

# 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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