Plan to become trusted

Despite positive news about potential vaccines, there can be no doubt that some of the changes to work environments brought by the pandemic may be permanent.

Nobody can predict exactly what will happen as lockdowns are gradually lifted and whilst we all hope for a degree of normality soon, businesses will continue in a state of flux for some time. There is every likelihood that further waves of infection will force new lockdowns well into the new year and, tellingly, Chancellor Rishi Sunak has extended the Government's furlough scheme until April.

Every area of industry has been affected by the coronavirus and the ICT channel is no exception. However, there are ways in which the vendor community and channel partners can support organisations to ensure that they not only survive this pandemic but go on to enjoy continued growth and success.

According to Koorosh Khashayar, VP Global Channels at global cloud service provider iland, the recalibration of organisations as they adjust to the 'new normal' will present a significant opportunity for the reseller channel.

"Partners are in the privileged position to help their customers transform the very nature of what they do; pivoting entire business models, supply chains, and operations to help their customers," he said.

"The stakes have never been higher. Businesses must now apply strategic thinking in short-term decision-making. This could involve transitioning the immediate business continuity measures into a robust digital foundation that enables organisations to modernise application environments and fully commit to cloud-based flexibility.

"The right partners therefore can play a vital role at this stage as trusted advisors, so long as they have the right vertical market and technical expertise. They need to know, for example, the particulars around certain cloud infrastructure systems, their precise purposes, and which scenarios they would be best suited to.

"Partners should know the nuances of their customers' businesses and be objective enough to drive new coordination and ways of thinking between different departments within companies," he concluded.

We asked vendors how they will be equipping partners to survive and thrive and the year ahead and the consensus is the support is there - you just have to ask for it.

ADAM CATHCART
9 GROUP

"The pandemic fast tracked the world's approach to remote working and many organisations have introduced operational changes which will have a lasting effect, long after the vaccine has been distributed. Remote working solutions, demand for improved connectivity and the convergence of IT and telecoms present our sector with the unique opportunity to serve businesses to achieve their goals in 2021 and beyond. We've identified key needs by sector and are equipped to support our partners to help their customers mitigate the effect of the coronavirus crisis. Productivity and mobility are key themes, along with digital collaboration and business continuity. Investing in IT and technology will help to revive growth in the economy and will naturally accelerate the transition to digital. Our role is to provide partners with value propositions that meet the demands of their customers today, along with sales and marketing support which helps them stand out from the competition."

ANDY WILSON
CITYFIBRE

"We hope the commencement of the vaccination programme will see businesses start to return to their offices and get back to some sort of normality in terms of working practices. With that in mind we expect businesses will be looking to upgrade and review their current services, to ensure they are accessing the best connectivity available. Couple this with the need for organisations to work efficiently from any environment, the need for cloud-based collaboration tools will increase. The final dimension that will no doubt become further opportunity, is to ensure that when employees are working from flexible locations, the organisations IT security is not compromised. In readiness for the year ahead we have held workshops around planned unpredictability, to give our team opportunity to learn new skills. We will continue to serve the channel in every capacity and work alongside our partners to offer the right propositions."

ALEX MAWSON
DWS

"The past year has brought to the forefront the benefits enhanced communication services deliver to allow flexible and transparent working. Technology is a key driver, with reliable connectivity required to underpin any agile working solution, such as IP Voice and UC apps. One huge opportunity which has emerged in every business sector, that partners cannot ignore, is the growing dominance of Microsoft Teams and the ability to enable external voice services by deploying Direct Routing or Calling Plans. We are also seeing an increased focus on the PSTN withdrawal and the growing fibre footprint, resulting in the accelerated migration to Single Order or FTTP connectivity and the rapid adoption of 5G-based mobile solutions, all of which will enable businesses to effectively work from anywhere. As the Channel's largest aggregator, the extensive DWS portfolio offers our partners the opportunity to build future-proof solutions to support their customers' communications."

advisors in new normal

"Covid-19 has changed many things in the way we think about how we can and should work. The old school mentality of needing to be in a set location is the first thing that springs to mind. For years our industry has tried to express the need for all businesses to move to the Cloud with a wide variety of services and products, with varying levels of success. Covid-19 has given us a real-life case study for what is needed to "keep calm and carry on". Yes, fibre is the backbone that will allow it all to work, but 5G will also play a massive part in connecting users to the network. As we know this is still a long way away from being a reality for EVERYBODY today, but we should do our absolute upmost to make sure every single customer we all have will never suffer like they have during this pandemic."

DANIEL ALVAREZ
GLIDE

"Our reliance on the internet for work, entertainment, communication and much more besides has increased out of all recognition during Covid, and so has our frustration when things don't work. A reliable, and fast connection not only helps to stimulate consumer satisfaction, it also drives business and economic growth. It is therefore incumbent on all of us as service providers to deliver a reliable, fast, responsive service. Doing this in a post-lockdown world is not easy, but that is no excuse. Our job is simple: deliver a great service and empower our customers to flourish in the post-Covid world."

PAUL STOBART
ZEN INTERNET

"This year we have all had to quickly become experts using video conferencing platforms and the trend for seamless 'work-from-anywhere' collaboration solutions will undoubtably continue over the year ahead. The key to the increasingly popular 'hybrid' work environment is the capability to move locations and to set up for work easily and quickly – relying on portable kit and compatible softphone apps that hand-off calls properly between devices. Those that have also been slow to adopt digital transformation in the past will have been won over by the events of the year, accelerating 'Infrastructure as a Service' and the significant take-up of cloud-based telephony and services such as back-ups and server hosting. With a flexible online billing platform that caters for subscription and event-based charges alongside traditional call rating, ICT resellers will be well placed to take advantage of these opportunities and easily bill for them, wherever they want to work."

SHAUN BODSWORTH
INFORM BILLING

"It's very difficult to predict with any certainty quite what will happen when the risk to public health begins to normalise. It certainly seems as though the genie is out of the bottle when it comes to flexible and remote working, and solutions that facilitate this will probably be in high demand as businesses begin to scale up their operations. If this is the case, then it stands to reason that channel businesses which specialise in selling UC solutions will be well positioned to capitalise on this trend. Knowledge is power, and channel businesses would be wise to pay close attention to revenue streams and customer feedback so as to identify trends early on and optimise their strategy/ service accordingly. Our teams are standing by to assist our partners in this objective."

VINCENT DISNEUR
UNION STREET

"I don't think COVID-19 actually changed the world but it accelerated what we already saw as a natural progression, swept a vast number of businesses into an enforced trail of new technology and new ways of working, and has yet to set us free to find our new 'starting point'. I have for a long-time stressed the lack of knowledge, within SME decision makers, of alternative communications tools as a reason for the strangely slow progress of 'Smart Working Tools'. That knowledge gap has been removed, so armed with the experiences of 2020, buyers will be able to discuss the right changes. Do not give up on desktop phones yet but don't bet your mortgage on them either. One element I still feel needs to be better explained is the use of Teams and Spaces/Channels in Webex and MS Teams. These tools are more than just virtual meeting rooms."

IAIN SINNOTT
VANILLA IP

"In 2020, the pandemic completely transformed every business environment – remote working has become the norm, and this is not likely to change in the year ahead. However, this permanent change can bring great opportunities for those businesses that revaluate their long-term strategy and employ the right technology. With a vaccine in sight, UCaaS will play a vital role to support and facilitate the likely shift to hybrid and remote-first working environments. At Gamma, we have been listening to our teams and partners to create a business environment that will benefit both. Our COVID-19 planning has stabilised and normalised the way we work, and despite the pandemic, we've made the decision to continue our investment in our UCaaS strategy. In the new year, this will enable us to deliver additional capabilities to help our partners succeed and will ensure the successful delivery of our strategic objectives."

MATT WORBOYS
GAMMA