th). The company is strong in education and provides

services to over 4,000 schools. In health, AdEPT counts Great Ormond Street Hospital as a key customer. It has deployed a high speed network across the entire Kent NHS, and helped over 400 GP surgeries cope with the lockdown. AdEPT has equal expertise in the commercial sector with the likes of Coca Cola, Citrix, the Savoy and Sotheby's on its books.

Virtual trends

In vertical markets, says Race, the 'trend to virtual' is one to watch. "The virtual classroom will create an opportunity for our education focused operation," he commented. "We are already seeing big opportunities. For example, the Department for Education has sponsored cloud migration and since March AdEPT has helped over 180 schools migrate to the cloud on either Google or Microsoft platforms. Furthermore, the virtual office will create opportunities for the business centre customers we support. The virtual doctors surgery will be an enduring change as a result of lockdown, impacting networks, communications and telephony. Let alone the clamour for fibre to the premise to facilitate the new remote working demands."

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a MSP is vital

Virtual1 and Pragma partners, a Platinum Partner of AV provider Prometheon, and a key partner of the Convergence Group. The company also works with CityFibre as a City Champion, and BT Wholesale and Openreach. "We have just signed up 8x8 as we realised there was increasing demand for a cloud native contact centre solution," added Race. "This demand is particularly being seen within the public sector which is championing cloud-first procurements."

Another big shift is the journey from selling point offerings (telephony, licences,

in the IT estates, communications strategies and network resilience of so many organisations. These are all areas where AdEPT has experience and proven, pragmatic case studies. The biggest challenge will be the severely dented confidence decision makers will have as we ease out of lockdown. So we, as AdEPT, will need to be flexible with solutions, pricing, contract lengths and advice, working with our partners to help companies in this uncertain world."

Having clearly defined AdEPT's strategic role and objectives, Race would like

We will need to be flexible with solutions, pricing, contract lengths and advice, working with our partners to help companies in this uncertain world

hardware) to selling unified solutions (collaboration, cloud and communication). "This will require a greater depth of skill and a different style of engagement and must deliver for customers over the long-term," added Race.

Unified solutions

AdEPT's seven product categories underline the importance of unified solutions – they are Data Networking, Security, Cloud Services, Business Continuity, Managed IT, Voice Services & Collaboration, delivered through Professional Services. "These are all extremely relevant in the massively changed world we now live in," added Race. "The Covid-19 lockdown has highlighted shortcomings

to see the same structural approach, in terms of the relationship between skills and careers, applied to the industry as a whole for the betterment of all involved. "The accounting industry, the legal industry and the HR arena all have clearly defined career paths, with qualifications that underpin defined roles," he commented. "The IT sector has 'role anarchy' with so many different jobs across so many disciplines. I can call myself a Software Architect even if I have no qualifications to substantiate the claim. A clear set of defined roles, supported by specific qualifications, would be a massive step forward into professionalising this amazing industry." ■

Just a minute with Phil Race...

Role model: My Grandma, who survived to the age of 99 and 364 days!

An ardent royalist who was bedmaker to Prince Charles when he studied at Cambridge University. She inspired me to learn, to read and to have ambition.

Your main strength and what could you work on? I form good teams, but I could work on my patience. I can't wait to get things done.

Best piece of advice you have been given? Maintain a work-life balance.

Who do you admire most in the channel? Anyone who challenges the lack of diversity, in all its forms, in the comms industry.

In hindsight: I spent a long time working for big corporates, but had most satisfaction in smaller companies. I may have made the move sooner.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know:

I've met Prince Charles and climbed Mount Kinabalu in Borneo, the 20th highest mountain in the world at over 4,000 metres, in a fund raising expedition for the Prince's Trust.

Name three ideal dinner guests: Bradley Walsh for entertainment; Keith Floyd for wine and food; and Marilyn Monroe for her glamour and stories.

Your first job: With ICL, which targeted graduates from Nottingham University where I studied Electronic Engineering. It was a great introduction to the world of computing and an opportunity to learn about all aspects of business.

How do you relax when not working? My 'happy place' is bodyboarding in the Cornish waves.



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Hale on why culture und

Convergence Group's restructuring has not only raised its objectives to a new level, it has also elevated the importance of culture in achieving those goals, says Director of Strategy and Change Franki Hale.

The relevance of Hale's career experience to Convergence Group is that it is based on the same premise that the performance of a business is inextricably linked to the performance of its people and teams. "My move into comms followed an introduction to Convergence Group founder Neal Harrison," she explained. "He was looking for someone to help build a senior management team ahead of driving scale and growth."

Hale joined the company in 2017 following a notable career in the retail and hospitality sectors, working across several large corporate, privately owned and PE backed businesses in senior positions. "I became aware that my success had come from building strong service-focused teams," she said. "It was at this point that I decided to move into human resources, specialising in building sustainable organisations that scale."

She noted that the retail and hospitality sectors are relatively mature and that businesses have evolved and reinvented themselves to survive, with culture an ever more important success factor – a story that is also familiar in the not so mature comms industry. "You only have to stand on a high street to see the size of the competition," she added. "That competition is not just after your customers, they



Franki Hale

This is where the excitement is – watching the last three years of hard yards deliver for everyone involved

also want your best people. Therefore being on top of your game, and culture, is crucial. Culture is built on finding the right people, ensuring the processes are simple and repeatable to

enable great service, and encouraging a constant evolution through an appetite to make mistakes, alongside good system development. Get this right and you will always grow."

Convergence Group hit the reset button on its cultural development in 2016 when it acquired Network First. The deal formed part of a plan to offer solutions in all areas of infrastructure,

specialising in layers 1-4 of the OSI stack and developing a Connectivity as a Service (CaaS) proposition. "When I joined, the Network First business had recently been acquired therefore my main priority was to bring the two businesses together culturally, ensuring true integration was achieved across people, processes and systems," said Hale. "Over the last three years we have focused on building the business from the inside out, bringing in quality people to lead the team, improving and simplifying processes and developing systems to increase capacity and drive service."

Pressing the green button

With its restructuring phase now complete, Convergence Group has unleashed a significant programme targeting all businesses in need of agile solutions. And having invested in a new network to increase capacity, the company hopes to connect five million users over the next five years.

"Our biggest opportunity is the current financial climate," commented Hale. "With the foundations in place we are now ready to take our CaaS offer to market, giving our customers new levels of commercial choice. The offer focuses on the number of users each business requires to build the right commercial model for customers. This is where the excitement

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erpins growth

is – watching the last three years of hard yards deliver for everyone involved.”

Convergence Group’s product split has favoured WAN, but over the last few years it has seen significant growth in its LAN services across the existing customer base, also driven by relationships in the public sector (mainly blue light services). “The move to a full connectivity infrastructure offer in CaaS with our existing partners

connectivity and more will be looking for flexibility, enabling them to access a secure network on and off premises.

“We have been working on CaaS for several years, now our priority is getting it out to market and ensuring we do not miss the opportunity to add real value to end users. Another big focus area has been enabling a mobile solution that gives people connected to our network the ability to access

The biggest challenge for many comes from Covid-19 which has changed how the world works. There is little appetite to return to the old ways of doing things

and their end users and our direct customers is showing growth,” stated Hale. “This year we are also launching a Joint Venture Partnership enabling established businesses or single operators to work in partnership with Convergence Group and share the full rewards of growing the business.”

Convergence Group has a strong presence in the channel and directly, and supports worldwide enterprises. “In times where people are unsure, they need experts to take the lead and show them what is available,” commented Hale. “The biggest challenge for many now comes from Covid-19 which has changed how the world works. There is little appetite to return to the old ways of doing things. Therefore, this is a turning point for us as fewer businesses will require fixed

the same service they would get in their office, anywhere and at any time, as part of our CaaS model.”

Connectivity is the fourth utility, according to Hale. More importantly, she says, the next generation workforce will expect the highest level of connectivity on demand wherever they are, in their personal life and with even higher expectations in the workplace. “To this generation, flexibility will be their normal, therefore working from anywhere at different times of the day will start to become the rule, not the exception,” she stated. “We need to drive simplicity to enable great service. Connectivity infrastructure is not something anyone will or should want to think about, therefore our business is working hard to make servicing connectivity as invisible as electricity.” ■

Just a minute with Franki Hale...

What talent do you wish you had? A watertight memory for places, routes and directions.

Your main strength and what could you work on? My greatest strength may also be my biggest weakness, which is when ‘I’m in, I’m in’. Being able to disconnect is something I need to work on.

Best piece of advice you have been given? If it doesn’t feel right, it probably isn’t, so don’t do it!

The biggest risk you have taken: Working abroad as a student with no visa (that is when I was given my best piece of advice).

In hindsight: I would have joined the tech industry earlier. There is great potential here!

Tell us something about yourself we don’t know: I’m a qualified sports masseur.

What do you fear most? Being really bored!

Name three ideal dinner guests: Right now, my best friends. It would be great to have a few beers and a giggle with them.

Biggest achievement: Getting two children into their teens, and one now beyond, while working full-time and having lots of laughs along the way.

How do you relax when not working? Cooking is a bit like meditation for me. It completely relaxes me and fortunately doesn’t take much thinking.

Top tip for resellers: Embrace the new world.

How would you like to be remembered? As a good woman.

How can we create greater diversity in the comms industry? By addressing the lack of ‘selling’ our industry into the younger generation.

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Adjusting to, and harness

From the moment Covid-19 smashed into the UK's business community the credentials of executive leaders and their people were put to the test. And as a 'commander-in-chief' at a moment of crisis, Onecom CEO Ben Dowd acted decisively and continues to pass muster with flying colours.

Dowd's, and Onecom's, adaptability has proved well suited to the Covid-19 crisis. He is currently managing the business back to a 'new normal', and his detailed 'change' plans also build on long-established strategies that are set in stone. "Life is, and will be, very different as we move through a series of phases from 100 per cent remote working to a full return," stated Dowd. "Apart from a small team in the warehouse, the remaining 99 per cent of the organisation are working from home. We have performed well in this new environment, and while some are desperate to return to the office, many are enjoying the positives that working from home can offer."

Onecom staff won't start returning to the office until September at the earliest, noted Dowd. "We made this decision for three reasons: The current Government advice is to work from home if you can – which most of us can; we have a number of working parents who would find returning to the office impossible given the lack of childcare options through the summer holidays; and under the two metre ruling we can only support up to 20 per cent of the workforce coming into the office at any one time," he explained. "The decision



Ben Dowd

We are living proof that a family first approach not only makes personal sense, it makes business sense too

also gave our people some much needed certainty."

In the meantime, Onecom has built a business continuity plan which is set to get under way. "We will test the plan with one office according to the current two metre social distancing rule and see how that feels for staff before we look to roll it out," added Dowd. "It will feel very different from life in the office before lockdown, so we will all need another period of adjustment as we start to move back. If the Government drops the two metre rule to one metre then we would look

to accelerate our return, in combination with a revamped flexible working policy."

Continuity planning

Despite the upheaval, Dowd's strategy has not changed as a result of lockdown. When LDC invested in Onecom it was agreed that the ambition was to achieve three-fold growth over three to five years through organic and inorganic means. Towards the end of 2019 and early 2020 Onecom invested significantly in additional headcount and systems to drive organic growth, and it has developed a strong pipeline of acquisition targets

which Dowd hopes to convert on in the near future.

"Undoubtedly, what the current market has shown is that there is accelerated demand for UC and hosted solutions and likely to be a quicker acceleration away from on-premise solutions," he added. "The inevitable inability of engineers not being able to enter customer premises has meant that there has been greater demand for services that can be spun up and provisioned remotely to enable employees to work from home. Examples of this include video and audio

conferencing, cloud-based contact centre platforms and disaster recovery solutions.

"We quickly responded to this change in demand by changing our approach and focus in our lead generation and sales conversations. We are now doing a lot more business over video conference, and I expect this to become a more permanent feature of how we operate in the future."

The biggest challenge to returning to BAU, says Dowd, is the pace at which businesses can get back to 100 per cent capacity, particularly given that many sectors are still totally shut down and many will be operating at partial capacity for a prolonged period. "Furthermore, any bounce back will be driven by consumer confidence to spend, and given the phased easing of Government support this is likely to drive a gradual bounce back rather than an immediate one," said Dowd.

"Once Government funding has been withdrawn for furlough and other loan schemes we will be watching to see how many businesses can stand on their own two feet and make it into 2021. On top of this, we will need to carefully manage a phased return to the office and further change for our employees. Office life will be



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Living Covid

quite different in the short-term and the adjustments we will have to make to keep the office environment safe may feel awkward or uncomfortable for some.

"While we are doing detailed planning, it's hard to predict every eventuality when you are doing something for the first time, like re-opening an office under Covid-19. Communication will be key to mitigate issues and minimise disruptions. Ultimately, there is no 'return to BAU', we are already in a sustainable BAU position. I see returning to the office as simply the next phase in our development as a company."

Positive outcomes

Notwithstanding the many issues caused by Covid-19, none of which any company is immune to, Dowd says Onecom will exit this crisis with a number of positives. "We realised immediately that good and regular communication would be key to maintaining the operation," commented Dowd. "At every level communication and engagement has gone up. Everyone is utilising Microsoft Teams, most keep their videos switched on and we feel tighter than ever as an organisation. This situation has created a level playing field where we are all easily

accessible if needed and support is readily available for those that have struggled. The informal virtual catch ups with staff have taught me that personal and visible engagement can achieve the same things as physical engagement and help to energise not just me but the whole organisation."

In fact, enthused Dowd, he has never been able to engage with so many people so easily. "We've run weekly and at times bi-weekly virtual roadshows," he said. "Morale has been kept high with virtual scavenger hunts, competitions and generally having fun. Since I joined Onecom in November 2018 I made it clear that a work-life balance was essential and that we should all put family first. During this crisis, we've been able to live up to those expectations. We are living proof that a family first approach not only makes personal sense, it makes business sense too."

"Clearly, the Covid-19 pandemic has been a real challenge for us all and not something we would ever want to go through again. However, it's important to maintain and keep doing the things that have inspired us during this crisis when we eventually come out the other side." ■

The best thing about lockdown...

SAVING time by talking over Teams rather than driving all over the country. This has opened more meaningful conversations within the business and given us all more time to spend with our family and loved ones.

And the worst...

NOT being able to have face-to-face sessions and conversations. There is still a place for seeing people in the flesh. We were able to cope with lockdown because of the time we spent together in the office beforehand. I can't wait to get my team together, walk the floor and engage with people in a more human way again.

Helping You Chase Your Managed Services 'Promised Land'

Chasing Your Promised Land

Most business owners and leaders will have a plan to maximise shareholder returns and grow the enterprise value of the organisation, setting goals over a 3 to 5-year period and the objectives required to achieve those goals. This outlines the strategic direction of the company and the clear communication of the plan enables the workforce to follow.

"We call this 'chasing your Promised Land'. For a lot of organisations, looking to capitalise on the demand for managed services, it is land rich, with addressable opportunity, recurring revenues, multi-year contracts, and strong financial (particularly margin and cash collection) performance." Says Greg Gyves, Regional Manager – MSSP at Fortinet.

The Challenge

The challenge on the road to the managed services promised land is that there are many rival organisations who tread the same path, broadening the competitive landscape and making differentiation harder to achieve. In addition, many MSP's can over time find themselves settling into a comfort zone, stifling innovation, and leading to the MSP standing still (therefore falling behind). To stand the best chance of winning you need to identify and defeat your 'enemies' which are normally internal inhibiting factors such as technology standards, process, people & culture. Then, you need to pick some partners (Vendors) who can align with your business model and work alongside you to meet both internal & external challenges head-on.

Moving forward requires a broadening of capability and/or diversification into adjacent



Greg Gyves

markets – all with finite resources. Focusing efforts to develop skills & new services in areas of higher demand (and returns) such as security, digital & cloud services can accelerate and increase the returns but needs to be balanced with maintaining delivery of core services. Then there's the need to translate the outcomes of the newly developed capability into standardised service offerings your customers will want to consume, all of which is much easier said than done.

Time for Change

Most MSP's require support in this journey from their vendor partners but unfortunately, the common feedback is that this support is usually in the form of a traditional reseller engagement model. This only serves to frustrate and alienate the MSP and slows down their ability to build new services. Be wary of vendors positioning themselves or their product as the "promised land". Instead, take the time to pick partners who have a genuine interest & understanding in the path you need to take. Partners who can act as a guide, having walked a similar path with other MSP's and have a broad

base of solutions and capability themselves that can help you on your way.

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"We noticed the need to change engagement model over 5 years ago and in that time through constantly listening to the needs of our managed service partners we have moved from a product-centric, inward-looking approach to a service-centric, outcome led approach. Our 'Service Factory' methodology aims to accelerate the whole service enablement process with our partners"

It is this approach that has resonated with our broad base of telecoms providers looking to augment their core business with managed security services to serve their customers whilst ensuring they grow revenue & EBITDA margin. We have also seen a clear upward trend on EBITDA multiples over recent years for organisations with solid capability in those areas of high demand, particularly security.

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A father of invention

Qubic founder Chris Papa has once again shown a knack for innovating with foresight and being quick out of the blocks with in-demand solutions.

Chris Papa is a highly appropriate name for a man who has been a father of invention within the telecoms industry for over 30 years and his latest breakthrough aims to give resellers total ownership of fully integrated Mitel-Microsoft Teams estates. Qubic, the company Papa founded alongside brother Joe in 1994, is a Microsoft Gold Partner and one of a handful of system integrators granted permission by Mitel to build bespoke customer solutions.

With this pedigree, Papa believes his company is now perfectly placed to team up with resellers looking to protect margins from major customer deployments. "We have always had the two strings to our bow," he said. "As well as being a Mitel Build Partner, we are a Microsoft Gold Partner in Small and Midmarket Cloud Solutions and Cloud Productivity. It's two-pronged – the traditional telephony organisations on one side and Microsoft Teams telephony on the other. Microsoft is really pushing its Teams telephony offering with a bundled call plan, effectively reducing any reseller margin opportunity."

Papa rails against certain shifts in vendor and partner paradigms, claiming some manufacturers are making a 'land-grab' for the customer relationship and the lion's share of the margin. For him, the opposite will always stand true. "We fully understand resellers want to own

customer contracts to build value in their businesses, and within our Mitel Partner Build agreement we can build systems for resellers and allow them to keep the billing relationship with their customer, which means much bigger margins," he said.

With its combined voice and data expertise, Qubic (which started out as Ambient Communications) has been a long-term exponent of Microsoft's telephony offering and built and deployed a worldwide telephony platform based on Microsoft Lync for a client over 10-years ago. Long before that, the technical knowledge of Ambient's TiVD (Total Integration of Voice & Data) team enabled Lucent to interface its SDX telephony products with data networks as the company did not have in-house expertise in the UK. And, in 1995, the same team delivered an international VoIP solution well ahead of its time.

"We became known as a creator of technical solutions both with end users and in the channel," added Papa. "That was our value add. We were also well ahead of the curve with the adoption of cloud. We had invested heavily and built our own hosted environment across multiple data centres with multiple interconnects. We were at the forefront of virtualising Mitel instances, long before Mitel was offering a hosted service.

"In tandem, we started taking 'wires-only' circuits



Chris Papa

We became known as a creator of technical solutions both with end users and in the channel. That was our value add

from a range of Tier 1 carriers that connected straight to our core in the data centres without crossing the public Internet, and then out through SIP, so we were giving users a 'near LAN' experience, even over ADSL."

Ahead of time

Alongside the voice offering, Papa had his vcloud computing platform in place well before Microsoft 365, Azure or AWS were even thought of. "When Microsoft launched its Teams telephony products last year we were quickly able to provide a Teams Direct routing platform that uses technology in our cloud to route calls to and from Teams over SIP, so we could capture the call revenue instead of Microsoft," he added. "Using that same technology we can also fully

integrate Teams with Mitel or other telephony platforms."

In the past, as Papa explained, Qubic has helped resellers lacking expertise and resources, or the size and scale to secure manufacture accreditations. "Our offer effectively gave them a 'leg-up', but we always made sure they maintained their billing relationship with the end user and were there to provide support at whatever level they needed. We also engaged with companies outside the comms industry that had a business customer base in an allied sector such as facilities management or office equipment."

With change coming, Papa believes resellers will have to get smarter and add value by offering wrap around services

like VoIP fraud prevention, cyber security, or professional services. "We are already having success in Augmented Reality (AR), Artificial Intelligent (AI), IoT, Big Data and are building relationships with organisations that can deliver new emerging technologies to us," he said.

"In one sense, nothing has changed since the early days of Ambient and TiVD. We are ahead of the technology curve and we're gearing up for what is to come by investing in technology and expertise as well as building relationships. "We can offer Mitel Partner Build, Teams Direct Routing and Teams to Mitel integration right now, allowing reseller partners to add value, increase margin and maintain ownership of the relationship." ■

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Energy deals boom for One Connectivity under the lockdown

FOR Nottinghamshire based business solutions provider One Connectivity, the national lockdown has provided a fantastic opportunity to drive sales in gas and electricity whilst providing a fantastic service for its clients.

"We have been working alongside Fidelity Energy for a couple of years now to facilitate our energy sales," stated Dave Bird, Sales Director.

"One of things they have always done is to keep us fully informed of the market situation. As events took a hold on the world back at the beginning of the year there were positive signs that petrol and energy prices were dropping which created the opportunity for our customers to save.

"Then, back in March, we watched an online seminar at which Fidelity's Managing Director, John Haw predicted what would happen in the months ahead and, as a result, we made a clear decision not to furlough the energy sales team. In fact, we made plans to be even more active and our message was simple: 'make the most of these favourable prices while they last'."

With wholesale gas and electricity prices losing 50% of their value from January 2020, the One Connectivity team knew they would be saving customers money which, given the circumstances, would be highly beneficial.

"We ran two email marketing campaigns to our base encouraging clients to send us their bills, even if we had recently done them a

deal, as we could potentially extend their contract at lower rate," said Rachel Harbon, One Connectivity's energy consultant.

"We simply reminded all our customers that things would get back to normal and that everyone would be looking to save on costs where they could. Reviewing energy contracts while people had a little more time on their hands was a perfect way to do that. It worked very well. We were inundated with enquiries! The first week saw over fifty new opportunities come our way."

Rachel Harbon says the majority of One Connectivity's energy sales are closed over email and the telephone and, whilst some customers have been harder to get hold of in the lockdown, when the sales staff presented Fidelity's market information along with favourable prices, most were very open to a review.

"Energy has no capital outlay for our business and does not require an engineer to go to site so switching customers hasn't been affected by the lockdown and has ensured commissions have kept coming in with no cost to our business.

"Through this uncertain time, we have already managed to secure significant savings for many of our customers which has been brilliant and, in addition, this quarter has been one of our most successful ever in terms of sales and new opportunities generated.

"All in all, we are delighted we kept going and we are glad we have energy as an offering at this time, as do our customers!" she added.

"Energy has no capital outlay for our business and does not require an engineer to go to site, so switching customers hasn't been affected by the lockdown"

One Connectivity Energy Consultant Rachel Harbon

Why resetting your mindset is critical to lockdown recovery

To thrive in the post-Covid-19 era don't jump into a knee-jerk strategic plan, think radically by introducing an honest personal review first, writes Amanda Daly, founder of coaching firm The Turnaround CEO...



Amanda Daly

Questioning the viability of your business and challenging your model is an essential part of the process of moving forward. Embracing change, and the fear of change, provides an opportunity to reflect and lift the lid on the boxes we perhaps have feared to open. And by facing fear we can progress to a new comfort zone. That said, it is natural to be wary of change, especially when it is enforced.

Routine, familiarity and habits form a stable part of our daily lives and even our identity. But what happens when an event like Covid-19 takes that control and certainty away? Fear can creep in. When we are considering how to move forward, beyond Covid-19, we will of course need to think about an array of factors – finance, staffing, marketplace, funding, direction, destination – the list is endless. If we allow our thinking on these elements to be influenced by fear, they will become universally negative and emotional, and it stands to reason that business decisions resulting from this thinking will be different from those arrived

Our fear can make us freeze, and we miss the chance

at in calmer more stable times. Our fear can make us freeze, and we miss the chance to make the business choices we want to.

Altered states

Many of us hailing from a traditional comms background recall the sense of fear, doubt and uncertainty we felt when confronted with the new challenges that moving from fixed line technology to the cloud presented. We just had to change our style of selling and even our business models to fit in with change. The Covid-19 pandemic is no different. It is exponentially larger in scale and impact, but it's still just change.

Covid-19 has accelerated change. The adoption of cloud, home working, collaborations and video

conferencing were always on the agenda, and have been for more than a decade. But the pandemic sped up something that was steadily being incorporated in some resellers into a head-long rush to completion. This is a significant landmark in our industry, and a turning point on how we will conduct future business. And in the world of business, we will all need to overcome the potential indecision, doubt and fear such pivotal milestones can bring.

Any event, however far reaching and enormous, can be viewed from different aspects, and if we 'reframe' our experience of Covid-19 in a positive way we can learn valuable business lessons, or even secure new business wins. If you are willing to look openly and bravely at the experience and your business, it will enhance the process of moving forward with these lessons and take your company to a stronger level.

Many of us will start looking inwards and challenge our thoughts about ourselves in terms of our skills as a leader and business owner. But a positive outcome to any event is dictated by your response to it. This is your chance to assess all of your processes, your functionality, your resilience, and yourself. Mindset is critical, and the stories we tell ourselves will affect the way we are able to transform our business and, to a large extent, our lives. ■

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How Covid-19 lockdown

What matters now is not the immediate impact of Covid-19 on businesses, it is how ICT providers are responding and gaining new strength from adversity.

William Copley, MD, Armstrong Bell

• Why my business is stronger because of the pandemic...

The time in lockdown has enabled us to develop and hone our strategy for growth. The reduction of 50 per cent of our staff who were unable to operate as usual during this period created a window of opportunity for that work. What's more, as our main business model is upheld by recurring revenue, we haven't experienced issues with cashflow to the extent that many other SMEs unfortunately have. And we have made the best plans possible across all key areas of the company, but we won't know the real challenges until the majority of businesses have restarted operations. The real test will be the next three to six months as lockdown continues to ease and businesses – both our existing and potential customers – return to some form of normality.

How the pandemic strengthened my strategic resolve...

At the start of 2020 we had a clear vision and strategy for growth in place, and this hasn't changed as a result of the pandemic. In fact, Covid-19 has strengthened our resolve to succeed, cementing our direction and providing us with more time to plan and develop our ideas. During the lockdown period we have continued to push forward with our growth plans and objectives,



William Copley

which have also been driven by the appointment of our new Head of Sales, Nick Lake. When our field sales team return in July they will have a clear set of goals and expectations, and as a team they will welcome the focus.

The best thing about lockdown...

The opportunity to spend quality time with my family, particularly as the weather has been amazing. It has also provided the opportunity to complete those tasks you never have time for, tidying the garage and changing every door knob in the house, or spending more time reading and exercising.

The worst thing about lockdown...

The worry and concern for more vulnerable friends and family members who don't have a strong network around them, but need to adhere to strict shielding or social distancing measures. ■

Sue Elliot, COO and Chief of Staff, Windsor Telecom

• The biggest eye-opener during the Covid-19 lockdown...

Making the most of the technology we offer during lockdown and the high performance of the team has really shown the value of remote working. Certain parts of the business have always been more remote-focused but we have shown ourselves that collaboration really can be just as effective without sitting in a boardroom together. With the addition of daily Teams calls to boost productivity and the fast adoption of MS Teams for collaboration and team working, we anticipate this trend continuing to provide the wider team with more choices than ever.

How the lockdown reaffirmed my strategic direction...

Lockdown has cemented the view that what made sense as a strategy six months ago makes even more sense now. Offering an end-to-end solution for our customers, becoming a trusted advisor for all aspects of their business comms and deepening and strengthening relationships are key, with the service wrap. If anything, we have fast tracked our investment in product diversification as our customers demand deeper collaboration methods.

My biggest challenges...

Ensuring all of our people are comfortable with the

pace of returning to the new normal. There are a wide range of unknowns, fears and motivations and it is vital that businesses don't adopt a 'one size fits all' strategy and really support the team's mental health along the way.

The majority of organisations have faced challenges during the pandemic, especially when supporting other UK businesses. But during the lockdown our people have been at the forefront of our considerations, with twice weekly full team quizzes, workout Wednesdays and regular treats/self care packages delivered through the post – and even an extra enforced days holiday. We see Windsor as a family, and a challenge has been keeping that family spirit alive throughout the last few months.

The best thing about lockdown...

Taking time to appreciate the small things in life. Seeing how everyone at Windsor has risen to the challenge so brilliantly and supported each other through both the good times and the not so great!

The worst thing about lockdown...

Seeing people struggle in certain situations, maybe missing loved ones or having a down day, and not being able to give them a hug or automatically be able to fix it. That's harder than usual when you can't physically be nearby to support them. ■



Sue Elliot

impacted my business

Chris Morrissey, Managing Director, Lily

• Why the Lily office will never be the same again after lockdown....

Business as we know it will never be the same again – that's no bad thing. We've truly been forced to consider remote working as an option and the results have been terrific. I've learnt to trust our people more than ever. They all proved that they have been working diligently and delivering results. For this reason, remote working will become a key part of our set-up moving forward, and the office environment will transform.

• Why I will take a more strategic approach to staff considerations....

Returning to work will be a more considered approach that includes following the Government guidelines, along with adapting to a routine that functions to get the best

out of our people. For staff members returning from furlough, this can also mean training on how to effectively work from home, and getting the right attitudes and behaviours linked to our business growth journey. With a strong team at our core, we can do anything.

How the Covid-19 restrictions unleashed our potential...

The lockdown has given us a better platform than ever before. Our core message over the past few years has always been about digital transformation in business, making sure that your organisation has the right technology in place to work more efficiently. This message is relevant to every business in the UK. For many organisations, their aim now is to make sure they have the right infrastructure in

place, if they haven't already, to not fall short again.

Key lessons learned and how new efficiencies were created...

From an operational perspective we've learnt that we can be more efficient with our sales process and we've adapted quickly to this change. We're also doing a lot more remote installations, all of which are driving major efficiencies in our business.

Identifying and overcoming the challenges ahead...

Finding the balance between the trepidation around a 'second wave' and a further lockdown versus the desire to get cracking and back into work is key. Many businesses will still have a reluctance to make big decisions on the basis that the landscape for the next 12 months looks uncertain. I also think BAU needs redefining – many businesses don't want to go back to BAU. As we've heard the term 'new normal' discussed so much, it's about us moving to somewhere better than we were before. The biggest challenge is ensuring that businesses transform for the better and learn from this experience.

The best thing about lockdown...

Seeing how well our people have adapted. We all keep in touch via our internal newsletter and Facebook page, and it's great to see such an amazing community spirit.

The worst thing about lockdown...

Being put in a position where we had to furlough some of our team. ■

James Pink, Director, Pink Connect



James Pink

• Why my business is stronger because of the pandemic....

Many staff found it tough being furloughed and are visibly buoyant about being back. We have seen renewed commitment to learning and stepping-up, and there is a palpable rolling up of sleeves everywhere. The Pink Connect team are galvanised by this experience and we see opportunities everywhere. Our target market has always been SME but the crisis has highlighted the poor flexibility of ISDN phone systems. The transition to VoIP is pretty much universally accepted as an imperative, rather than something 'we must look at some time'. A large proportion of people will work from home either permanently or part-time. We see that as a huge opportunity – and the crisis has removed the client inertia and resistance to starting a conversation about such moves.

How the lockdown boosted sales...

In the last month we recruited 10 franchisees, half of our target for 2020. So we have now revised our 2020 goal to 50. The lockdown has forced us to rethink franchisee training which we now do via Teams video meetings in

two hour bites. Having the visual content available to click through afterwards at any time has instilled confidence and ensures that the learning has 'gone in'. This is a big transformation.

The best thing about lockdown...

Lockdown has been a catalyst for action around change. We have re-written our training, reviewed, re-written and replaced our website, negotiated better wholesale pricing, secured better products from suppliers, re-set staff relationships, sourced a £10k grant and £50k inexpensive and deferred business loan; we've had an opportunity to work with our stressed customers and cement the relationship, and provide financial assistance to customers without dropping margin (thank you VoIP). It has proven the value in having a comparatively small but flexible supplier as opposed to the big boys.

The worst thing about lockdown...

Our son's school experience has been greatly reduced but the fees have not. We have all put on weight – much home cooking and too many deserts – and we have had a very few small customers sink, some without trace. ■



Chris Morrissey



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Repoint your marketing

Amid a crisis it's tempting to be sucked into existing practices when the opposite is required, according to 9 Head of Customer Marketing Louise Abbey who says Covid-19 has jolted marketers into taking a new approach. Here, she provides a guide to effective marketing in the post-Covid-19 era.

By having a more fact-based and customer centric digital marketing plan which looks beyond lockdown, such as the one outlined below, businesses can strike the right tone and be best prepared for market engagement in the 'new normal' environment. Here's how..

Understand changes in customer behaviour

There was a lot of hesitation and guesswork at the beginning of lockdown around how to market to customers in such difficult circumstances. But now is the time for 'less talk and more action'. By taking a clear and strategic approach you can gather hard facts and ensure that you're getting the maximum RoI.

What are your customers searching for?

Google Trends can be used to monitor changes in key areas, allowing you to adjust keywords and ads to link with audience searches. Find out what your customers are really searching for, it may encourage you to reconsider the theme in a lot of your messaging.

How is your website performing?

Free tools such as Google Analytics provide a clear view of how hard your website is performing, and which product areas your customers are most

interested in learning about. We've seen a spike in website traffic during lockdown and repointed our efforts towards content creation for our news pages and blogs.

Are your social media efforts worthwhile?

If you're engaging in social media marketing, all of the main platforms come with inbuilt reporting tools. Measure your success and use the data to decide whether to ramp up your efforts or repoint your focus elsewhere. We saw increased engagement on social media during lockdown, but for people-based profiles rather than our company profile. We redirected our efforts to increase our reach.

What's important to your customers?

Approach your customers to ask how they are. It sounds simple, but many overlook the importance of a basic interaction. There is nothing more important than this. Even if you block out one hour to place five customer calls, you won't regret it. Try to understand how the pandemic affected their business so that you can respond in a way that delivers real value.

Maximise your Search Engine Optimisation

As the lockdown restrictions prohibited shoppers from visiting non-essential retail stores, online spend sky



Louise Abbey

Audiences gravitate towards content that has meaning and relevance, so your messaging should focus on what's important today

rocketed. According to the ONS, online shopping as a proportion of all retail reached a record high of 30.7 per cent. Those who thrived had a slick online presence and the ability to place orders online. While the doors to most shops have reopened, many buyers are still hesitant to visit in person and the online figures remain high.

These behaviours are likely to spill over to the B2B space as buyers become more expectant of brands to cater for them online. By introducing SEO to your website you can draw in more visitors and climb to the top of Google when

buyers are searching for products and services.

If you have already invested time and effort in optimising your website prior to lockdown, it's important to revisit this as user behaviours have changed. We are seeing a lot of channel businesses placing effort in this area. So, even if you held the coveted top spot on Google before, you may find that a rival is now biting at your heels.

Focus on brand building, not short-term sales

It's essential to do more than simply keep the marketing lights on. As a popular adage says, 'When times are

good you should advertise. When times are bad you must advertise'. But it's not enough to just make a noise, brands need to be relevant and deliver long-term value to succeed. So use this time to build brand awareness. By being front and centre and providing value when your customers need you most, you will open the door for sales once buyer confidence returns. Simply by being present, you create an image of stability which reassures customers and encourages them to come to you.

Audiences gravitate towards content that has meaning and relevance, so your messaging should focus on what's important today. Give your customers advice and support; and rather than push a sales agenda, help existing customers get the most out of the services they have today. Such support and engagement can be delivered through one-to-one conversations, online training sessions, live streams, white papers and product guides.

Many channel brands are reducing marketing efforts and spends, but by placing effort in this space you can stand out and have a wider share of voice. Put your customers' needs at the heart of everything you do today. Be proactive, listen and be prepared to pivot your marketing focus to adapt to today's behaviours. ■



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Why sales strategies mu

Perhaps the greatest challenge post-lockdown is not to accelerate the market for comms solutions, but to develop the selling techniques and approaches that meet a new and present demand, according to our expert panel.

Simon Jones, Head of Sales UK & Ireland, Atos Unify

We've seen a lot of tools implemented hurriedly and tactically in response to the current situation. Therefore post-lockdown sales engagement will require strong trusted advisor relationships to help clients gain a more strategic perspective on their future communications needs. They will need assistance to either get full value from the tactical investments they've made, or to recognise their lockdown investments as expedient but unsustainable, and redirect investment towards new strategic platforms.

A clear uptick in demand for cloud-based communications, collaboration and contact centre solutions is also evident, and we expect this to be an ongoing dominant feature of the market. Cloud substantially changes the capital versus recurring revenue mix, so resellers



Simon Jones

must rethink their financial structure and focus on value add and sales incentives to flourish in this environment.

The accelerated consumerisation of IT during lockdown means that the end user is now an equal stakeholder to the IT team in terms of sales engagement. Their experiences drive adoption, so working with organisations to tailor the journey will become the new norm. No one glove fits all, not even in the same organisation. ■

Anna Roper, Partner Sales Director, 9 Group

Human-to-human connections are more important than ever, and communication plays a significant role in that requirement. Most sales people are social creatures who thrive in a one-to-one situation, but having a screen between you and your prospect can strip away some of your best sales techniques. So provide training and support to your sales team and equip



Anna Roper

them with the right tools for the job to sell remotely.

Relationship building is the cornerstone of sales, and the fundamentals of what makes a positive relationship haven't changed during the lockdown. So practice empathy and be human. Show goodwill and communicate often. If customers feel that you have listened and understand their needs during this period you'll come through the other side with an even stronger partnership. ■

Mark Curtis-Wood, Sales & Marketing Director, Vaioni

We have already seen an enormous shift towards the use of video conferencing; and with customers' movements restricted, the shift to self-serve has also reached a tipping point, so much so that 32 per cent of businesses still trading reported an increase in online sales. Therefore, resellers need to revise their sales strategies to meet



Mark Curtis-Wood

this behaviour or risk losing revenue. Shortening the sales cycle is another important

consideration. Prospects need more confidence in the products and services offered to counter the understandable fears and trepidation of agreeing to a long-term solution in such an unpredictable marketplace. Any assurances or guarantees that a reseller can provide, in terms of flexible contract lengths and reduced upfront costs, will help win more business. ■

Paul Emery, Sales Director UK & Ireland, Content Guru

As the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions continue to be lifted, remote working will likely become commonplace for most businesses and this will be no different in the contact centre industry. Adaptability in this environment is key for success and selling

strategies will need to evolve post-lockdown. Business meetings will continue to be virtual for some time, which means more difficulty in reading an individual's body language. Video meetings are great, but if all you can see is the person's face, then it's difficult to see the



Paul Emery

'tell signs' of how engaged a prospective customer is.

Conversations around technical feeds and speeds have long gone, as customers want to know how cloud-based technology can enable them to deliver a better customer experience.

However, an important question that will be asked now more than ever is 'how resilient and accessible is your solution?'. The pandemic has taught executives to be prepared for business continuity in the face of unprecedented social and economic upheaval. ■



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Biggest change post-Covid 19

Edward Aspeling, Sales Director, Excell Group

Buying decisions are now likely to be based on ensuring business continuity just as much as the focus used to be on affordability and flexibility. Positioning products and services that cater to the new normal is key, which is now firmly based on working from anywhere on any device and being able to do so securely. Businesses are less likely to resist cloud adoption as



Edward Aspeling

current times have proven the fundamental importance

of being cloud-ready. The old 'what if' sales strategy should now turn into 'are you ready'.

Furthermore, protect all business relationships, from partners to customers and prospects to staff and senior executives. Time has proven that we needed them yesterday, we certainly cannot do without them in the 'new' today and will heavily rely on them tomorrow. ■

Oliver Newby, Business Development Manager, Akixi

The conversations that sales people were having months prior to lockdown suddenly hit home for a lot of businesses. Fortunately, however, resellers were able to quickly deploy temporary solutions which not only got customers out of a hole, but also shone the light on how flexible and effective UCaaS solutions can be. This did seemingly come as a struggle to those businesses that relied on the physical visibility of their staff and hearing those phones ringing; but with analytics and the visibility it brings organisations have been able to operate efficiently working from home, with real-time reports enabling business leaders to view incoming contact from their customers and monitor the productivity of their staff.

The current climate has forced so many of us to work from home and also driven us to be more inventive with the way that we sell, and resellers fully adopting the same technology themselves has only helped in the process. While some teams may be finding that new business deals are harder to come by at the moment, in many cases, the practice of virtual selling has made it easier to tie down the decision maker and speed up the buying cycle.

However, one of the hurdles with this for resellers is that more of their competitors in the market are hunting out the same deals, so resellers need to quickly become more imaginative and evolve their selling processes. ■



Oliver Newby

Along with this, they must fully understand their company's value adds and ask themselves, 'how can I stand out from the crowd?', and 'how can I make this stick?'. Many resellers are doing this effectively already, but the importance of differentiation is greater than ever in today's new world of virtual selling, where physical locations and proximity to the customer are largely irrelevant.

There has also been far more cross-selling and up-selling, which has meant sales teams spending more time educating themselves around these value add services. This will only play to their advantage moving forward, not only giving a far better solution sell but also maximising the profit on the deal itself.

Resellers will also need to be mindful of the flexibility of their services, and should consider being proactive in offering the likes of subscription pauses and flexible payment terms. This gives end users peace of mind during these strange times, and in a post-pandemic world they won't forget that the reseller supported their business. ■

Will Morey, Sales & Marketing Director, Pragma

A large number of software-as-a-service companies adopted remote selling many years ago and there is a great opportunity to learn from them. We have been running events to help resellers evolve and adopt new sales practices. A poll of 200 attendees at our Ideas Lab event showed that 96 per cent of them rate remote selling as a top priority. Channel businesses have always proven their ability



Will Morey

to innovate and adapt, now they need to rethink support, software, tools and processes in this new context.

We have also seen a big increase in resellers looking at their digital portfolio and embracing opportunities for products that can be sold, provisioned and supported without any physical interaction. The message we are hearing loud and clear is that this change represents a significant opportunity for all kinds of resellers. For example, we have seen an increase of more than 600 per cent in sales of our Web Listings product. ■

Rob Downes, Head of Solution Sales, 9 Group

As well as home working, customer priorities now include business continuity, disaster recovery, and the ability to adapt to growth and downsizing. Repositioning your solutions to fit with these themes will allow you to fulfil this demand; and targeting these customers in a personalised way will boost results. As an example, customers in the hospitality space currently have very different needs and timelines compared to those in retail. Speak to your customers in



Rob Downes

a way that resonates with their individual circumstances. Demonstrating your value is also key. Buyers are likely to be more hesitant

to spend money and to make a commitment, but many business owners are examining their overheads and seeking out new alternatives. In understating more about their individual circumstances you can offer a solution which really fits.

At the beginning of lockdown we understandably observed a lot of hesitation due to uncertainty. But the country's circumstances have become normalised, for now at least. Agree a strategy for today and push ahead. ■



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Where do the big opportun

Unsurprisingly, Covid-19 and the UK lockdown has put many channel sales teams in a spin. For many channel businesses there was an upward spike in March as customers battled to get staff online and working effectively from home. This initial demand has tailed off, but with a measured return to normality gaining momentum, another rise in demand for interconnected communications is now predicted.

Research commissioned by global network provider Ciena has found that a staggering seven out of 10 (69%) of British adults are now working from home at least some of the time. This is up from 9% before COVID-19 lockdown measures took effect.

Significantly, this 776% increase is not just a temporary change, as more than two-thirds (68%) expect to work remotely more often even after lockdown restrictions ease. Of these people, over three in five (62%) believe this will be all the time or much more frequently than before the pandemic. As businesses return to work, it's likely managers will be under pressure to upgrade employee's home networks to facilitate this trend and, ergo, the demand for flexible IP networks and all the hardware that goes with them will increase along with the security solutions needed to guaranteed safe remote working.

Paul Taylor, Sales and Marketing Director at Voiceflex says: "Technology is the key word. It moves at an exceedingly fast rate and given the events of the last few months some technology has taken a quantum leap. Resellers must embrace the technology now used by an increased amount of end users. Change will always bring opportunity. Provide a clear message and you can turn the last few months into your advantage."

And this is not all about fibre. Demand for mobile broadband and the Internet of Things will continue to explode as organisations discover the benefits to staff welfare via temperature monitors and ePOS, thus avoiding physical contact. The message couldn't be clearer. Agile resellers that really understand their customer's businesses and can act quickly to meet demand will survive and thrive in the new normal.



ROB DOWNES
9 GROUP

"Obviously, there is going to be an increased demand for solutions that enable flexible and home working. Collaboration, mobile and connectivity opportunities will be plentiful, along with increased demand for business continuity and disaster recovery solutions. However, if we take a step back and look at the wider picture, all businesses will be evaluating their overall options and establishing a way to move forward. This process will be different for the individual organisation, dependant on many factors including industry, size, resource and budgets. The opportunity for the ICT Channel is to demonstrate real value and, to use a well-worn term, become a trusted advisor. We face an uncertain future and businesses need to respond to the rapidly changing circumstances. Companies should be able to lean on their ICT provider to deliver technology that enables them to adapt to the new landscape."



MATTHEW WORBOYS
GAMMA

"With the help of the channel, Gamma has deployed 10 times the number of free of charge homeworking solutions in one month, compared to pre COVID-19 conditions. We see the products and solutions we provide as an answer to problems many businesses are facing as they adjust to new ways of working. For last five years at least, we have been focused on the shift from ISDN and on-premise PBX's to the cloud and all the benefits this move can provide a business. The last three months have highlighted the failings of this legacy technology and their inability to provide robust business continuity capabilities, and as a result we will see an increase in businesses adopting cloud communications. Key to Channel Partner success will be those who can demonstrate their ability to deliver relevant sector specific solutions that are easily understood and deployed remotely with minimum impact to the end user."



DANIEL ALVAREZ
GLIDE

"Communications has proved to be the glue that has held us together, be it video calling, online meetings or just family time. We have in some cases reconnected by being connected. One thing COVID has proven/forced us to do is think outside the box. Old stereotypes of 'we must go the office or the world will end' have been disproved. The big opportunities will be in helping business work from anywhere at any time. The Channel has been pushing cloud for a while now, but we now have a real life 'Business Case' to show what can be done and that we can help deliver it. It has also highlighted the true scale of what needs to be done to improve the fibre infrastructure across the whole of the UK. We AltNets really need to carry on investing and helping the UK to a full fibre future, where anything is possible."



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ities lie post the lockdown?



ANDREW DICKINSON
JOLA

"Mobile data and ICT resellers and MSPs are well known for their ability to sell and adapt. This is because they understand their customers well and don't have infrastructure they need to 'sweat'. When offices emptied at the end of March and Openreach virtually put a stop to new fixed connections, our community read their customers' needs and pivoted into mobile data. We saw the highest activity ever on Mobile Manager and signed over 50 new partners. Once they saw how easy it was to sell and support mobile broadband for lockdown workers, they quickly set about looking for more IoT/M2M opportunities. With many organisations taking this time to review 4G suppliers, they weren't disappointed. May was a record month for Jola and the TCV of major bid prospects generated by Jola partners, with over 50% chance of closing in the next 6 months, went from £13m to over £30m."



IAIN SINNOTT
VANILLAIP

"Although businesses will be keen to get back to the day job, the shock of lockdown will motivate a continued determination by business owners to change the way they work. Do they need the same office space, do they need everyone in, can automation and collaboration raise productivity and reduce headcount? We will now be dealing with a recession, so every penny counts but for once, technology has already proven itself worthy of investment and capable of delivering productive results with a strong ROI. Resellers who do not lead their customers review into the latest technology and the deployment of the appropriate blend of flexible, low risk, high return applications will simply find themselves replaced. There is not room for sentiment when survival is on the line and resellers need to remember that suddenly business owners are informed and experienced in the modern world of remote working and collaboration."



ANDREW COOPER
NEC

"There is no doubt that the world, as we transition through the COVID-19 epidemic, will be a different place. What is clear is the way in which the ICT vendors and channels have reacted has driven at light speed a change that is unlikely to take a backward step. Lockdown, homeworking, and collaboration have created a demand for technologies never seen before. Discussed yes, but never consumed like they are today. Businesses will quickly discover their quick consumer fixes on collaboration don't deliver business-grade functionality, resilience, security and value for money. Herein lies the real opportunity for the channel, to capitalise on this period of change. Be selective with your approach and offer choice. Do not blindly push customers in directions that don't meet their requirements, not everyone will have the budget for wholesale change, many will want to capitalise on the current investment."



KEVIN BOYLE
CLOUDCELL

"Digital technologies have never been more important in our lives for working, interacting, and living. With the current climate and possible market trends towards more remote-working and greater utilisation of Cloud-based applications, many businesses will need to connect remote workers or teams to corporate systems and ensure remote working does not disrupt productivity. This raises important questions about how businesses are structured when it comes to connectivity, and where they need to invest for the future. Additionally, businesses utilising MPLS could be better supported with SD-WAN and cellular solutions, providing customers with flexible, robust, and cost-effective high bandwidth connectivity."



BERNIE MCPHILLIPS
PANGEA

"The channel will be as instrumental in the back-to-work shift as it was in the lockdown, so sales teams need to prepare their connectivity and IoT portfolios. There'll be a spike in demand as people come off furlough and work remotely. Dedicated bandwidth through multi-network 4G will empower homeworkers and enable applications like hosted voice through static IPs. For businesses looking to secure their finances through economic instability, fully managed data SIMs and intelligent, self-optimising tariffs are a priority. They'll control unexpected costs and protect against damaging overages. And it's no secret that COVID-19 has caused SLA issues for broadband installations. But you can get customers connected quickly with Pre-Ethernet, which doubles as cost-effective 4G backup. Lastly, offer your customers IoT solutions that reduce costs and keep their employees and patrons safe. Temperature monitors, capacity management, and (especially) ePOS are now mandatory tech for many—so it is on the channel to provide!"



DAVE REYNOLDS
XELION

"There is a tipping point with every emerging technology or social trend when it moves from early adoption to mainstream. Remote working facilitated by cloud-based voice and data comms will now be the new normal, even after the pandemic crisis ends. That's because businesses have discovered that there is no need for a 'presentation culture' in the office as staff can be as, or even more productive at home, with a better work/life balance. Employers benefit from hugely reduced premises costs and overheads by investing in technology. This presents a terrific window of opportunity for ICT sales teams because now they are preaching to the converted instead of having to educate business owners on the benefits of hosted services to support remote working practices."



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Diversity champ



Christina Pendleton

INTERCITY Technology has appointed Christina Pendleton to the Board of Directors as Head of People and Engagement. Part of her remit is to continue developing an inclusive and diverse workplace. She joined Intercity in 2014 as HR Advisor and pushed forward the business's schools initiative to help address the STEM skills deficit across the west midlands region. She said: "I will use my role as a platform to reach out to younger female professionals looking to kick-start a career in the technology industry."

Pendleton has also forged a strong relationship with Ahead Partnership, a social enterprise that connects businesses with schools and colleges across the midlands.

Andrew Jackson, CEO of Intercity Technology, stated: "The technology industry has a responsibility to celebrate and advocate gender diversity and encourage more women into the sector. Christina continues to contribute significantly to our

success as an organisation, and her desire to develop home grown talent and create a truly inclusive organisation is a great example of our people-first approach."

Pendleton has also initiated The Women in Tech Networking Group, a monthly event hosted by Intercity Technology open to partners, customers and women from across the industry.

Also on the move...

FORMER BT Sales Director for Corporate Mid-Market Nick Lake has joined Armstrong Bell as Head of Sales.

He brings over 30 years comms sector experience and was responsible for a team that managed

over 10,000 BT customers. He also led the integration of the BT and EE sales teams following BT's acquisition of the mobile telephone provider in 2015. Lake is now responsible for driving Armstrong Bell's objective to reach £4 million within the next three years. "My plan was to enjoy a few years travelling with my wife, but in meeting MD William Copley I quickly became inspired by his ambitious growth plans." Armstrong Bell was founded by Copley in 2001. He added: "It was clear that Nick shares a passion for delivering client satisfaction while driving business growth."



Nick Lake

THE appointment of channel veteran Chris Lee as North Supply's Sales Manager signals a ramping up of the distributor's channel reach. Lee has held senior channel positions at GPT/Siemens, Inter-Tel and latterly Mitel where he was Sales Director for UK Indirect Sales in the southern region. North Supply MD Richard Potts stated: "Chris's experience, channel knowledge and understanding of the market will be of great benefit to ourselves and our reseller partners as we all seek to emerge from these difficult and challenging times."

TRUESPEED has pulled in Paul Burrige as Chief Financial Officer. He moves from Bath-based tech firm MyLife Digital where he was also CFO.



Paul Burrige

His previous experience includes a stint as Finance Director at West Country Vending. Burrige began his career in finance over 25 years ago training as a chartered accountant with EY. Subsequent senior finance roles include spells at software and services provider Tribal Group, communications agency Shift Active Media and commercial law firm DAC Beachcroft. "My focus will be on providing financial and commercial leadership that will help to drive the business to the next level," stated Burrige.

AIDAN Furlong has been appointed as Avaya's Country General Manager for Ireland with a particular remit to champion cloud-centric communications. He joined the vendor over nine years ago and has 35 years ICT sector experience under his belt "I anticipate my role to be instrumental in helping to solve customers' business challenges, together with supporting the Avaya partner community ecosystem," commented Furlong.

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Sponsored for the first time this year by DWS and independently judged by a panel of industry experts, The Comms National Awards recognises quality across the channel spectrum with awards in both reseller (customer solutions) and vendor (service to the channel) categories.

This year, we will acknowledge the efforts made by supplier and reseller teams during the Covid-19 crisis with two special 'Keeping Britain

Working' awards. And, as ever, one special individual will be presented with the illustrious Entrepreneur of the Year Award to recognise his or her efforts in growing a highly successful channel business. We will also once again recognise channel efforts to improve Diversity and CSR.

For all the categories see www.cnawards.com

After the uncertainty of the Covid-19 lockdown, the Comms National Awards will give you the chance to put your magnificent support and solutions in the spotlight and get some valued recognition.



"The Comms National Awards is the UK's leading awards process for the ICT channel and whether companies are winners or finalists, the prestige and PR they can gain from participating is huge. In these challenging times I would urge everyone in the channel to get involved and put their name into the hat," said Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent.



DWS PROUD TO HONOUR THE NATION'S BEST ICT COMPANIES

DWS has put its name on the Comms National Awards as headline sponsor for the first time.

"This is a fabulous awards process and the awards night itself is always the highlight of the year, bringing together everyone in the channel for a night of celebration," said CEO Terry O'Brien.

"The effort channel people put into these awards is exemplary and we know the value our marketing teams place on being shortlisted. Our industry has done some amazing things during the Covid-19 pandemic keeping the NHS

and other key organisations communicating effectively and this awards process gives channel companies a wonderful opportunity to reward and recognise those efforts. I truly hope more organisations than ever will enter this year and show the country what we are made of and what we have achieved during this time of crisis.

"I am sure the atmosphere at the finals night will be as electric as ever and will be extra special this year given the year we've had. We can't wait to celebrate and congratulate everyone in the channel at this very special occasion."

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