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M247 CEO on breaking glass ceilings p24



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This month's movers and shakers



# Mills back with £20m cloud biz

FOUNDER and former CEO of Six Degrees Alastair Mills has returned to the sector at the vanguard of a LDC-backed £30m merger of three cloud firms.

### SPECIAL REPORT

THE acquisitions of Double-Edge Professional Services, Foehn and Metaphor IT creates a £20m business with 100 staff and circa 500 customers.

The combined organisation, called Kerv, will be boosted by follow-on LDC funding for acquisitions that will advance its strategic focus on mid-market firms with £50-100k annual IT spend.

Kerv CEO Mills is working alongside former Six Degrees

COO Mike Ing who is now MD of the company which has offices in central London, Richmond, Greater London and Vigo in Spain where an in-house development team is located. Kerv is developing a cloud-centric platform to provide a range of services.

"Our goal is not to chase short-term profit gains through aggressive cost cutting as we acquire businesses," commented Mills (pictured above).

"Instead, with the support of LDC, we plan to invest in great

companies and accelerate organic growth through a relentless focus on CX.

"In a technology market that continues to consolidate rapidly through M&A, we feel that now is the right time for a change in focus and culture."

Ing stated: "With the increasing availability of rapidly innovating cloud-based applications, MSPs should no longer need to be asset heavy or rely on long-term infrastructure investments. Their job will be to integrate best of breed capabilities."

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## EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

REALISM is the order of the day, but being realistic in uncertain times can be a challenge. Just look at the Government's Covid-19 balancing act, its decisions based on 'realism' as best it can be defined and understood in terms of interpreting a small but perhaps significant rise in the number of cases.

Yet we may ask at what point realism and 'science' becomes fear? Why is it more realistic to wear a face mask in a supermarket now, and not in March? The answer can only be that we have possibly shifted from a climate of realism to one of fear. And we literally face the fear with every face covering we see, lest we forget.

What is certain, however, is that the Government's decision to postpone planned lockdown easing measures by two weeks to at least mid-August can only reinforce the requirement for businesses to ensure they are technically geared up with permanent home working capabilities, creating a strong market for business grade connectivity to the home, especially FTTP, and cloud-based services.

Thus, the comms sector can overlay a climate of uncertainty with real customer-focused strategy and drive long-term and sustainable business growth at the same time.

Lockdown has triggered a psychological response in terms of how the nation thinks and acts, reinforced by the everyday outbreak of face coverings. Life will probably never be the same, and face masks may become a feature for months or years to come.

But the unquestionable and clear reality is that this all signifies the rise of tragically created business opportunities, and it is in the hands of ICT providers to take control and respond with an entrepreneurial spirit that defies the times, and an empathetic, wholly flexible approach to customers that is in keeping with Covid-Britain.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

# Windsor cuts Keen IT deal



Pete Tomlinson

WITH a multi-million-pound funding package from lender ThinCats in the bank Windsor Telecom wasted no time in swooping on Keen IT Solutions.

Windsor CEO Pete Tomlinson said: "Keen IT is our first acquisition and an obvious choice. It shares the same values and culture and its technical skills in managed IT services complement our capabilities."

Keen IT founder Phil Keen added: "I've known Windsor Telecom for a long time and felt that now is the perfect moment to join forces with a company of its scale and expertise."

Keen joins Windsor in the newly created Head of Technology role.

ThinCats Regional Head of Sales Dave Sherrington commented: "The IT and communications industry has never been more important than it is today, providing solutions and services that are vital to keeping businesses running."

Acuity (which advised on the deal) Partner Marcus Allchurch observed: "Windsor is a great example of the growing group of mid-market tech businesses becoming the driving force of growth in the UK economy. Windsor is now positioned to execute on its organic and inorganic growth strategy."

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## Area 3 in line for full fibre build

OPENREACH is to embark on a three year full fibre broadband build in the hardest to reach 'final third' of the UK, defined by Ofcom as Geographic Area 3, without taxpayer subsidy.

Area 3 signifies a geographic market comprising postcode sectors where there is unlikely to be material commercial deployment by rival networks.

In January 2020, Ofcom proposed having cost-based prices using a regulatory asset base (RAB) approach which would allow BT to recover fibre network investments over all customers, fibre-based and copper-based, in Area 3.

Ofcom says that there are 9.6 million homes and businesses in Area 3, and the project covers 251 market towns and villages.

Clive Selley, Openreach CEO, commented: "We hope that by publishing our own plans we can help ensure that taxpayers only fund connections in communities that really need public support.

"We're determined to find inventive engineering solutions and effective partnership funding models to reduce costs and enable us to connect as many communities as possible across the UK without public subsidy."



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# Comtec's acquired by distie

THE acquisition of Comtec by ETC gives the French distributor a UK foothold as it seeks to capitalise on next generation infrastructure opportunities.

ETC's 2,000-plus customers include American and European cable operators and telecommunications service providers, and large and small independent installers and sub-contractors.

Comtec has seven offices across the UK, Oman, Qatar, the UAE and Hong Kong.

The financial terms of the deal were not disclosed.

"For Comtec, the transaction provides additional offerings for its customers, particularly in the areas of product design, technical services, supply chain management services and logistics outsourcing for telecommunications service providers," said Comtec CEO John Archer.

Cédric Varasteh, founder of ETC Group, said: "The acquisition allows us to enhance our geographic reach and expand our range of products and technologies, particularly in the UK market where demand for value added services for telecoms equipment is growing."

Archer noted: "The acceleration of fibre roll outs will create several business opportunities."

# Scots firm completes exec team

THE Commsworld executive Board is officially a full house following the appointment of Charles Quinn as Chief Commercial Officer and promotion of Bruce Strang as Chief Operating Officer.

Quinn has more than 15 years executive leadership experience, spending most of his career at Microsoft, Dell and Hewlett Packard.

"With the backing of LDC and our own UK-wide optical core network in place, we have a golden opportunity to expand Commsworld's geographical presence and focus on a range of markets, with social housing chief among them," he said.

Meanwhile, Strang played a key role in Commsworld's performance and was influential in the completion of the investment by LDC, the PE arm of Lloyds Banking Group.

He added: "The Covid-19 pandemic has seen radical changes to the way we live and work and has changed the way we operate across the UK and internationally. Commsworld has an opportunity to help support people in their homes."

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# Gamma ties up HFO buy



Andrew Taylor

GAMMA'S acquisition of a majority stake in German SIP provider HFO significantly builds on its European presence in Spain and the Netherlands.

The deal sees Gamma take circa 80% of the issued share capital of HFO with an option to acquire the remaining 20% over the next three years.

HFO also sells cloud PBX and mobile services via its network of channel partners in Germany, and Gamma had already identified Germany as a target region.

It has an overall market of circa 36 million PBX seats (almost twice the UK market size) but a cloud penetration of only 6% (one of the lowest rates in western Europe).

Gamma CEO Andrew Taylor commented: "The acquisition of HFO provides Gamma with an opportunity to enter the German market – one of the largest but

under-penetrated cloud PBX markets in western Europe."

HFO CEO Achim Hager commented: "We can combine our experience of the German market with Gamma's experience of taking cloud PBX into the channel." See page 10

## NEWS ROUNDUP

A LINK-UP between FluidOne and 8x8 sees the network aggregator become a distributor for the US vendor's cloud comms services. "The partnership adds 8x8 on net to Platform One, allowing partners to combine FluidOne connectivity at layer3, layer2 or with a vCore network, with 8x8 and over the top services," said Russell Horton, CEO, FluidOne. Lee Rossano, Head of Channel, added: "8x8 allows our partners to support the 10-50 seat market but is particularly strong in the 50-plus seat and contact centre markets." FluidOne's fibre network interconnects the services of Ethernet carriers, cloud services, data centre, mobile operator and broadband suppliers.

## comms dealer

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**Circulation** 01635 588 869

**ISSN** 1366-5243

## bpl. | A BPL Business Publication

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

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

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 Printed by Pensord Limited

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



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# Sabio secures Genesys MSP



Jonathan Gale

SABIO'S play in the European CX market has shifted up a gear following the acquisition of one of Europe's key Genesys Cloud partners. The addition of Paris-based Coverage Group brings more scale to Sabio's French operations. The transaction also adds Genesys Gold, Avaya Edge, Oracle Gold and BroadSoft tech partner status.

"The acquisition is a massively important addition in a number of ways," explained CEO Jonathan Gale.

"We have built a substantial presence and customer base in France, it strengthens our expertise and relationships with Genesys and Avaya, and it brings a fantastic team and set of customers."

Coverage Group CEO Julien Jardin added: "With organisations across France looking to take advantage of the latest public cloud and AI-powered self-service technology, it's a great time for Coverage to join with Sabio."

## NEWS ROUNDUP

ANYWHERE365'S third acquisition in a year sees it bag PeterConnects, which provides software solutions for platforms including Microsoft Teams, Cisco Webex Calling and BroadWorks. The deal leverages a 60m euro investment from growth capital firm Bregal Milestone. PeterConnects CEO Lucas de Clercq joins Anywhere365 as a Product Director of the newly established Reception and Attendant Productivity division. "This combination will strengthen our position in the global market for omnichannel communications software," said de Clercq.

NUVIAS UC's status as a Master Agent for Zoom sees it roll out Zoom Room bundles including video hardware from Poly, Zoom licenses, plus white labelled installation and support services. Ravi Patel, EMEA Channel Leader at Zoom, said: "We're looking forward to seeing how both companies and our channel partners grow from this partnership." The master agency status means Nuvias UC channel partners across Europe can sell Zoom licenses as approved agents.

# Virtual1 snaps up network orchestration tech partner

VIRTUAL1'S acquisition of network orchestration firm and tech partner PacketFront is reflective of the network operator's future strategy and the high priority it places on SDN.

The Swedish-based software house was founded in 2001 and provides network automation solutions for telecoms operators, city carriers and enterprises in more than 20 countries, including Virtual1.

Virtual1 founder and CEO Tom O'Hagan stated: "Virtual1 has worked closely with PacketFront for a number of years. It has been a key partner



Tom O'Hagan

in the creation of our SDN carrier network strategy.

"Acquiring PacketFront helps to secure the intellectual property that we have heavily invested in. The transaction also recognises how critical orches-

tration software is to the future of Virtual1 and the industry."

PacketFront will operate as a stand-alone organisation and keep its own brand, customer base and senior leadership team.

Timo Kuusela, VP of Sales at PacketFront Software, commented: "Having helped FTTP providers get to market quickly and operate efficiently across the Nordics, we see an exciting opportunity with the new wave of FTTP suppliers emerging in the UK."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

TECH Data plans to invest circa \$750m in digital transformation initiatives over the next five years following the completion of its Apollo Global Management acquisition. The initiatives are focused on delivering automation, platforms and analytics. "Tech Data is a strong platform for growth and further diversification," said Robert Kalsow-Ramos, PE Partner at Apollo. "This investment helps to ensure the company has the resources to launch a bold digital enablement and innovation programme that will transform the way it serves channel partners and employees."

A £15m contract from Renfrewshire Council to upgrade its digital connectivity and services has been awarded to Commsworld. In a deal lasting 17 years the Edinburgh-based comms provider is partnering with CityFibre to roll out full fibre connectivity to circa 180 council buildings and CCTV and traffic control systems. CityFibre will build, operate and own more than 80% of the new network, with Commsworld delivering connectivity to the remaining sites and providing all services over the new network.

# Sector urged to 'do its bit'



Crissi Williams

ITP CEO Crissi Williams welcomed Chancellor Rishi Sunak's boost to apprenticeship funding announced last month but urged the comms industry to also do its bit.

The Government has pledged a £2,000 grant for employers per apprentice under 25 hired; and £1,500 for those over 25, for six months starting 1st August (in England).

Sunak also pledged £100m to create places on Level 2 and 3 courses and £32m over two years for a National Careers Service in England to provide advice on work and training.

"It's now time for our industry to step up and play its part," said Williams. "We need more businesses to hire apprentices,

to get more young people into the fields of telecoms, IT and engineering. We need to use this opportunity to close the much documented skills gap once and for all, and to lead the way in hiring, training and developing the next generation of talent.

"It's great to see apprenticeships recognised for the important part they play in the economy and for individuals and businesses. Now, more than ever, we need to create simple routes to industry for young people."

The National Apprenticeship Service says 78% of employers report improved productivity thanks to their apprentices; and 90% of apprentices stay on in their place of work after completing an apprenticeship.

# Fibre's key to Boris's big plans

THE importance of full fibre to the success of the Government's Project Speed infrastructure build plan outlined last month cannot be overstated, according to CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch.

"Project Speed will not find a faster technology than full fibre infrastructure to support the country's recovery," he commented. "Our multi-billion pound shovel-ready build programme is already well underway which will allow CityFibre to create up to 10,000 jobs up and down the country.

"From Bradford to South-end, Doncaster to Ipswich and beyond, the opportunity is there for full fibre to create a new agile, green and balanced economy where nobody is left behind. What the UK needs now is the Government to put in place the right policy and regulatory conditions to level up our digital infrastructure and unlock a new platform for success."



Greg Mesch

NEWS ROUNDUP

HOT on the heels of its Homeworker Package launch which provides business grade connectivity to home workers TalkTalk Business has rolled out a marketing development fund for partners. The company will also provide insight and data analysis and white label marketing materials. "Businesses are realising the benefits of supplying their remote staff with reliable, secure and congestion-free connectivity, with fibre being the ideal product, especially FTTP," said Richard Thompson, MD, Indirect at TalkTalk Business.

FOURNET has adopted Union Street's aBILLity billing software. The firm provides mission critical services to fire, police and ambulance operations and identified areas where aBILLity could be optimised for managing communications for emergency services including how the system could better manage escalations for clients in the blue light sector. FourNet also recommended enhancements to reporting features and the end user facing customer portal. Vincent Disneur, Head of Sales and Marketing at Union Street, said: "FourNet's advice has contributed to improved functionality and productivity benefits for aBILLity's users."



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# TinCan Comms responds to hospital's call for help

NEWS ROUNDUP

HATS off to TinCan Comms founder Amy Mitchell who helped deliver a vital communications solution to Covid-19 patients at Russells Hall Hospital in the west midlands.

Mitchell responded to a tweet by Staff Nurse Sallyann Wright who was seeking help to fill a 'communications black hole' in the wards, which stopped patients from calling or messaging their family during initial treatment and assessment.

"The NHS and key workers are doing an amazing job and when we saw the request for help on social media, we knew we had to get involved and find a solution," said Mitchell.

"We quickly got in touch with our EE supplier Mdee which advised on Cat phones that would deliver the connec-



Amy Mitchell

tion, but importantly are able to be washed, sanitised and even bleached. This makes them perfect for use in hospitals and for passing around between users.

"All of the phones have been supplied with unlimited minutes and texts and are Wi-Fi enabled.

It is so important that patients who are ill and extremely worried can get some comfort and reassurance by being able to speak to their families."

Wright added: "Being alone in a Covid isolation area, surrounded by staff wearing

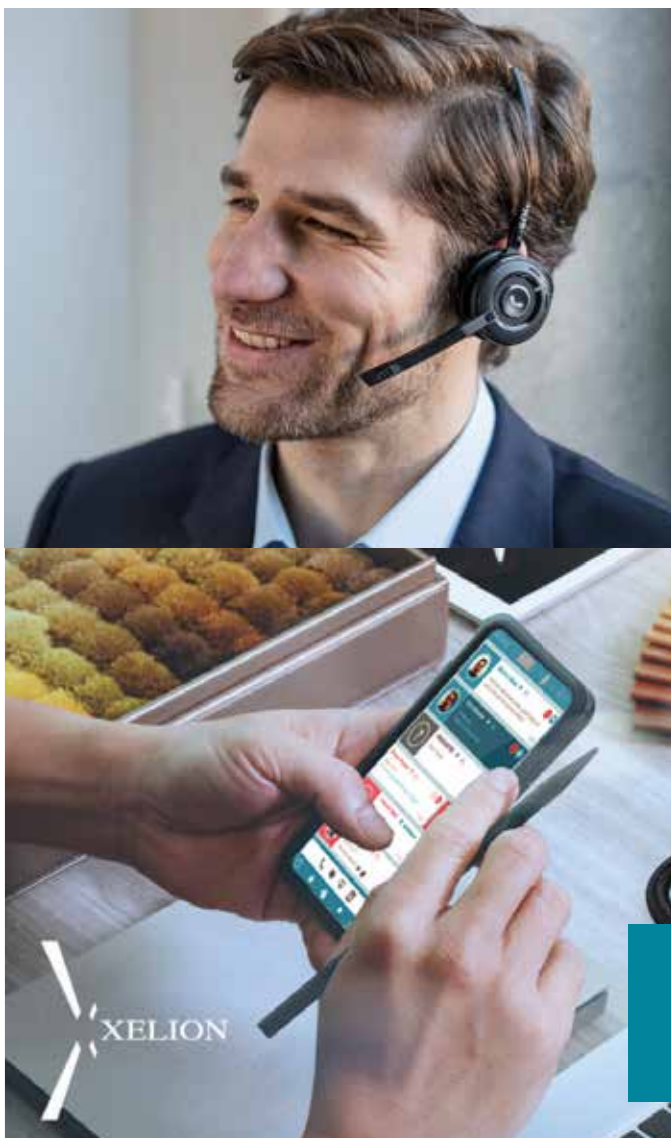
full PPE and with family not allowed to visit you when you are sick, can be a frightening and unsettling experience.

"Our isolation bays are notoriously bad for telephone signals, making it near impossible for sick patients to speak to their loved ones and give vital updates. We put out a message for help and this was kindly answered by Amy at TinCan Comms, which supplied us with Cat phones that we could clean after every use and would work on a Wi-Fi connection.

"This gave our patients contact with those closest to them before they were taken to Covid wards or, in some unfortunate cases, intensive care."

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THE real-time analysis, control and security attributes of plan.com's just-launched business connectivity platform will be a boon to resellers and users, according to CEO Dan Craddock. The platform, called my.plan, enables users to analyse every call, text or byte of data consumed on any device, at any time and in real time. my.plan also provides pinpoint location tracking, spend controls and productivity tools, along with new device and security features. "my.plan allows businesses to connect, configure and control all of their business communications in one place, and in real-time, from one employee to more than 10,000," said Craddock. He noted that my.plan combines more than two years of R&D, 50,000 man hours and millions of data points from more than 150,000 customers and users.



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# Global4 nets acquisitions



Nigel Barnett

WITH its gaze firmly fixed on home working trends Horsham-based Global4 Communications has snapped up two businesses that significantly boost its play in the residential market.

CEO Nigel Barnett says the acquisition of Fleur Telecom from DWS Group with circa 35,000 clients and Home Telecom from Spark Energy with around 15,000 clients will complement the company's residential sector portfolio.

"The rise in home working and the FTTP roll out will play a big part in our future, and the challenges over the last five months have added weight to our strategy to become a major

force in the residential arena," said Barnett. "During the past five months our workflow has continued, we have not furloughed anyone, our staff levels have risen by 10% and the sales pipeline has increased by 50%."

Barnett says Global4 has grown organically to date and now has a turnover of £30m with 115 staff.

"With the introduction of hosted offerings we have quickly added circa 10,000 seats to our traditional customer base, and bringing mobile and energy into our product range has made a significant difference to the dynamics of the company," commented Barnett.

# Gamma's expansion in Europe

GAMMA'S acquisition of cloud PBX provider gnTel, which is based in the Netherlands but has a small presence in Germany, trebles Gamma's cloud PBX base in the region and boosts its partner numbers. Gamma's additional presence in northern Germany builds on its acquisition of HFO (see page 4).

gnTel is HQ'd in Amsterdam with offices in Delft and Mönchengladbach and operates an indirect strategy with over 300 channel partners.

The acquisition comes under the DX Group in the Netherlands which Gamma owns (and which includes Dean One, Schiphol Connect and Nimsys).

Andrew Taylor, Gamma's CEO, stated: "The acquisition builds on our existing European operations and advances our expansion strategy."

Onno Speekenbrink, who is the CEO of gnTel, commented: "Gamma has a clear UCaaS strategy and with its additional knowledge and experience we can significantly accelerate gnTel's growth process."

# Industry stalwarts Burns and Chandler join forces with NTA

COMMS sector stalwarts Kevin Burns and Cliff Chandler have joined NTA as the company seeks to revamp its sales and support operations and double down of partner relationships.

Burns' experience includes running and assisting manufacturers and resellers and will oversee all operational activities at NTA.

Chandler also brings much industry experience with stints at Inter-Tel, Oaisys, Mitel and ASC under his belt.

His remit at NTA is to develop the internal sales team and forge closer channel partner-



Kevin Burns and Cliff Chandler

ships. NTA MD Paul White said: "Both come with vast experience in the industry, along with drive and leadership skills."

"We are due to release a number of new features over

the coming weeks to increase the branded solution available to our partners, so we will utilise their expertise in bringing this to market." See page 48 for more new appointment news.

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# UK cloud priorities in evolution mode

THE comms priorities of end users have evolved markedly following lockdown and the UK cloud market is displaying greater levels of maturity, according to a Mitel survey into the adoption rates of cloud-based communications and the as-a-service model.

The Covid-19 pandemic prompted 44% of respondents to consider migrating their contact centre to the cloud, an increase of 29 percentage points on Mitel's 2018 survey.

Agility ranked as the highest priority (46%) while avoiding vendor lock-in took precedence over all other contractual criteria, with 46% of respondents wanting the ability to change provider quickly if the service contract is not fulfilled.

UK businesses also place a high priority on the typical length of contractual commitment (cited by more than one third of respondents) as the main terms they would pay attention to in order to avoid vendor-lock-in.

Nearly one in three (32%) UK businesses say that feature-rich and reliable voice communications are the most important capabilities of a UCaaS system, ahead of UC



Rami Houbby

features like presence, IM and videoconferencing (23%) which topped the list last year.

For 29% of IT decision makers in the UK the integration of mobility features such as BYOD and collaboration tools are also driving demand for UCaaS.

UK businesses are more likely than their European counterparts to use a public cloud architecture for communications.

One in three said they would prefer a public cloud approach, with private cloud coming in second at 20%.

"Businesses in Britain and across Europe have turned a corner in the last two years," commented Rami Houbby, Vice

President International Cloud Sales at Mitel. "Companies are choosing the cloud for its flexible economics and access to the latest innovations which bring increased productivity and customer intimacy.

"IT leaders must deliver on their organisations' objectives for agility and competitiveness. Channel partners can act as trusted advisers and can help organisations navigate the various cloud technologies and their dependencies on network infrastructure, security and quality of service."

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## Huawei's turfed out of UK 5G

THE UK's 5G roll out could be stalled by two years following Huawei's removal from the infrastructure build.

Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden stated that Huawei 5G kit cannot be purchased by UK mobile operators after December 31st and that they must remove all Huawei equipment from their networks by 2027.

According to ISPA Chair Andrew Glover the move has removed uncertainty over Huawei's position and put a sharper focus on timescales for next gen' broadband roll outs.

"We look forward to further consultation with Government to determine the policy for fixed networks with a clear focus on ensuring that our members can roll out gigabit capable networks at pace," said Glover.

"Supply chain interventions have a direct impact on the speed at which networks can be rolled out, so any new restrictions need to be counter-balanced with an appropriate level of support for the sector.

"The Government has rightly made upgrading our digital communications infrastructure a priority, we now need to see a clear, ambitious plan from policy makers."

## NEWS ROUNDUP

8X8'S new tech partnership with SD-WAN provider Aryaka extends the 8x8 Open Communications Platform across Aryaka's managed SD-WAN service. 8x8 CEO Vik Verma said: "Extending the platform with SD-WAN provides enterprises with stable and productive employee, partner and customer interactions across the globe." The companies will co-market the combined solutions and 8x8 will also resell Aryaka's managed SD-WAN service, bundling regional and global managed SD-WAN services with its UCaaS and CCaaS propositions.

MANAGED IT services and cloud hosting provider SysGroup has posted revenues of £19.5m and profits of £2.8m, generated in large part by demand for remote working solutions. In the year to March 31st the Liverpool-based business boosted revenues by 53% and almost doubled profits, which were up by 99% on the previous financial year. Recurring revenues from long-term service agreements accounted for 77% of income. CEO Adam Binks said: "Investment in the appropriate cloud technology is becoming ever more mission-critical for businesses to survive and thrive."

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# TNP thrives in cloud ERP

That the case for cloud-based ERP is unassailable and scale key to success is a given, says Paul White, Exec Chairman of The NAV People (TNP), but market potential can only be realised if partner skill levels become an open book.

**T**NP's acquisition of certain NAV-focused assets from the administration of K3's Dynamics business unit in June was another step forward in the firm's strategy to keep building the scale required to provide the depth and breadth of support that customers now expect. "The opportunity to transition customers to the cloud is significant," stated White. "But we're not seeing them do this for cloud's sake. They are looking at their deployment options when deciding to upgrade their ERP, which they generally do when the business changes. Some choose to stay on-premise, many opt for Azure in a managed service environment, while an increasing number are going public SaaS. Microsoft Dynamics 365 Business Central supports all three choices."

There is a broad opportunity to migrate business ERP systems to the cloud, according to White. It's a reality that was underpinned by investment from FPE Capital in 2018, since when TNP has doubled customer numbers as more companies seek to upgrade legacy business applications and migrate deployments to the cloud. "The transition to the cloud creates challenges for smaller competitors, and a significant opportunity for those with the depth to deliver the services customers require," said White.

TNP was founded in 2008 to support customers using Dynamics NAV (now Business Central) with a higher level of service. "That remains the focus of the business," said White. "Any discussion about ERP software runs the risk of leaving many people cold. The team at TNP however are fascinated by the extent to which a flexible product, that is well implemented and supported, can liberate SMB businesses between 20 and 200 employees, allowing them to be agile and regularly change processes to suit."

TNP currently has 500 customers, 190 people and generates £23 million revenue. Its clients range from a relatively small business that wants to get a core finance system up and running in a week, to some of the UK's largest distributors and retailers. "Over the last two to three years we have been focused on gaining scale, the ability to serve many more customers while maintaining culture," added White. "It's a fascinating balance to try and strike."

White fully expects the UK SMB market to be increasingly served by a smaller number of bigger players. "Historically, the business applications software market has been fragmented," he explained. "There have been literally hundreds of accounting, ERP and CRM vendors, all



Paul White

## The transition to the cloud creates real challenges for our smaller competitors

fighting for a small piece of the action. We think that the market will now consolidate around five names – Microsoft, Salesforce, SAP, Amazon and Oracle. The winners in this pack will have a very large scale public cloud infrastructure, a low code development platform, ERP and CRM business applications, and a channel strategy that offers customers choice and access to large numbers of skilled people."

ERP software isn't getting any cheaper for vendors to maintain and develop. Meanwhile, the shift to cloud has increased customer expectations about the speed of development and delivery. "The economics of the relationship between vendors, ISVs and resellers has had to change and will continue to

do so," noted White. "That has wrong footed many reseller businesses, some of which were founded in the 1990s by people in their 30s. There's a generation shift underway compounded by the channel strategy issue. Large scale consolidation has already taken place, and more will follow."

### Career path

The early 1990s also saw White's first introduction to the IT sector – he spent a year with Honeywell Bull as part of his degree course. The intention was to take up a full-time post but having caught sight of a job advert in The Guardian he rewrote the plan and joined Systems Union in 1990, a privately owned company with circa 50 employees at the time. "Its software

looked more interesting," he said. "That judgement was right. The business grew to 1,000 employees."

White then joined Pegasus Software in 2000 followed by a spell at Touchstone before embarking on a 12 year stint with Microsoft in 2005, during which he ran the business applications partner channel in the UK and was later responsible for Product Marketing for the SMB focused apps Dynamics NAV and Dynamics CRM. In 2017, TNP co-founder and Chairman Peter Lingham was looking to retire and FPE invested in the business to make that possible. "The FPE and TNP team were looking for someone that understood them, knew the market and could help them maintain its impressive rate of growth," stated White. "I was very happy to oblige."

He says that the IT industry as a whole is obliged to raise its professional standards because too many ERP projects fail due to a lack of expertise. "If you increase the visibility of skills capabilities then partners have to raise their game," he said. "Too many customers spend too much money with partners that cannot deliver because they don't know how to. This industry spends lots of time selling systems that improve the visibility of other businesses and industry performances. It is time we took some of our own medicine." ■



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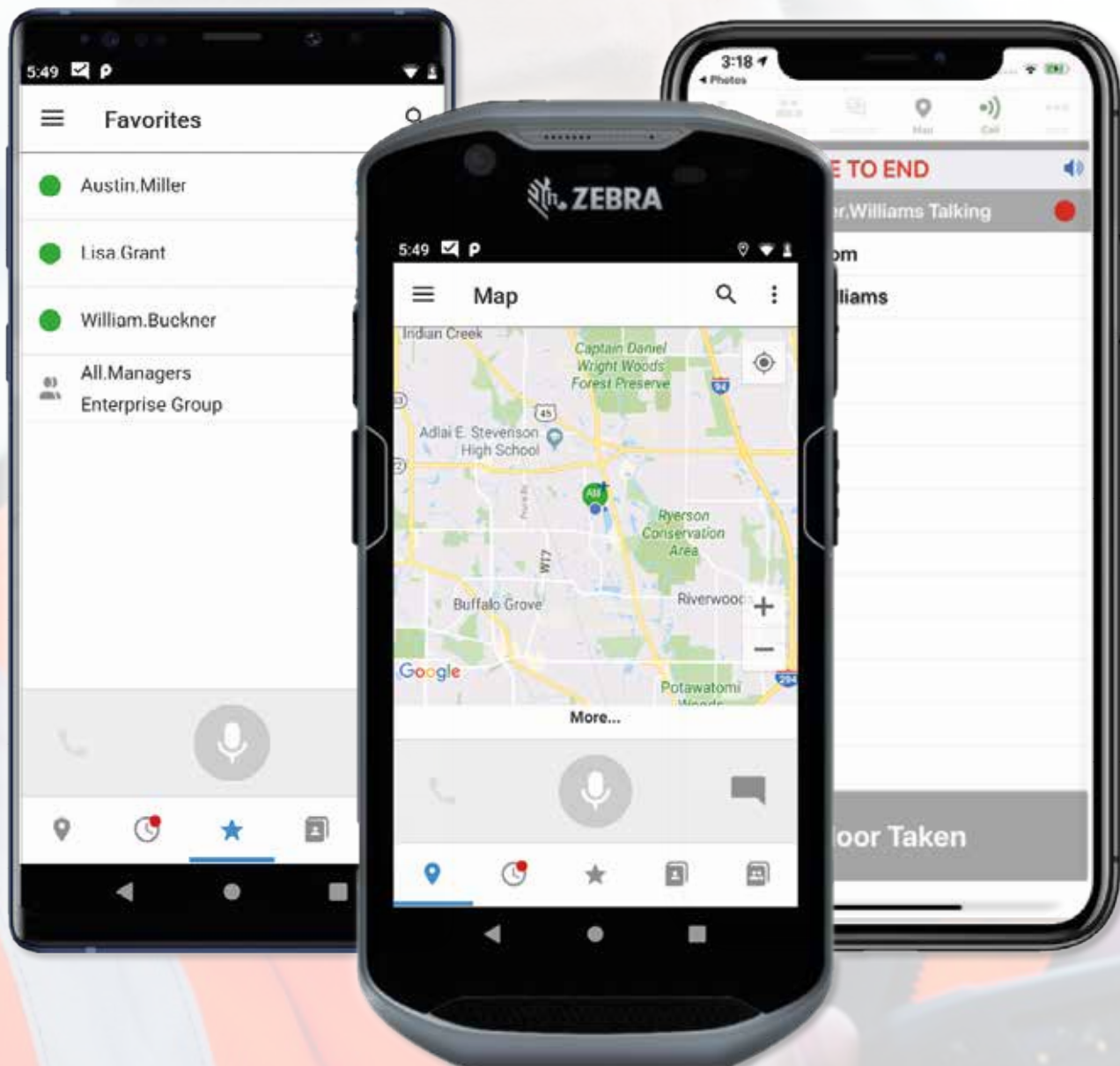
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# Why flexibility in the 'ne

The phrase 'the new normal' has emerged as a descriptor for a world where home working powered by digital communications has massively impacted the nation. What this will mean for business models and partnerships for the comms industry was debated by delegates at last month's Channel Insight Session hosted by Comms Dealer in association with BT Wholesale.

A recent survey from O2 and YouGov predicts that 81 per cent of the UK workforce will be working from home for at least one day a week, at least for the foreseeable future. Even as talk of potential recession swirls around financial markets, the comms channel is adapting dramatically to the resulting transition, with new types of products emerging along with changes to contract terms as vendors look to the dual approaches of innovation and flexibility to better serve customers.

"Given the changes over the last few months and what we've seen over the last few years, old style long-term contracts are a thing of the past," observed Rob Sims, CEO at Elite Group. "What we've increasingly seen very much during this period is flexibility and adaptability. Customers have been asking what they can do to minimise spend and move into different locations."

Many of the delegates said customers were seeking to flex up and down seats, bandwidth consumption and general spend and capability. Tim Scott, CCO at Adept, believes there is already a degree of flexibility around IT services: "I think in the telecom part of the supply chain there's still a lot of rigidity, a lot of three and five year based contracts which we all love to have, but customers and organisations are thinking differently. We need to be able to align the different services and create flexibility right across that service chain."

**Catalyst for UCaaS**  
This theme extended to enabling flexibility in critical areas, especially support, as organisations adopt a broader mix of home and office working. "This crisis has been the biggest shop window for UCaaS the world has ever seen, and it is not going to go away," stated Paul Taylor, Sales and Marketing Director at Voiceflex. "To offer a



Trevor Lovelock

**We are going through a massive IT infrastructure transformation to be able to offer the types of flexibility our customers want**

bundled set to a customer which is location independent is the way people are going."

The trend towards home working, flexibility and agility is feeding into a wider trend of cloud adoption in the view of Iain Sinnott, Sales and Marketing Director at VanillaIP. "The idea that long-term contracts are going away and we're moving to a 30-day true cloud deployment model suits us fine," he said.

Sinnott agrees the relationship between the

then we should be able to work a very fluid partnership with the customer to hunt down productivity," he said.

Tim Mercer, Managing Director of Vapour Cloud, is convinced Covid-19 is fundamentally changing long-standing vendor relationships and positioning. "I think there's going to be challenges from some of the bigger players that come to us, Microsoft especially," he said. "The challenge is how do we support our customers by ourselves?"

This view is echoed by Peter Lukes, Managing Director at Wanstor: "The relative relationship with Microsoft has become quite challenging because they're both a partner and competitor," he said. "We're now developing pricing models on a per user basis, or on a resource consumption basis. To some extent, they have enabled the sale of our own cloud services, but you look at the horizon and wonder

customer and reseller should help businesses to develop over the longer term and stimulate investment in customer service. "As long as you've got the mechanics to deliver products on demand,



Rob Sims



Tim Scott



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# 'New normal' world is vital



**Paul Taylor**

what the long-term view is for Microsoft. It wouldn't surprise me to see more and more challenges around work that we would traditionally do ourselves disappearing."

Attention to detail is the key differentiator according to Sinnott: "Having multiple services with different ways to satisfy the customer's requirement is going to separate us from the big guys coming through," he said. "If we're running a fairly simple, unresponsive product set, we can get picked off. But if we're thinking very closely with our customers, and we're bringing together various different elements, then it's much more sustainable."

The Office of National Statistics estimates that around half of all UK employees were working from home at the end of May, but many delegates felt that the situation was

unlikely to return to normal any time soon. "We did a staff survey two weeks ago," said Sims, "Five per cent want to be in the office all the time, five per cent want to work from home all the time and 90 per cent want some flexibility with one, two or three days in the office. The ability to move it around is really, really stark."

However, the clamour to return to the office varies by industry. "The feedback

## This crisis has been the biggest shop window for UCaaS the world has seen

we are getting from our call centre clients is that productivity has kept up to pace, while the quality of delivery they are giving customers has reduced substantially," said Fraser Ferguson, Managing Director at KubeNet.

"We've got all the tools but it's about getting customers to understand that they have to invest in flexibility. And, obviously, that comes at a cost."

Although flexibility is seen as a key requirement, several delegates highlighted that flexibility cannot subsume profitability and, ultimately, the sustainability of a partner's business model. "Some of our retail restaurant customers have asked us to suspend their services because they are not in operation. So, when we talk about flexibility, there are obviously bounds by which we can't make money," continued Ferguson. "If our customers go out of business either so we need to be pragmatic. I think they understand that flexibility has limits. Can we make

money working with our customers? Yes, absolutely we can, but we also need cooperation from our upstream service providers to offer the levels of flexibility that our customers want."

This end-to-end flexibility message was echoed by Pam Blanchard, Director at ICA: "Flexibility must run across the supply chain, ensuring that the burden of responsibility doesn't just solely sit with the reseller," she said. "We've had a number of clients within hospitality, and in the retail sector, asking us for payment holidays, and we've been able to support them although we've not



**Tim Mercer**



**Peter Lukes**

necessarily had that same support extended to us."

Blanchard said that although opex models are popular, capex options have also seen some new adoption. "With capex we can at least get some investment from the clients, and this gives them the opportunity to take more flexible terms on a multitude of services at a later point in time," she added.

Pricing is always a critical element across the supply chain and Andrew McNulty,

Sales Director at Pace Telecom, agreed that a lot of customers want the flexibility of short-term contracts: "Sometimes we can't always do that," he said. "For us to maintain the level of service that we want, we still want some sort of commitment from our customer base."

Aidan Piper, CEO at Welcomm, concurred: "What we need to see is flexibility of contract lengths from the bigger carriers and then the rest will follow,"

**Continued on page 29**



**Iain Sinnott**



**Fraser Ferguson**



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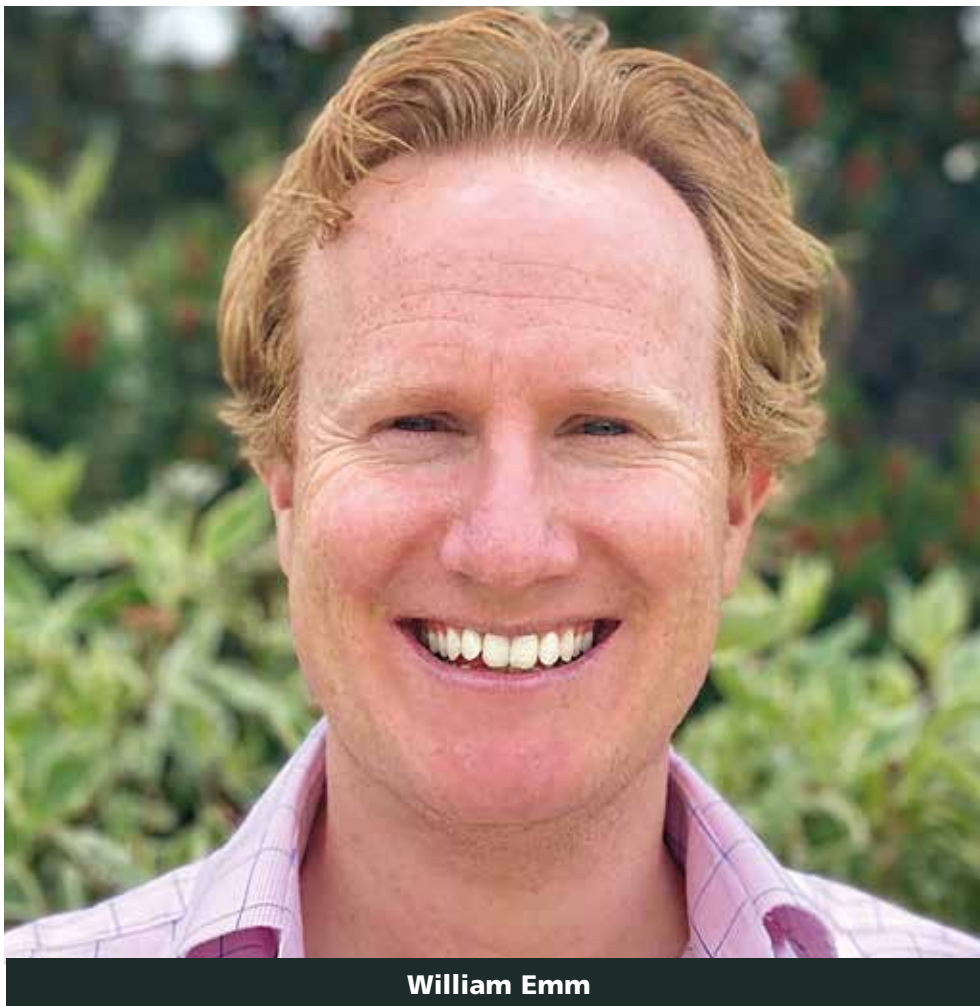
# Oak's legacy puts Teams

**Building on a 30-year channel legacy, William Emm is spearheading a revitalised Oak brand in the UK and North America and claims his company's in-house developed MS Teams recording solution alongside speech analytics, to be marketed under the new Clarify identity, are getting reseller pulses racing.**

**C**EO William Emm and CTO David Reynolds picked up the management reins from Oak founders James Emm and Philip Reynolds last summer. The fathers are still involved in the business and are regular visitors to Oak's long standing UK operation in Poole, but have given their two sons the freedom to innovate and take the business in a new direction both here in the UK and in North America, where William and David are based.

For three decades Oak has been providing call management solutions alongside the world's leading communications suppliers and has evolved into a call analytics and business intelligence specialist working almost exclusively alongside resellers across a variety of industry sectors. It is now estimated that due to the impact of Covid-19, the number of people using Microsoft Teams alone has risen from 32 million in March to 75 million now. Unquestionably, the pandemic has transformed the thinking of many channel facing business and none more so than Oak, which is addressing the remote working opportunity with renewed gusto.

Emm admits business slowed as channel players evolved into supplying joined up



William Emm

**The Oak development team did a fast and thorough job on Teams integration, enabling us to quote on larger systems**

digital and cloud solutions, but the staggering take up of Microsoft Teams, which accelerated beyond expectations during the Covid-19 crisis, has created a timely opportunity he is confident will put Oak back

into growth mode. Speaking from his Whistler home in Canada, he outlined his thoughts on the impact of Covid-19, the changes Oak has made and gave some deeper insight into the two Clarify solutions that

address both ends of the channel market spectrum.

"The Covid lockdown allowed us to accelerate the product development and business culture changes we were already planning. Call

recording has been keeping the Oak lights on for some time, but we believe the Clarify recording and speech analytics products have got the extra wow factor. The Oak development team did a fast and thorough job on Teams integration, enabling us to quote on larger systems. The Teams integration means our Clarify products have become a game changer for Oak and the channel."

**Clear opportunities**

Clarify for MS Teams addresses the growing need to record and analyse Microsoft Teams discussions and Clarify Speech Analytics intelligently transcribes and analyses important conversations to help companies improve interaction with customers. Part of Oak's new culture is to respond quickly to opportunities as they emerge and that has been borne out by the release of Clarify for MS Teams considering that Microsoft only released a call recording API for the platform three months ago.

"With so many companies working from home we were getting more and more requests from our partners and customers saying, can you record Microsoft Teams?," explained Emm. "When they released the API for call recording companies like us, we leapt on it and



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# on the record

launched on a channel webinar in early July.

"We had 150 reseller representatives listening in, including some senior execs from some of the bigger comms providers. And there were quite a few attendees that we have done very little or nothing with in the past. I think this proves that we are now on the same journey together. Post event, the response has been phenomenal.

"We followed up with an ecast and almost instantly we were asked to provide two quotes. On average our quotes are around the five to ten thousand pounds mark but these were for

for example, while having Teams for the rest of the back office staff. And our ability to deliver a single, fully compliant call recording solution that integrates with all of those PBXs as well as Teams is pivotal.

"Some of our competitors focus on individual telephony platforms quite heavily. In the past we've tried to integrate with as many platforms as possible. And that's achievable using the CDR integration that James started back in the nineties. All these years later, it's a real benefit to us because if we go to a data partner who's specialising in Microsoft Teams, they come across all the different types of

company that had already put in the man hours to develop an intelligent call analysis solution. "We didn't have a really good speech analytics platform and to actually develop one would have taken a big investment and a lot of time which would have made us late into the game," he explained.

"We got introduced to Call Journey which has a really neat product. It was what we were looking for and allows us to target the mid to enterprise market. Historically, call analysis has always been a high ticket item that's been very expensive. But with Call Journey we've actually managed to commoditise it and make it affordable right down to the small to mid-sized call centre.

"Call Journey has an integration with the Microsoft Insights analytics platform. When you say you can listen to calls and see how people are performing and add on the speech analytics, suddenly you're doing so much more than just needing to prove what was said on the phone. If you're a big insurance company and you're looking at things like fraud prevention, it's worth the investment."

Oak has built its reputation on hand-holding reseller partners through complex call management solutions demanded by customers and Emm says that will continue to give them a competitive edge in the channel. "Some of our competitors won't get out of bed for a deal that's less than £100k whereas we'll do somersaults for a £5k deal through a partner," he confirmed. "That's our differentiator and it always will be." ■

## The Covid lockdown allowed us to accelerate the product development and business culture changes we were already planning

forty thousand and sixty thousand. It's making my eyes water and transforms an average month into a great month. It's very exciting."

Emm believes that Microsoft's introduction of direct routing, followed by its API for call recording, means larger partners can now take Teams to legacy PBX customers such as financial services organisations perhaps with large contact centres, as a viable telephony platform.

"I think the main thing that stands out is our ability to support hybrid deployments," he commented. "It means resellers can keep the existing Avaya or Mitel call centre functionality

PBX their customers might be using. We're the only voice recording vendor that can probably say, yeah, we've got a solution."

### Data matters

Emm believes that the opportunity for Clarify Speech Analytics sits squarely in those sectors where customers seek deep rooted evaluation of calls such as analysis on emotions and sentiments, which can then be turned into valuable data to power growth and protect businesses.

Oak generally does not work with third parties but, as Emm explained, decided not to pass on the opportunity to partner with an Australian

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# Get set for fibre future

The Covid-19 crisis forced businesses out of their offices against their will but far from delivering a body blow the pandemic has served to underline the importance of home working and the technologies that enable it, not least FTTP, says TalkTalk Business' Indirect Managing Director Richard Thompson.

Home workers deserve better than to be at the mercy of copper-based broadband, according to Thompson, and they cannot continue in the same vein. "As we ease out of lockdown we've identified a massive potential market opportunity through the increase in home working," stated Thompson. "We estimate that at least 25-30 per cent of the workforce will be working from home multiple days a week by the end of 2021. Covid-19 has forced businesses of all sizes to adapt during these times and it has reinforced the importance of connectivity in how we conduct our lives and business in the future.

"With the majority of the workforce working from home regularly, businesses are now realising the benefits and significance of supplying their remote staff with reliable, secure and congestion-free connectivity with fibre being the ideal product for this use case, especially FTTP. To support this trend we introduced a marketing package with funding, insight, data analysis and campaign assets to help partners maximise this opportunity."

One aspect of the requirement for full fibre is that the sizeable opportunity could also turn into big challenges. "If we act now

and help support partners to make that transition it can become a genuinely huge opportunity," reaffirmed Thompson. "Partners need to already be thinking in a 2025 context and design their businesses, capabilities and processes accordingly. Never mind the 'new normal' – business has fundamentally changed. Take the NHS as an example, it will never be the same as Telemedicine is here to stay. Big offices may be a thing of the past. It's a pivotal moment – a chance to transform and reset. We expect to see a dramatic shift as businesses look to maximise their teams' productivity from home."

To an extent, the channel must be led, and Thompson claims that TalkTalk Business's emphasis on meeting the growing demand for more data and insights will pave the way for end customers to understand the changing landscape and for partners to capitalise on leveraging relevant information.

"The role of the carrier and how we partner and surface this information is key, and how we jointly go to market will be the point of differentiation," explained Thompson. "This will become far more than just giving a competitive price point, we will need to work with our partners shoulder-to-shoulder and be closer in our go-to-market



Richard Thompson

## Businesses are now realising the benefits and importance of reliable, secure and congestion-free connectivity

strategies. We're making significant investments in our business and marketing to enable us to do this, and it's all with a focus on delivering this fibre future and supporting partners as they make this transition."

### Leadership focus

Recent management changes at TalkTalk Business, which saw Thompson become MD for Indirect, bring greater clarity and focus to the company's indirect channels, noted Thompson. "It's important to set ourselves and our partners up for success with a view to 2025," he said. "We are focused on the journey

from copper to fibre. We're all in this together."

Thompson also pointed out that throughout these challenging times TalkTalk Business has worked closely with DCMS, Ofcom and Openreach on measures to help combat the effects of Covid-19 on organisations. "Beyond the commercial support we have secured we have also ensured escalation pathways for priority projects," he added. "We supported partners in delivering thousands of important CNI projects – hospitals (including London's Nightingale Hospital), care homes, schools and

upgrading bandwidth at supermarket click-and-collect locations."

The emptying of the UK's office spaces has ushered in a new era of flexibility that builds on an already agile working culture at TalkTalk Business, noted Thompson. "Flexible working is, and always has been, part of our culture to maintain a healthy work-life balance," he commented. "It was a smooth transition for us to take our flexible working to the next level during lockdown. Although we've been physically separated from our teams, we have still been connected with our people.

"The technology and connectivity aspect ensured we were all still working together as efficiently as possible. We have actually found that we are managing to have more frequent interactions with our partners and growing closer, with quick video calls to check in. Having that extra time without the need to travel gives us the opportunity to speak with more people more frequently. We don't see transitioning to the 'new normal' as a challenge. We see it as an opportunity to work differently and to look back at the previous 'normal' and see how we can improve. Is commuting two hours a day really an efficient use of your time?" ■



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# Empowered Network Tele

Perhaps the biggest hint of developments to come at Network Telecom stem not from its acquisition by a European investment powerhouse last year but the appointment of Duncan Ward as CEO three months ago.

**W**ard's prior work experience speaks volumes and had a direct influence on his decision to join Network Telecom as CEO in April this year. And like with other companies, he aims to elevate Network Telecom to the next level and beyond. It is certainly the case that turning strategic vision into reality is a potent skill of his; and in this respect his role in the creation of Orange Business, and how that relates to his current ambitions, is telling (more on this later).

Telford-based Network Telecom was acquired last September by Waterland-backed Enreach, which is based in the Netherlands, strengthening the parent company's position in the UK IT and comms market. It is also notable that German UC vendor Swyx merged with Enreach in July 2018 and acquired French UC and FMC provider Centile at the same time. Enreach is also the parent company of Voiceworks and ipnordic, and acquired comms and IT service provider Crystal Networks in the Netherlands, bolstering its play in the European UC market.

"The original strategy was to be the best in class telco in the midlands, but as part of Enreach we are looking to expand across the UK and Europe," said Ward. "Our growth plans are now supported



Duncan Ward

## The original strategy was to be the best in class telco in the midlands, but as part of Enreach we are looking to expand across the UK and Europe

by a network of sister companies across Europe, all with extensive product portfolios, an entrepreneurial spirit and expertise."

### Strong pedigree

Network Telecom was established by Paul Maxfield in 1997 and provides

telephony, hosted voice, lines and calls, connectivity, mobile and IT services to circa 2,400 small businesses. The company launched its NT Cloud hosted solution last year along with developments to its NT Multimedia desk phone. "In the next couple of months we will

be expanding our cloud telephony offering to include a new fully hosted solution," revealed Ward. "Integrating with our touchscreen NT Multimedia phones and providing an intuitive user portal, this will be a game changer for our customers. Watch this space!"

The new market reality holds that traditional CPE could become a thing of the past; and it is Ward's view that if Covid-19 taught us anything it is that the cloud cannot be ignored, nor customer migration discussions and strategies delayed. "Cloud services are the absolute solution for the future, providing flexibility, efficiency and versatility to allow businesses to continue regardless of the circumstances and wherever their employees are based," added Ward.

Prior to joining Network Telecom he was COO for comms provider Toople. Previous positions include being Managing Director for mobile software company Bluestone Media, Divisional Managing Director for Fujitsu Services and Senior Vice President at Orange where he launched the Orange business brand.

"In bringing Orange Business to market I built the brand from inception, built the sales and marketing team and introduced a customer experience to give businesses a level of service they lacked in the past," stated Ward. "The strategy worked and we took over 20 per cent market share, much to the surprise of some of the main players. My role at Network Telecom is not dissimilar to the opportunity I had at Orange. I was given the chance to build and bring a fresh offering to the business markets.

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# ecom set to rise

"The opportunity at Network Telecom was to join an established and successful business that, apart from locally, remains relatively unknown. The portfolio is exciting and I now have the chance to bring it to market nationally and build an even bigger product and service portfolio. We will continue to have a strong presence and maintain our headquarters in Telford – but growth is necessary.

"I am strongly focused on ensuring the growth of the business, bringing more top quality talent on board and vastly increasing our services and the entire customer experience. People are important and I believe

communications solutions are positioned to provide them with the versatility they now need. Our biggest opportunity is to educate SMEs on the adaptable technology we offer and how it can benefit their businesses going forward.

### Business continuity

"Businesses are of course concerned about flexibility and remote working, with many turning to cloud solutions for the answers. But, with this versatility comes the need for robust business continuity and disaster recovery plans. Organisations want to be prepared in a market that is now being made to think differently. This is at the

## I've always been excited by fast moving technology and have never deviated away from the industry

in building a team with a skill set better than mine and looking after them well. Some decisions are not popular ones, but it's the way you make them that makes the difference to productivity, loyalty and overall results."

### Growth curve

During the last year Network Telecom's staff numbers have grown by over 20 per cent, turnover was up 22 per cent and profit climbed by over 30 per cent. "We plan to build on these numbers considerably as part of Enreach," affirmed Ward. "The Covid-19 pandemic has made businesses rethink and as they begin to return to what we now call 'new normal' and flexible working is set to stay for the long-term, our unified

heart of our product offering at Network Telecom."

Thus, Ward has identified the need for agility in both ICT provider and end user organisations. It's this requirement to react quickly to fast moving market environments, where sitting on one's hands is not an option, that has kept Ward's career path firmly on track in the comms sector.

"I've always been excited by fast moving technology and have never deviated away from the industry," said Ward. "I have learned a lot, seen many changes and been lucky enough to travel the world as part of the comms sector. All of this will come into play in my role at Network Telecom." ■

### Just a minute with Duncan Ward...

**What talent do you wish you had?** To be able to play the piano.

**What do you fear most?** Failure.

**Best piece of advice you have been given?** Listen before reacting.

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Barack Obama, Bruce Springsteen and the Queen.

**Your greatest strength, and what could you work on?** I can passionately persuade people into agreeing to most things, but I can sometimes forget some of the smaller, but important details while working to get a job done.

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I am a fully licenced boat skipper.

**One example of something you have overcome:** Being able to say no.

**If you weren't in the ICT industry what would you be doing?** Sailing a boat.

**Lessons learnt?** Enthusiasm can sometimes overtake more pragmatic decision making and you have to sometimes balance speed with making the right, thought out choices.

**Top tip for resellers:** It's a new world with a new way of thinking. Be versatile and think laterally about all the opportunities that are now in front of people within this industry.

**How do you relax when not working?** With a fine bottle of red.

**The biggest risk you have taken?** Starting a business in south east Asia. The cultural difference was vast but I loved every minute of it.

**What could you not do without in your job?** The backing of my family. I am away from home a lot and wouldn't be able to do what I do without their understanding.



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# M247 CEO on breaking g

**In such a male dominated industry where unconscious bias remains an issue, a woman must have a special kind of fortitude, laced with intuition and empathy to smash through glass ceilings. These attributes have swept M247 CEO Jenny Davies to the top, and how she got there is inspirational.**

**T**he mother of two is a true 'scouser' with the accent to match. Born and raised in inner city Merseyside, she is the daughter of a welder who worked in the gas industry and a stay-at-home mum, and her roots are very much working class. "I was academically quite bright, but I was really streetwise too, which I guess I got from my dad," she said. "I always made my own decisions and although my primary school headmaster said I should go to a top secondary school for girls, I opted instead for the comprehensive around the corner. I wanted to be with my friends, because long-term relationships have always been important to me. It could have been regarded as a short-sighted decision, but my experiences at that school made me the strong, resilient individual I am today.

"There was always something in me that has made me an achiever – to push and push and not accept no for an answer. Just because you come from inner city Liverpool does not mean you should be written off. I once had a senior director say to me as a graduate trainee, you won't get to director level with an accent like that, which I find quite amusing now."

Davies joined United Utilities on its graduate scheme after completing



Jenny Davies

**There was always something in me that has made me an achiever – to push and push and not accept no for an answer**

a languages degree at the University of Liverpool. "My first leadership role was extremely glamorous, running a sewer network in the north west," she stated. "And I loved that job!"

Some may have seen this as a baptism of fire as Davies had to manage

a team of 30, all male engineers, but she relished the challenge. "Those engineers were tough," she added. "I couldn't try and be something I wasn't with those guys, they would see right through it, so I had to learn very quickly how to work with them and how to get the best out of

them. It's not rocket science, but I just took the time to understand their roles, what they were most proud of in their job and what they were frustrated about.

**Leadership blueprint**

"I was by no means a wallflower in managing them. They were clear on

my role and what I was there to do, but importantly they knew that I respected them and wasn't frightened to admit when I didn't know something. This is the blueprint that I apply in every people leadership role that I have been in since. As a leader, and a human being, you cannot possibly know everything there is to know about everything, but it is amazing how few leaders are comfortable in saying that they don't know the answer to something."

A move to Openreach gave Davies a solid grounding in the world of IT, telecommunications and the Internet, but joining fast growing M247 as Operations Director in 2017 was the seminal move of her career. She was rapidly promoted to MD and within 18 months was promoted to CEO. She is now responsible for over 300 people spread across operations in Manchester, London, Bucharest, Malaga and New York. When the Covid-19 pandemic struck Davies immediately transitioned 90 per cent of her global workforce to remote working, over a week before formal lockdowns, which was a priority for her given her commitment to her people and their safety.

"Being an experienced operational leader means that I am comfortable making decisions quickly,



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# glass ceilings

and although I have never experienced a pandemic, I have managed large incidents and I immediately went into 'incident mode' when I saw what was happening," explained Davies. "It was a no-brainer that we would move to remote working well before the Government guidelines came out. I wanted to ensure that my team and customers were as well protected from this as possible, and I knew by moving to remote working

Creating and maintaining a professional but family feel environment at M247 has been paramount for Davies and although Covid-19 has put the brakes on communal working for now, having empathy or 'emotional intelligence' remains at the vanguard of her management style. "I have a good friendship group and I still spend a lot of time back in Liverpool with my family," she added. "For me, it is all about surrounding yourself

The score was minus 40, which was mostly down to leadership changes, acquisitions and the like. It meant 40 per cent of our employees would have answered no to that question then. "Now, having done the survey again pre-lockdown, it was plus 32. So, in two years, we swung that back 70 per cent."

#### Diversity is key

Davies also believes engagement is enhanced through fashioning a diverse environment in which people want to work. Fifty per cent of her direct team are women and throughout M247 there is a blend of original home grown talent, original founders and outsiders who have become part of the 'family'. "Our company performs better because of its diversity and I love the fact that everyone in our organisation has their individual career story," she added. "Our people are what makes M247 the company it is today. It's simple – keep your employees engaged and this engagement will shine through to your customers and channel partners."

Whatever the future may bring Davies is determined to stay grounded and have complete faith in her employees. "I'm not a human rights lawyer," she commented. "I'm not a brain surgeon. I'm not changing somebody's life. I'm just very proud to run this company and I am lucky to have such amazing people around me. I would say to anyone... get the right team around you, invest in the team and you'll create a culture of real loyalty. I know my people have got my back, and they know I've got theirs. For me, that's the game changer." ■

## I once had a senior director say to me as a graduate trainee, you won't get to director level with an accent like that, which I find quite amusing now

quickly and getting the global M247 team up and running we would have the best chance of keeping our people safe, and we would be set up ready to deal with whatever our customers and partners needed help with.

"My philosophy is that as employees we all want to feel valued and want to believe that our leaders care for us and we do this through creating a safe environment for them. When you work at M247, you have access to a broad range of employee resources including support for mental wellbeing. We have also trained some of our colleagues to be mental health first aiders and we are proud to support Young Minds as our UK charity of choice this year, which was the overwhelming option for our colleagues. The average age in M247 is 34, so this charity is hugely relatable."

with positive relationships and role models. You spend a lot of your life in work so the same should apply there. I have worked in places where leadership behaviours have been dreadful and led to pretty toxic relationships for some employees, and it made me both angry and determined that I would create an organisational culture that people would be proud and excited to work in. I am all about creating an environment that makes people want to knock it out of the park for customers every single day."

Davies inherited a less than happy workforce at M247 two years ago which was borne out by a Net Promoter-type employee engagement survey. "There was a killer question in there," she commented. "It was: Would you recommend M247 as a good place to work?"



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# How to create a more diverse

**Intercity Technology's Head of People and Engagement Christina Pendleton's project is undeniably inspirational, and the following insights serve as a resource for the exchange of ideas that could help your organisation become more diverse and inclusive.**

**P**endleton was appointed to Intercity's Board of Directors as Head of People and Engagement in June, responsible for developing talent across its three business divisions – Communications, Cloud & Security and Managed Services. She joined the company in 2014 as HR Advisor and wasted no time in pushing forward the firm's schools initiative to help address the STEM skills deficit across the west midlands. Pendleton and Intercity also forged a relationship with Ahead Partnership, a social enterprise that connects businesses with schools and colleges across the midlands.

Before the introduction of social distancing rules she attended Ahead Partnership's careers workshop which attracted 250 students from 22 schools and colleges across the region, and engaged with secondary school students to raise awareness of careers and opportunities within the

STEM sector. Pendleton 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. Here, she provides valuable insights into how such initiatives are helping the company to become far more diverse and inclusive...

**Describe your diversity and inclusion strategy, its goals and objectives**

Our strategy is three-fold: To ensure we celebrate diversity; to provide continued inclusion training for our leadership team, managers and the wider business; and to make sure we identify and respond to any issues raised by colleagues. One of the problems facing the tech industry is that while there are opportunities available, there may not be a diverse range of applicants to fulfil these roles. Our long-term strategy ensures we are able to support the development of a more diverse and inclusive talent pool. This is



Christina Pendleton

**As a sector we have to make sure that inclusivity is at the forefront of any recruitment process to reach as wide a pool of candidates as possible**

the right thing to do and it makes good business sense.

**How will you achieve your diversity and inclusion objectives?**

We have developed a number of engagement programmes to support colleagues'

professional development and provide support to young people at the start of their learning journeys. To help achieve our longer-term objectives we partnered with charity Ahead Partnership, working with them to support schools across

Birmingham and educate students on the range of opportunities available across our industry. Intercity has also created a new work experience programme to enable students from diverse backgrounds to improve their confidence, attainment,

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# Diverse and inclusive business

motivation and social mobility through mentoring from leaders across the business. We also established the Women in Tech Networking Group at Intercity in January 2020. This not only celebrates diversity but also discusses the challenges faced across our sector and how we can look to address these to ensure we retain a diverse and inclusive working environment.

## What role does leadership and mentoring play in your diversity journey?

We have a number of women in senior positions across Intercity but there is still more to do to address gender diversity to ensure we remain a truly inclusive organisation. As an HR team, we provide regular monthly updates to the board highlighting any areas for improvement across the business, as well as key challenges facing the sector as a whole.

As part of our diversity and inclusion strategy we have re-evaluated our succession planning model, developing this into more of a mentoring programme with senior leaders assigned to support more junior members of the business.

Succession planning is something that is key to ensure the professional development of employees. Pairing colleagues with representatives from outside their specialism has been central to this, providing a different insight and perspective on their future development. We have also relaunched our Management Academy which sees the senior leadership team each mentored by a board member. This year we've expanded our Academy

to include a Leadership Management qualification from the Institute of Leadership & Management, to ensure that we really are taking a 'people first' approach in all that we do.

## How have you addressed the issue of unconscious bias in creating a more diverse workplace?

Unconscious bias can undoubtedly become an issue within organisations and throughout recruitment processes as people look for certain types of personality or skill sets similar to their own. At Intercity, all our managers and senior leadership team go through unconscious bias training. We also ensure we have mixed panels for interviews to represent multiple viewpoints. If you are involved in recruitment within your organisation, I would recommend this to enable different perspectives

to be heard and to be able to challenge any bias arising during the process.

## How have your recruitment policies changed and in what ways are you recruiting for a more diverse workforce?

Over three quarters of the workforce in the communications sector is male. The national average across most other industries is around 50:50, so as an

industry we have to make sure that inclusivity is at the forefront of any recruitment process to reach as wide a pool of candidates as possible. One of the most effective ways in which businesses can help to increase inclusivity through recruitment, which we have adopted as part of our processes at Intercity, is to ensure that job vacancies and recruitment literature does not use gendered language so as not to prejudice any potential candidates. To increase representation from diverse backgrounds,

using traditional methods but also optimising wider channels such as social platforms like LinkedIn to help reach a wider audience outside the sector.

## First steps: What first moves enabled you to stride out on your diversity and inclusion journey?

Always remember that as line managers and business leaders, it's crucial to give people exposure within a business, whether that's through a mentoring scheme, networking or getting them involved in wider initiatives outside an organisation. I was fortunate when I started at Intercity that I had a manager who believed in my abilities and gave me exposure to lots of different areas of the business and the board. One of the biggest things we can do as females in the industry is promote and celebrate each others' achievements. ■

## One of the biggest things we can do as females in the industry is promote and celebrate each others' achievements

it's also important for consideration to be given to the different recruitment channels available. Not only

## What diversity and inclusion means to me...

**Katrina McCann, Customer Service Executive, Intercity Technology**

**B**eing a woman of colour, equality and diversity is something I feel strongly about. I really appreciate how Intercity is not only trying to improve equality and diversity in terms of recruitment, but also creating awareness and celebrating the diversity we already have within the company and in the wider world.

Intercity's Women in Tech Networking Group has brought me together with people throughout the business who I would normally have little or no contact with. It's given me the opportunity to hear and



**Katrina McCann**

share different experiences of working in the technology industry and it's been comforting to hear that other people are dealing with

similar issues. The Group has a clear goal to help improve the working environment for women in the technology industry and raise awareness

about the issues women face, even outside the working environment. I'm really excited to see what changes we can bring. ■

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# Jola founder eyes £100m

**Andrew Dickinson's entrepreneurial weight has increased as significantly as the rise of mobile data – both a welcome indication that the comms sector is fertile ground for those wanting to emphatically make their mark.**

**D**ickinson's career history teaches us that daring to be different can bring remarkable results. His comms career began with a 10 year stint at Mercury and Cable&Wireless before turning entrepreneur in 1996 when he co-founded one of the first start-up dotcom companies in the UK to make a profit. "We sold 30 per cent of the business to private equity in 2000, valuing the company at £30 million post-money," he said. "My second venture was a Cambridge IP spin-out which was sold to trade pre-revenue. There have also been a couple of MBO deals, including Griffin which we sold in 2012. Jola is my third start-up from scratch and probably the most satisfying."

Dickinson wrote the business plan for Jola after leaving Griffin in 2013 and formed the company in 2014 the moment he was able to work in the industry again, giving up his controlling interest almost from the start. "It was an easy decision," he added. "I needed the absolute best individuals to run each part of the business and it was clear that the only way to achieve this was through substantial shareholdings and joint decision making."

The Jola 'dream team' and co-founders Adrian Sunderland, Cherie Howlett and Lee Broxson helped drive record revenues for 2018-2019, a growth spurt



**Andrew Dickinson**

**I needed the best individuals to run each part of the business, and it was clear that the only way to achieve this was through substantial shareholdings and joint decision making**

that saw the firm double in size and scoop Megabyte's award for the UK's fastest growing telecom services company. The fact that Jola's partners vary in size from £1 million to £13 billion turnover is also reflective of its growth success to date – as is the recent appointment of Ronnie Smith as CFO who

is well known in the sector for his work with Spiritel, Six Degrees Group and TiG. "For the year 2019-2020 we will again post record numbers with revenues up over 40 per cent and EBITDA doubled," commented Dickinson. "By the end of 2022 Jola will be worth over £100 million. We have 750

partners and between 15 and 20 new resellers and MSPs sign up every month."

#### **Mobile opportunity**

Jola began life selling hosted voice and traditional connectivity, performing well against its peers. "Then an opportunity alerted us to the changes in mobile

data technology," explained Dickinson. "The move from 3G to 4G meant mobile data was suddenly able to compete with fixed line and a wave of IoT/M2M projects accelerated this growth. Now we are a MVNO and our business is 75 per cent mobile data. Every day Jola partners are finding new opportunities in their customer bases and discovering how easy 4G is to sell and support. Our pipeline is bursting, with opportunities over 50 per cent running at TCV of £30m-plus. 4G is getting faster and more ubiquitous and innovations like eSIM, L2TP, Fixed IP and multinet are enabling Jola partners to differentiate and win deals from established incumbents at reasonable margins."

The channel is well positioned to ride the mobile data wave, believes Dickinson, and the priority must be to galvanise the mobile data market opportunity where possible. In the first instance opportunities are most likely to be found in a resellers' own back yard. "Every reseller and MSP has at least one huge mobile opportunity in their customer base right now, they just have to ask the right questions and partner with the right suppliers," he stated.

"That said, the roll out of 5G has been slower than expected. But this hasn't affected our business at all. On the contrary, the



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# valuation

noise around 5G has made many resellers think about mobile data and IoT/M2M. Furthermore, Covid-19 and the Openreach lockdown reduced opportunities for traditional comms and many resellers have pivoted into mobile data. The number of Jola partners placing orders on Mobile Manager has doubled since March."

### Robust channel

This is surely another sign of the channel's inherent strength and flexibility, which has seen it through four recessions. "I expect the channel to ride out Covid-19 too," added Dickinson. "Resellers serving hospitality and retail have mainly hunkered down and most have recurring revenues to keep them going. Others have taken the opportunity to pivot into growth sectors with new products. Three of our biggest deals in the last three months have come from nimble partners who had never sold IoT/M2M or mobile data before."

According to Dickinson, such resellers stand out in a channel which is fragmented and complex, populated by hundreds of infrastructure vendors and 20,000-plus resellers and MSPs, many of which still rely on one-off projects. Moreover, Covid-19 has reinforced that a focus on one-off deals is a dangerous strategy, says Dickinson. "The best MSPs and resellers are nimble because they don't tend to build out a

lot of infrastructure," he added. "They can re-purpose their primarily sales and marketing and support capabilities and pivot into new areas much more easily than the networks."

Jola's strategy to 'simplify, innovate and multiply' dovetails neatly with those partners able to act with flexibility and give the market what it wants. And the 'Jola approach' of which Dickinson speaks should be deployed strategically by partners keen to stand out and unblock any logjam they may face in the market, he says. "We write software and APIs to give partners choice and create new products so they can differentiate," added Dickinson. "We also use our buying power to drive down prices and make it all zero-touch so we can scale without adding cost."

Such a vivid opportunity as mobile data is what resellers should be harnessing and prioritising, urges Dickinson, and he acknowledges this potential in his longer-term outlook for Jola. "I am hoping Jola will be my greatest achievement," he added. "It's certainly the most fun I have had in my 35 years in the industry. Also, my children Joseph and (Daisy) Lola are thrilled to have the company named after them, although neither could tell you what we do, and as of yet there is no sign they may want to follow in their father's footsteps." ■

### Lessons learnt...

**OVER the years I have developed good judgement in people – I don't let people talk me out of this instinct any more. Also, starting companies from scratch is difficult. There can only be one boss, but you must surround yourself with good people and make sure you are meticulous in recruitment and development.**



Pam Blanchard



Andrew McNulty



Aidan Piper



Ian Cottingham

Lovelock, Strategy Lead at BT Wholesale, said: "We are going through a massive IT infrastructure transformation to be able to offer the types of flexibility our customers want," he said. "This is going to be quite interesting as we evolve, with lots more close collaboration and co-creation of new propositions with customers. This is moving away from a position where the market tries to lock customers in with contracts and moves towards a position where the lock-in happens naturally, because you're creating value for each other. That's how I'd like to see this kind of market evolve."

Yet contract length is just part of the equation. Sharing expertise and innovation is crucial in both invested portfolios and sell-through solutions. "We put a lot of software development into our education suite of services," said Scott. "But we also sell-through BT Wholesale products, for example. With each of those scenarios I've got technical and service expertise that I wrap around the products. The more I expose skills and expertise to customers, the better the relationship I have."

It was agreed that speed to market and the need to simplify interaction between partners and suppliers was also crucial moving forward. "We've talked a lot about contact length, but also it's the speed at which we're enabled to adopt new services," she said. "If on-boarding processes were less convoluted we would be able to spin up a service in a matter of days."

Continued from page 17 he added. "If we're able to speak to our customers with a sensible conversation, we might make a commitment with one of our carriers for three years, but offer the customer a 30-day, 60-day or 90-day contract. I think we all must have a less rigid

approach, but everybody, carriers included, have got to play their part."

As the UK's largest and oldest carrier, BT Wholesale has been somewhat constrained by its legacy and rigid operating systems, but change is coming, as Trevor

Summarising the discussion, Ian Cottingham, Wholesale Specialist Sales Director, BT Wholesale, said: "Contract flexibility, the need to access education and technical specialists and the simplification of on-boarding comes across loud and clear." ■



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# A winning combination

The Covid-19 lockdown and its impact on organisations has created a strong correlation between UCaaS and CCaaS that could redefine how these solutions are sold and deployed, according to Cirrus CEO Jason Roos.

Covid-19 has played into the hands of UCaaS providers but demand for a combination of UCaaS and CCaaS is reshaping how these solutions are sold and delivered. "The pandemic has forced organisations to move to a virtualised workforce quickly and has proved that this is not only possible but can be highly effective," said Roos (who aims to elevate his company as one of the UK's top CCaaS providers and rank among the top five in America). "Whereas UCaaS and CCaaS were traditionally viewed as two distinct solutions we are now seeing much greater overlap. Organisations that would not have considered their customer engagement as being a contact centre are now seeing more customers wanting to interact with them over a broader range of channels."

According to Roos, a standard UCaaS solution is no longer sufficient and customers are looking at CCaaS solutions to provide greater flexibility, agility and control. "With less face-to-face contact we are also seeing the lines blurring between the contact centre and the rest of the organisation," he added. "Today, everyone needs to be customer-centric, and if the contact centre is unable to deal with a specific customer query they need to quickly engage the support of specialist teams

such as logistics, finance or operations. This is where blending the capabilities of the CCaaS solution with more traditional UC capabilities is essential."

Responding to this need Cirrus has launched CCaaS for Microsoft Teams. The solution embeds the capabilities of Cirrus' Contact Centre platform inside the Teams environment and enables contact centre agents and the wider organisation to collaborate. But the attractions of a virtual contact centre extend far wider. "We are seeing an increased interest across our complete CCaaS portfolio," added Roos. "In particular, organisations are looking at migrating to a CCaaS solution to better support and manage virtual working.

"They need to accelerate their adoption of new interaction channels, expanding from a traditional siloed approach to embracing true omnichannel to empower 'super agents' to deal with customer enquiries over voice, email, messaging and social platforms. We are also seeing organisations looking for innovative ways to expand and enhance self-service, in particular embracing conversational AI to personalise and expand the capabilities of this channel."

It goes without saying that Cirrus is having many conversations around the



Jason Roos

## UCaaS and CCaaS were traditionally viewed as two distinct solutions, but there is much greater overlap now

virtual contact centre and how organisations can empower remote agents while being able to manage both productivity and the customer experience.

### Transformation

"However, what is more exciting is that these conversations are not just about virtualising the current capabilities of the contact centre but using this as an opportunity to transform the contact centre," enthused Roos. "We are working with organisations to expand the range of channels of interaction they offer to their customers. We are exploring innovative ways to provide intelligent and personalised self-service across all channels, and we see a massive appetite

to leverage analytics to understand and improve the customer experience across all touchpoints."

Another area of significant demand noted by Roos is around security and compliance. Cirrus has received urgent requests from customers needing to equip agents working remotely to make secure transactions. "We are helping a number of organisations to do this securely using our Link Pay+ solution which sends customers a secure payment link and allows them to enter their card details while speaking to an agent," he explained. "These card details are completely masked from the agent to ensure a secure transaction and conformance to PCI DSS compliance."

With the Covid-19 lockdown and rise of virtual meetings, selling over video requires new skill sets but Roos does not see this requirement as a significant issue for sales people. "Whether you are sat in the same room or engaging over video, the fundamentals are the same," he commented. "It is about taking the time to truly understand the challenges of the customer and what they are trying to achieve and then presenting the solution that delivers the desired outcomes. If anything, engaging more over video is proving a good thing. We are able to have more dialogue with potential customers and support our partners by ensuring we place the right specialist in front of the customer.

"Taking a step back, we do not see the Covid-19 pandemic as having changed the vision of the contact centre and the goal to create a connected omnichannel experience, but more as an event that has accelerated organisations' need to make this a reality. We now have greater respect for uncertainty and a more significant requirement for agility. This means that organisations have to adopt CCaaS solutions that not only align to what the business needs today but has the scalability, flexibility and reliability to adapt as customer preferences, expectations and the world we live in changes." ■

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# Market ripe for CCaaS

**Covid-19 and the rise of remote and hybrid workforces have played directly into the hands of virtual contact centre providers, according to this month's panel of industry experts.**

**H**istorically, CCaaS has focused on customer and contact agent communication, but following Covid-19, businesses are now looking for a communications platform that includes internal peer-to-peer engagement. This enables organisations to manage all of their communications on a single platform, creating more seamless connections and improved collaboration, while increasing business agility and speed to market. And as many businesses were forced to rapidly deploy cloud-based communications technology in March, sales and deployment cycles were accelerated at a pace not seen before in the industry.

"We have seen a significant increase in CCaaS sales in recent months," said Keith Jackson, EMEA Channel Sales Director, 8x8. "This is largely due to the fact that in the larger CCaaS space many businesses are re-evaluating their communications and technology plans, or even accelerating them, to meet the demands of a remote – and soon to be hybrid – workforce. The market is changing before our eyes, and resellers need to respond and adapt to survive and thrive in what we are calling the 'new normal'."

Jackson also noted that 8x8 is investing in enhancements to its digital channels and CPaaS capabilities, so customers can design and develop a



Keith Jackson

## The market is changing before our eyes, and resellers need to respond and adapt to survive and thrive in what we are calling the 'new normal'

communications strategy that reflects current and future requirements. "We are also focused on enhancing our reporting, analytics and user interfaces, leveraging our AI powered analytics and quality management platforms," he added. "These updates will equip customers with the tools they need to embrace and deploy the next generation of management and supervision for a remote or hybrid workforce."

One of the biggest benefits of CCaaS is the availability of data insights, and in the virtual environment it's easy to have a single pane view of key stats while speaking to customers on a video call,

noted Jackson. "Selling over video becomes a vehicle for more proactive and contextualised customer engagement," he added.

### Soft skills

"The important thing is to ensure staff receive the training required to make best use of these data assets. Although core sales skills are transferable across communication channels, resellers should focus on developing the softer skills sales teams will need when selling over video, which include relationship and rapport building."

According to Justin Hamilton-Martin, Director, Centile/

Swyx UK, putting CRM at the centre of the contact centre's communications infrastructure makes perfect sense, encompassing all aspects of customer engagement (social media, websites, marketing campaigns, inbound and outbound calls). "This approach can deliver big gains in terms of efficiency because the data mining opportunity increases and the risk of fragmentation is reduced," he said. "Plus, customers that have opted-out of marketing communication are recognised on all inbound and outbound channels without having to knit multiple data sources together."

Linking UCaaS with contact centre functionality also gives access to rich analytics

## There may be complexity around how companies engage with their customers, but there is no need for UC and CC technologies to add to that

across an entire staff base. Another important point, noted Hamilton-Martin, is that the cloud makes it easier to record calls, and there is no longer a need to maintain a separation between fixed and mobile devices. "This is important for call centres, particularly in regulated markets, since native call recording can be integrated into a modern UCaaS platform," he added.

"Importantly, UCaaS vendors need to continue to remove the complexity, using APIs and web hooks to easily integrate the user environment into the platform. There may be complexity around how companies engage with their customers, but there is no need for UC and CC technologies to add to that."

**Continued on page 34**



Justin Hamilton-Martin



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**Continued from page 32**

During lockdown, Hamilton-Martin also saw increased usage of Centile's mobile app, which highlights a trend towards a more mobile-centric approach to communications, not just in contact centre environments but across all business operations. "Rather than being an afterthought, organisations are increasingly putting mobility at the heart of their UC strategies," he stated. "The mobile-first approach that the Nordics have long appreciated is finally being embraced in the UK. This represents another opportunity for the channel to get on board early and grow their market share."

And as businesses come out of Covid-19 and begin

to look at the cost base, their overheads and which route to go down, there is also a big opportunity in terms of hosted telephony, noted Julien Parven, Director of Business Partner Sales at Daisy Communications. "There's another opportunity on the horizon in the form of the PSTN switch off and the benefits that brings by accelerating the move into a UCaaS/CCaaS combination which may have previously been seen as a challenge or as a risk," said Parven. "In channel, a partner is ideally positioned to lead that conversation."

**Hot ticket**

Overnight, virtual contact centre providers became 'the only show in town', according to Parven. "With

the combination of UCaaS and CCaaS they have not only been able to offer the virtualisation of the contact centre solution, they've been able to add a remote element which is incredibly powerful," he added. "Furthermore, as AI starts to take hold and moves beyond the basic chatbot type technology, the correlation between AI and video could be interesting."

Parven also observed growing numbers of organisations wanting to install business-grade connectivity into their employees' homes. "A business adopting an ongoing, flexible working model will want to own that connectivity," he added. "One of the challenges is whether the company is happy committing into a longer-term tenure contract given workforce movement, particularly in the contact centre space. Our current priorities are to work with our partners to establish the connectivity ownership and from there, look at how we can help to support CCaaS. A virtual remote contact centre where all of the agents have an enterprise-level hosted voice solution will enable the contact centre to have full management control."

**Management tools**

Inevitably, remote working increases reliance on communication management tools to uphold service, manage risk and optimise resources, agrees Ian Bevington, Marketing Manager, Oak Innovation. "With the cost of speech analytics falling, organisations are moving beyond quality management to leverage speech analytics and AI," he stated. "Managers can get a deeper understanding of the customer experience by measuring sentiment, emotion, over talk and silence. Key words and phrases can be monitored to identify and single out high risk conversations for investigation. We're seeing more organisations



**Ian Bevington**

**Organisations are moving beyond quality management to leverage speech analytics and AI**

deploying web chatbots – a combination of AI and human interaction helps to get queries answered, speeds up interaction and lightens the load during busy periods. Furthermore, many more of

us have become familiar with video communication over recent months. This will add a new dimension to omni-channel interaction, reporting and analytics over the next few years." ■

**Justin Hamilton-Martin's top tips on how best to present CCaaS via virtual meetings...**

**THE critical point for a video session to be effective is to make sure the connectivity works end-to-end. While many laptops are microphone-enabled, the sound quality often leaves much to be desired, so consider headsets or separate speaker devices. Do not underestimate the importance of getting lighting conditions and image quality right. Customers will have more confidence in someone they can see clearly, and background images should not be an unnecessary distraction.**



**Julien Parven**

**As AI starts to take hold and moves beyond the basic chatbot type technology, the correlation between AI and video could be interesting**



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# Mastering virtual sales

**UCaaS providers are sure to enjoy a surge in popularity among end user organisations, but only if they master the art of selling via video conferencing, according to VanillaIP Sales Director Iain Sinnott.**

**T**he Covid-19 lockdown has done more than anything to accelerate the adoption of UCaaS – but mission accomplished? No. Crucial to a reseller’s growth strategy is that selling via video will in large part replace face-to-face meetings, and success will depend on how far sales people can exploit the tragically created virtual selling opportunity that has emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic. “The lockdown has brought a new focus on time management and how much more can be achieved,” stated Sinnott. “In a sales context, this means road warriors could soon become a thing of the past.

“The behaviour of customer-facing staff will change dramatically as new tools are now an accepted part of the engagement process. Face-to-face still has value but in big deals some of the meeting time will be shifted to virtual, and for small deals the

additional margin afforded by a virtual-only process will be irresistible. The customer is king and will have the ultimate say, but as there is a very real time dividend for them when moving activity virtual we are unlikely to see much push back.”

Sales training must become an ever more inherent feature of a reseller’s growth strategy – vital in fact. “The method of solution selling has not changed but the skills to take ‘good’ conversations virtual must be learned,” added Sinnott. “Sales people must develop an ability to turn a meeting into a conversation using online ice-breakers in the same way as they open a face-to-face meeting. They must be able to bring their products to life virtually and have all the tools open and primed ready if the questions asked bring an interest from the customer. Sales people also need to keep the customer as the dominant speaker in a fact-find



Iain Sinnott

## There is a massive opportunity for sales people to study the art of virtual meetings and make themselves shine

meeting, as that is the only way to retain their focus.”

In all this, the consumption model is key. “The option of 30-day contracts and minimising the risk will be vital to opening up the dialogue,” stated Sinnott. “Customers are emerging into a recession after the biggest head spin of their working lives, long-term commitment will not be easy for them. This is not a model that resellers can continue to pay big salaries and big commissions to traditional hunters in the sales team, so that model needs to change.

“The deal starts with the first draft and never ends as the salesperson and the customer seek every ounce of human potential and process automation that technology can deliver

and which improves the customer’s profitability.”

### Embrace change

Belief is critical in a successful sales team so resellers need to embrace change, urged Sinnott. “There is a massive opportunity for sales people to study the art of virtual meetings and use this medium to make themselves shine,” he stated. “It is essentially the same game but in a different environment so you have to plan a different type of meeting craft and bring your product to life during the process. Bringing energy to a pitch is important but demonstrating a solution live, and in the form customers require, is the secret to a higher conversion ratio. This applies to an account manager up-selling one application as much as

it does a frontline seller pitching the core solution.”

Businesses almost never get a chance to re-set and write a new plan. For resellers, this may be the vital element that keeps them in the game. “Resellers will have to think hard about how to compete with a true cloud model while paying the upfront overhead of the hunters in their team,” stated Sinnott. “The cloud model is based around a farmer, a progressive and continuous relationship with the customer delivering increasing revenues but without the big bang cash injection. The ‘True Cloud’ model also removes the risk of technology adoption from the customer base, making the farmer’s life easier as the customer becomes hungry for the technology dividend.” ■

### Key consideration points...

- Virtual meetings should help to fact-find and ensure there is an agreed objective to a further meeting.
- Resellers need access to more stakeholders from within a business and virtual meetings are a powerful asset.
- Be skilled in face-to-face and virtual so the customer can dictate the choice of meeting.
- Don’t just switch to including virtual in the process, master it, learn how to use it like you use a face-to-face meeting and demand that your sales professionals train hard to be at their best.
- Now it’s more about 30 day contracts than five year leases. The deal is different and the sales process must be different.



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# Gamma calls for UCaaS

## trend takes residence

**For the comms channel, nothing speaks louder of the Covid-19 driven shift to home working than the requirement for UCaaS, writes Gamma Managing Director Daryl Pile (Comms Vision Platinum sponsor), who turns up the volume on what he says are unprecedented and equivocal business opportunities for ICT providers.**

**A**s businesses have reacted and adapted to the lockdown situation imposed on us by the Covid-19 pandemic, there has never been greater attention placed on a company's need for an agile and flexible comms infrastructure. As organisations hastily decamped employees from the office to the home, they just as quickly implemented new policies and procedures to outline their new ways of working.

Despite Digital Transformation, a buzzword that has dominated tech feeds and industry events for a number of years, the current situation highlights that many businesses still need to make fundamental improvements in their digital set-up to boost productivity and customer engagement. It's essential that these businesses build-in the necessary operational resilience to survive this new reality.

### Embrace the change in demand

While it's safe to say that the way we work and interact will never be the same again, for most businesses this represents a challenge. Just as we are all doing within our own organisations, customers are strategising as to what the future is going to look like, and central to that will be how they communicate with each other and their customers. The channel can, and indeed should be, key to these conversations.

With the mass adoption of remote working, employees' requirements at the office now need to be mirrored at home. While we have already seen cloud migration increase over the last few years, Covid-19 has acted as a catalyst for this acceleration to continue faster than originally anticipated.

Beyond mass adoption of flexible working and looking at the comms market broadly, Microsoft and its Teams platform has significantly disrupted the UCaaS space. Back in March, we asked our channel partner audience at our annual Roadshow if they saw Microsoft Teams as an opportunity or threat. Overwhelmingly the channel agreed, with 85 per cent of respondents stating this as an opportunity. We understand that some partners might be concerned about Microsoft bypassing the channel and going directly to customers. However, it's important channel partners ensure they understand the value they can bring and monetise from this relationship, through providing additional differentiation, outstanding customer service and technical expertise.

It's in Microsoft's interests to support the channel as a critical route to market, particularly with the blurring of the lines between traditional IT and telecoms channels and enabling active users as opposed to simply selling licences. In addition, partners have the opportunity to uncover the extent of an end users' need for UC and offer the appropriate solution for their business. This won't always be Teams. Many customers still have a requirement for hosted telephony, where they are utilising complementary overlay services which may sit outside what Teams can offer. There isn't a one size fits all solution for UC. It's essential for the partner to fully understand how the customer's business operates, their current comms tech stack and then recommend the solution best suited to the customer.

It's important to remember when assessing these opportunities that end customers are in a 'problem' mindset, as they undergo years worth of digital

**The platforms businesses chose at the beginning of the lockdown period are not likely to be sustainable long-term and we fully expect to see a second and third wave of buying**

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# push as home working



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transformation in a matter of weeks. The platforms they chose at the beginning of the lockdown period are not likely to be sustainable long-term and we fully expect to see a second and third wave of buying. Customers are looking for the channel's guidance and expertise to implement the best solution for their business. We encourage our partners to get on the front foot and start talking to their existing base today. If you aren't someone else will be.

### More than a port in a storm

We've talked for some years now about UCaaS and all the associated benefits, becoming a key component in the digital journeys organisations have embarked upon. We'd now say this is an essential component that businesses must have in order to survive and quite possibly thrive, as we navigate what will undoubtedly be some bumpy years ahead. With this uncertainty in mind, Gamma's financial stability will provide our channel a high level of assurance for the long-term.

Whilst we are yet to experience the full economic impact of Covid, we know that many partners are critically reviewing their supply chain as the cost to a reseller, should a link in their supply go down, is huge. Beyond assurance, our financial stability has allowed us to continue product development on our second generation UCaaS platform and services. We have also continued our acquisition strategy, not just in Europe, but the capability acquisitions we have made in the form of Telsis and its contact centre capabilities, and the timely acquisition of Exactive. Both of these acquisitions have helped augment our understanding of how to help the channel monetise contact centre and Microsoft opportunities.

Our recently launched Covid-19 Recovery Package has been built to support our channel partners in identifying new opportunities as we begin to emerge from the Covid-19 period. We've looked at specific ways we can help partners secure new business, including new 30-day rolling contracts for our UC propositions Horizon, Collaborate and Microsoft Teams Direct Routing. This package also supports partners in the event of any end customer business that doesn't weather this period of economic hardship. We feel that it's only right that we share this commercial risk with the channel partner, cementing our commitment to them and ensuring our financial stability can directly benefit our partner base.

### Delivering true UC

Despite the inevitable recession we are about to endure, we remain positive about the communications sector. The channel has generally shown itself to be resilient throughout periods of economic uncertainty, where business confidence is low. Our industry is robust and although the rate of growth will undoubtedly slow down, I believe the channel and Gamma will be able to ride this out.

For Gamma, the Covid-19 situation has simply solidified our belief that the future is in the cloud. Our strategy will continue to be focused on providing true UC technologies, delivered in an easy to consume fashion that will enable our partners to play their part in ensuring businesses can adapt and pivot over the coming months and years. We believe the channel will be a driving force to lead this change, and with a captive audience, now is the time to demonstrate to business leader's tangible transformation with technology at the heart. ■

**We encourage our partners to get on the front foot and start talking to their existing base today. If you aren't someone else will be**



# Polish up remote selling strategy

It has been widely reported that many organisations – Twitter and Google are cases in point – have decided to locate all staff at home and close or scale down their offices until the pandemic passes. Others are returning to their workplaces but are offering much more flexible arrangements so staff can work from home, maybe two or three days a week.

“Has there ever been a better opportunity for channel businesses to ‘showcase’ their remote working solutions than by conducting remote sales presentations using it,” argues Gary May, one of the ICT channel’s leading sales training specialists. Get it wrong and the consequences are disastrous asserts May, as presenting on screen is a different art form than presenting in person.

Here are his top tips for successful remote selling:

- Body language is restricted into a narrow field of view, so utilising the ‘steeple’ posture eliminates this common mistake and ensures your body language is always in the prospects field of view.
- Eye contact is limited as we’re looking at the screen rather than the camera, so placing a simple sticky arrow by the camera will help make you appear more engaged.
- Expert questioning strategies are critical, not only for the answers you get back but to ensure the smoothness and direction of the meeting. Predictive Answer and Socratic Questioning work best.

“On top of these there’s the deadly curse of all remote meetings! Not listening and over talking! ‘Sorry, you go’. ‘No, it’s fine, you go’.

“I can also see remote meetings being the ‘nemesis’ of the over-enthusiastic, salesy, pushy, ‘talk, talk, talk, never listens’ type salesperson. Prospects don’t have to put up with it remotely and can simply press the button and leave!

“Never has it been more critical for sales teams to have a polished product presentation, a nailed-on agenda, expert questioning and elite closing skills,” adds May

“For me, remote sales meetings are here to stay but, and it’s a big but, they are also a lot less forgiving for those who haven’t or won’t master their trade.”



JAMES SHRAGA  
FIDELITY GROUP

“Whilst we have championed remote working solutions for our channel partners and their customers for the past few years, the reality of mandatory home working bought uncharted waters for all. The hosted solutions that we provide day in and day out have made the transition seamless with value added bolt-ons to enable management oversight and unified communications across the various mediums. We have set up new management reporting and communication structures to ensure that we could remain connected despite geographic distances and we share our experiences both internally and externally. Whilst our teams have remained effective and motivated, the real challenge that we see in the future will be integrating new staff into the organisation within a remote working environment from a cultural, training and management perspective, though as channel innovators we look forward to this challenge.”



ANNA ROPER  
9 GROUP

“Most salespeople are social creatures but having a screen between you and your prospect can strip away some of your best techniques. We have developed a web-based brochure which allows our team to share and capture information. Marketing plays a vital role in commanding attention from a distance. Customers gravitate towards content that has meaning and relevance, so carefully tailor the tone of your messaging to the current climate. Placement is as important as the message itself. Digital Marketing has become a priority for us and many of our Partners. We have been providing support and advice on how to succeed in this space during lockdown. As ever, demonstrating value throughout the process is vital. Be crystal clear about your prospect’s individual circumstances and offer a personalised proposal, which is a genuine fit with their current challenges.”



PAUL HOLDEN  
AKIXI

“The first thing is simple – it’s trust. Covid-19 has forced the issue of remote working, however, enabling sales teams to be productive has always been paramount. Work is not somewhere we go, it’s an output in order to hit individual and company goals. After trust, it’s providing the right tools to communicate both internally and externally with partners and customers. This includes a unified collaboration platform for voice, chat, video, screen sharing, and the right access to information, utilising the cloud for one version of the truth for documentation, reporting and analytics. Mix all that together then set the right example yourself with good leadership.”



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# Agencies or customers will switch off



ANDREW JONES  
AUDPRO

"As a channel-first operation, enabling our partners to close sales is paramount. We've taken a hard look at our Partner Toolkit and refreshed it to address current challenges. Engaging, white labelled animations to share on social media, as well as sales training presentations have been incredibly popular among partners, as have our remote sales training sessions. These have helped partners' teams close more sales, and we're getting better feedback about what the people actually selling need to hit their targets. From a partner onboarding perspective, our recent webinars have helped push the AudPro name out to many more channel resellers and helped us grow our partner network even through these challenging times. Our most significant piece of advice is - find ways to bridge the virtual gap, try and have a laugh with those on the other end of the video call and make it memorable."



BIMAL MODHA  
HIGHLIGHT

"Firstly, I think it's important to consider basic hygiene factors – desk, chair, screens and suitable web cams. Then you have to accept that interruptions will happen, and that people will take time out – it's their home and home life after all! The fundamentals are around safety and security; you can't be concentrating on a conference call if your toddler's about to fall out of an open window. Watch out for burn out. Spending all day in front of a laptop screen or monitor is not good for you; get out, go for a walk, do a 1- to-1 whilst walking. Staff are working longer and longer and not taking the necessary breaks or hydrating which is bad for all concerned. Above all, remember you're working in the new normal; you're not working from home, you're working out of your home during a pandemic – very different."



GAVIN JONES  
BT WHOLESALE

"Throughout lockdown, BT adapted to new ways of working. Home working can feel very different to working from your normal workplace and we are empathetic towards individuals' differing situations. We are committed to doing everything we can to support our sales teams. We believe that, when supported effectively, our sales teams can operate well from home and have taken the steps to equip them to sell effectively remotely. Whilst at home, we have ensured that employees have access to the appropriate systems and are updated with sales initiatives. Additionally, just as with partners and prospects, open dialogue is vital, so we stay connected through Microsoft Teams. As a team, we're looking forward to returning to the office to be able to bounce off each other in person and appreciate the value of face-to-face discussions with customers."



CHRIS TUCKER  
INCLARITY

"As a UK wide vendor, Inclarity has always empowered its sales teams to work remotely. The support required by our partners relies on a quick and flexible response whether that be for face-to-face presentations, webinars, or local meetings. With the tools available today, coupled together with our feature rich hosted telephony platform, the Inclarity team, our partners and in turn their customers can rely on having the same working feature set regardless of where they are in the world. In the current climate with COVID-19 and for the foreseeable future this being the 'new normal' we have adapted to a new way of selling. We use technology to help us deliver the benefits of engaging with us as a business. This has been very successful over the last few months with webinars, MS Teams collaboration tools and traditional voice and video."



ANDREW WILSON  
CITYFIBRE

"We were initially concerned about how a move to working completely from home might impact the team's ability to serve our partners and each other. Following early emergency simulations to test our systems and business continuity, we've ensured they can confidently access the systems and communications they need to actively support partners. We have maintained frequent cross-team contact to share information and 'look after each other' and we have regularly updated everyone on their performance. Teams thrive as a community, so it's essential to sustain a dynamic environment. To achieve that we're creative in our use of the usual platforms to keep things fun and flexible as well as empowering. We've enabled individuals to stay productive and feel included working from home by creating that right environment. Significantly, the outcome is that our partners continue to feel supported and confident that we're there for them."



LEE BROXSON  
JOLA

"Resellers are nimble, flexible, and resourceful. Above all they know how to sell and just need their suppliers to help them find opportunities for appropriate and differentiated products. Jola account managers work closely with reseller sales teams and both have adapted well to communicating via Teams and webinars, instead of face-to-face. Our partners' sales teams and their customers took to videoconferencing just as easily. Jola identified product areas where volumes were still growing; Mobile Broadband, eSIM and Teams Direct Routing and ran campaigns and webinars focussed on the benefits of the products and finding opportunities for them. Each of the webinars had more than 200 attendees and in three months we signed 72 new partners. When COVID is over, we will recruit and train this way and we will certainly continue our more pro-active approach to helping partners uncover current opportunities via video calls and webinars."



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## Kaleidoscope continued



"I absolutely believe our sales team can operate effectively from home, arguably better than in the office. Home working has a number of benefits, including increased productivity, less distractions, less travel and also more time spent with family, which helps our employees get that much sought-after work/life balance. Sales can be a relentless role with lots of travelling and long hours, yet the recent pandemic has forced us into reconsidering what the sales process looks like. We're now doing most of our meetings via video conference; facilitating new tools such as Microsoft Teams, Collaborate and Zoom to work more effectively. We've made sure our employees are equipped with the right skills and knowledge to work from home by delivering specific training around remote working and ultimately, I believe the key to its effectiveness comes down to good communication."



"The last few months have been an eye opener, but our team has always been equipped to sell remotely, so it was easy to extend those capabilities and culture to the full team. In terms of customer and partner engagement, our operations have become more time and cost-efficient with less travel and more capacity for meetings. We can react faster, with internal and external meetings called when needed and global relationships are improving as a result. We are of course fortunate to have been able to support the sales team and maintain customer experience levels using our own iCall Suite call monitoring, recording and call back analytics. There will always be a place for face-to-face contact, but a mix of video and calls have become the norm and ultimately, the way we engage with customers in future will be driven by their needs. Giving them that choice is powerful."



"It's all about providing the right technology to enable staff to engage with end users using impressive technologies. In a lot of ways, the resellers' sales team are showcasing the businesses ability to practice what they preach. Our resellers have worked extremely hard to make sure that when any end user is on a call with our team, we put ourselves head and shoulders above the competition. As soon as Covid-19 took hold, our resellers worked very hard to think about how the end users would want to engage with potential new technology providers and it became apparent that it had to be thought about from the ground up. Some of our most successful resellers spent a lot of time training their teams on using technologies such as Teams or Zoom to make sure when they use this to present it is as professional as possible."



"Remote working isn't exactly new to the Union Street sales team; we've done so for years. That said, remote selling is a bit of a culture change. Whilst face-to-face may be our preference, our sales team have been no less effective when selling remotely. Many resellers were disappointed by some other vendors' responses to the pandemic. Consequently, we received higher than average enquiries throughout the Lockdown. Our sales team have done a fantastic job of assisting these resellers in converting to aBILLity billing, despite the slight unfamiliarity of remote selling. As with anything, ensuring your team are correctly equipped for the job is pivotal. We've provided them with the best hardware, secure remote network access, and the most efficient collaboration tools available. Communication is also key, and we hold regular Teams meetings to assess performance and review progress."



"Our sales teams have been home based for some years, but we have definitely seen their roles evolve through the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Core activities such as demos and training have now moved to a remote model. We have worked to adopt practices that keep the whole team connected and maintain a strong team and success driven culture. We now talk and meet far more than we ever have done. Every morning we check in as a team and every evening we have a video call to catch up and share what's happened and how things have gone. We have also adopted a range of new tools such as Microsoft Bookings to help meetings run more efficiently. Our channel support model has also evolved to support partners with things like specific training in remote demo skills. The channel has quickly adapted and seized the opportunity."



"Our staff have always been ready to work independently and from any location. The transition to remote working was straightforward, with Salesforce and Microsoft Teams being especially important to enable collaboration and ongoing operations. Coupled with our own Clear Voice hosted service to keep our teams connected, the only thing we're missing from the office is our Fi-Bar! Ensuring our teams have the right tools at their disposal to maintain productivity hasn't been our only consideration, as mental wellbeing is equally important. We've used daily calls and WhatsApp groups to keep our teams in touch and interact just as they would in the office, keeping positivity and motivation high. Coaching has been another key consideration, but by using call recordings in team meetings and on customer calls, we've continued to feedback to staff and ensure our messaging and service stays strong."



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- 02** Get them to check their appliances, heating and AC, which may have been left on a cycle when offices shut over 100 days ago.
- 03** Send in a meter read to stop estimated billing (which could be much higher than true figures) and allow suppliers to bill them at their reduced usage due to lockdown.
- 04** As the market price of energy has fallen, see if you can save your customers money by fixing a lower priced contract. This is possible even if they are in contract still.
- 05** If they have not opened or are using less energy, think about switching them to a low or no standing charge tariff. They will then only pay for the amount they use and not the standing charge.



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# Combating Covid-19

**CityFibre versus coronavirus – how the full fibre network builder combated the pandemic and came out on top: Here, Head of Regional Sales Paul North and Business Partner Sales Manager John Igoe provide insights into how CityFibre is helping partners and users resolve some of the key challenges created by the Covid-19 lockdown.**

**C**ovid-19 could rank as the most significant event in UK comms sector history, and the channel's response has been extraordinary, as illustrated by CityFibre's experience and subsequent actions. "At the Government's request we have continued to build and install throughout the crisis," stated Igoe. "Like all businesses we needed to re-evaluate our plans and focus for 2020 and some adjustments have obviously been required, but this crisis demonstrates more than ever the fundamental need for a future proof full fibre digital infrastructure. As we move into a 'new norm' this will be increasingly apparent as we as an industry strive to support the evolving needs of our customers. They themselves are being forced to evolve to support more remote working/learning, higher demand for centralised systems access and improved online retail systems etc."

Conversations with partners highlighted many issues and pressures due to the pandemic, observed North. "So we fed this back to the wider team and came up with a number of initiatives to address each issue," he said. "By way of example our partners also advised that as



**Paul North**

most offices and buildings were closed, some customers with existing Ethernet orders in progress were placing them on hold or cancelling.

"To counteract that we launched our 90 days deferred billing option which enabled partners (and their customers) to proceed with the installation of the connection while the office was empty, so it was ready and waiting for when they could reopen but defer the billing of the connection for up to 90 days or until they returned to the office and started to utilise the connection. We saw this enable partners to move over £68k worth of orders out of hold and progress them as normal."

Feedback from partners also identified a cash flow issue and uncertainty around long-

term contracts. To combat this issue CityFibre has launched a 'Buy now, pay later (or not at all)' scheme on all CityFibre install costs. This enables the customer to proceed with their full fibre connection but defer payment of the installation cost until the end of the 12 month contract. "If at this point they decide to extend the contract for a further 24 months the installation cost is removed altogether," added Igoe. "We've also worked closely with several partners on a one-to-one basis, helping them to reassess their plans and objectives for 2020, developing creative ideas for their marketing activities and helping them refocus and continue throughout the pandemic.

"One of the best examples of a City Champion partner that has battled on through



**John Igoe**

lockdown is ACS, who proactively worked with us to develop a CityFibre focused digital marketing campaign utilising webinar and LinkedIn to engage with customers and continue to win new full fibre business despite the difficult circumstances. We even launched a new city to the channel during lockdown – Plymouth. We now have 29 CityFibre cities through which partners can serve over 180,000 businesses."

#### **Key opportunity**

North noted that a 'huge opportunity' was presented by NHSX, which asked several key industry network operators including CityFibre to develop competitive offerings to the care home sector in England. "We worked with channel partners to deliver this and contacted several of our City Champions and

Launch Partners to explain the opportunity and discuss the proposition we had developed," explained North. "We later decided to extend the offering to Scotland where we have a major presence. The project started in early June and we currently have over 40 partners onboard who are eager to serve approximately 700 care homes."

According to Igoe, creative thinking and identifying new opportunities will be key to success during the expected economic downturn. "And as reliance on fast reliable connectivity continues to grow we will see an increase in companies looking to implement solutions that support remote working and access to centralised systems through Ethernet and bespoke Private Wide Area Networks," he added. ■



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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](http://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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"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. 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."

TERRY O'BRIEN, MANAGING DIRECTOR,  
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"The Comms National Awards are the industry's most prestigious and hotly contested awards, recognising excellence across the ICT channel. After picking up the 'Best Billing Solution' title in 2019 - for the second time in three years - and experiencing the tremendous impact these coveted awards have for the winners, we are proud to once again be supporting the event as a hospitality sponsor. On behalf of Inform Billing, I would like to wish all entrants the very best of luck and look forward to finally coming together on what is always a fantastic night!"

ELLIE ALLSEYBROOK, HEAD OF  
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"We work with entrepreneurs daily and we know the value they place on industry recognition which is why we are proud to be sponsoring the Entrepreneur of the Year Award at this year's CNAs. On a more general note, as a finalist or winner of a Comms National Award, your business receives a unique endorsement that will enhance the way not only customers, but staff, industry peers and potentially investors and buyers view your business - in our experience perception has a direct and tangible impact on business value."

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"The channel is very fortunate to have the prestigious CNAs, an awards ceremony that champions excellence and outstanding achievement within our industry. Success in industry awards demonstrates to the market that you are an elite performer with an edge over competitors. Targeting a particular vertical market requires high levels of skill and expertise, truly demonstrating that the winning company is the master of its market."

VINCENT DISNEUR, HEAD OF SALES &  
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# 9 banks on Barclay



Steve Barclay

FORMER Entanet Sales Director Steve Barclay has joined 9 Group as Networks Division Managing Director with a remit to build a new connectivity and IP voice proposition for channel and distribution businesses. He formed part of the team that led a MBO at Entanet in 2014 and was influential in its integration with CityFibre following its acquisition in 2017. Barclay exited in 2019 and in a gap year toured China and India and visited Everest's Base Camp.

"One of my proudest achievements at Entanet was helping to create a vibrant success culture, so a key attraction for me was the positive attitude of everyone I met at 9. This was a culture that I knew I would enjoy working in and CEO James Palmer's vision and energy can be equally persuasive.

"The pandemic has changed how and where everyone will collaborate at work forever, way

beyond even the most outrageous previous predictions for this market. This new role gives me the platform to make a transformative impact and change the way that connectivity and collaboration services are delivered, by providing a frictionless user experience and offering more than just solus connectivity or IP voice solutions."

## Also on the move...

KERI Gilder's promotion as Colt Technology Services CEO in May created an opening for Paula Cogan who takes over Gilder's previous role as Chief Commercial Officer. Her remit includes looking after the company's service partner base. Cogan moved to Colt four years ago and was VP for Enterprise and Capital Market Sales. Prior to joining Colt she held several senior sales roles at Verizon Business and BT. Gilder said: "In her time with Colt, Paula's achievements have been underpinned by her ability to foster strong relationships with customers and partners, while remaining focused on leading and transforming our teams." Cogan was a founding member of Colt's Women's Network – Network 25 – believing strongly in the equal representation of women in telecommunications.



Paula Cogan

TELESIS founder and MD Christian Bleakley has been appointed Firstcom Europe CEO. Firstcom Europe acquired Telesis in 2018 since when Bleakley ran the UK operations,



Christian Bleakley

and now takes on overall leadership of the group which has an annual turnover of more than £30 million. His prior experience also includes a 15 year spell building Britannia Business Communications. "The

transformation of the workplace has driven companies to collaborate in different ways," said Bleakley. "Flexibility of location and ease of use have become essential features for communication services. We will be extending our relationships with customers and partners and developing our product range to equip them for the digital future."

FORMER CenturyLink Vice President of Strategic Partners Jim Glackin has joined Masergy as SVP of Global Channels and pledged to invest more in the channel, forge closer ties with partners and better enable them to capitalise on market developments. He brings over 25 years experience in strategising channel sales and started his career at AT&T. He is based in Chicago. "I aim to reconnect with our partners and re-establish the value we see in them," he commented. "My first priority is to create an interactive community."

ECS has appointed James Jarvis as Chief Sales and Marketing Officer and Marc Turner as Customer Experience Sales Director. Jarvis joins from UST Global where he was Vice President and Head of Sales for the UK and Ireland. He previously held senior roles at Symantec and Veritas. Turner brings over 20 years experience in the contact centre space, most recently at AWS where he was Principal Business Development Manager for End User Productivity.

# IT boss signed by Converged

ABERDEEN-based IT firm Converged Communication Solutions' newly created IT Delivery Manager role has been filled by Mark Johnson. He's worked in the IT sector for 35 years and managed IT operations for office moves, infrastructure refreshes, new system deployments, company acquisitions and subsequent integrations. "My job is to work with SMEs to deliver an IT audit and lay out a clear and non-technical vision for IT change over a set period of time," said Johnson.



Mark Johnson

"All businesses should be able to access enterprise level IT services, not just larger companies." Managing Director Neil Christie added: "Lockdown created a seismic shift in how people work and underlined the need for organisations to have robust systems and technology in place. These themes will only strengthen in the future and everyone needs to be prepared for that."

# Holden appointed Akixi's sales chief

PAUL Holden has joined Akixi as Head of Sales, bringing 30 years industry experience to the role. He moves from US-based SaaS contact centre and CRM company Kustomer where he played a key role in building a pipeline and customer base in new international territories. Akixi Managing Director Bart Delgado stated: "Paul's experience in the industry,



Paul Holden

along with his passion, drive and leadership expertise will be an asset to the company. He will play a pivotal role as we execute our growth strategy." Holden added: "By bringing my leadership, acquisition and international experience I aim to help Akixi achieve its goal to double revenues over the next three years with our channel-led go to market strategy."



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