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# Click to open Consortium takes CityFibre private

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#### SPECIAL REPORT

CityFibre received an equity bid from two funds – Antin and West Street Global in a deal that represents a premium of circa 93%. Shares rose 89% on news of the pending acquisition.

CityFibre was established by CEO Greg Mesch (pictured above) in 2011 and floated in 2014 raising £127m.

In 2016 the firm acquired KCOM's national network for £90m along with two Redcentric MANs for £5m, followed by the

acquisition of wholesale comms provider Entanet for £29m in 2017. CityFibre now provides wholesale fibre network services in 42 UK towns and cities and last November entered into a joint venture with Vodafone.

"CityFibre now has more guaranteed access to significant funds away from the glare of shorter term investors, which is likely to see an acceleration in the plan across city networks, fibre to the premise and fibre to the tower," observed Megabyte Principal Analyst Philip Carse.

"Meanwhile, the bid valuation is clearly harder to call than usual M&A involving steady state profitable businesses.

"While the 1.4x invested capital is a mere shadow of the 10-20x that telecoms business were valued at during the TMT boom of 1999-2000 it still represents a reasonable premium.

"The 80p share price is well above the company's 70p high and the more recent depressed price, and the firm's Board and advisors cannot be accused of selling out." **Cont' on p3**

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## CityFibre takes more private

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## EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

THE comms industry (and business customers) must end the obsession with connectivity as defined by headline speeds and focus attention on use cases. Speed has long been the *de facto* call to action but 'size matters' is not always a best fit for the requirements of end users

caught in the headlights of adverts for ever speedier superfast highways, when quality, resiliency and the faultless operation of the business applications that overlay the foundational network matter most.

The prime duty of resellers is to ensure QoS, capacity and of course speed, and whether connectivity is sold as a mere utility or a more elevated value adding product depends on a particular viewpoint. Last month's round table discussion hosted by Zen Internet in association with Comms Dealer went some way to show how infrastructure is both seen as a commodity and also a value creator, with differentiating factors extending far beyond the wires as consultancy practices and getting under the skin of client organisations becomes intrinsic to the modern day infrastructure sell. Not to mention the differentiators or otherwise exhibited by the *modus operandi* of wholesale supplier partners – see page 32.

That there is long term value in fibre infrastructure is beyond doubt as illustrated by last month's acquisition of trailblazing altnet CityFibre. The deal could be seen as a move to accelerate full fibre and Digital Britain but all too often discussions about the march of fibre rarely touch on exactly how it will ultimately be used by SMEs and corporates. That is for the channel reseller to discern and then mesmerise clients with a conversation about what's possible rather than 'how fast?'

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

• How former Brylcreem model Simon Hollister, Director of Sales at Hollis Technology, attacks business growth with style (p36).

# tvf snapped up by US-based Evolve IP

PENNSYLVANIA-based cloud computing business Evolve IP has pocketed UK UCaaS provider thevoicefactory for an undisclosed sum.

The deal bolsters the US firm's distribution channels in the UK and Europe, adds a decent client base and provides deeper penetration into the hospitality, automotive, finance and legal verticals.

The acquisition also bolts on office locations in Cardiff, Fordingbridge and Florida, as well as data centres in the UK and United States.

thevoicefactory began its commercial life in 2009 and has since accumulated more than 65,000 users in 21 countries.

The company's 35 resellers now have access to Evolve IP's intellectual property and service delivery capabilities which include web-based call management, an omnichannel contact centre, single-sign-on identity and access management, and a global team of custom application developers.

"Based on the same blue chip BroadSoft platform as Evolve IP, thevoicefactory shares a common architecture and framework that will help ensure the rapid adoption of new fea-



Paul Harrison

tures and capabilities for existing and new clients," stated Guy Fardone, CEO and founding partner of Evolve IP.

"Combining Evolve IP's intellectual property and One-Cloud capabilities with thevoicefactory's reseller channel will help us to expand into new markets faster and provide growth opportunities for our cloud services."

thevoicefactory CEO Paul Harrison added: "Evolve IP has developed significant intellectual property and a service delivery platform that will benefit our partners and their clients. We're looking forward to con-

tributing to Evolve IP's international growth."

According to Elka Popova, VP and Senior Fellow of Digital Transformation at Frost & Sullivan, the deal provides Evolve IP with a springboard to expansive growth.

"The acquisition positions the company to capitalise on considerable opportunities in the rapidly growing cloud PBX and UCaaS market," she said.

Evolve IP provides cloud solutions to 1,500-plus enterprises and over 410,000 users.

thevoicefactory was advised by comms sector M&A specialist Knight CF. See p5 & 20

## Continued from page 1

CityFibre was an early mover in the provision of exclusively fibre optic connectivity in local access networks in the UK and has a targeted expansion plan to deploy full fibre infrastructure to further towns and cities.

Expansion to the residential market is underpinned by a 20-year framework strategic partnership with Vodafone to provide full fibre connectivity to one million homes across 12 existing towns and cities, which is expected to be largely complete by the end of 2021.

Carse noted that fibre networks have become a battleground for infrastructure funds.



Philip Carse

"The CityFibre bid followed news of a £25m funding for London-focused Community Fibre and Infracapital's recent

£270m bid for the equity of rural-focused fibre network builder Gigaclear, resulting in its stake increasing from 43% to at least 78%," he added. "They are attracted by the very long-term yield of fibre networks which, once over the initial pay-back period, will throw off cash for decades to come."

CityFibre also stated full year 2017 results with a part-year contribution from Entanet, showing revenues up 126% to £34.8m. The company's year concluded with £157m in cash with £61.5m borrowings.

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# Mitel acquired

CANADIAN vendor Mitel is to be acquired by investor group Searchlight Capital Partners for \$2bn. The transaction is expected to close during Q2 this year.

Mitel CEO Rich McBee commented: "This transaction is an exciting next step in our multi-year transformation.

"As a private company, and with the strategic and capital support of the Searchlight funds, we will have greater flexibility to manage the transition in our market, accelerate our strategy



Rich McBee

and drive the next phase of success for our customers, partners and employees."

How will Mitel's acquisition catalyse and expand its UC strategy? See page 24

COMMENT: A MAN'S WORLD?



Richard Carter

AS THE debate continues to rage about women in the workplace the sentiment contained within James Brown's hit 'It's a man's world' is fading fast. Sparked by the gender pay gap at the BBC, the ripples have spread far and wide to encompass all industries – with the comms sector now exposed for its lack of inspirational female leaders.

But looking around the sales floor at Nimans I can honestly say there is a healthy mix of both men and women in roles at every level. Not that long ago Nimans had a female Managing Director and women occupy several senior management positions too, even if our board is currently male dominated.

I was interested to read how male domination at leadership level could impede the comms industry's potential for growth, as highlighted by a Comms Dealer round table on the current and future role and population of women in ICT. This followed the release of a new report that confirmed a strong link between gender diversity on executive teams with profitability and value. The McKinsey report says firms in the top quarter for gender diversity on executive teams are 21 per cent more likely to outperform on profitability while 27 per cent could expect superior value creation.

I think the lack of women in high profile roles is down to a perception of the tech industry being a bit 'geeky' which originates from the school curriculum. In days gone by women would predominantly be the ones taking time off to raise children which may have sometimes hindered their career paths too. But in an age of equality times are thankfully changing.

At Nimans we employ and promote people based on their abilities, not their gender. Men and women have an equal role to play throughout the channel.

**Richard Carter, Director of Channel Sales, Nimans**

# BT converges three key business units

THREE distinct BT business units have been melded into a single entity branded BT Enterprise, headed up by CEO Gerry McQuade and serving SMBs, corporate and public sectors, along with 1,400 CPs.

BT says the unification of its Business and Public Sector and Wholesale and Ventures businesses reflects the rise of converged technologies while simplifying its operating model.

BT Enterprise officially began life on May 1st and Graham Sutherland, former CEO of the businesses in Ireland and MD of BT Business, is leaving the company.

The move extends to operations across the UK and Republic of Ireland and according to BT Chief Exec' Gavin Patterson the creation of BT Enterprise is the next step in streamlining the overall organisation following the amalgamation of BT's Consumer and EE businesses.

"Combining our enterprise operations will allow us to strengthen the services and products we offer to businesses and also sharpen our focus on customer service, through clear accountabilities and by introducing efficiencies," commented Patterson.



Gavin Patterson

BT's Global Services unit will continue to provide services to multinational companies.

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## comms dealer

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# ITP urges action as apprentice stats dip

THE Institute of Telecommunications Professionals (ITP) has urged the telecoms industry to take action in the wake of a dip in apprenticeship start stats.

One year after the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy the latest statistics from the Department for Education (DfE) show that apprenticeship start statistics are down between 22-25% compared to the same period in 2016/17.

The levy was introduced in April 2017 and requires all UK public and private sector employers with an annual wage bill of £3m or more to invest in apprenticeship training.

Crissi Williams, CEO of the ITP which runs apprenticeship schemes on behalf of telecoms businesses, is urging all comms companies to consider employing apprentices.

“Despite a disappointing beginning to the year for starts nationally, we are optimistic about the year ahead for apprenticeships,” she commented.



Crissi Williams

“In our industry, where the skills gap is widening, we believe that apprenticeships are the only way to solve this issue. However, there still appears to be confusion about levy funding and training.”

Businesses receiving funding need to spend it within 24 months or risk losing out, and other smaller businesses may be entitled to funding without them realising, she pointed out.

“Setting up a scheme doesn’t have to be complicated, and every year we see the benefits that apprentices contribute to our member organisations and the industry as a whole,” said Williams. “It’s important to future proof our industry and employ the stars of the future.”

The ITP launched its apprenticeship scheme in 2013 and so far has created more than 80 roles across the industry.

## Knight CF plays key role in sale of thevoicefactory to Evolve IP

THE sale of thevoicefactory (tvf) to US cloud business Evolve IP followed a two year period in which Knight Corporate Finance worked alongside tvf advising on business and financial planning, enhancing its management information and preparing for exit – including negotiating a growth capital package from Finance Wales in 2016.

thevoicefactory has made a name for itself through partnering with vertical-specific resellers and developing products to target specific markets; and its US expansion move put it under the noses of potential acquirers keen to buy into its expertise and market position in the UK.



Paul Billingham

tvf CEO Paul Harrison commented: “Working with Knight enabled us to prepare and instill disciplines that were key to unlocking value and realising the potential of our business.”

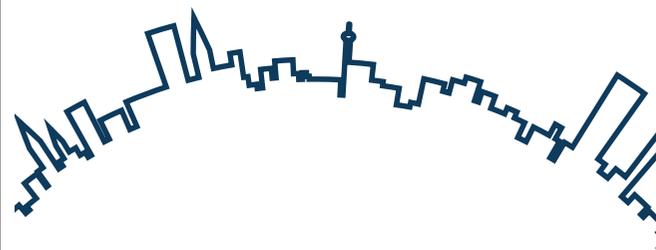
“When the time came we could clearly articulate a compelling strategy for a deal that

met our aspirations. These have been realised.”

Knight Corporate Finance Director Paul Billingham commented: “This deal highlights the importance of planning and strategy to ensure that your business truly stands out to investors and acquirers.”

“We have seen an increasing amount of interest from overseas in UK businesses, particularly for hosted platforms, and expect several more announcements this year.”

Founded in 2008 Knight Corporate Finance has completed over 90 transactions in the telecommunications, media and technology sectors. See p20



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COMMENT: WLR – END OF THE LINE



Dave Dadds

OPENREACH has announced that it is to start a consultation this month on an 'end of life' process for WLR. This is a pivotal moment for the telecoms industry and starts the final leg of a complete switch to IP over the next few years.

WLR was first introduced in 2002 as a regulated product set and enabled many of today's telecoms resellers to establish a complete business based around it or add a strong product set to existing portfolios.

For BT Group itself the WLR product contributed over £1.5 billion revenues in 2016 which went some way in enabling the investment in TV football rights.

The impact on the reseller community will be for many marginal in the medium term. As with the growth of IP services (including HPBX and SIP trunking) many resellers are already migrating across. Not to be forgotten are the companies offering support services including WLR provisioning and billing. These companies will be asking questions as to where next.

As much as we might shed a tear for the end of WLR there are elements many will not miss. Its antiquated back-end and limited fraud protection to name a couple. Also there are many elements to resolve before WLR is finally laid to rest including number porting, how to identify a copper pair without an associated phone number and when SoGea will be BAU.

For all stakeholders, including FCS members, having a defined migration path away from all elements of WLR is vital. WLR is going to be around for a while, but for many resellers this will be a great sales opportunity to catalyse the migration of clients to IP-based services. We expect WLR to be a distant memory for most by 2025.

Dave Dadds, FCS Chair and VanillaIP CEO

# Wavenet wraps up APR Telecoms buy

SOLIHULL-based Wavenet's presence in the East Anglia region will be more strongly felt following its acquisition of Norfolk comms provider APR Telecoms for an undisclosed sum. The deal builds on Wavenet's acquisitions last year of Manchester provider of network and cloud services Talk Internet and Norfolk-based Swains. Both deals followed a £30m investment in Wavenet by Beech Tree Private Equity.

The combined acquisitions significantly increase Wavenet's geographical reach, scale and resources while bringing its UC and IT solutions and services to ready made customer bases.

APR Telecoms was founded in 1994 and provides telephony, data, VoIP and cloud solutions. Its acquisition also boosts Wavenet's engineering and technical support capabilities.

According to APR Telecoms MD Andy Rackham the Wavenet deal was a natural next step in his strategy and marks a new beginning for their existing long-term partnership.

"Wavenet was our largest supplier and billed customers on our behalf, so we had built an excellent relationship through the years," said Rackham.



Bill Dawson

"This made the process of selling much less stressful, financially attractive and better for our customers and staff."

Wavenet CEO Bill Dawson commented: "Our increased capabilities and skill sets will enhance the customer service experience and give APR Telecoms clients access to Wavenet's expanded product sets, particularly in unified communications and IT services."

Wavenet began its commercial life in 2000 as a lines and calls business. Mobile services were introduced following the acquisition of Centralcom in 2009 and a VoIP service was launched in 2010 soon after the Titan Technology buy.

Wavenet's Connectivity options were then boosted with the addition of IZR Solutions in 2011, a deal that strengthened its core network.

Three years later Wavenet bagged UK Data IT to add TPS screening compliance and dialler solutions, while the acquisition of Next IS introduced inbound number and PCI compliant services.

In 2015 Wavenet launched BroadCloud and partnered with Level 3 for DDoS attack protection the following year.

Today the company boasts a proprietary carrier grade network with a broadening product set, especially in unified comms and IT services.



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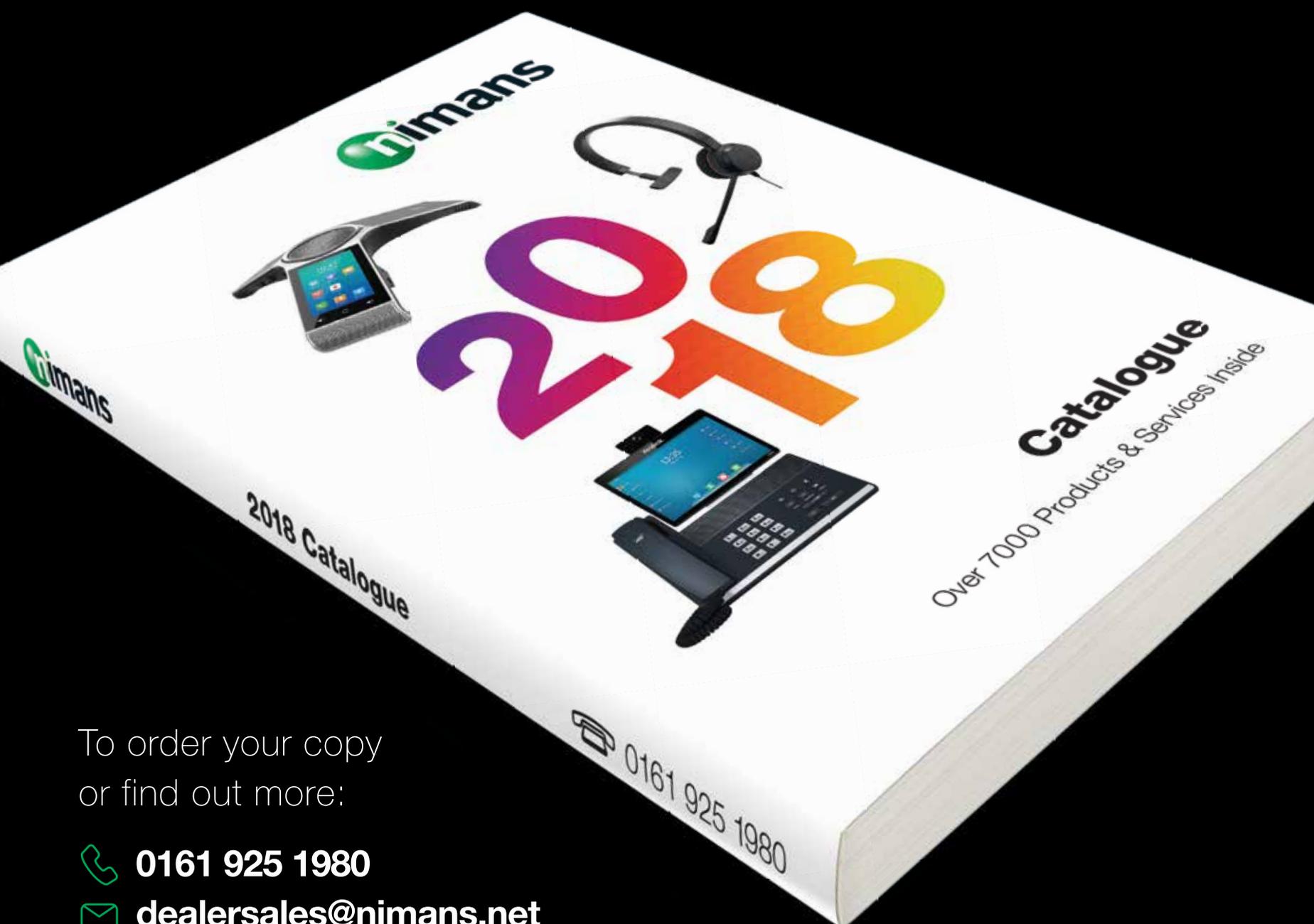


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COMMENT: STRATEGIC TALK



Richard Thompson

I'M NOT going to preach to the converted and tell businesses what they already know – that they need a fast, high capacity and reliable Internet connection. In the same way they expect the tap to stream water in the morning, they expect their ISP to provide the essential, continual service that enables them to operate in the modern, fast paced global business landscape.

Ethernet is now the preferred option for the majority of businesses to deliver web-based services to organisations and their customers. However, any delays ultimately throw a spanner in the works and get in the way of serving these essential stakeholders. That's why at TalkTalk Business we have been working hard to turbo charge the speed of installs so that customers can receive the high performance connectivity they need where they need it, when they need it.

We have been working closely with Openreach to improve the speed of delivery for Ethernet connections and get UK businesses moving to realise their ambitions quicker than ever before.

For Ethernet Access Direct (EAD), Mean Time to Provide (MTTP) has almost halved since April 2017, coming down significantly from 80 days down to 42 days. This is just one of the ways we have streamlined the delivery of Ethernet, in addition to giving partners greater insight into connections and fault resolution through our transparent MyNet portal.

**Richard Thompson, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business**

• Large sections of the comms industry's UC technology sales experts have become centres of entrenchment with no capacity to effectively sell the dream solutions in their hands, argues VanillaIP Sales Director Iain Sinnott (p42).

# Acquisitive Boston snares PEL Services

GLASGOW-based Boston Networks' ambitious plan to create a major UK life safety, security and networking force has been boosted by last month's acquisition of PEL Services for an undisclosed sum.

London-located PEL Services is Boston Networks' first bolt-on acquisition since investment fund Aliter Capital acquired a major stake in the company in January.

Aliter focuses on small to mid-size UK support services businesses and is working with Boston to deliver organic growth and target further complementary bolt-on acquisitions.

Owner-managed PEL was founded in 1976 and became a sound, fire, security and AV solutions company with national coverage and has a strong presence in London and the south east, significantly expanding Boston's national footprint.

The combined group employs 150 staff and the senior management team at PEL will continue to manage the business, working alongside Boston CEO Scott McEwan.

"We look forward to leveraging PEL's many years of experience of working in the sound, fire, security and audio-visual



Scott McEwan

markets which will help us to drive towards the next phase of our growth," stated McEwan.

"This acquisition will deepen the services offered by Boston Networks as we continue to grow and focus on applying technology to improve the performance, safety and security of people, buildings and assets."

PEL MD and exiting shareholder Kenneth Faulks added: "The partnership between PEL Services and Boston Networks, with the support of Aliter, gives the company a major platform for growth in the years ahead."

Greig Brown, who is a Partner of Aliter Capital and

Chairman of Boston Networks, commented: "PEL Services is an excellent fit for the Boston Networks business. In addition to offering a complementary product offering and strong management team, it is a significant step forward in our plan to create a national provider of integrated life safety, security and networking services."

In recent years Boston Networks has completed a range of major contracts, including projects and services for the Queen Elizabeth University & Children's Hospital, the 2014 Commonwealth Games and the 2014 Ryder Cup.



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NEWS ROUNDUP

**Aiming** to snare a portion of the enterprise WLAN market, which according to Research and Markets could be worth \$21.10bn globally by 2021 (CAGR of 30.7%), Exertis has hooked up with Ruckus Networks to supply its wired and wireless access network and ICX switching products.

Gareth Bray, Exertis Head of Commercial, Enterprise, said: "Our exclusive distribution of Captivnet by AirAngel complements the Ruckus offering in guest-heavy wireless environments."

**KCOM** has marked the second anniversary of its rebrand as a cloud-focused IT and comms company with its selection as an AWS Well-Architected Review partner, enabling it to review and remediate customers' workloads through an AWS framework.

The firm has also become an official member of Google's Cloud Partner Program, giving KCOM customers access to Google Cloud's technology, particularly data analytics and machine learning.

KCOM has also achieved Stage 2 compliance for the Health and Social Care Network, enabling it to deliver connectivity services to NHS customers as well as other health and social care organisations like pharmacies.

## Trials for G.fast in full flow

TALKTALK Business' just launched G.fast trial with wholesale and partner customers follows news of an extension to its own build out of FTTP 1Gb full fibre network beyond York.

G.Fast is a complementary technology to FTTP and can boost Internet speeds over the existing copper infrastructure (up to 330MB).

G.fast became available during a trial roll out commencing last month with a launch expected in the summer.

G.fast is available alongside ADSL and FTTC via the partners' API or portal.

TalkTalk Business is to launch an unlimited usage G.fast proposition in line with its FTTC offering, meaning partners will pay a fixed monthly cost, said the company.

Pete Tomlinson, Commercial Director at TalkTalk Business, stated: "As businesses and consumers we have developed an insatiable appetite for bandwidth and TalkTalk continues to embrace new technologies and champion the drive towards a full fibre future, which for many is still too far away."

"G.Fast can play an important role in helping customers enjoy the speeds they deserve."

## Key investor aids Chargifi



Dan Bladen

WIRELESS power specialist Chargifi is to scale up its growth strategy following a £5m investment boost led by Accelerated Digital Ventures (ADV). Other investors include HPE and first-minute capital.

The investment enables Chargifi to push ahead with expansion plans across US and Asian markets and also double its headcount in the next year.

In a related deal HPE will add Chargifi's wireless power to its connectivity solutions and take them to worldwide customers. Also announced is a strategic partnership with IoT platform Losant, an HPE partner.

Chargifi co-founder and CEO Dan Bladen commented: "As a society, we have never been more reliant on power for our phones and vehicles than we are today. In just a few years from now wireless power

will be as ubiquitous as Wi-Fi. Chargifi is doing for power what Wi-Fi did for connectivity, cutting the final cord and helping people get power when and where they need it."

VishalLall, SVP, Strategy and Ventures, HPE, said: "Today's enterprises are demanding more connectivity and power is central to that experience."

Mike Dimelow, Chief Investment Officer at ADV, added: "Building out the infrastructure to enable consumer wireless charging at scale needs to happen now."

According to figures from Global Marketing Insights the wireless charging market is set to be worth \$25bn by 2023.

## Tool pulls e-reviews into order

AN AUTOMATED social media and online review tool from SO Connect that pulls together reviews from multiple platforms into one dashboard is now available from Pragma, the sole UK distributor of the service, called SO Review, along with the automated marketing tool SO WIFI.

"SO Review also draws comparisons with a business's competition and offers an opportunity for resellers to engage their customers on improving their use of social media as part of their marketing plan," said Will Morey, Sales and Marketing Director at Pragma.

"Marketing budgets typically exceed ICT budgets, and this gives resellers direct access into that opportunity."

Daan Donders, CEO of SO Connect, added: "We have seen huge growth in the global markets where we have launched SO Review. Online reviews can make or break a restaurant or bar, and this new product helps ensure that reviews contribute to the success of a great hospitality location."

## VIP VoIP hunts 20 partners

SHEFFIELD-based wholesale hosted telephony provider VIP VoIP is on the hunt for 20 more channel partners this year and is offering a free four week trial of its platform.

Sales Manager Mathew Dale hopes that the platform's ability to adapt base solutions around any application will attract potential partners.

"The platform is offered on a wholesale basis where resellers can administer and add new customers via a web portal," said Dale. "Resellers can also



Mathew Dale

brand the portal should they want to provide admin access to their customers."

Southampton-based IT solutions company Fourth Pillar

was attracted by the VIP VoIP platform's multi-tenanted architecture and ability to customise each solution.

Fourth Pillar has been a VIP VoIP partner for four years and its Director Darren Jacob said: "The pricing allows us to be creative in how we package the service to our customers, often bundling it into our support agreements, ensuring our high customer retention levels."

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WESTCON has kicked off its 27th annual ski incentive that will see 18 channel partners who drive the greatest business growth scoop an all expenses paid trip to Cervinia in Italy early next March. John Nolan, Westcon UK&I Sales Director, said: "Places on the ski incentive are sought after and fought over. It's a superb reward for a lot of hard won business and a fabulous environment to share ideas with peers across the channel and vendors on the latest trends, programmes and opportunities." Pictured: Winners of Westcon's 2018 ski incentive.

# Permira seals Exclusive deal



Olivier Breittmayer

FAST growing Exclusive Group has sold a majority stake to PE firm Permira as it seeks investment to expand its service offerings, vendor portfolio, operations and global footprint.

Exclusive Group CEO Olivier Breittmayer commented: "The partnership with Permira preserves and builds upon the business culture and platform that our people have shaped over the last decade."

Exclusive Group attributes much of its growth to a 'global-local' value model and a sharp focus on the cyber security and cloud migration markets, a strategy that has driven strong organic growth with rev-

enues doubled every two years, bringing total sales for 2017 of 1.75bn euros (up 38% from 1.27bn euros in 2016).

Michail Zekkos, Partner in the technology team at Permira, stated: "The escalating threat landscape and increasing complexity of underlying infrastructures continues to position cyber security as one of the fastest growing and resilient segments of global IT spend.

"In a market that is characterised by structurally high product velocity, we believe that the role of value added services and technologies will become ever more critical in the years ahead."

## Support matters

A THIRD support layer introduced by Union Street Technologies is tasked with augmenting and backing up its existing first and second line support teams, offering access to quick-fixes on how-to questions, advice on best practice and how to get the most out of the aBILLity billing platform and other products, including the company's partner portal – and where possible provide insights into the potential for productivity and profitability gains.

The formation of this third line customer experience team

coincides with the relaunch of Union Street's support portal that for the first time features a live chat functionality and a store of video guides on how to use the aBILLity billing platform. Portal users can also raise and monitor support tickets.

Union Street's Chief Operating Officer José Fernandez commented: "We have introduced the customer experience team as it is crucial to ensure that our partners achieve the best possible results when using our software. Partner feedback has been positive."

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# AI tipped as major force of disruption

CUSTOMER experience transformation, new revenues and cost reductions will be the key drivers of a pending global AI revolution that Gartner says will create business value worth \$1.2tr in 2018, an increase of 70% on last year, forecasted to reach \$3.9tr in 2022.

“In the early years of AI customer experience (CX) will be the main source of business value as organisations use AI to improve every customer interaction with the goal of increasing customer growth and retention,” commented John-David Lovelock, who is Research Vice President at Gartner.

“CX is followed closely by cost reduction as organisations look for ways to use AI to increase process efficiency and improve decision making while automating more tasks.

“However, in 2021 new revenue will be the dominant source as companies uncover business value in using AI to increase sales of existing products and services, as well as to discover opportunities for new products and services. In the long run the business value of AI will be in new revenue possibilities.”

According to Lovelock AI promises to be the most disrupt-



John-David Lovelock

tive class of technologies during the next 10 years due to advances in computational power, volume, velocity and the variety of data, as well as advances in deep neural networks.

“One of the biggest aggregate sources for AI-enhanced products and services acquired by organisations between 2017 and 2022 will be niche solutions that address one need very well,” he added.

“Business executives will drive investment in these products, sourced from thousands of narrowly focused, specialist suppliers with specific AI-enhanced applications.

“Virtual agents will allow corporates to reduce labour costs as they take over simple requests and tasks from a call

centre, help desk and other service human agents, while handing over the more complex questions to their human counterparts. Agents account for 46% of the global AI-derived business value in 2018 and 26% by 2022 as other AI types mature and contribute to business value.”

Meanwhile, noted Lovelock, decision automation systems will use AI to automate tasks or optimise business processes.

Gartner calculates that smart products with AI embedded in them – usually in the form of cloud systems that can integrate data about the user’s preferences from multiple systems and interactions – will account for 18% of global AI-derived business value in 2018.

# Zest4 driving market for IoT

RESELLER driven opportunities in the IoT space are raining down on Zest4 in ever greater numbers, prompting the wholesale communications provider to roll out an IoT business generation campaign to further stimulate the market.

Called Zest4 Go, the initiative is designed to support a growing posse of resellers who are gaining in confidence within the IoT market and require a springboard to secure sustained long-term growth and build more innovative solutions.

Head of IoT Anton Le Saux said: “We have seen the channel evolve from one where we had to ask partners for IoT business at every interaction, to one where our partners are bringing opportunities to us daily.

“With this growth there has been a step-change in what our partners are looking for, from the simple beginnings of us providing data SIMs for standard telephony devices, to now where we are finding true IoT solutions to connect buildings, cars, smart machines and meters. The possibilities are endless.”

Le Saux also noted that a level of uncertainty about the IoT remains among traditional resellers in particular.



Anton Le Saux

“Many partners are uncomfortable with the complexity of the technology and unsure as to how IoT solutions can benefit their customers,” he added.

“The new campaign shows resellers how Zest4’s solutions and support will guide them on their IoT journey.

“Zest4 has set up a dedicated team focused on the IoT, and developed a number of end-to-end IoT solutions that bundle hardware and connectivity in a way that’s easier for partners to understand and sell.”

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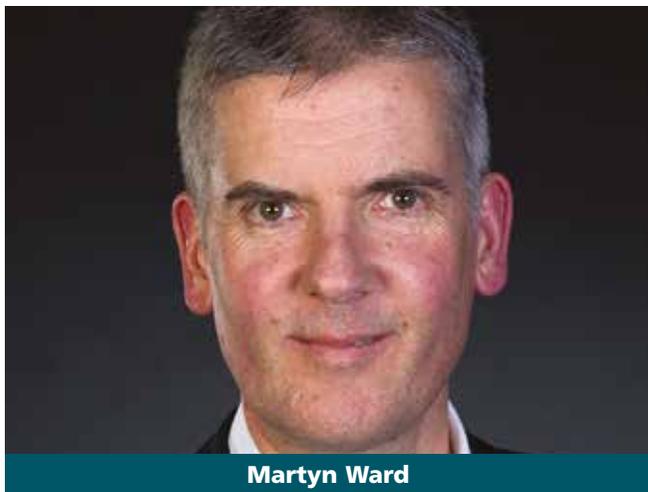
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# Ward named Red Box CRO



Martyn Ward

RED Box Recorders has drafted in Martyn Ward as Chief Revenue Officer and posted existing exec Pete Ellis to the Chief Product Officer role.

According to CEO Richard Stevenson these latest appointments signal the growing scope, ambition and stature of the channel in the company's long-term expansion plans.

"The global channel is our core route to market and this investment in our executive team provides additional focus on sales and product strategy, global partnership development and support for our resellers," he commented.

Ward brings senior commercial and operational experience

across a range of business types and environments including start-up, turnaround and large US-based corporations.

During a stint at AVEVA he was responsible for the FTSE 250 engineering software business's global operations.

Ellis has been a member of the Red Box executive team for more than two years. He was previously Chief Architect at Avaya, responsible for designing telephony and contact centres for some of the world's largest banks.

He then headed up several of Dimension Data's European business units and was more recently MD of O2's ICT and digital business.

# Glasgow firm spurs revenues

IN ITS THIRD set of full year results rising Glasgow business Silver Cloud doubled revenues to £2.9m, up 120%, with growth driven in large part by the addition of 40% more customers.

The company has also undergone a brand refresh, launched a new website and boosted employee numbers to 30 ahead of another year of anticipated record growth.

MD Tony Quinn said: "Since day one we've always set high standards in professionalism and expertise. Above all, we've built our business on strong long-term relationships with customers, employees, partners, suppliers and everyone else we work with. We have more exciting developments planned for later in the year."

Silver Cloud was founded in 2014 and opened a London office in 2017. It holds Samsung Platinum partner status and is a Gamma Gold partner.



Tony Quinn

# Corbin's big move to 8x8

FORMER channel chief for CenturyLink and Westcon Group Bill Corbin has joined 8x8 in the newly created role of Senior Vice President of Channels & Alliances, reporting directly to CEO Vikram Verma.

Corbin is tasked with ramping up the company's channel growth momentum and driving adoption of the just launched X Series platform.

"Bill has 27 years under his belt successfully finding new routes to market and growing global partner programmes," commented Verma.

"Under his leadership 8x8 is well positioned to help our partners and joint customers succeed in the next wave of enterprise communications."

The contribution of 8x8's global channel programme to the firm's overall performance is increasing as illustrated in its latest Q3 when six of 8x8's top ten deals were won by channel partners. Channel bookings are up 50% year-over-year.

Corbin stated: "Partners are critical to 8x8's position in the mid-market and enterprise segments and with the positive response to the new X Series from customers, investors and analysts we will continue to



Bill Corbin

invest in our partner growth to drive X Series adoption."

Corbin joins 8x8 from CenturyLink where he led a team of 400 employees and oversaw partner revenues of \$3bn as Senior Vice President, Alliances and Strategic Partnerships.

Corbin was previously Executive Vice President for Global Sales & Partner Management at Westcon Group.

He also co-founded channels consulting business RedCard Solutions and Network Catalyst, a network integration company.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

**Glemnet** has teamed up with Cisco company BroadSoft as a UK distribution partner for the BroadCloud application platform, branded GiNiEX. The platform is integrated with the Gamma SIP network across dual nodes and supports all of the household name IP handsets.

Glemnet MD Neil Linter said: "We are also talking to BT and TalkTalk Business about SIP connections."

**Jola** has added white label EE to its mobile data offering on Mobile Manager. "Jola partners now have the choice of Vodafone, O2 or EE data SIM packages with fixed IP and multi-network options for use in a variety of devices," said Lee Broxson, Sales Director. "By also offering single-network EE data SIMs we help partners service wider needs across multiple verticals."

**Channel Solutions Resource (CSR)** is to launch a white label hosted service based on Avaya's hybrid cloud platform in June. "Avaya's platform delivers multi-channel comms across phones, browsers and cloud apps," said CSR founder Don Moore "With our data centre partner CoolDC we have an offering that also harnesses customers' existing Avaya investment."

## Simplified tips to sell networks

A NIMANS roadshow in May will give resellers a simple route map towards gaining proficiency in selling network services including mobile, connectivity, hosted PBX and broadband along with billing.

The venues will be Manchester's Museum of Science and Industry (May 8th); The Arena, Basingstoke (May 16th); and the National Space Centre in Leicester (May 23rd).

The events also provide a platform for Nimans to spotlight its new reseller portal (branded The Hub), gain insights into the company's Simplified Service model, get hands on with its Simplified Hosted PBX platform, and hear about the distributor's wider strategy.

Head of Network Services at the distributor, Mark Curtis-Wood, commented: "We recognise that network services can sometimes seem complex for some resellers – from the technology itself to billing and recurring revenue.

"It's a journey where many resellers are at different stages, but we want to help them capture additional revenue."

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# Finance boss joins Timico



Matthew Farrow

MANAGED Service Provider Timico's appointment of Matthew Farrow as Chief Financial Officer adds significant integration experience to the business and is the fifth senior appointment in the last 12 months.

The hire comes a year after the firm secured a £50m investment from Lyceum Capital and signals a period of ramped up organic growth and M&A activity as the company targets the mid-market sector.

Farrow, who trained at Arthur Andersen, brings 20 years experience to the business including notable and long-standing stints at Phoenix IT Group and its subsidiary Servo Computer Services (which was acquired by Daisy).

He was most recently Finance Director at tech focused online estate agent Purple

Bricks which he helped grow from a start-up to a market capitalisation of over £1bn.

Farrow has also consulted for companies in the private equity technology sector.

He said: "Timico is in a solid position as it sets out to achieve ambitious growth, and I will implement winning strategies that will help to achieve superior financial performance."

Timico CEO Ben Marnham commented: "2018 has started strongly for the business and Matthew's appointment will play a huge part in continuing our expansion while helping us to deliver on our ambitious business goals."

NEWS ROUNDUP

**Roaming** Global Traveller bolt-ons introduced by plan.com provide cover in all destinations outside the UK and EU, and are based on three data options and three minutes options.

Chris Smith, Head of Product Development at plan.com, said: "We saw that, at times, there may have been some challenges in staying connected while roaming and set out to eradicate any hurdles that may have been encountered. Our Global Traveller range removes confusion and transcends borders."

**Glasgow-based** cloud specialist Eureka Solutions has set the stage for a new phase of growth with the hire of Xavier Bastien as MD.

He brings particular expertise in marketing, international business development and financial operations; and is known as the driving force behind the growth, profitability and strategic direction of several businesses.

Alongside its own range of software solutions Eureka's product portfolio includes vendors NetSuite, Sage, QlikView and Panintelligence.

## Oak adds cloud IVR service

OAK Innovation has added a cloud-based payment IVR service to its portfolio, enabling call centre customers to make payments by entering their card data using touch tone digits during an agent assisted call or as part of an automated service.

Called PaymentAssist, the service was developed in response to reseller demand and simplifies PCI DSS compliance by eliminating the need for onsite installation and de-scoping the office environment from sensitive card data.



Phillip Reynolds

"There's no need for agents to work in a clean room or pause and resume call recording," said CTO Phillip Reynolds.

"Payment progress is shown on screen allowing agents to prompt the caller, verify data

input and confirm transactions. Multiple agent logins together with concurrent licensing keeps the cost to a minimum."

Reynolds also noted that the SelfAssist option offers a fully automated service. "This bespoke service can be fully branded, is available 24/7x365 and requires no agent involvement," he explained.

"SelfAssist is suitable for organisations with seasonal spikes in payment calls and reduces the cost to a fraction of a traditional call centre transaction."

HATS off to Nimans Project Manager Scott Baron who completed a year long charity challenge with best mate Craig Hoyland. The pair undertook an Olympic grade triathlon through Warrington to bring the curtain down on more than 12 months of endurance and adventure challenges, raising over £6,000 for Beating Bowel Cancer charity. Dubbed 'Scott's Dirty Dozen', the 12 challenges began in January last year with a 34 mile walk from Anfield in Liverpool to Manchester United's Old Trafford football stadium. The tasks also included cycling around Anglesey, a 10km army obstacle course, full body wax with head shave and completing the Three Peaks mountain adventure challenge. "I've always wanted to do something for charity and I'm not one to do things by halves," commented Baron. "So over the last year I've pushed myself to the limit with the help and support of many friends including Craig. We originally set out to raise £2,000 but more than tripled that target. To finish the final challenge was an amazing experience."



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NEWS ROUNDUP

**HubStor** and Red Box Recorders have linked up to bring voice archiving compliance to Microsoft Azure.

Out-of-the-box integration enables Red Box technology to record voice conversations over soft client phones, turrets, and mobile devices while HubStor preserves the data in write-once-read-many compliant storage with full chain-of-custody in the Microsoft Azure cloud platform.

**NFON AG** notched up record revenue for 2017 and first-time break even at Group level. Over the past three years revenues increased at a CAGR of more than 30%. In Germany, its home market, 25% growth was registered and reached 48% in international markets. Total revenue grew to 35.7m euros in 2017 up from 30.4m euros in the previous year.

**NEC Premier Business Partner Peach Technologies** is to take the vendor's Smart IT products and services to market in a move that builds on its UC portfolio and opens up the potential to offer a wider range of integrated solutions. Peach Technologies CEO Darren Scott-Healey stated: "We're looking to provide further business value to our existing base and prospects."

**HPE** has bolstered its cloud consulting capabilities with the acquisition of London-based RedPixie, now part of the technology services organisation HPE Pointnext.

The deal strengthens HPE Pointnext's hybrid IT consulting capabilities and builds on its recent acquisition of Cloud Technology Partners.

Ana Pinczuk, SVP and GM, HPE Pointnext, stated: "RedPixie's team has helped customers to migrate legacy systems to the cloud, speed up the adoption of data analytics, drive cost cutting while accelerating time to market and increasing agility."

## Bloxham eyes new partners



Paul Bloxham

UNIFIED comms engineering specialist Sprint Convergence aims to become the 'John Lewis' of the channel.

At the company's inaugural channel partner event held at its country house headquarters in Silsoe, Bedfordshire, MD Paul Bloxham said his staff were ready, willing and fully equipped to provide resellers that lack in-house engineering expertise with the outsourced support they need.

"I want to change this industry," he stated. "I get frustrated when I see bad service."

In their presentations to delegates, partners Russell Lux, CEO of TelcoSwitch, and Matt Worboys, Gamma's Head of Channel for VARs, urged resellers to think of hosted telephony as the power behind joined up applications and services.

## Pillow set for £250k upgrades

THE growing popularity of Voip Unlimited's cloud platform prompted the company to complete a £250k core network upgrade ahead of plan.

The business is now offering 10Gbps standard copper ports scaling to 100Gbps fibre.

"Our engineers made large core network improvements in the dark of the night with minimal downtime," said MD Mark Pillow. "Switching speeds have increased to 20 terabits per second, enabled by smarter inter-DC rings.

"Alongside enhancing our network we are taking this ethos inside our HQ by recruiting six new staff and introducing more ergonomic internal systems.

"There is a rise in businesses adopting unified cloud communications. If we are talking the UC talk our staff will always see the benefits within our business first."



Mark Pillow

## Call for kitemarks

RESPONDING to last month's Local Government Association's (LGA) call for house builders to adopt FTTP kitemarks for new builds, Mark Collins, Director of Strategy & Policy at CityFibre, commented: "We fully support the LGA's call for the launch of a FTTP kitemark that will give full fibre – the gold standard in Internet connectivity – the status and recognition it deserves.

"Ultimately, this isn't just about residential broadband speeds, this is about driving

real and meaningful economic growth in all parts of the country for the long term."

Collins also pointed out that the FTTH Council in the USA has calculated that providing full fibre to just half of all premises in any given location could result in a 1.1% rise in annual GDP.

"This figure applied to our own research based on 100 UK town and city economies suggests an economic impact in excess of £120bn, which cannot be ignored," he added.

## Pennine ties up radio biz



Andrew Roberts

NIMANS-owned Pennine has bagged the radio business of Durham-based MTelecom for an undisclosed sum.

Bury-headquartered Pennine collected MTelecom's goodwill, assets, stock and test equipment following the retirement of its MD Stephen Black who founded the business as Border Communications in 1987.

Two-way radio vendor partners include Motorola, Hytera, Icom, Kenwood and Tait.

Pennine was selected from 14 companies that expressed an interest in acquiring MTelecom's radio arm.

"Pennine was first choice," stated Black. "MTelecom has

a loyal customer base with one client having been with us since 1988. You don't throw away that kind of loyalty, so how our customers would be cared for in future was key for me.

"Pennine can offer the necessary two-way radio expertise and other specialisms that could deliver additional value."

Pennine MD Andrew Roberts said: "The MTelecom business will now be integrated into Pennine's dedicated Pennine Radio division which sits alongside the UC, mobile, IT services and cloud operations."

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AN ATTACK by vandals on the changing rooms at junior football club Salford United caused severe and costly damage but thanks to Nimans and soccer legend Gary Lineker the facility and other items such as broken posts and nets have been fully restored. Nimans donated £500 towards the club's £6,000 repair bill target. Club Welfare Officer and Coach Mark Crossley, who also works at Nimans in IT Development and Support, said: "We have a strong committee and good parents around us, but everyone is devastated. The younger kids, those aged five, six and seven, they are the ones that were hit the hardest." Nimans Director David Bennett added: "As a large local employer with a community spirited ethos we just hope the club gets back on its feet very soon."

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# tvf empowered by Evolv

thevoicefactory's acquisition by fast growing Evolve IP is the latest move in the Pennsylvania-based UC provider's global expansion campaign and a key component of its ambition to triple in size within three years, according to CEO and founding partner Guy Fardone.

**B**illed as one of the world's fastest growing cloud strategy companies, Evolve IP provides cloud solutions to over 1,500 enterprises across the globe and to more than 410,000 users. The company already had a sales and data centre presence in the UK but the thevoicefactory (tvf) acquisition substantially accelerates its growth plan. "tvf is known in the hospitality and automotive markets around the world and is partner-centric – this catalyses our reach and capabilities in the UK," said Fardone. "The main priority now is to support Managing Director Paul Harrison and his team in achieving their growth plans over the coming years. Nothing will change and they are leading the charge. We are here to support them when and where we can."

Evolve IP shares a common architecture and framework with tvf underpinned by the same blue chip BroadSoft platform. "There is a reason why Cisco spent over \$2 billion to acquire BroadSoft," added Fardone. "This is exactly where Evolve IP and tvf play and add value. We will continue to add value by making it easy, scalable and profitable for our partners, and introduce more solutions that customers want for increased revenue, profit and stickiness. The smartest resellers are already moving away from premise-based



Guy Fardone

## Our biggest opportunity is the fact that, despite the popularity and ubiquity of cloud services, the market is still only in single digit penetration rates

solutions and implementing tangible recurring cloud-based services. There are many beneficial reasons for doing so, most notably it is better for their customers and more profitable for their companies."

Evolve IP's target markets are end user businesses

with 50-5,000 employees and partners with the knowhow and ambition to private label the company's solutions. The three primary growth areas are accelerated expansion, more M&A activity globally and the ongoing development and acquisition of attractive IP. "We like to say that unified

communications is a strategy rather than a service," said Fardone. "Just putting up a cookie-cutter HPBX solution does not enable customers to develop and accelerate their organisations. Business happens at the application level – think CRM and other applications. Our solutions integrate with the

ways that people operate their businesses. We will continue to innovate and develop in these areas."

Harrison founded Cardiff-based tvf in 2009 and the firm went on to own and operate a global carrier grade BroadSoft platform with more than 65,000 users in 21 countries. Its hosted unified communications platform is only sold through channel partners, while open APIs provide a strong focus on the mid-market and vertical sectors. In January last year tvf set about advancing its international expansion ambitions following a funding boost that enabled the firm to address opportunities in the United States, a move that brought the company to the attention of Evolve IP.

On the acquisition, Harrison said: "There are not expected to be any immediate implications for tvf with the current management team keeping control of the business for at least three years and maintaining directorship on Companies House, while the existing go-to-market strategy will be maintained. I fully expect to be at the helm for three years and possibly longer. tvf's brand will become 'thevoicefactory an Evolve IP company'. Our mid-to-longer term opportunities are around the Evolve IP technology, product and IP that may be incorporated into the tvf

# e IP acquisition

portfolio. We will become a significant contributor to the Evolve IP business."

Evolve IP was founded in 2007 when 'the cloud' was not a familiar technology term. The company pioneered solutions that enabled it to deploy both cloud computing and cloud communications on a single platform – called Evolve IP OneCloud. "Our platform allows us to deploy customised cloud solutions versus single application point services," added Fardone.

## Bespoke approach

"The solutions are designed to work with the applications clients already use. They are built on compliant architecture and leverage the blue chip technologies organisations already trust. Our long-term strategy is based on customers deploying more services, so we are invested in our clients' future. Also key to expansion is aggressive growth through product innovation, meeting market demands, listening to our channel partners and executing upon their feedback."

Great Hill Partners acquired a majority stake in Evolve IP in 2016, while at the same

time providing additional growth capital. The company has almost doubled in size since then. "Our biggest opportunity is the fact that, despite the popularity and ubiquity of cloud services, the market is still only in single digit penetration rates," stated Fardone. "Within three years we aim to triple in size through organic revenue generation, the development of attractive intellectual property and the continued acceleration of M&A."

Rarely do such growth opportunities come without challenges, at both a company and industry level, perhaps the biggest hurdle being the educational system in the US and UK. "Preparing the future workforce for technical business awareness and careers simply doesn't happen, despite the trillions of dollars of student debt," said Fardone. "The resulting burden is left to tech employers to deal with. There is a reason why we are in a zero sum game, it's called supply and demand and there simply aren't enough techies out there to meet the current global demand. At some point someone is going to figure out how to close this growing gap."



Paul Harrison

## Just a minute with Guy Fardone...

**On thing you could not do without in your job?** My curiosity

**What do you fear the most?** Letting our associates down (Evolve IP's staff members)

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** Running a tech-minded restaurant, winery or B&B, or coaching American football. Maybe a fishing charter business too

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I co-wrote a cookbook with my father about our family restaurant in Philadelphia

**What's the best piece of advice you have ever been given?** Know when to consensus-build and when to make a decision

**How do you relax when not working?** Outdoor activities with my family

**What possession could you not live without?** A mobile device of course!

**Name three ideal dinner guests past or present:** Leonardo Da Vinci, Graham Hancock and Richard Branson

**One example of something you have overcome:** Lots of injuries and the loss of my life mentor at an early age

**Top tip for resellers?** Run to where the ball is going not to where it is now

**What are your strengths and what could you improve on?** Just being well-rounded is a strength, but I could work on my patience

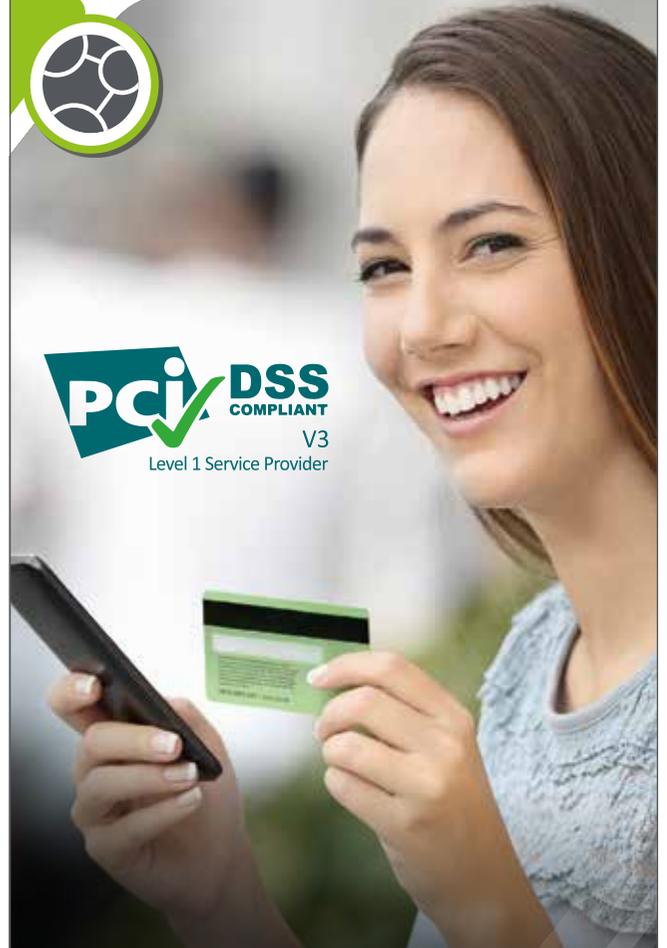
**Your greatest opportunity:** When I met my current business partners almost 30 years ago

**Lesson learnt:** We could have been more aggressive in certain situations

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# Prentis prepares for next

One man's ambition has turned Theale-based IP Integration into a major force in the UK contact centre space. Enter CEO Joe Prentis who has big plans and ambitions to elevate his company and the wider digital workforce to the next level.

**T**wo months ago IP Integration completed a round of key hires including the appointment of former SpiriTel CEO and Six Degrees Group founder Alastair Mills as Non-Executive Chairman. According to Prentis the move demonstrates the scale of IP Integration's growth ambitions. Also newly appointed was Chief Operating Officer Mike Ing, Chief Financial Officer Glenn Christie (both worked previously with Six Degrees Group), and Sales Director Simon Culmer who joined from T-Systems where he was VP of Sales & Services. Prior to that he was Managing Director of Avaya UK. "I've learnt you should surround yourself with those that can bring a different view point," said Prentis. "I always tend to think the glass is half full. While this helps to inspire great ideas it's nice to have people who can help turn them into reality."

IP Integration ended its last financial year as a £20 million business, just shy of 10 per cent growth. Considering its largest supplier is Avaya, which was lost to Chapter 11 during the period, the performance was a major accomplishment. "This year we are tracking towards 15 per cent growth and looking to end 2018 at circa £23 million," added Prentis. "One of our key focuses has been on transitioning our sales from what was essentially a one-off capex



Joe Prentis

**I tend to think the glass is half full. While this helps to inspire great ideas it's nice to have people who can help turn them into reality**

sales model to a more recurring opex one. Currently, around 60 per cent of our income now comes from recurring revenue streams."

The company now has over 110 employees which represents a 10 per cent

investment in headcount to help support ambitious growth plans. Its customer base includes the Co-op, United Utilities, Dixons Carphone, Bupa and Atos. But where did it all begin? Prentis studied economics at the London School

of Economics (LSE) and reached a point when he needed to decide his future. "Something my father said had stuck with me – 'make sure you take a path down the IT or communications route'," recalled Prentis. "I wasn't sure what I wanted

to do but knew I didn't want to target the traditional big blue-chip companies. I wanted to do something innovative and new."

Prentis spotted an advert for a telecommunications franchise opportunity when BT had liberalised, opening up the market for organisations to sell products and services that connected to the BT network. "This seemed like a perfect opportunity to start something different so I agreed an overdraft from the bank based in the LSE building," he explained. "I ran the company for 12 years, winning clients from IBM and Barclays Bank to the Royal Albert Hall before selling. By then I had acquired a taste for building up organisations through both organic growth and acquisitions."

After selling his first company Prentis was headhunted by the Chairman of ML Integration, a VC backed structured cabling company, to build the voice business as part of his vision for an integrated voice and data operation. "Within six months I was running the whole business and after two years we had grown from £12 million to over £40 million, at which point the company was sold to Cable&Wireless," added Prentis. "Post acquisition Cable&Wireless looked to sell part of its assets so I manoeuvred

# t growth push

an MBO and bought back the voice division which became IP Integration."

Contact centres are bastions of customer service and they must be at the leading edge of technical innovation, says Prentis. "When we existed as ML Integration and Cable&Wireless we had a mixed customer base ranging from SMEs to public sector organisations and contact centres," he explained. "We took time out to decide what we could be famous for and narrowed things down to the contact centre space – the strategic hub for organisations to interact with their customers. With this focus we have been able to develop our strategy with the core principle of providing leading contact centre solutions augmented by our own bespoke in-house developed solutions around payments, customer surveys, queuing, wallboards and business intelligence."

## Bespoke solutions

The way to win business, believes Prentis, is to build out unique selling points. "By providing bespoke solutions to meet customer needs we create differentiation in the market," he said. "We currently have several patented solutions that are delivering this differentiation and driving business value for our customers – which are primarily contact centres with between 250-5,000 agents. Our focus is on the digital workforce with Robotic Process Automation (RPA), virtual agents and Artificial Intelligence (AI) as key growth areas."

"To develop this it's important to have the go-to-market knowledge. It's critical to know all the

moving parts within the contact centre space and to have the expertise on hand. This is something that isn't necessarily found within the realms of the traditional network providers. These companies tend to be focused on infrastructure rather than the complex business apps. This will allow niche players like us to become the go-to entities."

Prentis also noted that in the age of the digital workforce there are fears that RPA and AI will take over many job roles. However, IP Integration's primary aim is to improve customer service and free up time that allows employees to focus on driving business value. "RPA and AI will take away the drudgery and enable contact centre agents to concentrate on the true value add conversations," Prentis commented.

"Against this backdrop resellers will fall into two camps – those with an infrastructure play where you need to deliver IT or dial tone to the desktop, and those who focus on the business outcomes and applications. "This is where the value is, and it will become increasingly important for resellers to focus on building relationships as it is now all about advising clients on business strategy."

"Our aim is to become one of the leading organisations helping customers to deliver the digital workforce to their front office, helping organisations to make the transition from live agents into a hybrid environment, augmented with digital agents delivering operational efficiencies that add true customer value." ■

## Just a minute with Joe Prentis...

### Who do you admire:

Roger Federer. He has been at the top of his game for so long

### What talent do you wish you had? To play the guitar

### What do you fear the most? I'm competitive

so have always feared failure. This is what drives me to succeed

### If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?

I would have liked to have been a barrister. I enjoy thinking on my feet and playing devil's advocate

### Tell us something about yourself we don't know:

In the past I have been a long distance runner with several marathons under my belt. But now I'm a keen cyclist and on my last holiday in the south of France I cycled a total of 1,350km into the hills for breakfast during three weeks

### What's the best piece of advice you have ever been given? Fast failure beats slow perfection

**How do you relax when not working?** Reading and watching movies. I'm currently reading a trilogy on Russia which is very topical

**What's the biggest risk you have taken?** I bought an old Aston Martin without seeing it or telling my wife. Luckily, she let me keep it!

**Name four ideal dinner guests:** Ricky Gervais, Tony Blair, Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage. It would be a lively dinner party

**Your greatest career achievement?** I have only ever worked for myself

**Top tip for resellers?** Focus and make sure you aren't spreading yourself too thin

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## Energy's a CAN do for comms reseller

Any ICT company thinking about adding energy to their portfolio of services will find a willing advocate in Tom Finch, Director at Crewe based CAN Solutions.

"Just three months into our energy journey with Fidelity Energy, we have attracted around 70 opportunities and we've already closed 10% of those," enthused Finch.

"The others, due to contract end dates, will come around throughout the next year or so. The good thing about our partnership with Fidelity is that when a customer is in a position to sign into a new contract, they follow through on our behalf and add the persuasion element to the sale."

CAN Solutions provide business-to-business mobile services throughout the UK in partnership with Carphone Warehouse and Gamma. Having built a successful client base, CAN decided to branch out to supplying hosted systems and, more recently energy, having been introduced to Fidelity Energy via a mobile partner.

"When we started out five years ago we didn't want to restrict ourselves so when the energy opportunity came along we decided to deliver it under the CAN brand," said Finch. "We were attracted to the proposition because it gives our customers an extra service as well as a complete all-in-one solution. It was extremely easy to get started as Fidelity's people have made the whole process seamless. We have our own account manager who always

does everything we need him to do."

Finch says CAN's sales people are addressing the company's current base for now, but envisage developing new business with energy in the future as it is a such simple sale.

"From a customer's prospective, you are giving them options on various well-known suppliers and you're not going in with one option. This shows you are looking for the best rates across the board which most of the time then results in a relatively easy sale. You always have the odd company wanting to stay where they are for ease, but more often or not they are happy to save money and switch."

Finch does not see energy provision as a 'diversion' from CAN's core business because it simply adds value to the customer relationships the company has already built and the set-up process was "a breeze. Also, Fidelity's support is ongoing.

"It's a cliché, but it really is a 'no brainer'. We didn't need to make any changes to the structure of the business or take on any more staff; just a quick question at the end of a courtesy call from our account managers and away we went. Our account manager at Fidelity acts like an extra member of our staff - he literally does everything once we send him the bill. All we have to do is simply go back to the customer and save them money – which is what we have built our reputation on!"



TOM FINCH, DIRECTOR, CAN SOLUTIONS

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# Butt states cloud vision

Going private is not the only planned outcome of Mitel's \$2 billion sale to Searchlight last month. According to SVP of EMEA & APAC Jeremy Butt the deal has catalysed the vendor's evolving cloud strategy which includes a blend of UC, machine learning, big data, the IoT and AI technologies.

**S**peaking to Comms Dealer last month Butt opened up about the Canadian vendor's cloud and UC strategy, what's top of mind post-acquisition and the role of new technologies in elevating the customer experience. The official line from Mitel is that machine learning and AI will deliver higher levels of personalisation and efficiency to customer transactions and interactions at a time when IT decision makers see customer experience improvements as a key component of their digital transformation programmes.

"Central to customer experience transformation is unified communications," stated Butt. "Customers expect an omnichannel experience that extends seamlessly across their mobile and online interactions, and gives them the option of moving between voice, video, text and chat as the situation and personal preferences dictate. Equally important, customers expect contextual conversations that integrate their multichannel

experiences so, for example, customer service agents on a voice call can quickly reference an online chat that took place earlier in the day."

Combining UC with the potential of big data, IoT and AI holds huge promise for optimising customer interactions, believes Butt. "As we know, unifying customer communications streamlines and simplifies processes and ultimately delivers a more satisfying customer experience," he added. "When organisations can combine this with collecting more data from their products they can integrate insights from data analysis into their customer relationship management systems and begin to anticipate the needs and questions of both new and returning customers. This predictive model will provide a more tailored, more personalised customer experience and UC will continue to play a vital part in this evolution."

According to a market study undertaken by Mitel which took into account the views



Jeremy Butt

## We are living through a time of unparalleled digital transformation

of 2,500 IT decision makers across six countries, three out of four respondents plan to implement machine based interactions with customers within the next two years. The research paper, called Giving Machines a Voice: How Machines Will Shape the Customer Experiences of Tomorrow, confirmed Mitel's strategic view that 'machines' will prove to be a key value add in delivering a more personalised customer experience.

The move to a mobile workforce is something Mitel

is also keeping a close eye on, noted Butt. He cited Strategy Analytics which forecasts that by 2022 circa 42 per cent of the global workforce will be mobile.

### Key objectives

He believes that unified communications will play a key role in making this way of working a success and Mitel anticipates that team collaboration apps like MiTeam will grow in appeal in this space. "Our objective is to take our customers to the cloud by making everything cloud capable," stated Butt.

"The challenge is to align tightly with the channel and end users in this transition. Customers have their own business needs so it's vital that we accompany them through the cloud migration process at their own pace rather than offer a crude rip and replace approach."

Deploying unified communications and AI enables organisations to move from a proactive model of customer service to a predictive one, reaffirmed Butt. And the applications of this technology are wide reaching. Take healthcare, for instance. "If you're a healthcare provider, imagine being able to offer someone who is diabetic a glucose monitor that constantly sends information back for analysis," said Butt.

"Data analytics could be used to identify trends and predict outcomes. Does the patient need a reminder to eat something? Does no response to the reminder signal that something more serious might be happening and that the emergency services are needed? This is the kind of preventative care that in many parts of the world we're looking at using, thanks to these technologies."

Mitel believes that all businesses will eventually move to the cloud, and the company has more than done its bit to facilitate the migration having notched up one million subscribers for worldwide UCaaS last year. "We are living through a time of unparalleled digital transformation," said Butt. "AI, IoT and VR are all driving the evolution of unified communications, none more so than cloud migration." ■

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# Unify now defined by cha

The chemistry of comms is in constant flux and according to Unify's VP for Global Marketing Michelle Jones the ultimate test of any product and marketing strategy is whether it gives channel partners a target to aim at and an opportunity to win.

**M**oving from Avaya Jones joined Unify in January 2015, attracted by its strategy to transform away from on-premise to cloud and impressed by the potential of Unify's Circuit collaboration platform. "From a career perspective the move gave me an opportunity to develop my skills and knowledge in the software and cloud arenas," commented Jones. "Unify's strategy to grow its channel business also appealed. I knew my core skills, ideas and programmes could be used to accelerate growth and transition the company to become a channel-first vendor.

"A year ago our aim was to deliver 60 per cent of business via the channel and we achieved that target. Now we do 90 per cent of our overall business and 100 per cent of net new sales via partners. Unify has a great channel presence with over 130 partners actively engaged across a mix of integrators, service providers and resellers."

Jones' close rapport with the channel began in 1994 when she worked for a small Lan2Lan company called NewPort Systems, which was acquired by Cisco. "That's where my career really progressed," she recalled. "I rapidly engaged with channels and this has been core to my role and success ever since."



Michelle Jones

## Greater financial stability is fuelling innovation within our portfolio, enabling us to drive transformation

Her first job at Unify was to increase the value and understanding of partner models, re-shape the marketing organisation structure to support channel marketing and investment, and build a scalable global marketing support function. "In the past 12 months we've committed sizable investments and made

upgrades to our partner programme and channel strategy," she commented. "We have not only added more heads into the channel team, launched an internal channel account management programme and created a global Sales Enablement division to make it easier for partners to do business with us, we've also

invested over £100k into our mid-market programme."

### Cloud investment

That's not all: Unify made a multi-million pound investment in the launch of a public cloud and collaboration service to complete its portfolio offering for the 'as a service' market. "The landscape has shifted

to social, cloud-based ways of working and digital workplaces," commented Jones. "Our purpose is to make collaboration better and easier and help organisations succeed in a disruptive world by creating great experiences for employees. After all, as Charles Darwin once said, 'It is the long history of humankind, those who learned to collaborate most effectively have prevailed'."

According to MZA, in 2017 Unify's market share for on-premise grew slightly in the 11-50 user market, 1.5 per cent in 50-250 and 2.5 per cent in the 250-1,000 segment. "We expect this growth to continue in 2018 despite the competition from the cloud in these spaces," noted Jones. "We were pleased to see that our contact centre market share grew significantly in 2017. Our public cloud offer results will also start to kick off this year. This performance, apart from the 11-50 market, compares favourably to the rest of the market."

The backing of Atos in terms of financials and capabilities has allowed Unify to develop a value proposition for the digital workplace, wrapped around partner services. Atos is also a channel for Unify and has opened up big opportunities in the large enterprise space where most partners don't operate, meaning no channel conflict. Last month Atos moved to a

# channel centricity

new London headquarters, offering partners access to a customer experience centre.

"Being a strategic part of Atos and a core component of its digital workplace strategy provides the market with confidence about our collaboration and communication platforms and how these fit into the wider digital transformation agenda," stated Jones.

"The combination of analyst reviews, new partner opportunities and some large new clients are proof points of this. Greater financial stability is fuelling innovation within our portfolio, enabling us to drive transformation to both Atos's client base and Unify's new and prospective clients."

## Adding value

Jones also noted that a lot of 'as a service' offerings are simply a race to the bottom on price, especially in the hosted telephony market. "These offer little scope for a partner to add value through services or differentiate their offer from others," she added. "It's not a strategy we see working for Unify's UK business. We make sure all of our platforms give partners the opportunity to maximise their margin. An example of this is the Openscape Cloud offering where our partners can wrap their own services, support, connectivity and SIP trunking to the Openscape Cloud collaboration service. This means a partner can shape a proposition to a prospect without competing totally on price, and allow them to make a healthy 40-plus per cent margin."

Jones' lens is also focused on improving the way Unify communicates with existing partners, as well as on-

boarding new ones. She expects the cloud to drive an uplift in the number of overall partners that resell the vendor's offerings, and a crucial stage of this is the on-boarding phase. "We have invested in a sales enablement team that will guide a partner through signing up with Unify, getting access to the right support and resources, and explaining our partner programme to set them up for success," she said. "Partners are our future and we need to make sure we are easy and simple to approach and communicate with. The Unify Partner Portal is the foundation for everything we do and now we have our cloud strategy set we can continue to reward growth and investment. We are also using our Go Cloud/Go Hybrid promotions to allow partners to re-monetise their existing base of on-premise and hosted customers."

Cohering cloud and on-premise into a single solution is one thing, but for Jones, a mother of three, how the work-life balance hangs together is a different proposition. "I don't think I will ever achieve the right balance, but that's just me," she commented. "I have a crazy life outside of work with horses and children, but I've learnt not to feel guilty about finding time for my children, even if that means dropping them off to school and picking them up. I'm fortunate to be in a business that empowers and enables flexible working through technology. I love the flexibility and can get my job done from any location on any device. It's so important to be connected, but not necessarily to a desk or office." ■

## Just a minute with Michelle Jones...

**Role model:** Richard Branson: A self-made millionaire and successful businessman with no ego, so inspirational, caring, successful and willing to share advice

**What talent do you wish you had?** To be able to treat horses or animals, like a chiropractor. I love being with animals and to know I'm making a difference

**What do you fear the most?** Not being able to ride my horse

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** I like working with children so probably teaching. I teach netball at my daughter's primary school and enjoy giving back to the local community

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I was a ball girl at Wimbledon and relished every minute of it. I still have the full kit but unfortunately it doesn't fit any more!

**What's the best piece of advice you have ever been given?** Say 'yes, you can do it' and figure things out as you go

**Career highlights:** Launching the biggest SME Efficiency Campaign at Cisco, which was a major success in terms of awareness, channel loyalty and revenue. And recognition as a strong leader in the top one per cent during my time at Avaya

**Comms industry bugbear:** We need to see more young talented females join the industry. It's such a fast moving sector with so many opportunities, but all too often seen as a male dominated environment

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# A Daly digest in comms

Leicestershire-based Dalycom is a bastion of customer service. To be anything else is folly, according to Managing Director Amanda Daly, who also champions staff development initiatives that differentiate the company as an authoritative voice of the industry.

**M**uch debate has surrounded the shift from a capex to an opex model. It reflects the decline of on-premise kit and the rise of the subscription economy, which is unavoidable. So much so that efforts to safeguard future profitability will stall unless a cloud strategy is embraced, believes Daly. It's a transition that Dalycom was quick to make, despite the immediate impact of big ticket sales being replaced by the drip feed of recurring revenues. Yet the future outlook is far more assured.

"Like many in our industry a major turning point for our business is the evolution of the cloud," said Daly. "We started selling hosted products around eight years ago and have built up a great base of cloud customers who take voice, exchange, anti-virus, storage and the network provision elements such as broadband and Ethernet services. It can be painful as some of the monthly contracts are in the hundreds rather than thousands. However, once the wheel is moving the revenue starts to build

and makes a difference, which brings more security in times of recession."

During the last four years Dalycom has grown steadily from £1.4 million to £2 million, mainly based on recurring revenues. So far the business has grown without any acquisitions and is developing a reputation in the midlands for its cloud-based services. "Within five years we want to see Dalycom reaching the £5 million mark and to have this growth on the back of recurrent revenue," commented Daly. "We tend to target the smaller SMEs, our sweetspot being the 20 user bracket. We can really help these clients with our expertise and consultancy approach. Many of our customers take the full range of services which helps to keep them sticky and contributes towards our high retention rate. The main driver for all of our team is customer service."

Competition now comes from all angles as a greater number of rivals from the mobile and IT markets target customer bases in the comms sector. What



Amanda Daly

experience, run our own networks and do a lot more public speaking. We look at a variety of ways to attract our prospects and make us stand out against the competition.

"Our biggest opportunity is how staff adapt to the new sales process. We are training our people to be marketers with skills to develop their own communications channel and expertise on social media. It's very different to how we used to sell in the past. Again, we are moving towards expertise and the voice of authority in our market. Not many competitors have our 30 year trading background and knowledge."

Dalycom was formed in 1986 by Daly's father-in-Law Tony Daly. Following deregulation he saw an opportunity and grabbed it with both hands. Various family members have worked within the business, including the founder's son Matthew who is Chairman (formerly Managing Director) and has a 25 year stint under his belt. The company underwent a name change to Dalycom 10 years ago to reflect changes in the industry. The firm no longer sold just telecommunications products – IT, CCTV and mobile had been added to the portfolio. Dalycom has since established a strong reputation in the retail sector with major high street names on its customer roster. A number of them have been clients for over 25 years.

These loyal customers would have been on-boarded at a time when Daly began her own career with a PR firm that worked with companies such as GPT and Siemens Nixdorf. Writing  
**Continued on page 30**

**Our industry needs a greater number of women in senior roles. It's time for change, time to see more women attending events, receiving press coverage and getting more involved**

can be done? Erect a barrier based on impeccable service, believes Daly. "Our customer experience and retention rates are a high priority for us," she stated. "We are being targeted by mobile, IT and web providers with similar propositions but the customer journey is always

an area Dalycom works on. Our differentiator has to be our service and testimonials. We are a lot more targeted in our approach to our audience and use social media and networks to help broadcast our message. A big change in our marketing is that we now lead as the voice of

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**Continued from page 28**  
press releases and organising briefings proved educational, giving Daly background knowledge on the industry she would soon enter in a sales capacity. She was head hunted 20 years ago and became Managing Director in 2013, moving up from Sales Director. "Matthew and I now spend less time within the business due to the development of our senior management team," said Daly.

**Leadership**

"Our time is spent more on direction and working 'on' the business rather than being heavily involved in day-to-day matters. This was always our long-term plan. By 2020 we expect our involvement to become even less as our team grow through experience and develop leadership qualities. We advocate an employee ownership model and our intention is to look at this in the future. It would be great to see some of our staff running the business, reaping the rewards of their loyalty and hard work. I have also set up a separate consultancy called The Turnaround CEO where I help and coach business owners on growth and leadership."

In the time since Daly became Managing Director five years ago the business has grown by over 50 per cent. Her intention is to continue introducing product sets and exploring the potential of emerging markets. "Artificial Intelligence and the IoT will have an impact on our business and who knows where this will take us,"

she added. "Every single appliance will soon have some form of connectivity which will potentially need a level of support and access to a network. The mobile arena is also exciting. So a priority right now is innovation as we move towards IT support and provision over the cloud, and we are looking at areas that help service our clients and complement our portfolio. IT support is exhibiting strong growth and we always try to stay ahead of the IT curve. This is where Matthew's skills and knowledge in IT comes into play. The blend of Matthew and I works well. He finds the products and my team sells them."

Yet finding a happy balance in the context of a work-life blend has not been so forthcoming. "One of my biggest regrets is not spending enough time with my children," added Daly. "I allowed work to take over my life. However, without the hard times and difficulties I would not be where I am now, and with my experience and hindsight be in a position to help coach other business owners."

"Our industry needs a greater number of women in senior roles. When we look at our channel partners the majority of senior or board members are male. It's time for change, time to see more women attending events, receiving press coverage and getting more involved. This is a great industry with so much to offer, so I am puzzled why more women are not in ICT. At Dalycom we have a diverse team and that adds value to what we do."



**Amanda Daly**

**Just a minute with Amanda Daly...**

**Role models:** Female inspirational speakers

**What talent do you wish you had?** To be more artistic

**What do you fear the most?** Rats

**Industry bugbear?** We need greater loyalty from our suppliers. It is difficult to offer high service levels when our supplier is not providing them

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I got GCSE grade E in IT

**What's the best piece of advice you have ever been given?** Anything is possible. First know what you want, visualise it and go for it

**One example of something you have overcome:** Sexism and prejudice

**What's the biggest risk you have taken?** Tight time frames forced us to furnish and decorate our first office before the mortgage had been agreed

**In hindsight...** I would have not taken everything so personally. As a leader you cannot please everyone and some of the decisions you make are hard ones, especially where people are involved

**Three ideal dinner guests:** Simon Sinek, he makes you focus on your 'Why'; Oprah Winfrey, she's inspirational; and Margaret Thatcher to learn what inspired her and how she overcame the hurdles

**Your strengths and what could you work on?** I can be very direct, which is both a strength and a weakness

**Top tip for resellers:** Don't talk too much. Listen and work on the information you are given, not what you want to hear

**What can't you do without in your job?** Pen and paper – I write lots of notes

**How would you like to be remembered?** Building up a legacy and helping others build theirs

# Ten years for Forest



**Andrew Louka (left) and Bradley Worboys**

**B**uckhurst Hill-based Forest Communications is poised to mark its tenth anniversary year by breaking the £1 million revenue barrier. The company was founded on May 2nd 2008 by Managing Director Bradley Worboys who was later joined by his friend and Key Account Executive Andrew Louka. "At the time I was looking for a new job and after a number of interviews came to realise that I wanted to start my own telecoms company," commented Worboys. "My friend Andrew had the same idea. We complement each other and over the years have learned to understand each of our own strengths and weaknesses."

Prior to Forest Worboys had already gained four years comms industry experience working for Cellclear which sold GSM gateways. "I came on board to manage a large sales project being rolled out to Unison over 35 sites. This deal was the largest that any reseller and T-Mobile direct had done that year. After we completed

the project I sold GSM gateways into the NHS."

Forest now employs five people and focuses more on driving sales in partnership with resellers while keeping service levels high. "We have 350 customers and turnover is circa £900k," added Worboys. "We grew £200k last year so should break the £1 million barrier this year."

**Product diversity**

Converting ISDN customers to hosted and winning new cloud, UC and mobile business has helped to drive growth. "Three years ago we started to offer business gas and electric rates and card payment solutions which delivered new revenue streams and made us more of a business services company with telecoms at the core," explained Worboys. "While we are keeping a close eye on the IoT we are currently focused on a new industry specific payment solution with feature add-ons. Looking further ahead, we aim to build a bigger base of customers and offer more business services which are currently being set up."



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# It's critical, but don't fixa

Megaphonic calls for connectivity to become a utility, vigorous arguments in favour of the opposite, and a fragmented access technology landscape have brought us to this round table debate hosted by Zen Internet in association with Comms Dealer. The big questions: To what degree is access technology a 'utility'? Should connectivity undergo decommodification? If not, how can we differentiate and survive other than on price?



**T**he distinction between commoditisation and differentiation is clear-cut, except in the connectivity marketplace where both designations hold sway. Look closely at connectivity and you can see all the elements that underpin the UK's digital future while supporting a range of differentiated products and services that ultimately define the user experience. Round table delegates agreed that connectivity is

## Historians of the UK connectivity sector may struggle to identify the primacy between a utility or decommodified model

now the forerunner to a new conversation with the customer, reflected in the rise of more discerning buyers and a new 'application experience' model based on resellers gaining a full understanding of how the access technology is actually used by their customers.

According to VanillaIP CEO Dave Dadds this model can be squared with a strong case for commoditisation and entitlement. "Connectivity should absolutely be seen as a utility, designed like a utility and owned by a single body for the betterment of all," he stated. "Everyone

should be connected and there must be an obligation to deliver it. The differentials are what you put on top of the network rather than the fibre piece itself. The alternative is an underplay with everyone fighting about the connectivity rather than the applications."

Digital Britain will never sprout on a sub-standard network infrastructure, therefore should connectivity be merely positioned as a universal commodity? Connectivity is more than wires, fibre and signals – it underpins how organisations operate and is the heart and soul of modern society. Simon Davies, Director of ID Net, commented: "I disagree that connectivity should be regarded as the fourth utility. It's not a matter of turning a tap on and off or



For more information please visit [www.zen.co.uk/partner](http://www.zen.co.uk/partner)

# ate on connectivity alone

flicking a switch because much more can go wrong. Connectivity is technical and can be difficult."

But if customers can't see or define the connectivity themselves they cannot judge the scale of its importance, the cost of delivery and the complex nature of the underlying technology. Therein lies a strong case for escalating knowledge transfer as a top priority. "It's about us educating the market," stated Nick Goodenough, Partner Services Manager, Spitfire. "When a customer comes along and says I want cheap broadband the scenario becomes a question of talking to them at a deeper level, finding out what they're using it for and the various apps that are critical to their business. What would happen if they stopped working? Delving into these areas is absolutely essential. It's not about headline speeds, it's about quality and reliability."

### Foundation layer

Connectivity infrastructure may well be seen as the chassis of Digital Britain's rolling campaign convoy, but consultation, along with innovation and direction over how the connectivity is used is its steering wheel. "As an industry we have an infrastructure that carries whatever services we want to provide," added Tony Ford, Operations Director, Marston's Telecoms. "We now have an opportunity to say forget about the broadband itself – it's what we put on top of it that matters. The industry is growing up, we're all working on other products and apps. It's the customer that drags us into the price conversation and I hate it

when people ask how much it is. They should be asking whether I'm reliable or if I'm going to be here next year."

Failure to ask these probing questions could open the door to rogue resellers with little product knowledge who are drawn into the demand impetus for ever more speeds and capacity, and add another layer of complexity that evokes reactive condemnation from legitimate specialists including Vapour Media Managing Director Tim Mercer, who sees the charlatans as fraying at the edges of the UK's connectivity fabric – and he often picks up the pieces himself. "There's a lot of people who don't understand this space and spin a connectivity story to customers, telling them it will do their voice, backup, infrastructure etc," he stated. "Superfast, that's all you need, right? Wrong. We end up sorting the issues out. The level and importance of education in this sector needs to be raised."

Consumers have been inundated by pressure from advertisements to adopt a 'gigabit-only' mindset with price at the forefront of their choices. But the rule of business is that a connection's quality and reliability, as well as a company's usage characteristics, must be separated from the headline speeds and consumer outlook. "The industry is awash with acronyms and various definitions based on different speeds," observed Ben Knights, Product Marketing Manager (Connectivity), 9 Group. "We need to move way from what's available at a location and focus on how the connection will be used.

Don't worry about the speed, what do you actually want to do with it?"

What distinguishes connectivity today is its transformational capabilities, the sky high expectations of its users, and its 'utility or not' identity issue that embroils 'commodity' talk with the higher language of access technology as a high tech digital enabler of differentiation, and ultimately Digital Britain and the UK's ability to compete on the world stage. The key fact of this full fibre future dream vision tells us much of the problem of today's infrastructure, and society, believes Dadds.

"Openreach's mistake for 10 years was to focus on

## If customers can't see or define the connectivity themselves they cannot judge the scale of its importance, the cost of delivery and the complex nature of the underlying technology

copper," he stated. "We have to get fibre inclusive around the country and take us away from London-centricity. That's the most important point about the drive to fibre. People could live anywhere and work remotely when possible. We need a different model where infrastructure builders connect to a common hub. This would create a countryside network far quicker and offer equal access for everyone. The commercial model doesn't work because it pushes stakeholders in the wrong

direction. It's time to examine the bigger picture. We need a network to trade anywhere in the world, so infrastructure spend on HS2 is total folly. If we full fibre this country productivity will be massively improved compared to installing a railway line. Abandon HS2 and spend on full fibre."

### Unrestricted demand

An assured blanket of fibre-based connectedness descending on Britain would be a dream come true, but right now the unrestricted torrent of demand for connectivity means we have to make do with what's available. And anyone who enters the cross-industry connectivity debate knows that the issues and legacy challenges are

We'll sell a product when it's guaranteed to work – not 80 to 95 per cent of the time. But our wholesale suppliers can't provide that. As far as I know no-one else can unless they are delivering fibre connectivity into the premises."

Historians of the UK connectivity sector may struggle to identify the primacy between a utility or decommodified model. What is certain is that the customer is king and connectivity forms the foundation of how they consume their services. "With cloud and SaaS you've got to understand the customer's needs, provide the service and charge for it," noted Dadds. "It's about the relationship between building applications and what people will pay for them. Consider PCI compliance, call recording and CRM integration.

"We get hundreds of feature requests. When I see the minutia that exercises end user businesses (and resellers) I appreciate just how much people are buying on features. If you can give business leaders something that provides insights about their staff, for example, or helps to save costs, they'll buy it. You've got to find that piece. In the application space there's more opportunity than ever to differentiate."

Even allowing for the suppressant effect of a legacy copper network the opportunities to differentiate exist in spade fulls, says Dadds, with connectivity being the key underlying component of a package that includes multiple apps and services in an 'experience driven economy'. **Continued on page 34**

Continued from page 33

This offers a future for the channel and it must be grasped, but not everyone dances to this tune.

"There is a consensus that you can't run a successful business based on one product set," stated Peter Wightman, Director, IP River. "The new generation is diligent. They look around and want to keep their options open, so bundling services together wouldn't work for me. I don't want everything in one basket. We only concentrate on providing low latency transparent plumbing so you can run whatever you want over it, from whoever you want.

**Uncertain times**

"Apps change so readily and quickly and no-one really knows what the next platform and apps will be. But one thing remains certain – if you want to invest in anything, invest in the connectivity. With substantially lower overheads and expertise in our field, and because connectivity is ubiquitous despite whatever applications are used, we have a legitimate business model. It's nice to keep a business pure."

No business or industry is listed for preservation. That's a point to bear in mind in the context of an observation made by Ford. "The biggest broadcaster in the world, Arqiva, has the technology to deliver a broadband data product over white space – the TV signal," he stated. "We're now talking about a cheap delivery mechanism that's no longer in the spectrum and not under licence. What disruption will that have on the industry if it happens?"

Is this brutal realism or an opaque and unlikely stretch of the imagination? Either way, Arqiva's potential to disrupt communications is clear and should not be dismissed. It is a symbol

**Bites from the table**

Capacity and headline speeds aren't the issue. You don't need as much bandwidth as people think.  
**Peter Wightman, Director, IP River**

Qualify the customer correctly to understand what they are going to put over that wire.  
**Tim Mercer, Managing Director, Vapour Media**

We often sell a basic product and take the customer on a journey. Cross and up-selling is a lot easier than acquiring a new client.  
**Ben Knights, Product Marketing Manager (Connectivity), 9 Group**

Differentiation is about delivering multiple apps, but more important is how you monetise those elements.  
**Dave Dadds, CEO, VanillaIP**

The person sitting at home who makes the buying decision can't tell the difference between consumer and business connectivity.  
**Tim Mercer, Managing Director, Vapour Media**

It's a nonsense that after 30 years we're still buying our mobile phones based on what works in your location.  
**Dave Dadds, CEO, VanillaIP**

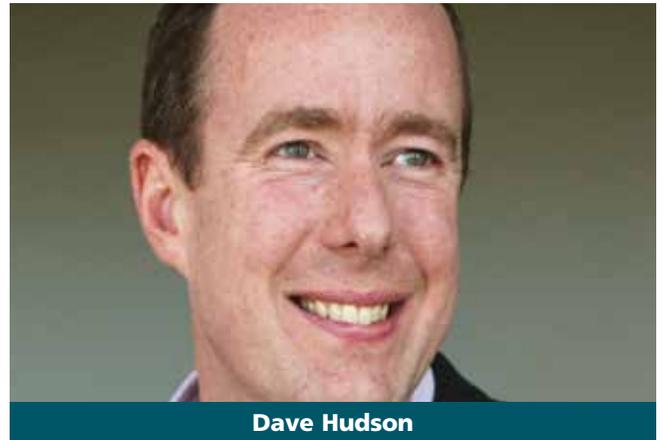
of the market's fragility and serves as a catalyst for resellers to ensure survivability through differentiation. "Be an expert in your own field," urged Ford. "You cannot hide any more. Today's customers do not take risks and they buy differently. They check you out. It's about what you did and how you performed. Customers are looking for a company that can offer that 'other' service or added value. And connectivity is the basic need."

# Differentiation: A fact of choice

It was great to be part of last month's round table debate on the issues and opportunities surrounding and reshaping the UK's connectivity landscape, writes **Dave Hudson, Managing Director for Wholesale at Zen**. Despite the wide ranging views that were expressed, and the evident uncertainty about how the UK connectivity infrastructure landscape may play out, there was broad agreement on a number of issues that align with Zen's strategy and thinking.

Ever decreasing prices and highly capable (even entry level) services have helped to drive utility or commodity perspectives on connectivity. Nevertheless, Zen sees high quality connectivity as absolutely critical and foundational. There is no argument about that: Enterprise grade hosted voice and clever cloud applications would not exist without the robust connectivity that makes them possible. In other words, although services across the board are getting cheaper and more reliable there's still a significant responsibility on underlying network providers to ensure a consistently great experience. That's why we've unbundled 400 exchanges to build our own footprint and created Zen Wholesale to make this capability available to other providers.

To say that the connectivity market is 'commoditising' does not do justice to the many opportunities for differentiation in this critical and often confusing space where expert, valued advice



**Dave Hudson**

and thought leadership is a stand-out factor. Embracing new capabilities such as the latest network and access technologies will also unlock great market potential for resellers. The good news continues: There are further opportunities to enhance and promote the service wrap, your people and high levels of proactive management around services.

**Close integration**

Another point of differentiation is to pursue closer integration with networks. For example, making it easier to consume APIs helps providers to differentiate in a market that continues to display an insatiable appetite for bandwidth. The demand for apps and high bandwidth services will only gather pace, therefore Zen has pushed ahead with a multi-million pound investment in a new core network, ensuring that it is scalable and ultrafast-ready for consumer and business.

The shift to ultrafast creates a natural point for customers to review their supply chain, and an opportunity for resellers to add value in reviewing bases to make sure they have the most appropriate solutions.

Also top of the agenda is the importance of consistency and reliability which outweighs all the headlines about speed. That's why we've embraced LLU to own more control of end-to-end services and to be at the forefront of delivering new products to the wholesale market, so that providers are always ahead of the game.

Technology being technology – at some point things may go wrong or people need the support of experts. In anticipation of this possibility Zen has for 23 years always taken a people first approach with a well trained and highly experienced team on hand to ensure that customers get the best possible experience. Both Zen's service and network is award winning as voted for by our customers.

The sum conclusion of all these points and the matters discussed during the round table debate is that whether or not you think the connectivity market is commoditising or otherwise really depends on the breadth of your strategic outlook and the vision, commitment and people-centric nature of the providers you choose as business partners.



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# Hollis sets a new trend

How former Brylcreem model Simon Hollister, Director of Sales at Hollis Technology, attacks business growth with style.

It is a little known industry fact that Hollister once modelled Brylcreem. These days, he is better known as the architect of a slick growth model that he hopes will propel Hollis Technology nationwide as it seeks to multiply revenues and double down on core values. "We are now executing a plan that will establish Hollis as the go-to solutions and technology partner for enterprise and education in the UK," he said. "The numbers will speak for themselves. Anything less than 100 per cent year-on-year would be seen as a failure."

Hollister's career began at Canon (UK) at the age of 16 selling fax machines. It was a role that prompted him to explore all areas of technology and its adoption, ultimately leading him to thrive in pressure situations such as being first on the ground for US-based start-ups. Hollis Technology was itself a start-up in 1990, established as a provider of business support solutions to organisations in both the public and private sectors throughout the UK. The company provides a portfolio of solutions including IP telephony, multifunctional printers, servers, storage, network security devices and office supplies. Hollister has a strong track record of achieving growth,

including the formation of Airtight Networks (now Mojo Networks) in the UK in what was an ultra-competitive market. "To take an unknown brand in a saturated market and deliver the results we did was amazing," stated Hollister.

Last year Hollis Technology decided to invest in becoming a technology partner for all things IT. "For several years Hollis had been heavily involved deploying network security, IP telephony, print, Microsoft desktop and servers in particular," said Hollister. "But there was no coherent plan for the end-to-end delivery of solutions. I have been instrumental in implementing a strategy that sees Hollis delivering everything from merchant services at the edge of the network to SAN solutions, optimisation and back-up at the core as well as full desktop and application delivery and support. This is reflected in recent contract wins by our Managed Services team. We expect managed services to continue to be the central strand of our strategy for growth moving forward."

This year Hollis will increase its headcount by 30 per cent in sales and 25 per cent in engineering, and is on target to double turnover and boost gross profits by 30 per cent. "We have now



Simon Hollister

**The numbers will speak for themselves. Anything less than 100 per cent year-on-year would be seen as a failure**

moved away from being just a local business in Shropshire and north Wales supporting SMBs to supplying and consulting for global retail chains, education and enterprises from Scotland to London and the south of England," added Hollister. "The growth is underpinned by the mantra of 'national company, local service'."

Target markets are SMB, large enterprises and the education sector, with key

growth areas being storage, security and optimisation.

**Smart moves**

"Artificial Intelligence is on the rise," added Hollister. "It has been around in various guises for some time but is now beginning to mature. This will sit well within all verticals and we anticipate that petrochemical, pharmaceutical, finance and logistics will be the early adopters. Cognitive systems will consolidate unstructured

data from individual data silos that exist across such organisations regardless of format allowing for more effective decision-making. This is the future and Hollis is already in discussions with what we believe will be the major player in this space."

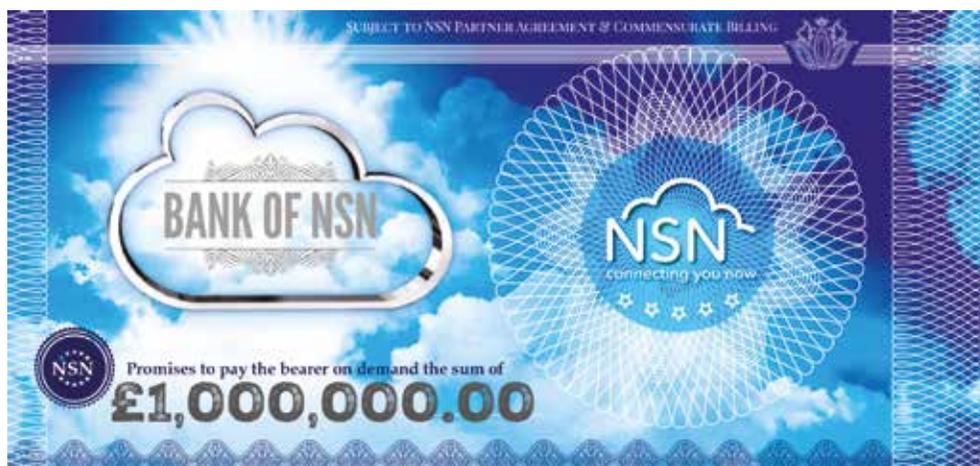
The commitment to deliver IT at a national level proved to be a seismic and propitious change of direction for the business which must now focus hard on the practicalities of making growth happen. "Our key priority is to recruit the right staff in sales and technical roles to facilitate our growth," explained Hollister. "As everyone in my position knows, the good people are taken and need a driver to move, so we have to look at what would make them do this. I am exploring the possibility of franchising Hollis from a sales perspective to give these 'good' people an opportunity to be part owners of their own business and allow them to explore how far they can take it."

If this plan goes ahead, Hollis will offer a start-up opportunity to those with an entrepreneurial spirit and seeking a challenge. It's a scenario that reflects a pivotal time in Hollis's own career journey, a time that also underlined the importance of trusted and authentic partnerships. "Before joining Hollis I rejected a chance to be first on the ground for a Californian start-up which was oozing success and could have been a retirement role," he stated. "But something just didn't feel right about the management and trust has to be there. Instead, I've sacrificed California for the UK and will take Hollis to the next level." ■

# NSN partner bonanza

## Service provider pays over £1m in partner channel commissions

At the inaugural NSN Awards event at 'The NSN Arms' last month Channel Director Ryan Kersey delivered an inspirational speech to an audience of partners and suppliers. Far and away the most significant part of his speech was the statement that NSN had managed to deliver more than £1M in commissions to its channel partners in 2017.



"In an industry where the majority of Finance Directors and CFO's are seeking to reduce and curtail commissions paid out, NSN is actively striving to increase the level of value we can return to our partners" stated Kersey.

"Adding in Energy and Cloud IT commissions from peripheral 'green shoots' NSNrg Limited and Cloud 100 Limited, the potential earnings for NSN Partners are only set to increase in 2018."

Highlighting the potential for NSN Partners to increase their earnings by 'going global' with NSN's Global Partnership Programme, MD Nick

Shraga commented: "With the launch of the South Africa Partner Channel in January of this year we now have 100's of customers billing across South Africa in the Rand, so if you have any UK clients with connections in SA you can get them connected with zero fuss or stress."

### Astounding growth

"The fact is that the sun never sets anymore on your potential to increase your recurring income streams with NSN. We now have customers connected from San Francisco to Sydney and from Harrogate to Hong Kong. The is frankly astounding and exciting for

all of us here at NSN," added Nick Shraga.

NSN's CEO Mark Shraga believes the future is brighter than it has ever been for NSN and its partners. "Building on two decades of commitment to returning value to channel partners, I am personally delighted that we have stayed true to our promise to loyal and committed partnerships. When sketching out the brand and the focus of NSN back in 2010, I never dreamed it would increase its reach so dramatically.

### More green shoots

"It really is a testament to our

people and our partners. With senior staff having a meaningful stake in the green-shoots sprouting out from NSN, the growth horizon is totally limitless as we are keeping our best people for longer than ever."

"With service delivery being core to the needs of every successful business NSN has invested in the systems, people and services that can offer the highest quality with a competitive edge. Our clients and partners both feedback regularly to tell us where we have stood out from the general market place, both in how we deliver new installations and how we respond when things go wrong."



**"The sun never sets on your potential to increase your recurring income streams with NSN."**

Nick Shraga NSN MD



NSN CEO Mark Shraga reflected on an 'astounding' year at The NSN Arms partner networking and awards event last month.

## NSN has always delivered...

"NSN has always delivered on helping us create value here at ABC Ltd, and we have seen our commissions grow year in year out over the last 3 years. This month we received a five figure commission statement, our largest ever, and I can absolutely say NSN are meeting and exceeding my expectations."

John Miller CEO ABC Ltd

For your global pass to limitless earnings, please email Ryan Kersey today at [ryan@nsn.co](mailto:ryan@nsn.co) or call him on 08000546200.





# OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS!

## Open new doors to profit at MiVaD 18

With the impending switch-off of ISDN, the increasing demand for customers for joined up ICT solutions, plus the increasing popularity of cloud communications which creates a plethora of security issues, the opportunities for Voice & Data resellers have never been better.

### THE BIG ISSUE IS: WHAT DOORS DO YOU KNOCK ON AND ENTER FOR NEW PROFIT OPPORTUNITIES?

Each year since the turn of the millennium, **Margin in Voice & Data** – affectionately known as ‘The Industry event of the Summer’ – has helped resellers addressing SME markets identify and open new doors to profit and truly understand the changing ICT environment.

This is a truly inspirational event that will help you really understand the market changes and meet suppliers keen to help you unlock these amazing opportunities.

### Where will it take place?

On June 14<sup>th</sup>, MiVaD 18 returns to the beautiful Forest of Arden Hotel complex in the heart of the West Midlands and once again this 24-hour event promises a day of inspiration and exploration plus a ‘once a year’ opportunity for resellers to network with like-minded peers and business generators.

### Who will qualify to attend?

**IF YOU ARE A DIRECTOR OF A RESELLER ORGANISATION TURNING OVER UP TO £3M, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO ATTEND MiVaD 18 COMPLETELY FREE OF CHARGE, INCLUDING ALL HOSPITALITY AND AN OVERNIGHT STAY AT THE FOREST OF ARDEN!**

This offer is only extended to 120 reseller directors operating in the ICT channel so do not delay, register now to secure your place.

### What happens at MiVaD?

Split into three sessions, the event will comprise a morning thought leadership conference to help delegates get an understanding of the new Voice & Data landscape; an afternoon ‘managed meetings’ session where resellers can meet new supplier partners; and last but by no means least, a fun evening networking dinner.

### What people say about MiVaD

“I would just like to say a big thank you for delivering a great day and evening. Not only did we have a great time enjoying your wonderful hospitality, we have met some new contacts and hopefully have some solid leads. Once again thank you.

*Julie and Chris, Train2WinTV*

“I wanted to say, ‘thank you’ for a fantastic event yesterday, well organised, well-orchestrated and the attendance was brilliant. On top of that, we came away with a sack full of prospects. This has already become an unmissable event in the future for NTA!”

*Justin Blaine, NTA*

“Just a quick note to thank you for your hospitality and also most importantly for putting on such a great event. Some really good conversations had that will definitely bear fruit.

*Keith Bartlett, EMEA Director, Business Development & Distribution, ShoreTel (Mitel)*

Thank you, yet again, for a great event yesterday. We’ve come away with a couple of gems and enthusiasm, thanks to the new connections and presentations, so thank you once again.

*Claire Maddox, Eurolink Connect*

# MiVaD sponsors line up to meet new partners



**Adam Cathcart, 9 Wholesale**

"Without doubt, Margin In Voice & Data is one of the most important events in the industry and 9 is proud to be a top-level sponsor.

"For over ten years, 9 has been a leading provider of voice and data communication products for the channel.

"Our acclaimed Purple Partner Programme delivers exactly the kind of support our partners need, including commercial and marketing workshops, as well as product incentives and discounts. Finally, our combination of Managed Billing and Virtual Office solutions, allow partners to concentrate on selling.

"Come and talk to us about how 9 can help you to win and retain more business."

**SPEAKER**



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**Peter Goddard, Spitfire**

"In Spitfire's 30th anniversary year, we see MiVaD as a key event to talk with Partners about staying abreast of industry developments.

Our unique Engineering Account Management approach allows us to engage on both technical and commercial levels providing you with best practice recommendations and training covering all aspects of multi-site voice and data connectivity – from MPLS to QoS and Security to Cloud.

Whether you are looking to expand your product portfolio or just want to work with a company which provides properly engineered solutions, come and talk to us about how we can help you build new revenue streams."

**SPEAKER**



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**Anton Oliver, Ombex**

"Being our first sponsorship opportunity in the UK, we are honoured to be among so many great new partners, and look forward to many years being part of Margin in Voice & Data. Throughout 2018, Ombex will showcase disruptive, Quantum safe technologies that will allow your business to exceed the existing expectation of Cyber Security, because Ombex builds from the bottom: your data!

"Our technologies can easily be integrated into existing systems to give your clients the protections that exceed what is available today. We are looking forward to present our solutions and revenue opportunity and meeting with potential partners to discuss how you can protect your and your customer's data."

**SPEAKER**



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**Mark Curtis-Wood – Nimans**

"Margin In Voice & Data provides the perfect opportunity for Nimans to showcase how resellers can take the simple route to maximise revenues from Network Services as we execute on evolution.

"Having been a regular sponsor of MIVD over the last six years it's clear that the reseller community continues to evolve alongside our own business. A lot of things we highlighted six years ago are still relevant now.

"Following the sad passing of our Chairman Julian earlier this year, we want to emphasise how the size, scale, trust and ease of doing business with Nimans remains as strong as ever – and how we continue to take resellers on a simplified journey based on the evolution of our product set through automation of our back office and a 'one pane of glass' philosophy."

**SPEAKER**



Silver sponsor



**Paul Taylor, Voiceflex**

"Voiceflex is looking forward to Margin in Voice & Data 2018 as it offers a great opportunity to meet existing and potential partners within an informal setting. The event last year was very successful for Voiceflex; we were inundated with meetings, and so this year we're doubling the members of staff attending. In 2017, we launched our WebRTC applications Voiceflex Visual Attendant and Voiceflex Click to Call. In 2018, we'll be demonstrating additional WebRTC applications which are simple but effective and are all based on our award-winning SIP Trunk offering. Our WebRTC applications enhance any PABX either on-site or in the cloud making our partner's offerings stand out."

**SPEAKER**



Silver sponsor



**Philippe Matos, MyPhones**

"MyPhones are delighted to be returning to the MiVaD 2018. Our development team have been working extremely hard to deliver something very unique for our existing and prospective partners and we are really excited about launching our brand new partner portal at the event. We will be showcasing the best that British UCaaS technology has to offer and discussing how our partners can benefit from our technology partner status with Cisco MPP and why it has been hugely successful to date."

MYPHONES.COM

Bronze sponsor



**Iain Sinnott – Vanilla IP**

"As buyers become more and more knowledgeable within the cloud communications product sector VanillaIP will be exploring 'The resurrection of the sales professional'. 'Keep it simple stupid' got HPBX resellers started but now they need to work with their customers to extend the power of cloud solutions, deploying a blend of multi-vendor, multi-service tools deliverable down to the user level with the flexibility to add and remove services on demand. To make this happen resellers will need to employ the services of professional solution sales people, adopt supplier portfolios that support this methodology and Uboss. A uniquely advanced portal that drives client application adoption and therefore reseller revenues and profitability."

**SPEAKER**



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# Staff welfare goes beyond

**A**side from the legal 'duty of care' employers must adopt to ensure the welfare of employees, there is also the question of motivation. Providing a healthy, safe and inspiring environment means staff are happier, more likely to work harder and less likely to seek employment elsewhere. This month, 14 companies in the ICT channel were finalists in the Best Company to Work For category in the Comms Dealer Sales and Marketing Awards which demonstrates the importance firms place on keeping staff content and loyal.

Your staff are what makes your company tick so how can you make sure you're looking after them properly?

Comms Dealer visited 9 Group recently which has recreation and chill out areas and, notably, a glass fronted cooler in the kitchen filled daily with rolls and sandwiches, which staff can help themselves to at no charge. Hungry people can be irritable and difficult and the unedifying vision of staff queuing in the bitter cold to buy a sandwich is clearly not one the 9 management would wish to experience.

At Salisbury based Berry Telecom, management have introduced go home early Fridays (and when teams hit targets), a free lunch on pay day and days off on birthdays. And during the last year, Berry spent a staggering £80,000 on staff entertainment which covered an all-expenses-paid trip to a luxury villa in Marbella, days out to Newbury and Ascot Races, a Christmas Party on the No Man's Fort island in the Solent and making Berry's new super yacht charter available for staff.

These examples prove one thing: staff welfare is not just about providing a healthy environment and career development, it's about going the extra mile to keep staff feeling they are valued.



DEAN BURGIN  
BOXX COMMUNICATIONS

**HOW DO YOU RANK STAFF WELFARE?**

Our greatest asset is our staff and in return for hard work, we offer flexibility, motivation and freedom to pursue their own interests and initiatives.

**HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED YOUR ENVIRONMENT?**

Our refurbished office with modern décor and 'break-out' areas for a well-earned rest, offers motivation, rejuvenation and makes staff feel happy to come to work.

**WHAT NON-STATUTORY EXTRAS DO YOU OFFER?**

In our mission to be a flexible employer we offer duvet days and staff can work around school/childcare commitments, fostering a healthy work-life balance.

**HOW DO YOU KEEP STAFF MOTIVATED?**

Our office table tennis is popular amongst staff as are our Perkbox subscription, weekly run club, cash-prize incentives and end-of-month take-aways!

**WHO HAS INSPIRED YOU MOST?**

Richard Branson: Despite not fitting into the traditional educational system, his passion for life and mixture of work/play has made him a truly successful entrepreneur.



CLIFFORD NORTON  
CHANNEL TELECOM

**HOW DO YOU RANK STAFF WELFARE?**

Staff welfare and satisfaction are critical because happy and valued staff makes for a much more effective and productive work environment.

**HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED YOUR ENVIRONMENT?**

Recently we have taken steps ensuring that the team feel more connected with each other and the company by promoting our social media channels in-house.

**WHAT NON-STATUTORY EXTRAS DO YOU OFFER?**

Monthly all expenses-paid, company outings to new and exciting locations; flexible working hours to suit personal needs; health care through Aviva; childcare vouchers.

**HOW DO YOU KEEP STAFF MOTIVATED?**

As well as incentives with our staff reward and recognition programme, our 'Shining Star' staff awards continually reward individual members for outstanding service.

**WHO HAS INSPIRED YOU MOST?**

Winston Churchill is a hugely inspirational person for me because although written off and denigrated, he stayed strong to become the saviour of the nation.



RICHARD EGLON  
AGILITAS

**HOW DO YOU RANK STAFF WELFARE?**

At Agilitas employee welfare is our top priority. Our reputation is built on our people, and we recognise that a happy employee delivers an enhanced customer experience.

**HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED YOUR ENVIRONMENT?**

We have invested heavily over the past 12 months including new breakout areas, table tennis table, pool table, darts, office furniture and LED lighting throughout.

**WHAT NON-STATUTORY EXTRAS DO YOU OFFER?**

Employee of the quarter and year awards, additional days holiday, long-service gifts, social events – Summer BBQ, Wimbledon Cream Tea, invites to industry awards.

**HOW DO YOU KEEP STAFF MOTIVATED?**

A company-wide pay rise in the past 12 months, membership to Perkbox that provides free mobile phone insurance, half price cinema tickets, high street shopping discounts.

**WHO HAS INSPIRED YOU MOST?**

I take inspiration from my family and a handful of work colleagues that I have built strong trusted relationships with over the years.



MARK VICCARS  
DIGI TOOLBOX

**HOW DO YOU RANK STAFF WELFARE?**

We believe that staff are the heart of the business and their happiness and satisfaction will be reflected in how they work with our customers.

**HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED YOUR ENVIRONMENT?**

Inclusion and innovation are important concepts and we foster an environment where everyone generates ideas, has a voice in the company and can challenge the norm.

**WHAT NON-STATUTORY EXTRAS DO YOU OFFER?**

Home working promotes a work-life balance which is important to Digi. All staff can access a £1,000 training budget and a 24/7 confidential phone line for any problems they may be having.

**HOW DO YOU KEEP STAFF MOTIVATED?**

Staff rewards are a part of the culture and staff are regularly given days/evenings out, pizza lunches, gifts and positive written and verbal feedback to let them know they are appreciated.

**WHO HAS INSPIRED YOU MOST?**

Richard Branson is to be admired for his strong staff-focus: "Train people well enough so they can leave, treat them well enough so they don't want to".



Unified communication

# and workplace environment



TIM ROBERTS  
ENTANET

**HOW DO YOU RANK STAFF WELFARE?**  
Our people are critical to our success. We try and create an environment where both our staff and company achieve their full potential.

**HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED YOUR ENVIRONMENT?**  
We have an open plan office for all staff right up to our CEO. Our office is decorated in our corporate identity and we've recently revamped our kitchen.

**WHAT NON-STATUTORY EXTRAS DO YOU OFFER?**  
These include flexi-time, sick pay, healthcare cash plan, free broadband, high street discounts, on-site parking, on-site canteen and childcare vouchers.

**HOW DO YOU KEEP STAFF MOTIVATED?**  
We've recently developed a company-wide performance based employee bonus scheme. We also host annual staff awards, long service awards and a lavish Christmas party.

**WHO HAS INSPIRED YOU MOST?**  
I've been most inspired by Emperor Constantine for completing the most successful change management programme of all time; it is still running 2000 years later!



CHRIS MORRISEY  
LILY

**HOW DO YOU RANK STAFF WELFARE?**  
Keeping our employees motivated and happy is one of the fundamentals to achieving our business goals.

**HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED YOUR ENVIRONMENT?**  
We recently relocated to a new £1m office that was refitted specifically with the needs of Lily employees in mind. It is our biggest ever investment and its essentially investment in our people.

**WHAT NON-STATUTORY EXTRAS DO YOU OFFER?**  
We give each employee a 'birthday in bed' free holiday each year. We provide free phone insurance, 2 for 1 cinema tickets, breakdown cover and discounts at restaurants nationwide.

**HOW DO YOU KEEP STAFF MOTIVATED?**  
We have multiple trips for high achievers including our 'I am a successer' getaway to Ibiza and our sales high flyer trip to Cancun.

**WHO HAS INSPIRED YOU MOST?**  
I'm most inspired by my wife and her desire for a fantastic lifestyle, it motivates me daily!



SHAHRAM BAGHERZADEH  
LOOP VOICE & DATA

**HOW DO YOU RANK STAFF WELFARE?**  
Employees spend most of their time at work, so the office must feel like home – a place you feel safe, happy, healthy, cared for and valued.

**HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED YOUR ENVIRONMENT?**  
The office is clutter free. Work stations are comfortable. Everything is designed to make life easier, safe, fair and fun.

**WHAT NON-STATUTORY EXTRAS DO YOU OFFER?**  
We offer additional holiday entitlement, an extra day off when getting married, extra days after three years of service. Plus, we will soon offer private healthcare.

**HOW DO YOU KEEP STAFF MOTIVATED?**  
Performance based financial bonuses, extra days off, theatre trips, hotel stays, dinner out at iconic places like the Shard, vouchers and social events.

**WHO HAS INSPIRED YOU MOST?**  
Elon Musk. On the edge of bankruptcy he never gave up. He values people, rewards with shares and promotes an environment that is safe, fair and fun.



ESTHER PARK  
NIMANS

**HOW DO YOU RANK STAFF WELFARE?**  
If our people are healthy and happy then they can give their best at work, which means we are able to succeed together.

**HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED YOUR ENVIRONMENT?**  
We hold Investors in People Gold status, which challenges us to continually improve and develop.

**WHAT NON-STATUTORY EXTRAS DO YOU OFFER?**  
Alongside our company pension, death in service benefit, enhanced annual leave and flexible working opportunities, we offer a healthcare cash plan, confidential employee helpline, annual flu vaccinations and discount gym memberships.

**HOW DO YOU KEEP STAFF MOTIVATED?**  
From chocolates on Valentine's Day and treats at Easter to the famous Nimans chocolate log! In addition our Edge award allows employees to nominate one another to win a trip abroad.

**WHO HAS INSPIRED YOU MOST?**  
My sister. She is wise, down to earth and pragmatic and always there to help and support other people.



PAUL BLOXHAM  
SPRINT CONVERGENCE

**HOW DO YOU RANK STAFF WELFARE?**  
Staff welfare is extremely important to us. We firmly believe that a happy employee will be the best ambassador of our brand.

**HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED YOUR ENVIRONMENT?**  
Over the last six months we have developed an internal mentoring system backed by a scheduled external training programme.

**WHAT NON-STATUTORY EXTRAS DO YOU OFFER?**  
We look at each member of the team and tailor the benefit to their own individual needs. It is a privilege we have and hold dear.

**HOW DO YOU KEEP STAFF MOTIVATED?**  
We speak to each member of the team and discuss individual benefits depending on their circumstances including individual training plans.

**WHO HAS INSPIRED YOU MOST?**  
Other than the usual sensational leaders in the world, self-improvement and growth is my biggest motivator and to be an inspirer myself.



RYAN KERSEY  
NSN

**HOW DO YOU RANK STAFF WELFARE?**  
If you look after the welfare of the people, you are looking after the welfare of the company

**HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED YOUR ENVIRONMENT?**  
NSN wants happy/relaxed people in the work place so we always engage with our staff to ensure we are meeting their expectations first and foremost.

**WHAT NON-STATUTORY EXTRAS DO YOU OFFER?**  
At NSN we provide our staff with funds to help towards their own personal goals and treat them as importantly as goals inside the business.

**HOW DO YOU KEEP STAFF MOTIVATED?**  
As NSN has businesses in the UK and South Africa, we offer staff the chance to cross the sea and meet the teams on opposite sides.

**WHO HAS INSPIRED YOU MOST?**  
I would have to opt for my CEO Mark Shraga who from the outset empowered me to be responsible for my successes in my work life.

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# If only UC could flourish a

We've got fantastic UC technology so let's drive the pace of change! If only: Large sections of the industry's sales experts have become centres of entrenchment with no capacity to effectively sell the dream solutions in their hands, argues VanillaIP Sales Director Iain Sinnott.

**T**he comms sector is blessed with UC technology and stands ready to transform British businesses, yet all too often those charged with selling it are in no position to serve the nation, observes Sinnott. He says UC would flourish if liberated from mediocre sales pitches that lack even a modicum of education on its transformative potential. So much so that UC risks going from a beacon of universal connectedness to the domain of a minority few. The crucial point Sinnott makes is that there will be no accelerated adoption unless things change and UC becomes fully understood by all, including customers.

"As a salesman with over 30 years experience I am still staggered by how many of the field sales forces in our industry invest so little time in understanding every element of their product and every possible benefit the customer can derive," stated Sinnott. "Our products are so cool it seems absurd to dumb them down or drop them into some shapeless bundle. Goodness only knows how much margin is wasted in Dutch auctions. With cloud, each feature is a choice, and each well designed solution a contribution to the productivity of UK PLC. We should be proud and excited about doing a great job every time we go to see a client. When they say they just want the lowest



Iain Sinnott

**With cloud, each feature is a choice, and each well designed solution a contribution to the productivity of UK PLC. We should be proud and excited about doing a great job every time we go to see a client**

price we should slap them – metaphorically of course."

For UC to be at the beating heart of UK PLC the priority must be to focus on and deal with the current challenges faced by businesses, noted Sinnott. "The majority

are still wedded to on-premise solutions," he said. "Although some PBX systems have high levels of capability the capex model means progress and development is nobody's priority. So we aim to sell cloud UC as a true cloud service, available

to all, easy to deploy and based on need."

It follows that cloud services should be straightforward to consume, test, and if unsatisfactory summarily rejected. "All inclusive packages are for many users

counter intuitive," added Sinnott. "Low function users should have low costs, high function users need the best technology fit – and as people change so should the solution mix. For partners our main responsibility is to bring as many functional options into the portal as we practically can and let them decide what they bundle into their user packages and what UC means to them."

#### Knowledge sharing

The biggest opportunity for the channel and the element that keeps it vital and relevant to today's market is the sharing of knowledge, believes Sinnott. "Businesses are confused by our industry messages around UC, AI, VR, plus the additional considerations of MiFID II, PCI and GDPR," he added. "They need a supplier that is informed, realistic, supportive and above all flexible and dynamic. If channel partners can listen to customers, educate them on options, advise them based on experience and help design the solution rather than just selecting one they will lead the market and guarantee their future in a high value revenue business."

Failure to do this is an undoubted waste of revenue and business improvement potential, and does not bode well for the success of emerging technologies in the UC space such as AI and VR, which bring their own viability challenges. "AI



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# As intended Considerations as GDPR looms

and VR can be off-putting to sales channels and SMB buyers," observed Sinnott. "AI seems an unlikely ally of a small business but if a reception tool for a chain of hairdressers can identify where the caller was last transferred it makes for an enhanced customer experience. If the data we capture can streamline call management, shorten waiting times or give customers new chat options then AI will be valuable. VR will be slower in the same way that video calling has never truly taken off. Managing the tasks has always taken priority over seeing the people. We all recognise the need to retain

## Who knows how much margin is wasted in Dutch auctions

face-to-face meetings so video and its derivatives will lag other developments."

Technology push is around group working and collaboration, noted Sinnott, but because the SMB sector is 'very busy' it's slow to embrace or drive change unless prompted by solid reasoning. "Businesses need management tools to break their old habits," he added. "So, as well as smart-simple services it is the management portal that gets our focus.

"Smaller businesses are slow to invest in activities they distrust. For us it is all about making the existing products easy to adopt, supporting them with management tools

and ensuring that progress towards the latest UC options can be controlled within the same trusted space. Resellers without such management tools leverage buyer distrust to justify a PBX replacement. We built Uboss to help buyers take advantage of technology without taking risks with productivity."

In trying to woo new customers resellers would do themselves a big favour if they keep prospects sweet with messages on the benefits of services that are already in evident demand, highlighted Sinnott. "In the marketplace we are seeing the adoption of smart mobile services, call recording and conference bridge with feedback that tools like TeamViewer offer a simple way to bring screen sharing into the mix," he said. "As these solutions become commonplace a wider base will be able to examine a move towards a more 'team' focused solution. Work and workplace flexibility must change in order for smart tools to truly deliver value. While this is growing it is still in its infancy."

The SMB sector moves forward in steps rather than strides, and in recent years it has advanced by small degrees into the UC world. As for the future? "We have not moved far to date," stated Sinnott. "How we progress is up to us in the industry. If we keep talking too far into the future but deliver a slightly remodified version of the past then things might not look too different. We need to drive the pace of change through high quality selling, true cloud delivery and automated control at customer, partner and platform levels." ■

**T**he General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) legislation comes into force this month and its effects will be far reaching for the telecoms industry, writes **Peter Ellis, Chief Product Officer at Red Box Recorders.**

The legislation covers all areas of personal data and includes onerous penalties (up to 20 million euros or four per cent of annual turnover of the previous year, whichever is higher) for those who fail to comply. Building on existing data protection laws, the GDPR has been introduced to strengthen data protection for all individuals in the EU, with the emphasis very much on the individual. Under the GDPR, the rights of individuals are strengthened and increased transparency around how their personal information is captured, stored and processed is required.

The role of recording in supporting customers with GDPR compliance cannot be over stated. It also helps customers to get the most out of conversations taking place across their business. Consent for recording individuals must be easy to give, simple to withdraw and explicit for sensitive data.

GDPR doesn't stop you from carrying out the same processing you do today, but it does mean you have to be clear with the people whose personal data you are processing. So define what processing will take place, and make sure that those policies are enforced throughout the business. As long as you meet one



Peter Ellis

of the six criteria specified in the new regulations you can continue to handle the same data as you do today. These criteria include obtaining consent, fulfilling a contract or recording for legal purposes. The ICO website has some useful resources to help businesses understand the regulations.

### Age of consent

Organisations must now obtain explicit consent to process personal data. This is particularly pertinent for call centres that will need to be a lot clearer on how they will be using and processing recorded calls and data. They may be required to demonstrate that they asked for and received consent. Tools such as live annotation enable agents to manually or automatically add notes to recorded communications and tag to confirm that consent has been captured. This metadata can then be tracked, audited and easily reported on. This also means an individual can be identified at the point of capture and if consent is withdrawn these records can be deleted.

If an individual refuses to have the call recorded, this must be respected unless there is a lawful basis for recording. Tools such as call suppression can be used to stop the audio or screen capture. It is also possible to record all calls as default but immediately discard the call in progress if consent is not explicitly given, or opt to record on demand.

The GDPR's 'right to be forgotten' clause means that customers are allowed to request that their data be permanently deleted from all records. The GDPR also empowers data subjects to obtain and transfer their personal data from one data controller to another, safely and securely.

This is highly relevant to organisations capturing communications in terms of their ability to identify customer records and delete or port them if requested to do so. Rich metadata, search and replay capabilities and the availability of highly accurate speech to text transcriptions that can be imported into CRM or BI systems helps with this, as well as the capability to delete records.

The GDPR requirements are broad ranging and we would recommend the engagement of a GDPR expert to look at the processes and procedures across an organisation. While there's no certification available to mark any technology solution as GDPR compliant, having the right tools in place to support GDPR processes and policies is essential. ■

# Charting the UC-scape

Here we consider the driving forces shaping a new geography of the UC landscape, including the rise of certain technologies, changing buying habits and a new focus on up-selling to existing bases.

To say that UC is a hotbed of technological innovation would be to greatly understate its role in bringing emerging technologies to market. One such innovation is AI which is starting to play a key part in UC with personalised market-of-one engagement, giving businesses more context and insight into customer problems before employees even speak with a client. "This technology brings accelerated sales, reduced churn and increased customer value," stated Sharon Maslyn, Vice President of EMEA Sales at 8x8. "We also expect more organisations to adopt AI micro-segmentation in their UC strategies. This allows businesses to address the uniqueness of customers by learning their patterns of behaviour, issues and business goals. Relevant insights about customers makes each interaction intelligent, engaging and provides a faster time to resolution."

Daniel Yin, Senior Product Manager for UK & EMEA at RingCentral, expects AI and VR to significantly influence the UC industry, but in different ways. "AI is already starting to play a serious role in optimising and

streamlining communication systems," he said. "Tools like chatbots will also play a key role in how we interact, providing a bridge between the comms platform and other applications. For example, being able to interact with a CRM system directly from chat tools using natural language rather than having to learn complex commands to interact with a CRM. In the contact centre space we see virtual voice and text agents becoming more commonplace and able to replace even complex agent use cases."

VR has not made the leap into the UC space in any significant way, but the potential for immersive experiences is real. "One of the big challenges with UC is providing a truly collaborative experience," added Yin. "Various vendors have tried with large and immersive telepresence solutions, none of which have truly captured the feel of face-to-face meetings. VR provides an exciting possibility to make these sorts of meetings as close to face-to-face as possible."

According to Alan Mackie, Product Director at Gamma, AI will have a big impact over the long-term future of customer care for a large



Alan Mackie

## The biggest opportunity is for partners to go back to existing customers and up-sell UC features

number of service-based businesses, and integrating with the UC platform that enables the other forms of customer support will be key. "This is not an immediate trend for most businesses but will become more important," he said. "I see VR as a specialist model that would add value to a limited number of organisations."

### Market drivers

The immediate UC driver is integrating features like collaboration and desktop sharing with applications already in use by the customer, such as CRM systems. "The key is ensuring that the UC application is contextualised to integrate with the customer's main

business processes," added Mackie. "So far the take-up of UC services such as desktop collaboration, web and video conferencing by SMBs has been limited. I see the main trend for resellers not being new UC functionality but rather the way that existing functionality is taken to market to show the benefit for all businesses."

"The biggest opportunity is for partners to go back to existing customers, both PBX and hosted, and up-sell UC features that can easily be consumed by a large percentage of clients. This offers partners a way to increase the margin from their existing base and provides an opportunity to

extend customer contract lengths. The main focus for Gamma on UC right now is to provide a set of simple packages with marketing and sales support to enable partners to up-sell services such as enhanced audio, web and video conferencing alongside the Horizon Hosted Voice service."

Another trend noted by Yin is a shift in buying strategy. In the past the majority of buyers focused on telephony solutions, either replacing legacy PBX systems or looking to scale telephony into new offices. "While this is still a common buying pattern we are also seeing interest in UC solutions being driven by other primary interests such as conferencing, web meetings and collaboration which were often previously viewed as add-ons," he said. "They are now becoming the drivers for UC uptake."

According to Maslyn the CIO's focus is shifting as more businesses make the customer experience a top priority. "But, they are being held back from delivering great service by a number of factors such as fragmented systems, information and a lack of customer insight," she added. "This is why we have created a technology that allows businesses to shift their communications towards one platform for all comms, collaboration and engagement between employees and customers. This third wave of enterprise communications enables organisations to weave together voice, video, messaging, meetings and contact centre solutions for enhanced employee and customer engagement. This will be a main component in the evolution of UC." ■

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# Horton's in full flow



**Russell Horton**

THE appointment of ex-Elite Group COO Russell Horton as FluidOne's CEO sees former chief exec Piers Daniell become Chairman. Daniell founded Fluidata in 2004. Horton's previous experience includes leadership roles across the telecoms and IT sectors including senior positions at Daisy and Vodafone.

John Taylor, Director of Investments at Rigby Technology (part of FluidOne parent company Rigby Group), said: "The market opportunities are significant for FluidOne which has now merged cloud and data communications business Fluidata with mobile business One Point. Russell joins with a wealth of experience across the sector in cloud, data, voice and mobile services having aided the growth of Elite over the last three years."

Daniell added: "Russell has worked in a diverse range of organisations from start-ups to small and large businesses, in entrepreneurial and corporate styles, at companies including

Daisy, Isis Telecommunications, Flexphone, IP Integration, Vodafone and Elite Group, as well as running his own consultancy for many years. Russell's strategic leadership, motivation, drive, team focus, innovative approach and sector knowledge really stood out in our selection process for the role."

Commenting on his new appointment, Horton said: "I will be working with Piers and the leadership team to finalise our five year strategy and then announce my vision for the business."

## Also on the move...



**Steve Kent**

**PURDICOM Sales Manager Steve Kent has been promoted to the post of Sales & Marketing Director. He joined the company in 2015 and became Sales Manager in May 2017, a move that catalysed quarterly revenue growth from 4.2 per cent up to 84**

per cent in Q3, delivering overall annual revenue growth of 40 per cent. Q1 this year is up 45 per cent on the same period last year. Purdicom Managing Director Hugh Garrod said: "Steve has brought a fresh hands-on approach to the role. His cohesive brand of leadership has provided indisputable results in a short period of time, setting Purdicom on the fast track to another record breaking year."

**WESTCON-Comstor has recruited Leigh Howard as Sales Director UK&I for its Cisco dedicated Comstor business. He joins from renewals automation firm**



**Leigh Howard**

**Renewtrak where he established the UK and EMEA operation. Prior to that he spent time in Asia Pacific as Managing Director of Westcon Group ANZ and Commercial Director of Exclusive Networks APAC. He was also**

Westcon's UK Sales Director. Howard commented: "I aim to raise the bar higher. We're here to advise, guide and mentor new partners wanting to invest in a Cisco business, and enable existing partners to develop their Cisco capabilities."

# Johnson gets Energy boost



**Caroline Johnson**

FIDELITY Energy's partner support structure has been strengthened by the hire of Caroline Johnson as Marketing Manager. Her move from Microsoft follows a sharp rise in Fidelity Energy's partner numbers and the appointment brings

new marketing and support capabilities to Fidelity Energy's growing partner base.

"Caroline will be working with partners to provide marketing thought leadership and ensure they are maximising the existing relationships within their customer bases," commented Managing Director John Haw.

"Caroline will also be working with several select partners to offer a white label B2B energy switching site, allowing customers to compare their business energy prices online and switch without the need to be called back."

**FORMER Nexus Telecommunications BDM Darren Mitchell has joined Diva Telecom as Senior Account Manager. Diva Managing Director Erica Lewis said: "Darren's experience and product knowledge, as well as his passion in helping businesses succeed, will enhance our customers' experience."**

# TTG swoops on Atkinson



**Michelle Atkinson**

LEEDS-based The Technology Group has appointed Michelle Atkinson to the board as Service Director in charge of new telephone system installations and customer support. Managing Director Jonathan Marsden commented: "Michelle has run large installation, project and service operations over the last 14 years and has experience covering almost every operations function. She will lead the installations and service team and add her insight and expertise to our board of directors."

# Stream banks on Burdett posting

LESS than six months after rejoining Stream Networks as Head of Channel Sales Stuart Burdett has been posted to the role of Sales Director. The promotion follows a period of record sales



**Stuart Burdett**

that put the company on track for its best annual performance to date. Burdett has 15 years industry experience including stints at national carriers in business development roles and heading up data services for large distributors.

Stream Networks CEO Matt Shanahan commented: "Stuart has brought a real energy and focus since rejoining the company. This appointment will be a key milestone in the future growth and success of Stream Networks."

Burdett added: "I aim to establish Stream Networks as a key player within the industry and I have every faith in achieving this."



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