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Click to open Riley takes helm as Muller vacates

DAISY CEO Neil Muller's exit sees Chairman Matt Riley (pictured) revert to a hands-on leadership role and signals a planned refinancing of Group debt.

SPECIAL REPORT

In February Daisy outlined big plans to double in size within five years by taking advantage of a potential 'wave of consolidation' in the industry as it sought a circa £1bn sale to private equity or a trade buyer.

But Muller's shock exit last month signalled the likely curtailment of Daisy's intention to sell, observed Megabyte Principal Analyst Philip Carse.

"Daisy's planned refinancing of its debt scheduled for the

autumn suggests that the sale process has ended with significant implications for UK telecoms M&A," said Carse.

"Riley has decided to step back into the breach, aided by potential significant annual cost savings from a refinancing off the back of a stronger business now than compared with the take private consummated just over three years ago."

Daisy also posted its financial results for the year to March 2018, reporting revenue and EBITDA of £684m and £127m

with guidance for next year of over £700m and £140m.

Last month Daisy also acquired Voice Mobile and DV02, adding around £15m revenues and £2.2m EBITDA.

Muller, the former Computa-center UK MD, joined Daisy in December 2014 in a move that saw Riley become Chairman.

As we went to press news broke of a collapse in Daisy's planned £175m acquisition of TalkTalk Business's direct client base, which was due to complete later this month.

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

WHAT do emojis, tabloid journalism and industry acronyms have in common? You may have read that we are apparently entering a post-writing world in which emojis are rising to dominance as modern day hieroglyphics, creating a visual, universal language. It is perhaps ironic that this reversion to

the dark ages of pictorial characters has been brought about by huge strides in communication technology.

So what does this mean? Emojis as hieroglyphics aim to convey a sentiment or meaning without the laborious task of having to string a few words together, which in our fast-paced time-poor world saves inordinate numbers of hours. That said, comic-like emojis are an unlikely nod to a practice that I applaud in writers who take the shortest distance between two points – in other words, they use as few words and syllables as plainly possible to convey meaning, creating near transparency between signifier and signified. The best examples equate to a reading age of six, which makes The Sun one of the best written newspapers.

Toddlers understand pictures before words, and tabloid journalism is within reach of those not long walking, so the intellectual demand is not challenging – which doesn't say a lot about today's emoji junkies (nor the writers of many press releases I receive which would be better offered in picture format as they would make more sense that way).

Carried out with flair, creativity and discipline, good word usage literally encapsulates speed of communication, it is the superfast fibre in non-verbal contact. Furthermore, the outbreak of emojis mirrors the spread of acronyms in our industry. They are also one dimensional and used with little thought. And acronyms ultimately lack detail and are confusing – hardly poetry. May the number of people who write with plain words, clarity, skill and creativity multiply – and hopefully the demise of flat emojis and the 'post-writing world' will be written on the wall.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Time to arm the soldiers

WITH the right support sub-£3m revenue resellers represent a significant engine of growth but according to Adam Cathcart, 9's Director of Partners, this group are a 'forgotten army' in the channel.

Speaking to delegates at this year's Margin in Voice & Data (MiVaD) event staged at the Forest of Arden Hotel on 14th June he stated: "The sub-£3m turnover reseller segment is overlooked by many service providers, yet it's where they can add the most value. Resellers need full support to be free to perform."

Poor selling techniques are also a potential inhibitor of growth, according to keynoter Iain Sinnott, Head of Sales at VanillaIP, who said: "It's critical to deploy a sales methodology to create value. Look at your teams: How much time do they spend studying and researching to develop their sales skills?"

Fellow keynoter Paul Taylor, Sales & Marketing Director at Voiceflex, pointed out that traditional sales methods still stand up but to clinch the deal useful applications must become the order of the day.

"You need deal winners such as fraud control and WebRTC



Adam Cathcart

applications like click-to-call, and apps for the statistical analysis of call data to move you towards the goal line," he said. Full event report on page 38

NEWS ROUNDUP

MAINTEL has acquired a base of UK clients from Atos for £5.1m as the French tech firm and owner of Unify seeks to drive growth via partners and large customer accounts. On completion of the deal – which is expected to be accretive in the first full year of ownership – Maintel will become a channel partner of Atos.

TALKTALK and Daisy have kiboshed the planned sale of TalkTalk's direct B2B business. TalkTalk will continue to manage all direct B2B business and FY19 EBITDA guidance remains at the originally stated 15% year-on-year growth (FY18 £233m). Daisy remains a strategic partner for TalkTalk.

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Beta acquires AV specialism



Jamie Blakemore

BETA Distribution is springboarding resellers into the digital signage market following its acquisition of ContentWall and subsequent launch of an AV services division headed up by ContentWall founder Jamie Blakemore, who set the firm up in 2015.

“We can all see the ever increasing presence of digital signage,” stated Blakemore.

“It’s a no brainer for resellers, offering more flexibility and impact compared to traditional forms of media.”

The argument advanced by Blakemore is that all organi-

sations require new ways to engage more closely with their target audience.

“Traditional forms of static advertising such as posters and banners don’t provide the level of interactivity demanded in today’s digital age,” he added.

“The challenge for resellers is to understand how to interest clients in a move to digital signage, and then present a complete solution with design, product selection, installation and post-sales support.”

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



NIMANS' Manchester HQ has been named Julian Niman House as a tribute to its former Chairman who died early this year. Julian helped to build Nimans into a £125m turnover business and passed away at his Manchester home on January 12th aged 64. His wife Sue commented: “When Julian first started this company from a small office it was beyond his wildest dreams that it would ever have grown into this size. But it’s more than just a building, it’s the people that are in it and their lives that make it so special. Julian cared about everyone.” Pictured: Directors Richard Carter, David Bennett and Andy Roberts with Sue Niman.

NEWS ROUNDUP

A SEARCH to replace BT CEO Gavin Patterson is under way following news that he is to step down later this year. The decision came after a share holder backlash on the company’s latest results and plans to cut 13,000 jobs. Patterson will continue to lead the business during the transition phase.

BASINGSTOKE-based Southern Communications is to target more acquisitions following an increase in existing debt facilities from a syndicate led by Santander Corporate & Commercial, alongside HSBC and Aviva Investors. The company has completed 13 acquisitions since 2013 after it first secured a Santander Growth Capital loan.

BRITISH tech firms pulled in almost three times more venture capital investment than any other European country over the past two years, according to figures from the London Mayor’s agency London & Partners, which found that London’s tech firms account for over 80% of all venture capital money invested into the UK since the EU referendum vote.

A GIGABIT full fibre network roll out in Portsmouth by Giganet (the connectivity brand name of Hampshire-based M12 Solutions) in partnership with CityFibre is set to provide connectivity to circa 1,500 businesses along the existing fibre route, ahead of further expansion.

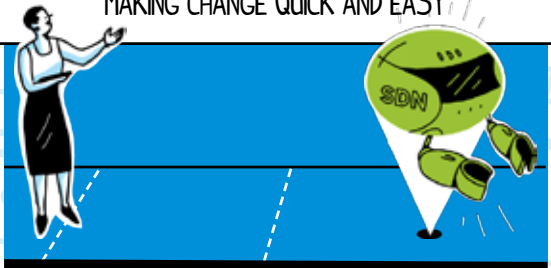
SWCOMMS is offering leased line connectivity via Virtual1 to the south west and other regions. Brian Lodge, MD, said: “Leased lines are the way forward in a world where most communications tools and business systems will be hosted in a cloud environment. Businesses need reliable uptime and superior speeds to optimise their productivity and ultimately their profitability.”



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COMMENT: COUNTDOWN TO 5G



Richard Carter

THE 5G countdown has begun with just 18 months to go before the scheduled switch-on and the dawning of another bold new era in mobile communications. With the first tests already under way could a new mobile revolution be just around the corner? More importantly, what will be the biggest business and personal benefits?

Many of us will remember

the leap from 2G to 3G and then onto the current 4G spectrum. The increase in speed was certainly noticeable. While the majority of users will expect 5G to be even faster perhaps one of the biggest benefits will be the emergence of true mobile working based on a much better battery life, combined with no latency of data.

Unlike 4G where your phone constantly searches for a signal, 5G locks onto your device to dramatically improve battery life. 5G will further accelerate the growth of IoT and associated technologies such as connected cars through its extra network capabilities.

EE recently announced that east London will be one of the first places in the UK to get a trial of 5G in October, which isn't too far away. The trial will see 5G switched on at 10 sites to demonstrate how it can provide the highest speed mobile data connections, even in the most densely populated urban spaces.

Longer term, EE says it foresees 5G delivering more reliable Internet connections and enabling greater take-up of tech like virtual reality and augmented reality in apps and services. Let's hope 5G is the five star network that takes technology to new heights of reliability and performance to benefit all aspects of our working and personal lives.

Richard Carter, Channel Sales Director, Nimans

• Comms People: This month's movers and shakers (p52).

CVC sells IoT gong winner



Wireless Logic wins at the 2015 CN Awards

CVC Capital Partners has sold Hurley-based Wireless Logic Group to Montagu Private Equity. The financial details of the deal were not disclosed.

CVC acquired Wireless Logic in February 2015 from ECI Partners. The sale marks CVC's first exit from its technology growth fund.

ECI backed the founders of Wireless Logic to buy back the business from Phones International Group in 2011, owned by Dragons' Den star and serial entrepreneur Peter Jones CBE for £35m.

Berkshire company Wireless Logic was established in 2000 and provides IoT and M2M platform managed services in Europe. It has over 2,500 customers and more than 3.1 million subscriptions.

Wireless Logic also has offices in Denmark, France, Germany and Spain.

The firm's co-founder and CEO Oliver Tucker (*pictured left*) commented: "Under the CVC Growth Fund we have continued our double digit organic growth complemented by four acquisitions in the UK, Germany and Denmark, with each introducing new technologies and skill sets."

Montagu Private Equity Director Ed Shuckburgh commented: "Montagu intends to work with the management team to continue to drive growth, leveraging Montagu's experience, network and resources to strengthen the business."

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

NEWS ROUNDUP

A UCAAS platform released by Node4 is built on a shared architecture that enables SMEs with as few as 30 seats to access enterprise collaboration tools from Cisco. "Channel partners can offer customers a dedicated platform and a multi-tenant one, allowing much smaller organisations to affordably access enterprise collaboration tools," said Collaboration Product Manager Mark Phelps. "We want to help SMBs be part of the 'future of work' revolution."

CONNECTUS Group has acquired Doncaster-based Eximus Solutions for an undisclosed sum. Connectus has also invested a further £100k into network hosting improvements, refurbishments and new office space in and around Doncaster Business Park, bringing the total investment in these areas to £250k.

IN RESPONSE to security and surveillance equipment increasingly becoming the responsibility of network managers Ingram Micro has established a Physical Security division and added Axis Communications' surveillance range, Galaxy's CCTV cameras and recorders and Assa Abloy's door access controls.



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COMMENT: STRATEGIC TALK



Richard Thompson

BIG changes are coming to the Wholesale Line Rental market. 2025 might seem like it's far away but now is the time to stop and ask yourself, 'is my business prepared?'. The WLR switch off (including PSTN and ISDN) affects the heartland of our partners and on the 15th May Openreach released its WLR Closure Consultation. So it is imperative that resellers start thinking

about how they will transition to next generation voice services sooner rather than later.

Open conversations with our own partners tell us that they are nervous about the migration path as it is currently unclear. This three step approach will help you start to have those important conversations with your customers: Engage with your customers to understand what their thoughts are on the consultation; talk to them about their roadmap for migration in terms of timings and practicalities etc; and education is key – customers need to know what options are available to them to make the right choice.

Once you have this information you can then work together to put in place a suitable solution for both you and your customers. The main thing to note is that you're not alone. Everyone will be going through this between now and 2025, but just because you've got that time it doesn't mean that you should wait for seven years to decide what is right for you and how you're going to do it.

In my opinion, it's important to partner with someone who is already thinking about this, so you feel confident that you aren't going to be left behind.

Richard Thompson, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

• The grandest mission of any channel service provider is to facilitate the growth ambitions of all partners, including the smallest, according to speakers at this year's MiVaD symposium (p38).

Arrow snaps up next buy



Chris Russell

ARROW Business Communications' influence in the legal sector and east midlands region has been strengthened by the acquisition of 360 Solutions, its second buy of the year.

360 Solutions' legal sector expertise reflects Arrow's specialisms and product portfolio and also delivers strong capabilities in other markets including online retail, property development and recruitment.

Arrow confirmed that all 360 Solutions staff and directors will remain in place.

360 Solutions has over 400 customers and offers Unified Communications, Skype for Business, PCI compliant call recording and IT networking and mobility solutions.

Arrow CEO Chris Russell said: "This is our largest acquisition to date and will significantly enhance Arrow's legal sector focus."

"The 360 Solutions team will help to broaden our product portfolio, particular around our Skype for Business and PCI compliant solutions, and enhance our Mitel capabilities and the technical skill set of the Arrow Group."

Oliver Marsden, founder and main shareholder of 360 Solutions, said: "Having started 360 Solutions with my brother Sam 15 years ago, it was time to join a larger group that shares the same values and approach."

Arrow has eight offices, annual sales of over £40m and 200 staff.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

VAPOUR Cloud has become the sixth organisation in the UK to achieve approved Avaya Cloud Solutions partner status through BT Wholesale. Vapour's CEO Tim Mercer said: "Many organisations are starting to realise that on-premise telephony systems are holding them back, so they're beginning to explore the world that we have operated in for the last five years." See page 32

TALKTALK Business has restructured its partner support operations and increased its sales team by 25%, enabling partner managers to spend more time on developing and supporting fewer partner relationships. The company has also introduced a two-tier account model for larger partners who have permanent access to an Account Director or a dedicated member of the service helpdesk.

ITALY headquartered PBX vendor Wildix has added Romsey-based reseller Elementel to its growing stable of UK channel partners. Elementel Sales Director Martin Jupp noted that Wildix's WebRTC system was especially attractive to the business, along with enhanced conferencing and voicemail transcription features.

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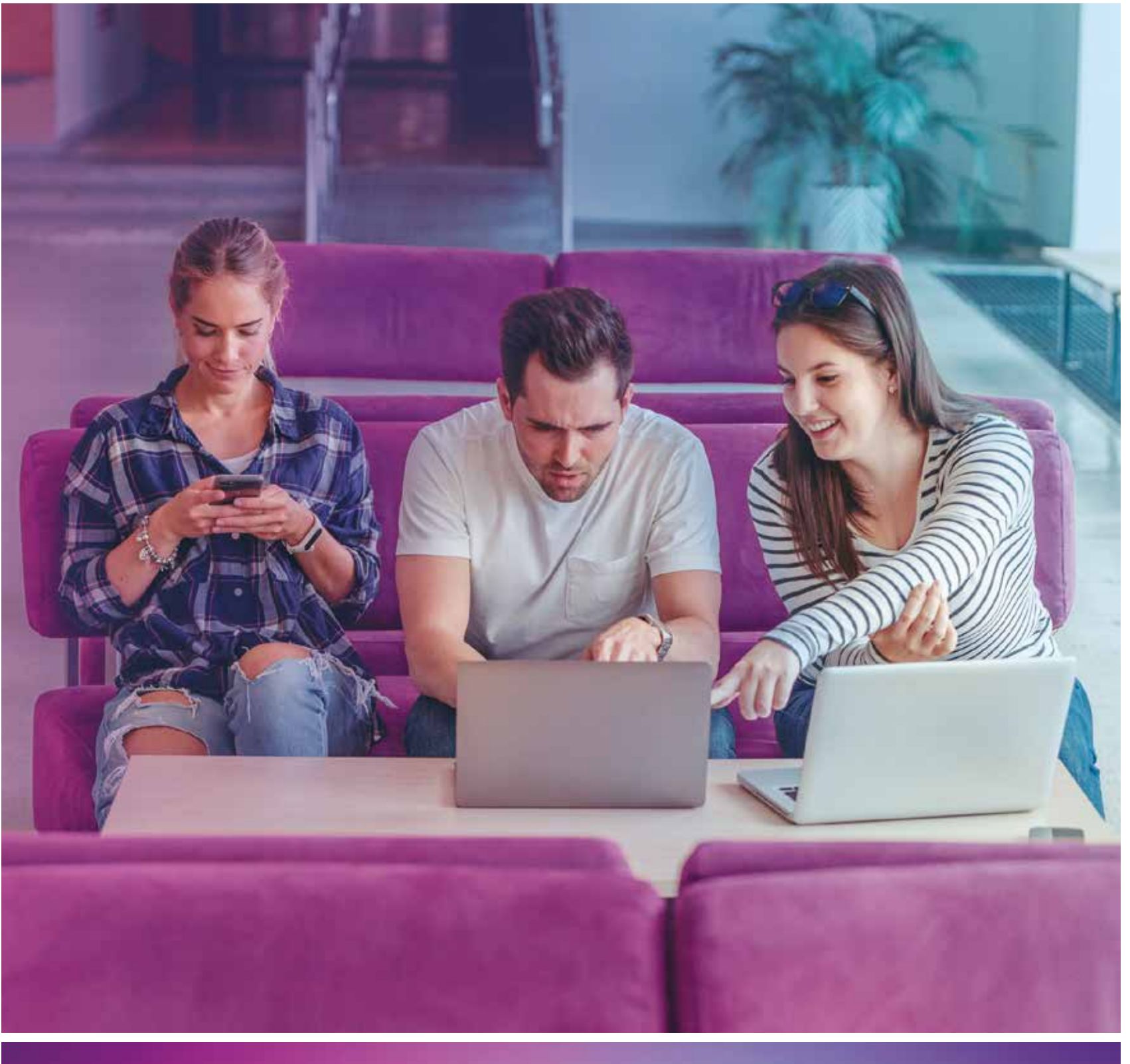
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COMMENT: BILL CAP DILEMMA



Itret Latif

THE Digital Economy Bill 2016-17 received its Royal Assent at the end of April 2017. The DCMS website stated, 'The Act includes provisions which will help protect consumers from bill shock by requiring mobile network operators to offer a bill capping facility'. It seems that the Government consultation process and

implementation plans had not considered the full impact of bill capping beyond the MNOs. This legislation also affects the service providers who take services from MNOs directly or indirectly through wholesale aggregators, as well as their third party billing solution providers.

These market participants are reliant on MNOs being able to provide real-time usage data so that it can be utilised throughout the supply chain for bill capping to be effective. A lack of understanding on this by the regulatory bodies has created concern for mobile service providers who do not own their own mobile networks or provide services to the consumer market.

Many significant mobile service aggregators and MVNO wholesalers are still waiting for MNOs to provide their solutions and are struggling to offer their customers and billing software providers solutions any earlier than early Autumn 2018. Clearly, this is not enough time for all the market participants in the supply chain to build a workable response to comply with this legislation requirement by 1st October 2018.

Regrettably, when this implementation issue was brought to the attention of Ofcom its response was to point to DCMS. The market participants understand and support the legislation and therefore are looking to DCMS for recognition of the issues and the different circumstances surrounding the B2B suppliers which will need longer to implement and, perhaps, a lighter regulatory touch going forwards.

Itret Latif, FCS Interim CEO and Deputy Chairman

Pure ups the stakes with London move

LEEDS-based Pure Technology Group has secured a London foothold in response to rising interest in its propositions from organisations in the south of England region.

The £28m turnover business is targeting £40m revenues and expects its new office to facilitate additional channel partnerships and collaborations.

Pure Technology Group COO Cliff Fox commented: "With 50% of our customer base made up of national and international brands the London presence will allow us to be physically closer to some of our customers, as well as the prospective organisations we're currently in talks with.

"There are some game changing innovators in the south too, so as we look to expand our product and service offering it's important that we're closer to potential partners."

Staff numbers at the London base will be doubled from three to six taking Pure Technology Group's headcount to over 100.

The company also brought in a new IT security testing service which includes simulated attacks that enable customers to independently evaluate security in a controlled environment.



Pure Technology Group staff hail growth strategy

Pure Technology Group's intentions in the VR space are also clear as organisations seek new ways to leverage wearables, particularly relating to assisted reality in the education and training sectors, noted Fox.

He indicated that IoT will be 'the most exciting addition' to the firm's portfolio over the coming years.

"We will devise bespoke data-driven solutions to meet business challenges that will include AI, machine learning and even simple process improvements," he commented.

"For some customers innovation is a simple shift into the cloud or the streamlining of their operations, for others innovation is far more advanced.

"They're using tech to turn 24 hour jobs into 60 second tasks. They're saving lives, creating jobs and changing the scope of what's possible with tech-based solutions that sound like they could only belong in science fiction. It's our job to help make that happen."

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NFON boosts UK campaign



Myles Leach

CASH from NFON's flotation on the Frankfurt Stock Exchange will be used to grow the cloud telephony business's channel across the UK according to UK MD Myles Leach.

He is confident he will secure a significant proportion of the new funds to help UK resellers embrace cloud telephony opportunities across all sectors.

"We have grown over the last five years and the UK is the second largest market for us outside of our core market in Germany," commented Leach.

"The IPO means that we will be able to invest more in our channel partners with market-

ing, incentives, promotions and brand development."

NFON has three UK distribution partners – Chess, Westcoast and Scansource – with the latter planning a relaunch of the company's product offerings to the channel alongside end point manufacturer Polycom.

NFON also has 100-plus reseller partners and Leach stressed that helping IT resellers to supply cloud-based voice solutions will be a key strategy going forward.

"There must be many IT resellers thinking about voice for two years or so but have not done anything," added Leach.

Hi-tech contacts

ORGANISATIONS that judge their online customer experience to be 'exceptional' could be overstating the success of their client engagements, according to a study by Mitel which found that most respondents don't think that a 'perfect online buying experience' is achievable using current technology.

But the growing use of cloud comms and apps, combined with technologies like the IoT, AI, chatbots and natural language processing (NLP) are creating new ways for companies to build customer relationships.

"As the physical and digital worlds begin to seamlessly intersect, how effectively a company serves its customers across both domains determines tomorrow's winners and losers," stated Jon Brinton, SVP of Customer Experience Solutions.

"By supplementing existing applications and investments with technologies such as AI, team collaboration and IoT, companies can better communicate and collaborate internally and externally and proactively deliver the level of customer experience buyers expect."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

GLOBAL IT players including Google, Apple, Microsoft, Intel, Facebook, Twitter and Salesforce are racing to invest in AI start-ups and scale-ups, according to Hamleton Partners' latest M&A Market Report. It says that the three key AI sub-sectors – machine data analysis, natural language processing and machine vision – have all shown impressive growth rates over the past 24 months, but it is the machine data analysis category that is attracting most buyers with 49% of all deals.

US TECH company Diversified has secured a UK foothold with the acquisition of AV and meeting room specialist Digitavia, the first phase of its EMEA expansion bid. Diversified CEO Fred D'Alessandro (pictured) said: "In today's global economy overseas expansion is a



necessary step in continuing our strategic plan and success. Having

partnered with the Digitavia team on multiple projects in the past, the decision to combine our companies and bring them into the Diversified family was a natural fit."

Mid-market security gap



Steve Nice

PLUGGING the mid-market security skills gap is a channel opportunity not to be missed, according to Node4's Mid-Market IT Priorities 2018 report published last month.

The research found that 28% of firms expect a cyber attack in 2018, with 23% of IT decision makers concerned they may not even be aware of data breaches.

"The threat landscape is constantly evolving with the prevalence of increasingly sophisticated threat vectors such as AI-powered attacks, sandbox-evading malware and state sponsored attacks," said Steve Nice, Chief Technologist, Node4.

"Mid-market organisations must ensure that basic security measures are being implemented. But security is the big-

gest skills gap that exists in the mid-market, which makes tackling the problem a serious drain on manpower and financial resources.

"The consequences of inadequate threat management and lack of visibility into the network could have far-reaching implications for mid-sized businesses, especially now GDPR is in effect.

"As threat vectors and hacker tactics constantly evolve, protecting a business is becoming an increasingly difficult challenge, but a fully managed service that continuously monitors every type of threat can take that headache away."

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

Marston's set for Cisco push

STRATEGIC partners Marston's Telecoms and Cisco showcased their joint channel strategy and roadmap to delegates at Innovation Enterprise, their first channel event staged at Manchester's Mi-Idea Innovations Centre.

The strengthening partnership between Marston's Telecoms and Cisco is gaining in significance and first came to light when the comms provider expanded its hosted voice solution with Cisco's HV1 handsets last September.

Two months later Marston's linked-up with Cisco distributor Westcon Comstor and onboarded the Comstor Mentor Program, enabling the business to ramp up its Cisco ambitions.

The move built on the Cisco Select certification held by Marston's and signalled a sharper focus on technologies such as Cisco Unified Communications & Collaboration and Cisco Meraki. "Cisco's product and distribution support emphasises a tech edge to the company that was always there but not so visible," stated Marston's Telecoms MD Mike McMinn.

"Together we hosted an intimate event that showcased the benefits of our collaboration to partners and customers."

The partnership also builds on the infrastructure and connectivity investments made by Marston's that enable it to offer enterprise grade cloud solutions to partners.



Mike McMinn

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NEWS ROUNDUP

THE future role of ICT distributors in EMEA is assured according to Global Technology Distribution Council (GTDC) CEO Tim Curran who says a growing number of vendors are opting for distribution rather than direct sales strategies. He also noted that the shift to cloud is no longer a threat to the distribution sector but a market rich in potential. "Cloud was seen as threat to distribution, but it is now a major opportunity," stated Curran. He delivered these messages to 190 attendees at the annual EMEA GTDC summit in Amsterdam on June 14th.

SWCOMMS has added a managed network service to its portfolio which, says ICT Director John Holdstock, removes complexity, reduces costs and frees IT staff from administrative burdens. "When it comes to a data network performance issues can lead to expensive downtime, customer complaints and reduced staff productivity," he said "Proactively managed networks make all the difference, but this can be time consuming and costly for in-house IT teams."

THE hosted aBILLity billing solution from Union Street Technologies has been adopted by contact centre company Sabio. Union Street's engineers have configured aBILLity to automate the process of collecting and importing call data records from Sabio's wholesale suppliers. Ben Le Feuvre, Head of Network Services at Sabio, said: "Sabio is experiencing fast-track growth within the UK and, following acquisitions, within Europe also. We needed a billing solution supplier that could keep pace with us and provide a billing platform with functionality for rating internationally originated traffic."

Distie move for Chargifi



Dan Bladen

WIRELESS charging provider Chargifi has strengthened its UK presence and gained access to the infrastructure it requires to grow within enterprise markets following a distribution deal with Westcoast.

Chargifi has built and patented an IoT platform designed for the control and enterprise management of wireless power infrastructure. Its technology is deployed in 21 countries by over 90 organisations.

The wireless charging market is forecast to be worth \$25bn by 2023.

"The appetite for wireless power is increasing and as consumer expectation grows businesses must adapt to keep up," commented Chargifi CEO Dan Bladen. "Westcoast's reach will help us to scale and build out the Chargifi platform.

"Chargifi is doing for power what Wi-Fi did for connectivity – cutting the final cord and removing the final barrier to true mobility, helping people get power when and where they need it."

Westcoast MD Alex Tatham stated: "Wireless charging of devices is becoming widespread, but that's not half the story. Chargifi's link with wireless networking technology, including Aruba, allows network managers to locate a user by their

device and transmit relevant and authorised messages to the device using Chargifi's cloud-based managed service tools.

"It may be just beginning, but this market is going to accelerate exponentially. Sooner or later we will all be asking why there isn't a wireless charging point in every meeting room, café, shop, stadium and public venue in the country."

Chargifi is backed by tech investors including Intel Capital, HPE, Techstars, Accelerated Digital Ventures, R/GA Ventures and Firstminute Capital.

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Reshuffle as Davies finds exit

COMMS-CARE MD and co-founder Ben Davies has left the business along with Technical Director Darren Brisco and Chairman Peter Lloyd.

The three-way departure had been planned once Comms-care's acquisition by Ingram Micro reached completion.

Former Operations Director Mark Forster steps in as MD working alongside Commercial Director Rob Darby, Professional Services Director Simon Day and FD Steve Holah.

Forster commented: "The IT marketplace is as exciting and dynamic as ever and I'm looking forward to the challenge of shaping the future of Comms-care and its service portfolio."

Comms-care will continue to operate as a separate entity under its own brand.



Mark Forster



A 90% INCREASE in profits last year compared to 2016 helped to secure midlands-based telecoms and IT services provider Network Telecom 35th place in this year's Sunday Times BDO Profit Track 100. MD and founder Paul Maxfield collected the award at The Savoy London with two of his longest serving members of staff. The Sunday Times BDO Profit Track 100 ranks Britain's 100 private companies with the fastest growing profits over three years. "After a record year of growth we're proud to have been recognised nationally among such a high performing and ambitious group of businesses," said Maxfield. Pictured: Colleen Taylor, Director of Billing and Retention; Richard Clarke, Director of R&D; and Paul Maxfield.

NEWS ROUNDUP

CITYFIBRE has linked up with West Sussex County Council to provide gigabit connectivity to nine urban areas within the council's jurisdiction. This is the first project funded under the UK Government's Local Full Fibre Networks initiative (LFFN) stimulus programme. The framework agreement is for four years over a 30 year IRU (Indefeasible Rights of Use), with a total value of £52.7m. CityFibre will construct new future-proof full fibre networks to 152 council sites in Bognor Regis, Burgess Hill, Chichester, Crawley, Haywards Heath, Horsham, Littlehampton, Shoreham and Worthing.

THE latest Avaya IP Office release, available globally, includes cloud UC with voice and video, meetings, team collaboration and content sharing, and adds support for Avaya Equinox alongside other new capabilities. Chris McGugan, SVP, Solutions and Technologies, Avaya, said: "By providing a single app to access all the tools they need to communicate and collaborate, we're enabling teams to work smarter, not harder." For European customers the solution nearly doubles scalability for DECT users.

PROVIDER of SaaS-based privacy solutions TrustArc has predicted a post-GDPR era of growing demand for its portfolio and has expanded its partner programme accordingly. The company says its platform is designed to support virtually every privacy use case and includes solutions to manage data mapping, risk assessments, website tracker scanning and consent management. VP EMEA Channel Sales Philippe Ortodoro said: "GDPR is a significant and ongoing commitment, and organisations are aware that they must now find more sustainable and efficient ways to meet that commitment."



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NEWS ROUNDUP

ZEST4'S licensing of Arkessa's Emport IoT platform enables it to operate as an IoT MVNO and target UC channel businesses. The Emport platform manages the whole estate of SIMS irrespective of mobile network operator, and track SIM usage individually, by sub estates, or in entirety. The platform also monitors data alerts, caps and SIM data allowance usage, produces data usage reports and organises estates through tags and categories. See page 40

PEACH Technologies has linked up with Pragma to take the Ericsson-LG iPECS on-premise and cloud proposition to market as a core component of its portfolio. Pragma operates a targeted partnering strategy to selectively on-board high growth resellers with the Ericsson-LG product set.

CLOUD workforce solution provider CloudFactory has opened a new global HQ in Reading. The US-based company was founded in 2010 and has so far raised \$13m in funding. CEO Mark Sears said: "Locating our headquarters in the UK provides a strategic global anchor to support clients internationally."

MLL Telecom and CityFibre are rolling out FibreConnect to businesses in Stirling, Scotland. CityFibre has already installed 24km of network which now connects most of Stirling city's public sector estate.

VODAFONE UK is to conduct 5G trials in seven cities with roll outs starting between October and December this year. Its engineers are laying the groundwork for 5G at more than 40 sites in Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow, Liverpool, London and Manchester. Vodafone anticipates the commercial launch of full 5G early in 2020.

FCS sets industry standard



Brionaidh Siegel

HIGHNET and NFON are confirmed as the first recipients of the new FCS Mark of Excellence for Regulatory Compliance.

FCS interim Chief Executive Itret Latif stated: "Attaining the Standard demonstrates to the marketplace a provider's compliance, not only in their key documentation but with all relevant industry rules and regulations, including the General Conditions of Entitlement.

"The Mark is only awarded by the FCS once all documentation has been independently audited to show that full compliance has been achieved."

NFON UK MD Myles Leach commented: "The process was valuable as we were able to thoroughly check that all areas of the business comply with the current industry regulations, which gives partners and customers the necessary assurance that our processes and procedures are stringent."

HighNet's Service Delivery Manager Brionaidh Siegel warned: "Customers who choose non-compliant suppliers risk getting tied up in long contracts with no proper fault handling procedures in place."

FCS members who have undertaken Regulatory Compliance training with its official telecoms training partner Hants-based Train to Win.tv are able to proceed towards attaining the Mark of Excellence award following a review.

Ribbon to tie up key acquisition

THE acquisition of Edgewater Networks by Ribbon Communications creates a new force in the Session Border Controllers (SBCs) and Network Edge Orchestration market.

"With the ability to serve the core to the edge of the network, Ribbon will be equipped to provide an end-to-end connection to the enterprise and deliver service assurance, security and monitoring capabilities," stated Fritz Hobbs, President and CEO of Ribbon Communications.

On completion of the acquisition Ribbon's Kandy UCaaS platform will provide analytics and service assurance capabilities across the enterprise network edge; while its Microsoft Skype for Business and Teams propositions will be expanded by Edgewater Networks technology, said the firm.

Diane Myers, Senior Research Director for IHS Markit, commented: "This is a high synergy, low overlap combination that gives Ribbon a broad product line for customers of all sizes, offered and distributed through multiple channels."

Hobbs added: "This transaction demonstrates how we are delivering on our objectives and extending our market reach."



Julie Mills

Julie Mills, MD of Train to Win, commented: "NFON and HighNet have gone through a rigorous audit and addressed grey areas to gain the FCS Mark of Excellence."

DTC clarifies digital vision

FUJITSU'S mission to help customers and partners turn their digital vision into actionable strategy has taken a significant step forward with the opening of a second European Digital Transformation Centre (DTC) in London.

The moves follows a similar launch in Munich and was prompted by Fujitsu's research that says more than 90% of organisations have a clear digital strategy but many struggle with its delivery.

The initiative forms part of the company's Co-creating Programme which promotes via workshops a social and collaborative approach to accelerating the design process for digital transformation solutions.

"Across the UK organisations face a multitude of socio-economic and technological changes, and over the last few years we've witnessed businesses in every industry grapple with what a digital future might mean for them," stated Rupal Karia, Fujitsu Head of UK&I, Public and Private Sectors.



Rupal Karia

"With digital transformation challenging all sectors, the Co-creating Programme encourages organisations to identify the opportunities to be a disruptor rather than be disrupted."

In March this year Fujitsu opened its International Blockchain Innovation Centre in Brussels to facilitate research into driving forward the development of Blockchain and other distributed ledger technologies.

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Daisy swoops on two targets in same week

DAISY bagged two acquisition targets in a week last month – wholesale partners Portsmouth-based reseller DV02 and midlands firm Voice Mobile. The financials were not disclosed.

With Voice Mobile, Daisy Group has established an EE Centre of Excellence based in Birmingham. Voice Mobile has operated as a Daisy Distribution partner for more than 14 years. It will retain its sales and operations teams which form the core of Daisy's new EE hub.

Dave McGinn, MD of Daisy SMB Services and Distribution, stated: "These are examples of how an indirect partner business

can develop and thrive, all the time having a shared interest with us, culminating in Daisy ultimately acquiring them.

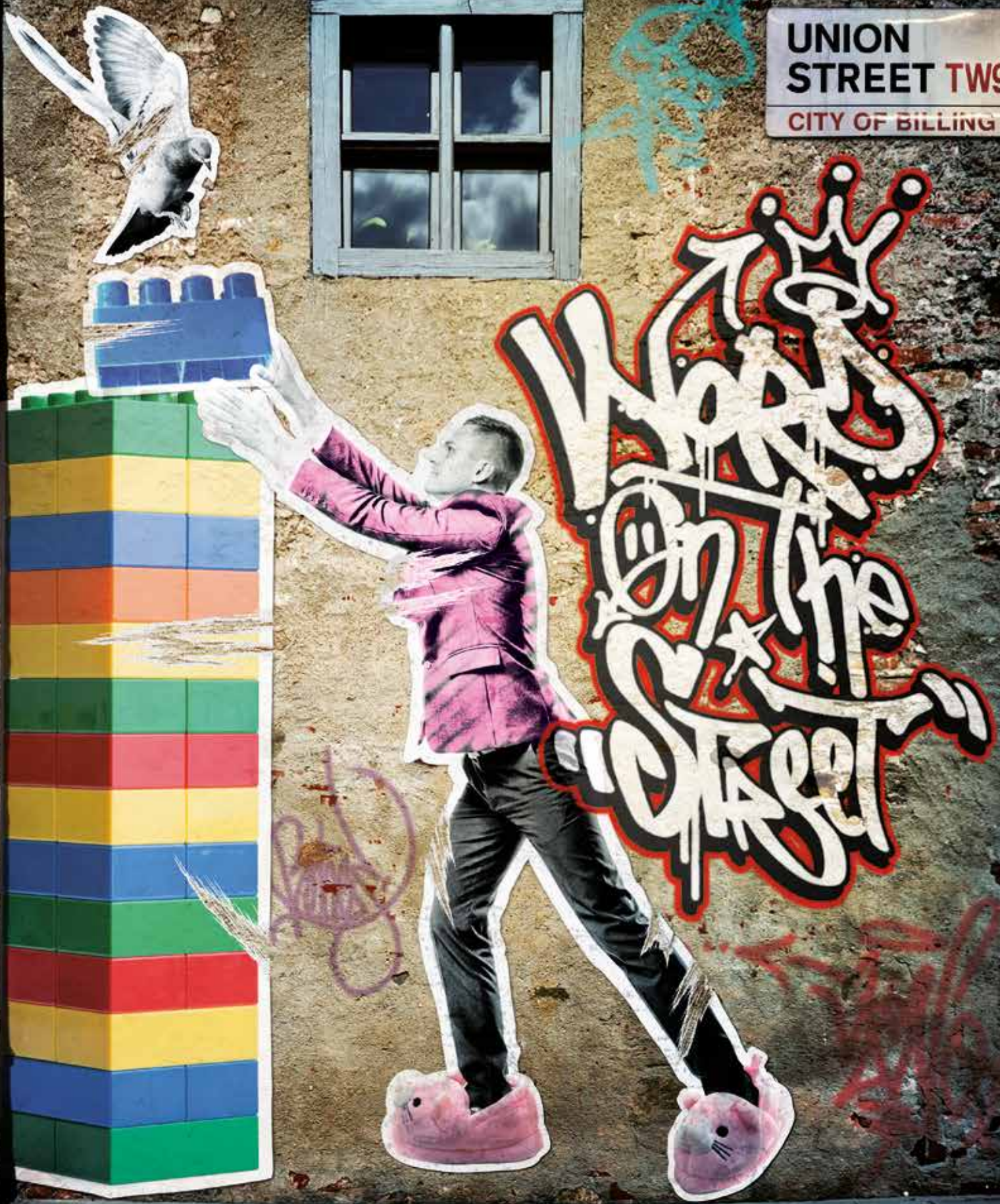
"Our strategy remains acquisitive, and this is a blueprint for other partners who may pursue their own exit strategy."

Voice Mobile MD Ian Watson commented: "With Daisy at the helm there is a brighter future ahead while I explore new avenues and ventures."

Former DV02 owner Vince Potter added: "When the time came to look at our future plans Daisy was the obvious partner."

DVO2's sales and operations teams are to be retained.

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Glide spreads its wings

With its long-term strategic roadmap and rebrand now cemented, Glide Business (formerly WarwickNet) has the backing and scope to expand its partner base as a national supplier of alternative connectivity services, according to James Warner, Director of Sales, Marketing and Product.

As pure fibre infrastructure providers extend their tentacles across the land, the channel opportunities get more interesting, and the impressive growth figures generated by full fibre pioneers demand our attention. During the past 12 months Glide Business witnessed a £2.5 million rise in revenues from £4 million to £6.5 million. It registered a doubling of the customer base and an uplift in staff numbers from 20 to 50. The coming year is more ambitious with plans to double the current turnover, introduce more heads and rev up the partner model as a primary engine of growth.

“Our biggest opportunity is the channel and working with a core set of partners to leverage the fibre footprint we are building,” stated Warner. “Our infrastructure focus is superfast and ultrafast broadband built for business. We lay our own physical fibre and cabinet infrastructure enabling us to provide a service

previously unavailable to the business, science and industrial parks we serve.”

The benefits of pure fibre and the rising status of alternative providers is reflected in unprecedented levels of investment. “The industry is going through a period of significant change with the rise of alternative network providers delivering fibre provisions across the UK,” added Warner. “This reduces reliance on the likes of Openreach and enables innovative players to talk about something genuinely different and exciting for their customers.”

First footprint

Glide Business began life as WarwickNet in 2008. It was established by current CTO Ben King who decided to do something positive about the poor quality broadband that under-served the business park where he then worked. Ten years later the company has over 50,000 businesses on its footprint and a national fibre network that extends the length of the country.



James Warner

to differentiate against the normal connectivity options.”

Parent company CableCom Networking Group underwent its name change to Glide last month, and reaffirmed its focus on providing infrastructure, connectivity, utilities and technology services to three areas of the growing PropTech market, operating three divisions – Glide Residential, Glide Student and Glide Business. In the last year Glide reported growth of over 25 per cent, propelling the business beyond the £50 million revenue milestone, which has allowed continued investment into its own fibre infrastructure. The company expects this growth to increase by 30 per cent year-on-year and has made provisions to deploy an additional 500km of full fibre over the next 12-18 months.

Our biggest opportunity is the channel and working with a core set of partners

To date Glide Business has deployed over 1,400Km of its own fibre network with 400-plus parks enabled and over 50,000 premises passed. The company recently surpassed expectations of the DCMS gigabit voucher scheme by confirming 67 per cent of vouchers in the pilot region of Coventry and Warwickshire, worth up to £3,000 each for local businesses.

Turning points in its history include SLU (Sub-Loop-Unbundling) and working with Ofcom to drive this capability through the industry, enabling the delivery of superfast and ultrafast services to businesses. Its

acquisition by CableCom Networking (now Glide) in January 2017 provided a platform to significantly scale the business from a local niche player to a national infrastructure provider and challenger in the SMB market, aiming for a 50:50 split between direct and channel sales models over the next three years.

“The acquisition gave us the ability to invest heavily in our fibre and cabinet footprint across the country,” said Warner. “Making best use of this investment means working with channel partners to capture as much of the market as possible and helping them

Glide anticipates a steep and ascending growth curve, but Warner’s career path prior to entering the comms industry was all downhill. He’d built a successful Bulgarian hotel and ski instructing business, and after two years returned to the UK with his wife and sought a short-term sales role. “I fell into a job locally selling broadband for a south west-based ISP,” he explained. “I immediately liked the industry and the people in it, and saw how important it is to stay nimble and focused on what actually matters while maintaining a local feel without getting caught up in a ‘we run a business for running a business’s sake’ scenario. That’s what makes Glide exciting for me. We don’t just talk about poor connectivity provisions, we are being truly entrepreneurial and disruptive to our industry.” ■

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TTG's big master plan

With one acquisition under its belt and a five year growth plan set in stone, The Technology Group has added a strong emphasis to its short and long-term ambitions, according to Managing Director Jonathan Marsden.

Far from being a victim of the overpowering cult of technology that consumes today's young teenagers, as a mere boy Marsden took tech-control and harnessed the web's potential for generating business. He established Jagged Media at the age of 17 after spending two years working on websites and graphic design in between school time. Three years later he sold the business to his father who persuaded Marsden to run the telecoms systems sales operation he had set up. Marsden then secured his first £100k-plus deal with the AA at 21 and went on to build and sell three businesses.

His determination to win deals was evident from the outset. At 15 he built and sold a website to Persimmon Homes. Retaining youthful looks, at 19 Marsden pulled the proverbial wool over prospects' eyes by concealing his own with fake glasses that made him look 'older and geekier'. With equal boldness The Technology Group was founded in 2011 by Marsden, his brother Richard and father David. "We quickly won two key deals, one of them with an

important NHS department," explained Marsden. "That was a great milestone."

Securing the PO for an internationally recognised large film production business based in London was another turning point, marking the company's first international deal. "Our technology is now in 18 countries," added Marsden. "Other step-changes include having more non-family board directors which introduced a high level of corporate professionalism and enabled us to acquire our first business in October 2017, Hertfordshire company Exchange Comms."

Expansion mode

To support this acquisition The Technology Group opened a local office in Welwyn Garden City, adding to existing bases in Leeds and central London. Seeking more expansion, Marsden expects to generate over £4 million revenues this year and is targeting £6 million in 2019 through organic growth and another acquisition that will help boost customer numbers to circa 1,000. The company currently has over 420 clients across four continents, and a staff headcount of 30 which will be increased to support growth. "Our priority is to



Jonathan Marsden

Our priority is to identify potential acquisition targets

identify potential acquisition targets and cross-sell to newly acquired clients," said Marsden. "But the challenge as you evolve rapidly is managing change, so we work with the management team to ensure that as we scale we've got the processes and foundations in place to grow at the right pace with a coherent strategy."

Staff numbers almost doubled in the past year as a middle management layer was introduced. "Everything

must be professional," noted Marsden. "It took almost a year to put in place the HR aspects of the business, including employee handbooks and core value wheels. Now we're aiming at achieving Investors in People accreditation.

"We've also planned out the next five years which gives us a clear view of our future direction. On our roadmap are exciting technologies that Google, Amazon and Microsoft are pioneering

in voice assistance but for use within a telephone system environment."

The longer-term plan is to triple the size of the company and boost staff numbers to 60-plus as it approaches the £10 million revenue milestone. "I'm looking at how to embrace new technologies ahead of the curve," commented Marsden. "Over the next few months we have some exciting announcements to make. We're thinking big!

"UC has been the buzzword for a long time, but UC&C is where we want to be. In sectors like recruitment, education and professional services we advocate video conferencing, whiteboarding and desktop sharing capabilities. A key goal is bringing all this into one telephone system that competes with Skype for Business. Our relationships with Gamma and 3CX, among others, have served us well."

Three years ago The Technology Group created its own private hosted platform working closely with 3CX, enabling it to offer a fully managed service. "This took us over the 100-plus user market which requires a certain amount of technical capability in-house alongside significant investment," explained Marsden. "This fundamental change has been pivotal to growth. From a portfolio perspective we plan to establish our own development teams to create bespoke mid-to-enterprise sized solutions as we get more vertical. We will all need to customise products to prevent commoditisation in the marketplace and remain competitive." ■



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Comms sector produces 'v

Philip Carse, Analyst at Megabuyte.com, reports on the trading performance of leading companies in the comms space during the last quarter.

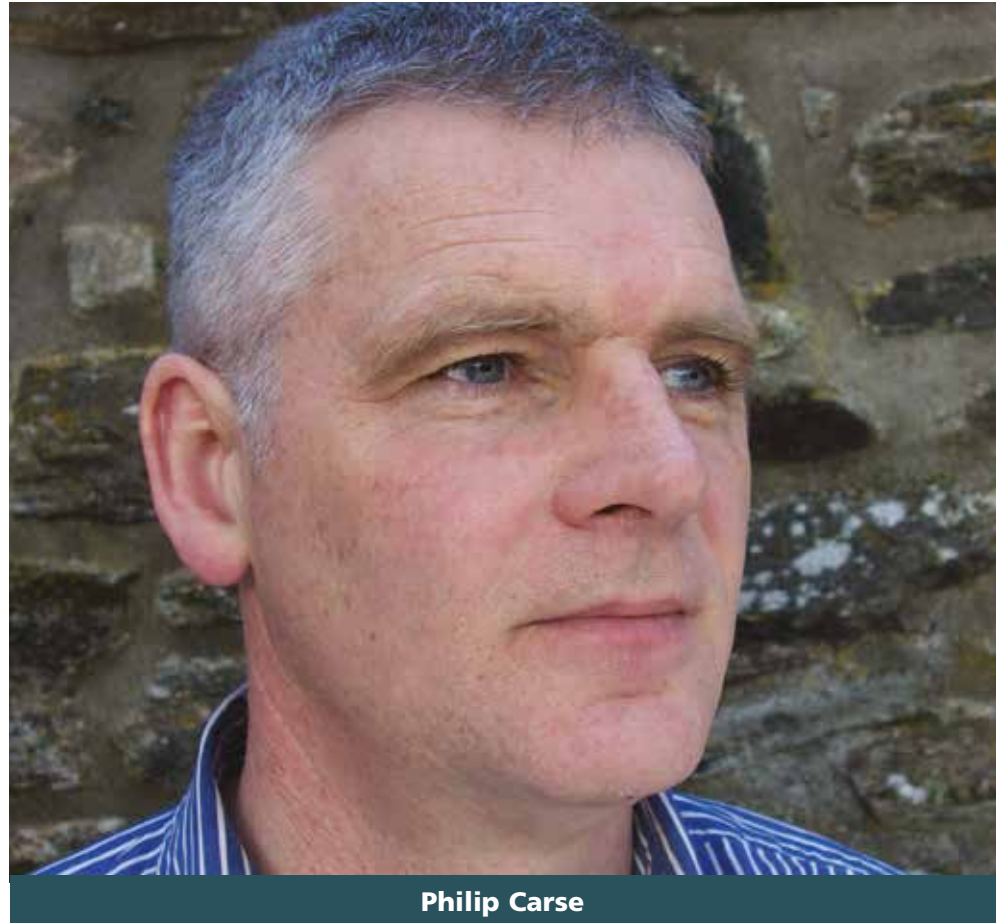
This was a vintage quarter for Telecoms & Networks corporate activity, including a spate of fibre-led deals (CityFibre take private, Infracapital taking control of Gigaclear and advancing its FTTP JV with TalkTalk, and private equity investment in Community Fibre); a conferencing merger (LoopUp and Meeting Zone) combined with an equity fund raise; a major private equity deal (GCI) and several smaller deals (Excalibur, Luminet and Natterbox); an inbound acquisition of a UK company (thevoicefactory); a proposed major customer base deal (Daisy/TalkTalk); and bolt-ons for well established players (Sabio, Chess, Wavenet and Arrow). Non-UK deals of interest include Vodafone's proposed acquisition of some Liberty Global interests in continental Europe and the German IPO of hosted voice provider NFON which is active in the UK.

CityFibre recommended an 81p per share/93% premium/£538m equity bid from a consortium of two funds: Antin and West Street Global. Founder and CEO Greg Mesch told us that CityFibre will be better able to execute its plan away from public markets, while also highlighting that the company is experiencing strong demand across all four verticals – public sector,

B2B, fibre to the tower and fibre to the premise.

In a move that transforms TalkTalk Business into a wholesale-only operation, TalkTalk agreed heads of terms to sell its direct B2B business (comprising 80,000 SoHo, SME and enterprise customers) to Daisy for £175m, with target completion the end of this month. The asset accounts for 17% of TalkTalk B2B revenues – about £100m – and EBITDA of about £25m, almost doubling the direct element of Daisy's SME business.

It was generally a solid reporting period for the UK's smaller telecoms players with highlights including connectivity (Exponential-e, CityFibre, MLL, Arqiva, Interoute, M24Seven and Luminet); contact centres (Sabio and IP Integration); CRM/voice integrators (Cloudcall and Natterbox); and business comms providers (Gamma, Charterhouse, Adam Phones, Maintel, Adept Telecom and Redcentric). As usual, the last quarter was a tougher time for the big boys (BT, Virgin, Sky, TalkTalk, Vodafone, O2 and 3UK – also including a spectrum auction). We witnessed continued strong growth from the non-UK listed UCaaS providers (RingCentral, 8x8, Vonage and NFON).



Philip Carse

With the latest accounts from connectivity players Exponential-e and M24Seven maintaining their strong Megabuyte Scorecard ratings, the top of the peer group continues to be led by investment bank cum telecoms reseller Bistech, followed by three connectivity players, M24Seven, Ask4 and Exponential-e. The biggest improver this quarter was also a connectivity player, MLL Telecom, though its score remains well below the peer group average at 43 on cash flow metrics, while Charterhouse improved to a well above average 59.

Significant fallers include contact centre specialist IP Integration to 29, weighed down by margins and cash conversion, while its peer Sabio maintained a below-average 42 due to the cash impacts of its 2016

MBO. Maintel fell to 41, impacted by a tough 2017. Last, and least, telecoms exchange provider Trilico (previously RouteTrader) entered the Scorecard with a table-bottoming 18.

Mixed performances

The Telecoms & Networks peer group had a poor last quarter in share price terms, dragged down particularly by travails at BT (-15%) and Telecom Plus (-18%), with a 9% decline versus +2.4% for the Megabuyte All-Share and 6.1% for the FTSE All Share. In contrast, CityFibre gained 91% on its recommended take private, conferencing's LoopUp (+42%) benefitted from strong investor demand ahead of its MeetingZone acquisition and related fund raise, Cloudcall jumped 24% on results and TalkTalk (+10%) was boosted by its balance sheet-repairing fund

raise, though the latter is down 37% over the last 12 months, the main faller and just ahead of BT's -34%.

This underperformance is reflected in declining current year valuations at a time of strong software valuations, though the difference between software (20.2x EBITDA) and ICT (10.4x EBITDA) has reduced slightly over the last quarter – but with Telecoms & Networks on a lowly 6.4x. Most of the quoted telcos are in the 6-10x current year EBITDA range, the outliers being BT (4.2x), Gamma and Telecom Plus (14.5-15.5x), and CityFibre's 7.5x revenue. ■

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Vintage' quarter

COMPANY NEWS ROUND UP

FluidOne's new CEO elaborates on fresh growth opportunities

With his feet now firmly under his new desk, Russell Horton, the newish CEO of Rigby Group-backed network specialist FluidOne (formerly Fluidata), revealed his plans for the £27m revenue organisation. Given the company's network aggregation platform and differentiated products, the revised strategy involves broadening the addressable market through selling to smaller resellers and having more product to cross and up-sell. He also reaffirmed guidance of a one third growth in EBITDA this year to £3.2m.

Telecom Plus details a mixed year

LSE-listed multi-utility provider Telecom Plus has detailed full-year to March 2018 results in line with April's update, with adjusted pre-tax profits up 1.8% to £54.3m on revenues up 7.1% at £793m, with profits impacted by a 17% increase in staff costs due to customer service investments. As ever, the company's outlook is in the hands of energy markets, competition and regulation, with a relatively wide guidance range of £55-60m adjusted pre-tax profits depending on the timing of new energy price caps.

Redcentric warns on public sector colo loss and HSCN start up costs

AIM-listed managed IT service provider Redcentric issued a trading update, reiterating an in-line year to March 2018 (consensus expectations are for EBITDA up 6% at £18.3m on revenues down

3% at £101.8m). However, Redcentric also warned that revenues and EBITDA for the year to March 2019 will be 5% and 10% below previous expectations due to a public sector colocation customer loss, some weakness in new business sales, and to the start-up costs of the significant recent public sector HSCN win. Analyst forecasts have come down to around £99.5m revenues and £17.9m EBITDA, both down about 2% on 2018.

Muller cornered, debt being refinanced, Riley in charge

In a flurry of announcements Daisy released headline year to March 2018 numbers (revenue and EBITDA of £684m and £127m) and reiterated FY19 guidance (of £700m+ and £140m+), announced the departure of CEO Neil Muller, with founder and Chairman Matt Riley taking back day-to-day operations, and outlined a planned refinancing. What hasn't been said by the company, but which is almost certainly the catalyst for the Muller exit and refinancing, is that Daisy has pulled its planned sale process, with quite significant implications for UK telecoms M&A.

Chess deals almost like buses as adds Frontier and StoneHouse

Business comms and IT provider Chess made two acquisitions – Frontier Voice & Data and StoneHouse Logic – with deal financials undisclosed. Executive Director Richard Btsh said the two deals collectively add about £8m revenues and £1-1.5m EBITDA post synergies, and provided an

update on what turned out to be a flat year to April 2018, implying circa £15m EBITDA on £110m revenues, as weak mobile offset good growth in IT services and particularly cyber security.

Arqiva continues to grow FCF but no IPO update

Macquarie and CPP-backed broadcast and comms infrastructure provider Arqiva reported results for the nine months to March 2018, with EBITDA increasing 10% to £387m on revenues up 2.9% at £722m, or more like 4% organic growth net of the sale of the Wi-Fi business to Virgin Media in 2016. Despite an outlook of continued EBITDA growth and faster FCF growth from declining capex, there is no fresh news on the company's corporate plans following the pulled London IPO last November.

Ofcom comes up with same answer on spectrum fees

The long-running saga of mobile annual spectrum fees for 900MHz and 1800MHz spectrum continues with Ofcom announcing new proposed rates, after rates set in 2015 were subject to a successful legal challenge. The long and short is that the new proposed rates will cost the four MNOs an estimated £210m in April 2018 prices versus the original £195m in March 2013 prices, coincidentally (or not!) the same in real terms adjusted for the CPI. However, a reweighting from 900MHz to 1800MHz fees means that Vodafone and O2 would pay 4% less while EE and 3UK would pay 11% more. The fees represent 4.2% and 8.3% of estimated industry EBITDA and free cash flow. ■

ENERGY UPDATE
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Energy puts wind in Ocean's sales

THE move into selling energy services has been a breeze for Suffolk based Ocean Telecom, one of the leading providers of communications products and telecom services in East Anglia.

Ocean specialises in creating enhanced ways of working to help businesses become more efficient and provide their customers with a better experience. That's why adding energy supply to his company's portfolio was a simple decision for sales director Giles Ecclestone.

"I attended the Comms Dealer MiVaD conference last year and had a meeting with Jason Fernyhough from Fidelity Energy. He convinced me it was easy to start selling energy services and a year on, I have to say he was right! Fidelity made it very simple for us to get going and energy is relatively easy to sell once you get in front of a potential customer.

"I think the opportunity is an excellent addition to the other communication services we offer, further cementing our customer relationships."

Ecclestone believes most customers have very little loyalty to their existing energy supplier and therefore if the deal offered is competitive they are very receptive. Ocean's sales representatives have analysed their existing customer base to highlight those customers they feel are most likely to benefit

from the Fidelity offering and success has been rapid.

"We have had an excellent response to date and the take up has been higher than expected in the first few months," said Ecclestone. "Our newest sales recruit has certainly taken to the new challenge with enthusiasm and a good degree of success.

Ocean is operating its new energy business under the company banner, but has added a section cleverly titled 'Ocean Energy' on the company website.

"It is early days, however it has been an excellent start to what will hopefully be a long standing and mutually successful business relationship for many years to come. I believe that Fidelity has an excellent concept and can deliver it in a responsive and supportive manner.

"We have a field based account manager, Zack Wootton, who has delivered training sessions in our offices to the sales staff face-to-face and helped set-up Fidelity's portal access. Zack is well supported by an in-house accounts team that help with quotations and advice for the sales team where needed.

"Any telecoms business that sees energy supply as a diversion from its core business are completely wrong as it's entirely complementary," added Ecclestone.

“Any telecoms business that sees energy supply as a diversion from its core business are completely wrong as it's entirely complementary.”



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Industry set for AI-fest

When something sounds too good to be true it probably is, but there is nothing artificial about the prospects for AI in the contact centre.

The rise of AI in the contact centre will lead to a new generation of 'supercharged agents with additional skills', according to 8x8 Vice President of AI and Machine Learning Ali Arsanjani. "AI will never overturn the wealth of human experience and customer insight that contact centres have built over decades," he said. "It will augment human insight with deep and speedy data analysis."

Contact centres will be empowered to provide a more personalised approach to boosting the customer experience with AI through a combination of sentiment analysis, engagement context and customer value, noted Arsanjani. "Traditionally it's been difficult to make sense of the volume of voice data produced by a contact centre, but AI-enabled natural language capabilities – through both language processing and speech analytics – is helping businesses analyse customer interactions for both sentiment analysis and keywords identification, as well as mining them for customer insights," he commented.

"For example, in the event of a product launch a high-tech company may notice an increase in the words

'trial' or 'try', indicating greater interest in a free trial of the solution. Machine learning algorithms can also help to detect anomalies and alert call centre agents when the agent-to-call ratio is low, enabling humans to take action."

AI also resolves the issue of customers being passed between multiple agents, pointed out Arsanjani. "AI is helping agents to be more relevant and respond to calls quicker," he added. "With intelligent call routing the caller can automatically be identified along with their reason for calling and connected by AI directly to the right expert to resolve their call first time. AI can also automatically show detailed information on previous interactions and a complete customer history while the caller is on the line, enabling agents to handle their query quickly and efficiently."

Despite all these upsides we have only scraped the surface of AI's true potential, according to Daniel Yin, Head of Product EMEA at RingCentral. "We will see entirely AI-based user flows become more common, more lifelike, and more able to satisfy complex tasks, allowing humans to perform the highest value and most complex interactions," he stated.



Nerys Corfield

Contact centre platforms enable AI and bots to be deployed but they do not always power the underlying AI agent, observed Yin. "In the longer term we see our partners bringing best in breed AI scripting deployment specialists to the table to complement the contact centre platform," he added. "They will also add value in their expertise, recognising which markets and industries can leverage the technologies best and the most appropriate approach to integrating and deploying them."

Simple use cases

It is important to think of AI as a tool that adds benefits, not simply as a way to automate digital agents, believes Yin. "While the idea of fully automated agents is powerful and can deliver great savings for businesses, there are so many other, simpler ways that AI can add benefits," he explained. "AI will go from strength

she stated. "AI is not a technology solution, it is a customer experience tool and as such there should be collaborative engagement between operations and IT with operations leading the project."

Corfield also noted that AI encompasses emotional intelligence, machine learning, system of things and customer analytics, and this wide scope means that use cases for AI in contact centres is varied. "The primary reason for using AI in the contact centre is to serve transactional, predictable interactions in order to reduce the requirement for costly, unnecessary human communication," she added.

AI is not a technology solution, it is a customer experience tool

to strength, and while the technology continues to be deployed and used heavily across most segments, it is still in its infancy."

AI is not an adjunct piece of intelligence, it should be an integral part of the customer journey with a clear remit, noted Nerys Corfield, Independent Contact Centre Consultant working with Unify. "There are many examples of poorly deployed AI because scenarios have not been explored properly, benefits have not been clarified and the impact on both customers and agents has not been mapped out,"

"Due to the significant commercial gains and changes to customer engagement models, AI is set to become far more mainstream in the call centre and this presents both challenges and opportunities. And with Google, Microsoft and others in a race to become AI-first there is plenty to suggest this next leap in engagement models is going to become commonplace soon, with the slowest adopters taking the hardest hits to their bottom lines.

"There will always be a place for voice. I still go to contact centres where voice represents 93 per cent of all contacts, but consumers are generally looking for an easy frictionless experience, and AI deployed correctly will deliver on this demand. Provided there is a powerful tool accessing the knowledge library, or using machine learning, then AI is always going to be quicker and more effective than a human." ■

See pages 36 & 50



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Secure Implementation of Your IP PBX: What You Need to Know

Implementing IP telephony is not without its challenges, concerns and obstacles. Although the move towards IP-based solutions is inevitable, many business and I.T. decision makers find the various considerations and the overall transition for administration and end-users a daunting task.

One major concern, that holds companies back from making the jump, is that of security, and whether entirely IP-based communications systems can be sufficiently protected in order to avoid the potentially devastating effects of VoIP hacking and data leaks.

Simple Measures, Big Results

The security challenges relating to VoIP solutions are similar to those facing any other internet application or service. However, with careful management, an IP PBX can be equally as secure as an analogue system. One easy way for hackers to gain access to the IP PBX server and SIP accounts is at the authentication layer by guessing weak passwords or stealing log-in details. Once a hacker has achieved access to the system they can commit toll fraud, running up large phone bills against unsuspecting companies.

Most modern IP PBX servers can be configured through a web interface. Whilst practical, it is very important to choose a strong password. Leaving default passwords in operation would be asking for trouble therefore it is of critical importance to ensure VoIP security, by setting strong, unique passwords during installation. Attackers are known to actively and blindly target these services by launching brute-force attacks on common usernames on the system. Businesses should pay

close attention to highly privileged user accounts and should instill the significance of choosing secure passwords that are regularly updated in all employees.

3CX automatically generates highly secure passwords by default when new extensions are created. However, administrators need to be proactive in the battle against hackers by periodically reviewing and changing passwords. Further to this, the rights to connect to the PBX outside of the local network can be restricted to only those employees that need it.

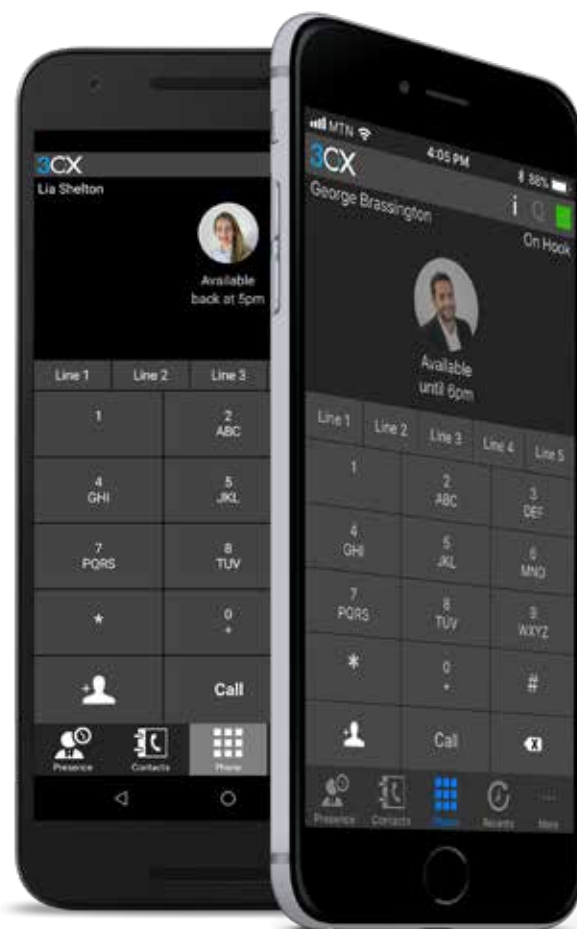
Insecure Network = Insecure Software

Software and network infrastructure security measures must work hand-in-hand in order to achieve a fully secured VoIP solution. Software measures are extremely important in securing an IP PBX. 3CX includes an anti-hacking module which stops hackers getting access to an extension and prevents attacks such as, brute force attacks, dictionary attacks and DOS attacks. The system will also block IP addresses from which the attack originates to prevent repeat attempts. In addition, with 3CX it is also possible to limit outbound calls by asking users to input a pin code before they dial out, adding another layer of security. Extensions can also be blocked from making outbound calls outside office hours.

Although it's important to choose a software solution that is secure, if the network is left vulnerable attacks can still occur. With regard to infrastructure security measures, network segregation can often help simplify complex networks and improve security. With a segregated network a breach will remain localized and not affect other parts of the network. However it is important to note that different types of businesses will have different requirements from their PBX and these require their own tailored solutions.

Special care should be taken on which ports to allow on the firewall. If you know that you should not be expecting connections to come from a specific IP address range or from a group of countries, you can use firewall block rules to prevent connections from these countries.

Businesses should also employ host intrusion detection systems, as these will help system administrators to identify possible attacks before it is too late. A host-based intrusion detection system can be useful in identifying attacks on a targeted system by analyzing log files, event logs and file system modifications. Another way of detecting network based attacks on an IP PBX system is to monitor network usage to spot unusual network activity. Certain attacks, such as password brute-force attacks, are known to create a large amount of network traffic.



Secure SIP & Secure RTP

VoIP traffic is split into two parts. The signalling, which contains information on the call setup including when the call started and ended, as well as the numbers dialed. The second part contains the voice and video data. However, both need to be encrypted in order to create a secure connection. To protect the signalling, the information should be encrypted using Secure SIP (TLS) protocol, while the voice data should be encrypted using Secure RTP (SRTP). As an additional layer of protection 3CX mixes the signalling and voice data and transmits it as one, this makes it far harder for hackers to sniff out information and also bypasses man in the middle attacks.

Hosted or On-Premise?

With 3CX's Software PBX, on-premise and hosted solutions are equally secure, without having to compromise on UC features. What businesses should be wary of is choosing an appliance-based PBX. Too many businesses fit these

"black boxes" and forget about them, leaving serious security holes. Relying on a customised operating system often bundled with an appliance-based PBX is extremely dangerous. These operating systems are often not updated when new security vulnerabilities become known, and will leave a business vulnerable to attack. These attacks can potentially not only affect the PBX itself, but could be used to launch attacks on the network.

3CX can be run on Windows, Linux and in the Cloud. By working with popular cloud providers such as Amazon and Google, you need not worry about the security of a hosted solution. Deciding to go on-premise? In assessing your network's overall security, and by making use of 3CX's advanced features, you will have a reliable and bulletproof system that can be safely accessed by employees wherever they are.

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The only way is Leeds

Ask Lily Managing Director Chris Morrisey how to catalyse growth and lift your business, and he would say relocate to Leeds. Here's why...

Having sniffed the Leeds air Lily upped sticks in November 2017 and moved out of its Bradford office which could no longer sustain the company's growth ambitions, was counter-productive and lacked glamour. According to Morrisey the relocation was long overdue and protracted, but the shift to Leeds quickly unlocked Lily's capacity to grow. "We struggled to recruit the right quality of people in Bradford," stated Morrisey. "But we now experience great candidates keen to work in our attractive office and have already employed 20 people since moving. The relocation is a massive step up for the business, putting us on the map in Yorkshire."

As organisations grow, the scope for free collaboration between staff and their ability to make clear and swift decisions dissipates, but Lily's response to this is to encourage and maintain always-on communication. To this end the two-floor 6,000 sq ft building has been designed to facilitate all-encompassing inter-company communication with wallboards and screens that encourage collaboration including the use of company video comms. Staff energy is also directed into activity that creates a sense of buzz, belonging and purpose.

At the spine of this process is Lily's Strategy for Success (S4S) grand project, launched in August 2016. It's a framework that sets out the company's vision, success factors, values and culture, and is designed to help push the firm past the £10 million barrier. "S4S channels the company's aspirations and stimulates activity, it's productive, sustainable and puts all staff in one place singing from the same song sheet," explained Morrisey.

"It communicates with clarity what we want to achieve and asks people to play their part. The document outlines our critical success factors and encourages staff to perform and ensure we meet our goals. It defines us, our approach, guides and motivates staff and keeps us focused on a day-to-day basis. S4S is the backbone of the business, enabling great people to follow a common cause. It's the most important initiative we have ever followed."

During the past three years Lily has generated year-on-year growth of 35 per cent, introduced new products and services, boosted its headcount and won a pile of industry awards. Just five years ago Lily was in the sub-£1 million revenue category, but Morrisey expects £7.5 million this year, placing the company within the top five



Chris Morrisey

Massive investment in Leeds by the Government and businesses is transforming the city into a primary tech hub in the north

per cent of growth businesses in the UK. Its natural stomping ground is the SME sector, although a small number of corporate clients exist, and Morrisey hinted at plans to establish a channel partner network as he seeks expansion in new areas.

Diversification

The growth that Lily recognises now is based on turning out everything that's needed to run the business itself. The product strategy is defined as much by new circumstances as the usual response to the requirements of the market, its portfolio having been diversified as a result of the move to Leeds. "On relocating offices we saw that everything we consume as a business we could sell direct, from door phones, IT infrastructure, desktop support, AV, business

marketing solutions, and we're even establishing a relationship with the refurbishment company," said Morrisey. "This builds on our CRM solutions, suite of energy products, mobile proposition and the IT division. SMEs want a partner that can deliver all solutions."

Lily has also developed a remarkable habit of bagging industry awards – 26 collected over the last five years to be precise – all recognising Lily's achievements in delivering effective ICT solutions and marketing campaigns, and for providing staff with a cutting edge work environment and offering customers high levels of service. The stuffed trophy cabinet is emblematic of a theme that runs to the core of Lily's ethos – success – a

factor that's also reflected in the company's 'I'm a Succeeder' incentive which is open to all staff and rewards those who go the extra mile with a VIP trip. Nine Succeeders are jetting off to Ibiza this month, another destination of their choice, the other being Leeds.

According to Morrisey, what Leeds can offer growing businesses should not be underestimated, and if more companies followed his lead the north-south tech divide and regional imbalance weighted towards London and the south would change overnight. "Massive investment in Leeds by the Government and businesses is transforming the city into a primary tech and creative hub in the north," he stated. "The optimism and opportunity is tangible." ■



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The UK comms industry's biggest and most prestigious recognition programme has been activated...

Now in their 17th year, the Comms National Awards is the ICT channel's most respected and coveted prize and now's the time to power up your involvement.

Sponsored by 9 Group for the sixth successive year and independently judged by a panel of industry experts, The Comms National Awards recognises quality across the channel spectrum with awards in both reseller (customer solutions) and vendor (service to the channel) categories. We will again also acknowledge the contribution made to the ICT channel by one special individual who will be presented with the

illustrious Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

With past hosts including, Jimmy Nesbitt, Ronnie Corbett, Patrick Kielty, Rufus Hound, Hugh Dennis, Stephen K Amos, Michael McIntyre and Vernon Kay the entertainment as ever will be top drawer.

This powerful combination means the Comms National Awards is the ultimate evening for the ICT channel to gather together, recognise excellence and innovation, network with industry friends and colleagues and, of course, have some much-deserved fun!!

ENTRY DEADLINE JULY 27th 2018



9 MAKE IT A STRAIGHT SIX BY TAKING POLE POSITION AT NATIONAL AWARDS

This year's Comms National Awards, to be held at The Park Lane Hilton, London on Thursday 11th October, will be sponsored for the sixth successive year by leading service provider, 9 Group.

According to Marketing Director, Mark Saunders, there was not even a moment's debate around renewing the service provider's commitment to the event, which is the unquestioned highlight of the awards calendar.

"Last year was another memorable evening and it's wonderful to recall how welcome our brand ambassador, Josh Webster, was made to feel by everyone in the hall as he opened the event, ably supported by a hugely amusing host, James Nesbitt. Saunders believes the standard of award entries will improve once more, meaning the judges will again face the unenviable task of separating them.

"If you win one of these awards, you really can legitimately claim to be the very best at what you do and I look forward to seeing a healthy mixture of familiar and new faces on the podium this year.

"I hope the channel's top people will be there to enjoy the very best night out in our industry and will enter as many categories possible to showcase the incredible range of talent that this industry should so rightly boast about."

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A WORD FROM OUR SPONSORS...

Business Category



Justin Blaine

Channel Sales Manager
NTA

"NTA is proud to yet again be a sponsor at this year's Comms National Awards. The awards are recognised as one of the most prestigious within in our industry and this year we are sponsoring the Business Awards Category. There are a number of new awards in this category including 'Best New Innovation' and 'Best Business Growth' to recognise enterprising and forward-thinking businesses in our community which we endorse wholeheartedly.

"All of the NTA staff would like to take this opportunity to wish all entrants in all categories the very best of luck. The CN Award finals night is a highlight of the industry calendar and we look forward to seeing channel friends and colleagues and celebrating success on the night."

Vertical Market Solution Category



Vincent Disneur

Head of Sales & Marketing
Union Street

"Union Street's channel strategy focuses on developing innovative software solutions backed by comprehensive support, training and consultancy services. Encapsulated by our company strapline, 'powering your potential', this approach enables our partners to leverage maximum value from our solutions. It's a great honour to be sponsoring this year's CNAs, an event which like ourselves, encourages and celebrates excellence within our industry. At last year's CNAs it was extremely gratifying to see so many Union Street partners collecting awards for their efforts. On behalf of myself and team UST, I'd like to wish the very best of luck to all this year's entrants."

Telephony Category



Kevin Boyer

Managing director
IPNetix Ltd

"IPNetix Ltd have sponsored the CNA awards since 2014. This event is the highlight on the calendar because it brings together the channel to celebrate our mutual efforts and is also the predominant channel awards of the year. Winning here really is a special achievement and the CNA team always deliver an event to match the quality and breadth of the participants.

"IPNetix operate a channel-only sales strategy delivering expert professional services to our partners, this event is a pivotal point in the year where we celebrate our joint success."

Distribution Category



Paul Taylor

Sales Director
Voiceflex

"Voiceflex is delighted to be sponsoring the Distribution Category at the Comms National Awards, the event has grown in stature over the years and is firmly established as the go to event within the industry. Voiceflex is all about the channel, we are one hundred percent channel focused, if you haven't looked at our applications in a while, it's worth a call. Voiceflex is leading the market with simple but effective WebRTC applications such as click to call and click to call me."

Hospitality Sponsor



Alp Kostem

Head of Channel Sales
Exponential-e

"Exponential-e is delighted to be sponsoring the Comms National Awards again this year! We see great value in these events and we're really excited to be attending. The Channel Community is a huge part of Exponential-e's make up and the fastest growing business unit internally year on year so it makes absolute sense to sponsor one of the biggest channel events of the year.

"This event shows recognition to those hard-working teams, companies and some outstanding individuals who truly deserve to be rewarded. It would definitely be worth entering and, on behalf of myself and the team at Exponential-e, we wish the very best of luck to all this year's entrants."

Reseller of the Year – SME



Garry Grown

Sales Director
Daisy Wholesale

"Entering the prestigious Comms National Awards not only brings together great individuals and companies, whilst showcasing businesses' successes, it allows you to acknowledge the hard work, talent and determination of your teams. At Daisy Wholesale, we believe the SME sector has huge potential which is why we are proud to support our fantastic partners and the channel by sponsoring the SME Reseller of the Year category. This is your opportunity to reward the people that make your business a success, so grab it with both hands and get your entry in now."

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Woodhead: A vociferous

Simwood Managing Director Simon Woodhead continues to expose the industry's 'dirtiest secret' – the hidden facts about poor privacy and protection that he says some service providers prefer to keep to themselves. Meanwhile, the company's winning formula for secure voice solutions in the finance sector has sparked a wave of growing interest.

Simwood's secure voice solutions continue to gain appeal in the finance sector with interest greatly boosted by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which came into force in May and the requirement for finance firms to be PCI compliant. "Our strengthening presence in security has prompted a big increase in enquiries about the applications we build and bake into our network for these Goliath financial institutions," commented Woodhead. "We've been quick to respond to GDPR."

One of Simwood's prime goals is to combat security threats and tackle privacy issues at their roots – and do so quickly as a vocal force for good. So it's no surprise that the company's proactive approach has gained traction in the finance sector where secure voice is especially critical. Notably, Simwood is in the pipeline for 60 per cent of the world's credit card transactions and its success in providing secure telephony solutions has generated ongoing interest from organisations seeking a watertight response to the threat of voice related fraud.

"Telephony is a key tool in the fraudster's arsenal for unrelated crimes such as credit card fraud," stated Woodhead. "So for the last two years we've been



Simon Woodhead

As an industry we're deceiving the market by allowing misplaced presumptions on privacy and security to persist

doing a lot of work in this space for our financial ultimate end users."

Exposing malpractice

His mission is to enforce encryption and put a spotlight on the important and gritty issues that, he says, many other service providers prefer to keep in the dark – despite them

being entrusted with guarding their customers' security. Meanwhile, most organisations are oblivious to the risks they face through no fault of their own. "As an industry we're deceiving the market by allowing misplaced presumptions on privacy and security to persist," said Woodhead. "The privacy and protection that customers

assume they get from 'me too' organisations is largely non-existent. With more education, every business in the UK will be outraged about the total absence of protections from most service providers. They'll be looking for providers that can fix that, backed by carriers that know what they're doing and care."

One of the latest examples of Simwood's good practice in exposing what it believes to be the industry's dirtiest secret is a new book written by Woodhead himself which spills the beans on the sorry state of privacy and protection in the marketplace and reflects his pioneering work and experience around telephony related



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fraud. Called 'Speaking up on Telephony Risks', the book speaks volumes about Woodhead's mission to persuade organisations (including service providers and carriers) to care more about encryption and the security risk landscape.

The work also aims to educate end users about the privacy and security challenges that sit right under their noses, which is why Simwood has sent the book to all UK companies with a turnover of more than £50 million. "We want to expose the risks they face that not all providers share," added Woodhead. "We've built many solutions to assist in identifying where telephony is being misused and would welcome conversations with service providers."

Because nothing is more dangerous to a network's integrity than misconceptions about the effectiveness of its privacy and protection Simwood has also made the book available to other interested parties that meet the company's criteria. Woodhead's mission to deal only in facts that counter false assumptions is also evident in a new tool developed by the company that overcomes objections from internal approvers such as price-obsessed CFOs who are not familiar with Simwood's multifaceted and granular charging structure.

Approvers may unwittingly base their buying decisions on straight price comparisons, missing a trick in the process. "Simwood has never competed on price," stated Woodhead. "We offer a choice of rate decks that suit all customers and set the rates within them

using a consistent model. This is fair, transparent, and reflects how we need to operate at each level."

Woodhead noted that decision makers who are familiar with Simwood understand its model, along with the variables and upsides including intangible value adds, but recommendations to use Simwood often fall foul of the CFO's lack of knowledge and insight into the company's more structured proposition. "We're often compared on straight price, usually per minute for the top few destinations, with our

With more education, every business in the UK will be outraged about the total absence of protections

own values ignored and the absence of stealth charges lost in the detail along with the granularity of our breakouts," said Woodhead. "Many of these instances are resolved by educating the CFO but we don't always get the opportunity."

A tool created by Simwood that rates CDRs from other carriers exposes the advantages of its more thought out method, returning a spreadsheet that shows breakout by breakout what Simwood would have charged for calls across its rate decks, explained

Woodhead. "This can give objective data to support any case to move to Simwood, or upgrade service levels, so we can all be dealing with facts," he added.

Putting facts centre stage is also reflected in Simwood's expanding conference speaking tour which has entered a new domain of intensity and reinforces its position as an industry activist, campaigner and pioneer on the UK and international stage. The company's counter-cybercrime plans and VoIP fraud insights were keynoted by Associate Director Ross McKillop at the SOCEX conference in Reading on May 15th. At the same time, Woodhead took his message on network architecture, specifically his AutoPilot technology (which enables a container to self-describe and self-manage, and run the same anywhere) to Kamilio World in Berlin.

Woodhead then keynoted at CommCon 2018, the UK's primary open source real-time comms conference on June 25th-29th. Followed by an appearance at ClueCon in Chicago (a developer's conference hosted by the team behind the FreeSWITCH open-source project) on July 23rd-26th.

"Simwood has long directed energy at conference appearances and built a reputation as a creative hub of innovation and a vociferous champion of important causes such as combating VoIP fraud and exposing widespread misconceptions around security, privacy and compliance – and how elements of the industry perpetuate those falsities," stated Woodhead. ■

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Former soldier risks ever

Vapour Cloud CEO Tim Mercer's ambition to go it alone proved irresistible and shows us a man with the true courage of his convictions – no matter the risk.

The rise of West Yorkshire-based Vapour Cloud owes far more to the courage and conviction of its founder than can be lauded in this article. It is beyond words. Who else would trade in their wife's car to help fund a start-up? In hindsight, what was a risky strategy with no back-up plan now makes perfect sense as Mercer puts Vapour Cloud on the road to impressive growth. Indeed, Mercer has delivered what a no-risk approach could not. "In 2013 I sold everything and my wife gave me five years to make it work," he stated. "Failure was not an option. But I always knew I'd own my own business. I had a knack for spotting a market niche and the drive and passion to make it work."

From the outset there was no shortage of ambition and discipline to get the business moving. "I needed funding and came upon the Finance Yorkshire Dragons' Den style tendering process," explained Mercer. "I pitched the same core services that we offer today, fuelled by next generation WebRTC capabilities, and was extremely honest in outlining the £1 million I required to build a network and make my vision a reality. We attracted third party investment from Seneca which totals £4 million to date and our growth story began.

"The first year was challenging, not least



Tim Mercer

I sold everything and my wife gave me five years to make it work. Failure was not an option

because I'd sold my wife's car. But organisations slowly began to trust us with their comms infrastructure. They put their investments on the line by going with Vapour rather than a more established yet traditional

provider. But the fact that these customers remain on board today – and they have re-signed for a second term – speaks volumes."

Mercer's intention has always been to provide agile

business communications without 'baggage and corporate restraints'. "The focus has to be on great technology delivered with even better service," he stated. "It sounds simple, but what began as a leap of

faith has satisfied a market gap. Having experienced poor customer service delivery within the IT space I realised there was a huge opportunity to exploit. I was also convinced that the cloud revolution was coming."

Everything on cloud mission

Ever since Mercer embarked on his journey there has been no clear sign of self-doubt because he is rooted in the reality of his own and Vapour Cloud's capabilities, which perhaps makes his growth projections more compelling. "My longer-term aim is for us to become a £15-30 million recurring revenue based organisation delivering the same services but with a best-in-class portfolio that will inevitably look a little different as we develop, test and release new cloud products," he stated.

"We've established a 96 per cent net recurring revenue rate to date, so our business development model is easy to maintain. We had a 64 per cent seed of growth in 2017 and hope to realise 65-80 per cent by the end of this year. That's if we focus on organic growth alone – however we recently announced a £10 million acquisition trail to accelerate our expansion with a buy and build strategy."

Mercer is seeking to acquire a northern IT security company, ideally with a Microsoft public cloud speciality and Partner status, plus a traditional PBX specialist. "These two acquisitions would bring people, technology and a bigger base into our business," he added. "My priorities are to drive growth, aided by our buy and build strategy, without ever weakening service levels. We'll use our investment fund to fuel product development and we'll look for more people. Great talent is always hard to find. That challenge feels extremely real as we look to the future."

Mercer now has a team of 31, over 100 clients and has set his sights on £12 million

turnover by 2020. But while growth stats can often define a business journey, according to Mercer there is a bigger story around the people he's recruited, many of whom he has known for a long time, including Finance Director Jason Sharp and Cloud Director Steve Dempsey. "Other colleagues are at the start of their career but they've all got something special to contribute," commented Mercer, who began his own career in the Forces (an experience that taught him what it truly means to be a team player).

Following a seven year stint in the army, including active service during the Gulf War, Mercer took on a number of sales jobs and in 1996 moved into a commission-only role

The first year was challenging, not least because I'd sold my wife's car. But organisations slowly began to trust us with their comms infrastructure

for a managed printing company in London before heading home in 1999. "I secured a job selling data networks with TeleWest," recalled Mercer. "It merged to form NTL and then Virgin Media. By 2011 I'd worked my way up to the position of Regional Sales Manager before deciding to go it alone. We took a huge risk and put everything we had into making Vapour work. The cloud revolution came and a satisfying outcome of our achievement is employing a talent-rich team that's hungry for more.

"We were early adopters of cloud technology which,

while a risk at the time, now sees us pick up sizeable contracts. The market has shifted and clients are seeking cloud-first solutions. They don't want to work with organisations that just dabble in this complex space. They want to invest in businesses that live and breathe this world, and have done so all along. Our client base is made up of growing SMEs and blue chip brands that are familiar household names. I love this mix."

Product strategy

Vapour's solutions sit under three brand names – Hollr (unified voice comms), Sanctm (secure storage and backup) and Tunnl (network connectivity). How these products and services take shape and are deployed

differs depending on the brief and budget. "We still remain true to the services we wanted to offer at the start – secure voice comms, network connectivity and storage," noted Mercer. "That will not change. But our cloud product suites are evolving and becoming more exciting. We invest constantly, and the breadth of our offering means we can now attract clients of all shapes and sizes."

Mercer has also worked hard over the last two years on developing channel partnerships, a model that will be pivotal to Vapour's future expansion. "I don't

want 500 ordinary partners, I want 15-20 awesome ones," added Mercer. "If we get our next partners right and give them the tech they need to satisfy the requirements of their base, the mutual growth will be phenomenal. We know what we're good at and we want to help partners concentrate on where they can add value. Together we'll secure the big deals. We've helped generate £2 million of additional revenue for one partner since 2016. There are two huge new channel collaborations that I am keen to reveal to the market. But all I can say right now is 'watch this space'."

Mercer's strategic planning policy has to date got everything right, so it would be wise to take note of where he thinks the industry is heading. "Digital transformation is a growing element of our marketplace, moving into more secure services," he observed. "Unified and multi-channel comms is becoming pivotal for many organisations, particularly those with contact centre operations. The on-premise to SaaS shift is also paramount, and we're investing heavily in securely recorded video.

"Against this backdrop organisations are moving away from one-size-fits-all vendors in favour of defined sector specialists, which suits us fine. This is why our partner-led approach to servicing client tenders is currently working so well. The real potential lies with organisations that place innovation at the heart of their roadmap, rather than just talk about it. Customers are getting savvier and they don't accept things at face value any more."

Just a minute with Tim Mercer...

Role model: I'm an ex-soldier so have met hundreds of people I admire tremendously

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

What do you fear the most? Being unable to provide for my children

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? In the Forces with a bonkers role like a pathfinder, or practical hands-on jobs

What's the best piece of advice you have ever been given? That I'm too spiky to succeed in the corporate world. It's how you respond to such words that defines you moving forward

What possession could you not live without? My ideas book

What's the biggest risk you have taken? Selling up and committing to Vapour

Name three ideal dinner guests: Jack Nicholson, Sir Ranulph Fiennes and George Best for a night of incredible stories

Industry bugbear? Sales people that focus on price-led selling rather than solutions

What possession could you not live without? My dad's watch has massive sentimental value

Top tip for resellers? Don't over-commit on what you can deliver nor set unrealistic targets. Manage your journey, be honest and focus on the wins that you really want to achieve

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I like going to the ballet

Your key strengths: I don't give in, I'm a fighter, honest and trustworthy

Horton embarks on new

Russell Horton's obsession with business growth continues unabated as he releases the great potential that lies within FluidOne – and his CEO appointment in April means the game is on.

Growth is the road down which Horton has moved throughout his career. It is a challenging one, but experience and strategic vision have again come together as he puts in place a five year plan that will take FluidOne to £75 million. The company currently generates revenues of £27 million, has 100 staff and over 300 channel partners alongside a direct business that focuses on enterprise customers. "I plan to grow over 10 per cent organically by 2019 and then look for strategic partnerships and acquisitions," stated Horton. "When I was approached about the role I noted a lack of brand presence in the market, under investment in sales and marketing, particularly in the channel, but great potential for growth."

Another deciding factor was the parity between how the Rigby Group – FluidOne's private equity backer – aligned with Horton's future vision for the business. "My first job was to work with the team and devise a five year strategy," he explained. "I launched this at the end of May. Other short-term priorities include strengthening the management team, launching our Platform One proposition to the market – a Software Defined Network that integrates cloud, IoT, broadband, Ethernet and mobile communications services from every major asset owner in the UK, and



Russell Horton

I plan to grow over 10 per cent organically by 2019 and then look for strategic partnerships and acquisitions

makes them available to partners and customers with full software control via a single in-house developed portal called DASH."

Rigby Group acquired Fluidata in March 2015 and added mobility specialist One Point to its portfolio in

December 2015. The two companies merged to form FluidOne in October 2016. The combined business offers a full range of connectivity, Unified Communications and mobile services, has 18 data centre PoPs across its Software Defined Network, and strong vertical

propositions particularly in construction, professional services, financial services, hospitality, hotels and retail. The appointment of ex-Elite Group COO Horton saw former Chief Executive Piers Daniell become Chairman. Daniell founded Fluidata in 2004.

"FluidOne is well known in the carrier and wholesale space but we lack presence in the reseller market," commented Horton. "I see fragmentation increasing in connectivity supply in the UK, for example with niche providers covering certain geographic locations

path to growth

only. This creates an opportunity for FluidOne as an aggregator building out our national network of data, offering best fit services per location and a mix of services and suppliers for a combined solution. In this, investing in the reseller channel is key to growth. There will be a scaling up of capabilities in areas such as product management, software development and project management to create a more robust support structure."

Horton's previous experience includes many leadership roles across the telecoms and IT sectors. His career began in accountancy in 1990 and he took his first job in comms four years later joining Securicor Cellular Services which grew to £220 million revenue and 440,000 mobile subscribers before exiting to Martin Dawes and O2 in 1998. Horton went on to lead the design and build of MoBill, an award winning end-to-end web portal, customer care and billing system which added significantly to the sales value of Isis Telecommunications Management when it was acquired by Vodafone in 2006.

Horton then co-founded and became Managing Director of Flexphone. A stint at Daisy as Commercial Director followed and in 2011 Horton joined IP Integration where he gained experience in complex project engineering and managed services. In 2014 he was headhunted by Elite Group and as COO helped grow the UK business from £30 million to £57 million revenue in under four years.

"A big lesson for me was being involved in

several acquisitions at a large company that led to unplanned levels of staff and customer churn impacting the value acquired," added Horton. "I learned a much better approach that I was able to use at IP Integration and Elite Group, which meant we put retaining clients and key staff at the heart of our integration plans and that way better maintained and grew the value of the acquired businesses."

Growth markets

Horton pinpointed cloud, Unified Communications, mobility and the IoT as rapidly growing markets with a projected five year CAGR of over 16 per cent, making connectivity and mobile 'great markets to be operating in'. "Software Defined Networking and SD WAN will have a significant impact over the next three years, and as an independent with our network core already in place to support these services it allows us to be at the forefront of developments in this space," commented Horton. "I have some exciting product launches to announce in the coming weeks.

"The business opportunity for resellers is strong but they need to build skills and capabilities in delivering bespoke and personalised services. Suppliers are constantly innovating and expanding their solution ranges, and customer requirements are fast evolving. The pace of change and complexity experienced by organisations means there is a great opportunity for value added resellers to be the expert and bring together different supplier services to create the right solution for each customer." ■

Just a minute with Russell Horton...

Role model: Jonny Wilkinson for his dedication, focus and integrity

What talent do you wish you had? To have been a world class rugby player

Name three ideal dinner guests: Jonny Wilkinson, I'm a rugby fan and 2003 will always stand out in my memory; Tom Hanks, a brilliant actor; and Liz Hurley, she would be great fun

Your greatest career achievement? The growth and sale of Isis Telecommunications to Vodafone. We had a fantastic team, fun culture and achieved great results

Industry bugbears? Problems with the installation of Ethernet circuits and the lack of interoperability of IT services. I see excess cost and timescales in many projects due to this issue

Tell us something about yourself we don't know? I'm a black belt in karate

One example of something you have overcome: Fear of heights

Top tip for resellers: Over the long-term repeat purchase clients are more profitable than winning new business, so be brave about short-term margin versus long-term relationships

One thing you could not do without in your job? Excel: I'm a numbers man

Best piece of advice you have been given? Always start with the end in mind

Your strengths and what could you work on? I lead from the front and have integrity, but I need to work on empathy, talk less and listen more



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AI revolution advances

The key message about the rise of AI is that its lead role in the contact centre space is inevitable and truly revolutionary, according to Avaya's Solutions Marketing Director Natalie Keightley who offers an upbeat assessment of AI's transformational powers and its positive implications for the customer journey and resellers.

Artificial Intelligence is not only a formidable self-service channel in itself but also a powerful enabler of existing channels, whether self-service or agent assisted. Current chatbots, even limited ones, are already proving useful to the customer experience but they have the potential to deliver so much more, observed Keightley. "Chatbots are the primary AI vehicle but the majority of them today are not 'AI' in the strict sense of the term," she said. "They are mostly linear, scripted voice-to-text (or text-to-text) tools that perform a limited set of predetermined tasks. They drive value in specific ways but often hit brick walls because they aren't programmed to manage new tasks. To truly transform today's chatbots into AI we need to plug the gap. The missing piece is machine learning, the ingredient that puts intelligence into AI."

Voice enabled conversational AI like Alexa and Siri flies in the face of doom mongers who say voice is dead. In fact, AI is instrumental

in extending the life of voice channels, pointed out Keightley. "The use of technologies like AI, data analytics, IoT and blockchain in the contact centre space is not about how they can be leveraged for their own sake, but how they can better serve the customer," she said. "AI is a natural fit to make all channels more convenient, delivering information in a way that is simple and effective. Organisations need to support all customer touch points, that includes not only new channels like chatbots with AI but also traditional ones like voice."

Chatbot potential

Most chatbots today are built only with Natural Language Processing (NLP) capabilities. They are restricted to a predetermined set of words, sentences, languages and accents and create dialogue based around this. "The proliferation of chatbots will only happen when they have the ability to proactively source new data, analyse it, learn it and deliver responses based on this new knowledge," stated Keightley. "That is the



Natalie Keightley

The missing piece is machine learning, the ingredient that puts intelligence into AI

point when a mere chatbot becomes conversational AI."

AI and chatbots have the capacity to resolve unforeseen problems before they are even brought to a customer's attention. "These technologies, at the very least, have the capability to minimise customer effort when first raising an issue," commented Keightley. "The use of this technology also improves the resourcing within an organisation as more time is freed up for human agents to attend to the more complex issues."

The advantages are clear: Chatbots and conversational AI are technologies that can

meet the expectations for convenience that are heaped on organisations by their customers and employees. It brings self-service efficiencies to customer touch points and ultimately creates a more innovative customer experience. "AI supports interactions by presenting information to the agent, guiding them through an engagement, providing possible answers to issues and escalating if necessary," commented Keightley.

As long as AI is an integral part of the contact centre and seamlessly blended with its human elements, it should not demand a new relationship with the

customer. "But it does mean that customers must be willing to share data with organisations so that they can be better served," said Keightley. "This is critical in an age where data privacy is such a big topic."

Contact centres are the face of an organisation, and AI needs to be deployed strategically so it is aligned to the overall customer experience strategy. "AI is as much an ambassador of brand as human agents," stated Keightley. "Both need to make sure that the experience is consistent and seamless across all channels the customer uses. AI and humans must work hand in hand to determine which type of resource or what next steps are best suited to a particular interaction."

It follows that AI should not be perceived negatively as a disruptive technology that will ultimately take jobs away from contact centre agents. "AI will help agents find time to do higher value, revenue generating, loyalty promoting, customer retention type activities," said Keightley. "And if resellers can help customers understand what is happening in their AI-driven contact centre and why, that is where they can add real business value."

"Right now there is no one-size-fits all AI solution which means that – depending on the customer requirement – resellers must integrate several different AI with all other elements of the customer journey including metrics and reporting. As with any form of big data the true value comes in the analysis. Storing and relaying it can only be so valuable." ■



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Realising the potential of

The grandest mission of any channel service provider is to facilitate the growth ambitions of all partners, including the smallest, according to speakers at this year's Margin in Voice & Data (MiVaD) event staged at the Forest of Arden Hotel on 14th June.

What did we learn from this year's MiVaD symposium?

That, in effect, the most neglected group of resellers represent the greatest growth opportunity, according to Adam Cathcart, 9's Director of Partners, who says many service providers would do well to conduct a review of how they engage with partners and enter the 21st century. Why? Because all the evidence shows that how a reseller is supported makes a positive difference to how they perform and boosts results. "The sub-£3 million turnover reseller segment is overlooked by many service providers, yet it's where they can add the most value," said Cathcart in a keynote address to delegates. "This segment is where 95 per cent of our transacting partners reside and we are focused on moving them from good to great."

He cited feedback from partners that confirms the value they attach to products, portals and pricing, but most important is receiving help to make a step-change in their business growth. "They need support, training and practical business knowledge, advice on financial modelling, planning, help with staff recruitment, marketing, creating more opportunities to sell, incentives, brand building, social media, content for newsletters and more," added Cathcart. "Complete support like



Speakers spotlighted the true growth potential of smaller partners

Smaller resellers will gain the power to wield a growing influence on the UK comms market with the right support from channel partners

this enables the partner to be free to perform."

Distributor Nimans is also working hard to ensure that resellers will not be operating in a market that has evolved beyond their ken. The company currently generates £145 million turnover and has set its sights on £200 million, but a transformation is required if this ambitious number is to be realised. Change, said Mark Curtis-Wood, Head of the Networks Division at Nimans, rests on three pillars – better collaboration with partners, deeper automation and broader simplification. Citing examples of each he explained that closer collaboration with EE has

created more flexibility in the mobile proposition, and the sales pipeline has 'exploded' as a result, said Curtis-Wood.

Nimans has also introduced AI and analytics into its portal to promote automation and ensure that customers receive an improved experience. As for simplification, one example of Nimans' efforts in this area is the compartmentalisation of its wholesale network proposition which is transparent and straightforward to use, simplifying the customer journey. Curtis-Wood then targeted what has become a traditional and overwhelming feature of the industry's lexicon – acronyms – which

fly in the face of reason and are the enemy of simplicity. "Acronyms mean nothing," he stated. "The focus must be on simplifying the message and proposition."

Sold on old rules

The comms industry's obsession with acronyms and complexity is not the only potential inhibitor of growth. Poor selling techniques at the coalface will also blight the channel's prospects, according to keynoter Iain Sinnott, Head of Sales at VanillaIP, who called for the daily honing of sales skills as an antidote to price battles in the wide open cloud comms marketplace, which is just 20 per cent penetrated. To secure a decent share

of the cloud opportunity he urged resellers to LEAD customers through the sales process – Listen, Educate, Advise, Design – and apply a set of old rules that will bring about a resurrection of the sales professional. "It's critical to deploy a methodology to create value in the process," he said. "Look at your teams: How much time do they spend studying and researching to develop their sales skills?"

Fellow keynoter Paul Taylor, Sales & Marketing Director at Voiceflex, agrees that success has everything to do with feature and benefits selling, which makes the sales person more magnetic. Traditional methods still stand up – sell



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yourself, your company and core products – but to clinch the deal useful applications have become the order of the day. “We take a SIP trunk and add various applications to make it more beneficial,” said Taylor. “As well as expected apps like call recording you need deal winners such as our fraud control platform which deploys Advanced Behaviour Based Analysis using IP profiling, call analysis techniques and other functions. Furthermore, WebRTC applications like click-to-call and apps for the statistical analysis of call data move you towards the goal line. Customers must be educated about these – it can mean the difference between winning and losing a deal.”

Security matters

The attraction of apps like these is undeniable. Just as appealing is the ability to always thwart the plots of hackers, but the security landscape is dominated by technology that is fundamentally unfit for purpose, claimed computer security and forensics expert Sean Chumura, the man behind US-based CybX Security, who told delegates that devices are so permeable as to be an open invitation to hackers. “The only way to keep data private is to put the control in your hands,” he stated. “Security is built on broken technology. But we reversed this and developed quantum safe security that you can control.”

Until now CybX Security technology was only open to governments, but having created the Ombex company ICT resellers in the UK now have access to its solutions and expertise, which also

transforms a traditional security expense into an affordable RoI opportunity. Chumura explained that apps are designed with 376 permissions, yet only five fall into the scope of app developers. The rest remain open and give hackers always-on access to operating systems and personal information. “People download apps with no clue about what is happening in the background,” stated Chumura. “So we decided to start over and develop a quantum safe security product which forms the basis of all our technologies.

Sub-£3 million turnover resellers are overlooked by many service providers

Now we watch everyone else, they don't watch us, and you don't need the expertise – we put it in your hands.”

Once downloaded CybX fixes all the permission sets that developers never touch, eliminating any potential for leaks into or out of the device, and then gets to work on building an impenetrable security wall. “We give you exposure of all apps and everything that happens on your device,” added Chumura. “We cut off every data broker, data miner and third party that any app brings in that's not required to work, and drop the bandwidth usage by up to 75 per cent on mobile devices. That's how much they use your bandwidth to make their money. That's

RoI, and no one can steal from you any more.”

Amid all this, commoditisation of the telecoms sector is a perpetual warning sign to shrinking margins, emphasised keynoter Andy Duncan, Spitfire's IT Interface Manager, who explained how the company designs and builds products to suit the demands of resellers in this margin squeezed environment. He said service providers must offer more than products if they are serious about giving resellers real revenue opportunities, and the shift must be towards reducing the effort expended by resellers on sales and support as a route to increasing their bottom line. In this, claimed Duncan, Spitfire has become a master practitioner with guaranteed voice quality an important component of its strategy to add value by minimising effort.

MiVaD this year confirmed that opportunities for business growth exist in spade fulls, and that smaller resellers have the power to wield a growing influence on the UK comms market with the right support from channel partners. Who would bet against the rise of the sub-£3 million reseller? Certainly not keynoter Adam Zoldan, Director at Knight Corporate Finance, who spotlighted a buoyant comms sector still abuzz from last year's 276 M&A and investment deals, worth £28 billion and mainly driven by unprecedented levels of funding and PE interest. “There is strong competition for the best assets as PE companies compete hard against trade buyers and look at smaller firms as investment opportunities,” he stated. ■



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Zest4 raises the IoT bar

It is not beyond the bounds of all resellers to secure a share of the emerging IoT market, argues Anton le Saux, Zest4's Head of IoT, who says it's not only doable but also straightforward and essential to future business growth.

Resellers must quickly embrace what they too easily turn their backs on – which is realising the market potential for IoT in their own customer bases and beyond – urges le Saux, especially as game changing adoption catalysts such as narrowband IoT and low power connectivity are poised to go mainstream. UC provider Zest4 first brought IoT into its portfolio two years ago, kicking off with a standard network offering that evolved into a more bespoke approach that aligned better with the requirements of the channel – offered via the company's IoT Partner Programme. It was a move that redefined the portfolios of more than 25 per cent of its partners.

The initiative provides training, pre- and post-sales support and end-to-end solutions along with bespoke commercials. "Today, more than 60 per cent of our 200 partners have started selling products and services into the IoT space," stated le Saux. "Zest4 is now entering the next phase of development by becoming an IoT MVNO."

This required a big investment into licencing the Arkessa Emport platform as its own,

creating Zest4 Connect. "Arkessa has spent over 10 years developing the platform and we have acquired that capability, giving us our own IoT platform that allows our partners, and customers, to manage their entire IoT estate – irrespective of mobile network – all in one place," added Le Saux. "It's the right time to push the button on the plan, to keep the momentum growing and take it to the next level."

Zest4's final preparations as an IoT MVNO are nearing completion as the last few pieces of infrastructure fall into place, along with APIs and automation processes. While Zest4's status as a channel-only provider of IoT services is cementing, the current state of IoT in the UK comms channel is less solid, noted Le Saux, who sees partners falling into three groups: IoT adopters; aspiring adopters who need the help of an IoT specialist; and doubters who believe that IoT will be a struggle to monetise. "These segments are always at the forefront of my thinking," he said. "Whatever product, solution or service we bring to market we must ensure we cater for the various types of partners. We are offering some simple



Anton le Saux

It's the right time to push the button, accelerate momentum and take IoT to the next level

to sell end-to-end solutions that fit the dealer and fixed line reseller portfolio, where we bill and manage on behalf of the partner and pay a revenue share. Or we give partners the ability to buy wholesale, contract and bill their own customers."

Market drivers

The technical and market forces shaping the UK IoT market are also multifaceted, observed Le Saux. "Many initiatives are driven by the impetus for the UK to be more ecological, more efficient and use less energy," he explained. "Smart cities, smart buildings, smart road networks and smart energy initiatives are under way. These filter down through businesses, large and small, giving owners something to think about, especially where there is a need to measure,

monitor or control an asset, person or system. Duty of care is also an influencing factor. Employers are looking at ways to make sure their staff are safe and have the ability to communicate effectively. Retail and healthcare are also big drivers in the consumer marketplace. These solutions are driving B2B opportunities."

The next big game changer will be narrowband IoT and low power connectivity, observed Le Saux. "We currently have access to a number of low power services with Lora and Sigfix, among others," he explained. "But all the MNOs are now developing their own narrowband services that will run across the existing network infrastructure. Vodafone and EE have done live tests in several countries

across Europe, and in the UK there are development teams and plans in place for 2018 /2019 roll outs. The European standards have been agreed and the launch of this technology will open up the IoT space. The channel needs to be skilled and selling before it hits the mass market, or there will be catching-up to be done. At that point maybe partners will start to take more notice."

The key factor, says le Saux, is educating and incentivising the sales function to identify opportunities, not least those in the partners' own back yard. "Every business that sits within a reseller's base could – and at some point will – benefit from some form of IoT solution," he added. "It just needs a different type of conversation. If you can start talking about their business efficiencies instead of communications or IT needs, you're onto a winner. We are seeing traction with our own channels because we are educating, supporting and driving the behaviour." ■

Primary uses of IoT

- The automation of business processes and remote management of assets
- Efficiencies through cost control
- Instant connectivity where required – mobile and in remote and greenfield locations
- Failover and back-up for existing connectivity services
- Data management and security
- Insights into what is happening in a business remotely. For example, the location of assets or people, operating hours of machinery, preventative maintenance, data gathering and understanding



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Meaningful Insights

For Emma de Sousa, Senior Vice President of Insight, leadership is a vocation, a calling to build teams whose members live and breathe the core cultural values she helps to instil.



Emma de Sousa

When de Sousa accepted the Senior Vice President role in January the move reflected her fast paced, dynamic nature and commitment to make a difference – all qualities she identified in the organisation she’s championed since joining in 2003. Eagerly jumping on the rolling bandwagon of Insight’s global campaign convoy, de Sousa turns her hand to reinforcing the cultural values of the company. “Insight is about people and we live by our core values of Hunger, Heart and Harmony, which sets the tone for our business and defines who we are,” she stated.

“Establishing successful teams that are aligned and committed to these values is at the heart of my leadership philosophy, enabling us to deliver consistent growth while transforming our business. With a background

in sales leadership, my skills were immediately relevant, and culturally Insight is the perfect fit. People are everything and if you get the right mix together, focused on a common goal and inspired to succeed, anything is possible.”

The IT services giant was established 30 years ago in Phoenix Arizona by brothers Tim and Eric Crown. It was then known as Hard Drives International. Over time the company expanded its geographic coverage and technical capabilities through acquisitions and organic growth. Today, Insight is a Fortune 500 global technology solutions provider. Its headcount in December last year stood at almost 6,700 worldwide. For the full year 2017 net sales reached \$6.7 billion, representing 22 per cent growth on the previous year. Insight serves clients across all market segments and the latest market share data

indicates that the firm is strengthening its position.

“We have been on a transformation journey for the past four years, investing heavily in bolstering our skills and capabilities and in particular developing service offerings that allow us to help clients define, architect, implement and manage IT solutions,” added de Sousa. “Our strength lies in our partner network which enables us to combine best of breed technology with our services capability.”

Partnerships

She noted that clients are not looking for a partner that just supplies technology, they are seeking one that can help leverage IT to compete more effectively in their own markets. “To achieve this we have transformed our sales organisation, investing in field sales skills as well as increasing technical resource, ensuring our clients have access to knowledge

and experience at every stage of their journey,” commented de Sousa.

The end user’s digitalisation journey is likely to be less challenging than the trip de Sousa undertook in 2006 when she accepted a position to run Insight’s EMEA operations based in Munich. “I left my life behind at short notice to take on a challenging role,” she recalled. “There were many unknowns and I felt vulnerable. But it was the best move I ever made. I learnt so much about myself and the need to constantly stretch yourself beyond your comfort zone.”

Not one to sit on her hands and fuelled by ambition to influence positive outcomes and make a difference, de Sousa’s life took another turn when she became a mother. “The psychological challenge of being a successful working mum was hard to reconcile,” she noted. “On returning to work after having my first daughter I loved being back in the role but felt incredible guilt. It takes time, but eventually you figure out that you can succeed at work and be a great mummy, and not feel bad about it.”

de Sousa’s inherent strengths also help to drive notable success within Insight’s managed services business during 2017, which she plans to enhance this year. No less ambitious is her strategy to accelerate growth in the cloud operation. “Over the last five years businesses have gone from seeing cloud as a one-size-fits-all model to save money, to something far more strategic and nuanced,” she added. “We have invested in technical tools and resources to provide

clients with the assessment, migration, integration and managed services required to simplify the cloud adoption process, whether that be a private, public or hybrid cloud environment.

“We’re also focused on helping customers become more agile, ensuring they have the right platforms in place and that applications work across the cloud and multiple devices, while focusing on automation and maximising business processes to support digital transformation.”

Just a minute with Emma de Sousa...

Role model: Elon Musk: He is brave and fearless, the two qualities I admire most

What talent do you wish you had? To fly: I would get around more quickly and avoid airports

What do you fear the most? Running out of time

If you weren’t in IT what would you be doing? Exploring the world as a travel writer for Condé Nast

What’s the best piece of advice you have ever been given? It’s better to do something and regret it than never do it at all

How do you relax when not working? Hanging out with my six year old daughter. Whatever we do it’s always fun and she teaches me a lot

Tell us something about yourself we don’t know: I worked for a well known supermarket many years ago, thrown in at the deep end to manage a store with no experience. On my first day I ordered so many toilet roles the delivery driver couldn’t fit them into the warehouse!



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Why consultation is key

A growing bevy of cyber crime threats show that the old vendor-led model of selling security has collapsed. Why? Because breaches will continue to prevail unless a consultative approach to the security landscape is adopted, argues Steve Burden, Security Product Manager at Daisy Group.

A full and quantified assessment of the security threats faced by particular customers must be understood before proposing a solution, any other tactical approach is doomed to failure. "The worst aspect of the security market is resellers and vendors looking to push a specific product without understanding the overall needs of their customers," stated Burden. "While this approach may have worked in the past the market is changing and calls for a consultative strategy rather than a product-led sales pitch. Resellers need to concentrate on what they can do to add value in this space."

User education can often produce the best return on investment, noted Burden, along with getting some of the basics right such as firewall, anti-virus and regular patching. "Ironically, the biggest security threat faced by SMEs comes from their own employees," he added. "Many are poorly trained in security and do not know how to use web and email safely. These threats often manifest themselves

as phishing, ransomware and data privacy issues. Wannacry was a good example of how devastating a ransomware attack can be to organisations of all sizes. Phishing is becoming more sophisticated, with many targeted at siphoning funds from business bank accounts. Also, GDPR has become relevant and we've already seen mistakes being made by employees accidentally sharing personal information."

Organisations can never do enough on security, and with limited budgets their resources must be concentrated in the right places. Not surprisingly, non security-centric resellers are currently struggling to keep up to date with the fast changing cyber security threat landscape. "It's difficult enough for those large enough to dedicate full-time resources and departments to the job, let alone resellers who typically focus on other areas," said Burden. "However, it's crucial not to lose sight of how important security can be as part of any IT proposition. We're seeing customers take security into consideration when



Steve Burden

The biggest security threat faced by SMEs comes from their own employees

purchasing a wide array of offerings such as connectivity, UC and cloud. If you are not protecting an asset or service you are providing to a customer then you are either leaving money on the table or risking losing a client and damaging your reputation."

Core considerations

There's pressure on all resellers to accept security as an important part of their core offering, rather than an add-on or nice-to-have. And according to Burden, everything needs to be looked at from a security perspective, not just traditional considerations like firewalls, anti-virus etc. "With security opportunities

resellers need a consultative approach, working with the customer to understand their key risks and proposing a way to use their limited security budget in the most effective manner," he commented. "The best aspect of the UK security market is its willingness to openly discuss challenges across organisations to create solutions that work for everyone. Security is not something that only affects a small number of organisations, it is an area of concern for us all."

GDPR is a big talking point for everyone in the industry at the moment, and for good reason. It's implications

are broad and a GDPR-beater product doesn't exist. "Another big issue is patching which is commonly overlooked and can have grave consequences," pointed out Burden. "Just look at the Wannacry attack. The vulnerability it exploited in Windows had been patched months earlier but hadn't been applied to a large number of devices. Furthermore, confusion surrounds how the security landscape is perceived. Customers are aware they are under threat but don't know what to focus on."

Sales people who can consult with customers and have a diversified portfolio to support them will be most attractive to SMEs, especially if they can display a capability to react to cyber events in an agile way. "We don't know where the next threat may come from, but when it hits the organisations that suffer most will be those that take the longest to respond," commented Burden. "By reacting quickly the impact can be minimised. Security sales is all about confidence, building trust and demonstrating that your organisation has the capability to provide a responsive end-to-end solution. The old scaremonger tactics no longer work.

"Daisy has adopted a consultative approach of Discovery, Prevention and Response – discovering the threats faced by the organisation, putting technological solutions and processes in place to prevent those threats from materialising, and ensuring that resources are in place to respond to events should the worst happen." ■



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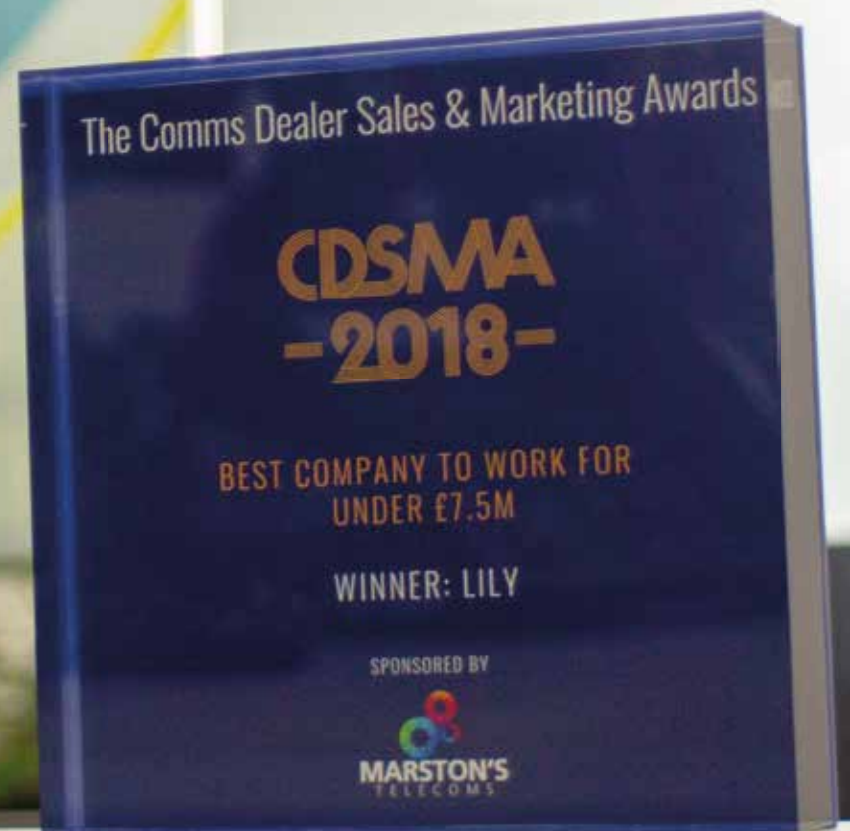
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Customer protection

Staggering under the potential threat of security crises and compliance failures, SMEs have turned to their technology providers who they hold accountable for protection. Here, Intercity Technology CTO Matt Johnson discusses what is expected of ICT resellers and affirms their critical role as trusted security providers.

The cyber security challenge looms ever larger on all digital agendas. At a macro level the Government's focus on security is growing in intensity as the UK aims to become a secure and resilient digital nation, seeking engagement with industry and law enforcement to bolster the UK's security capabilities. "This heightened level of activity is creating a market in which organisations are spoilt for choice when it comes to finding the right solutions or services, leading to confusion and the potential to make the wrong decisions," noted Johnson. "Organisations require a trusted security partner that can advise them on their options."

Cloud is becoming an integral part of technology strategies for businesses, especially as more agile pay-as-you-go options become available, so robust protection is essential. "Cloud service providers have cyber security at the top of their agenda but as data starts to infiltrate

different environments it can become difficult to control security across a disparate estate," observed Johnson. "It's therefore important that SMEs look for flexible security solutions that work across multiple platforms and different infrastructures."

The threats facing SMEs and larger corporations are the same, but the challenge is different. SMEs rarely have the internal resource or budget to match larger organisations, meaning they need to fight cyber threats in smarter ways. "Cyber criminals are always learning from each other and it's becoming easier for those with few skills to launch an attack," added Johnson. "Malware-as-a-service and DIY DDoS software are readily available on the dark web. This, coupled with new technologies broadens the attack surface and presents more opportunities for those looking to cause harm.

"It can be easy for SMEs to become overwhelmed and do nothing, but it's essential



Matt Johnson

The days of sitting back after buying a firewall and configuring policies are over

for them to constantly evolve and review their security estate. Another area that could be improved is the level of collaboration between vendors and IT resellers. The industry needs to work together more and share solutions that protect customer bases."

Time to act

There is no time for SMEs to sit on their hands in the face of the security challenges they face. Furthermore, the sea of data shared across corporate devices is greater than ever and expanding exponentially, and with the onset of GDPR and demands of PCI, rules and regulations have been tightened and

cannot be overlooked. "SMEs can no longer pay lip service to the controls they need to meet," stated Johnson. "A trusted security partner should advise on the right technology, processes and approach to keep customers safe and avoid governance pitfalls. But working with external companies to tick the initial governance boxes is only the beginning. Making sure that best practices continue to be followed is the real battle to avoid cyber threats and fines."

As cyber security becomes a top priority for businesses their expectation is that comms and IT resellers will have security inherently built

in. This requires constant assessment of the threat landscape and maintaining the skills to keep pace. "Investing in new solutions that have security baked in from the beginning, implementing formal staff training programmes and using solid management portals will ensure that comms and IT resellers remain ahead of the game," stated Johnson.

"It is crucial that resellers keep up to date with the new technologies and solutions that vendors offer. They then need to ensure that security solutions fit the customer's objectives. This will often mean combining complementary technologies to create a bespoke end-to-end security solution. By offering a security wrap and disaster recovery capabilities for all services, products will also be more resilient."

It goes without saying that the days of sitting back after buying a firewall and configuring a few policies are over. As more high profile cyber attacks rear their heads organisations will become ever more vigilant and budgets will increase to ensure that effective security measures can be taken, which in most cases will mean leveraging the expertise of trusted partners.

"The fast pace of technological change and evolving data environments, together with a rise in the scale of cyber attacks, means that safeguarding a business in-house is now a full-time job that requires a small army of staff," said Johnson. "Therefore the business opportunity for resellers to become trusted security partners is significant." ■

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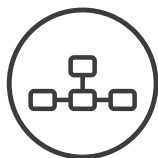
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Digital customer experience

Technology and choice have given customers power like never before and the customer experience is today's most important battleground on which ICT channel business are struggling to compete. This is purely because the pace of changing demands is unrelenting and companies often have difficulty keeping up with their customers.

Global business Medallia specialises in giving telecoms companies a unified view of the customer journey across all touch points via its Medallia Experience Cloud™ platform which provides real-time feedback to drive greater profitability, enhance customer retention and lower costs.

The company says that by 2020, customers will manage an estimated 85 percent of interactions without speaking to a human. The prevalence and richness of digital touchpoints means that companies are accumulating an unheard-of volume of measurable information about their customers, including behavioural analytics, ratings, and reviews.

It also means that companies everywhere—including those that built their success through high-quality, in-person interactions—are talking about digital transformation. Even if you're not competing directly with a digital disruptor, chances are your customers have been served by one, and those experiences are shaping their expectations.

Comms giant Mitel has just unveiled the results of its survey on customer expectations and how businesses are meeting these (or not) as the case may be. The global survey samples the responses of 5,000 consumers and reveals that while businesses are investing in technology to improve customer experience, many are still falling short of giving customers what they want.

Among the headline findings are that:

- Nearly two-thirds of respondents in the UK (58%) say more work is needed by companies to improve their online experience.
- Yet 81% agree that overall, buying online is more convenient.
- Customer experience ratings vary in the UK by vertical, with retail and hospitality sectors leading the way.

It's good to know that not all companies, from both sides of the channel fence, are lagging behind in addressing and benefiting from developing digital customer experience strategies and our contributors to this month's Kaleidoscope can attest to that.



NEIL WATSON
ENTANET

HOW ARE YOU IMPROVING DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT?

We recently relaunched our synergi portal making it mobile responsive - ensuring our partners have access at any time of day, anywhere, on any device.

HOW DO YOU MONITOR YOUR ONLINE EXPERIENCE?

We conduct an annual customer survey to measure satisfaction across our customer base and hold regular reviews with our most influential partners to identify any areas of improvement as a whole. Plus, we actively encourage feedback at all times through our teams and systems.

HOW HAVE YOU BECOME 'CUSTOMER OBSESSED'?

All staff strive to ensure a superior customer experience at every interaction with Entanet. We proactively monitor our contact teams and provide ongoing training across the business, with continued investment into recruitment and resources (33% last year). If our partners succeed we succeed!

PLEASE OUTLINE YOUR DIGITAL SUCCESS STORY?

It's all about measurement and the baseline. The introduction of a new phone system has given us a much greater insight into the customer experience and has allowed us to improve. We're currently implementing a new ITSM platform and are excited by the potential for improvement this brings.



JOHN MURPHY
GAMMA

HOW ARE YOU IMPROVING DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT?

Gamma has developed a mechanism through our portal to allow our channel partners to rate themselves technically. This is the first step towards skills matching between Gamma and channel partner support staff.

HOW DO YOU MONITOR YOUR ONLINE EXPERIENCE?

We use analytics to understand the online journeys our portal users are undertaking. This data helps us reorganise our online journeys and develop new tools to improve, reducing the effort our customers spend doing business with us.

HOW HAVE YOU BECOME 'CUSTOMER OBSESSED'?

Since the inception of our business we have held monthly cross-functional meetings focussed on the quality of service we provide to our customers. Combined with our empowering culture, this has kept customers at the heart of what we do.

PLEASE OUTLINE YOUR DIGITAL SUCCESS STORY?

The range of 'best of breed' online technologies, coupled with our ability to integrate these within our core platforms has provided a host of solutions available to us to develop service. A market leading customer service is now far more achievable.



ANTONY BLACK
WAVENET

HOW ARE YOU IMPROVING DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT?

Our in-house development team has built our bespoke online gateway called 'Toolbox'. One portal enabling access to multiple carriers for quoting/ provisioning/ assuring and billing. It puts our partners firmly in control by displaying all the information they require to make a buying decision.

HOW DO YOU MONITOR YOUR ONLINE EXPERIENCE?

Online analytics help us assess abandoned orders, track installations and provide automatic service delivery updates.

We use this information to identify how 'Toolbox' can improve.

HOW HAVE YOU BECOME 'CUSTOMER OBSESSED'?

Our service centric approach means we have multiple ways of engaging with customers ensuring they can pick an option best suited for their business needs. As an aggregator, we need to add value and we do this by constantly adding efficiencies for our partners.

PLEASE OUTLINE YOUR DIGITAL SUCCESS STORY?

The self-serve customer service environment means we are essentially delivering information to our customers ahead of them asking us for it. In turn this also allows us to free up the customer services team enabling them to focus on continuous improvement.



JASON KILVERT
INCOM

HOW ARE YOU IMPROVING DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT?

Solution sales and e-commerce do not marry well, so digital customer engagement needs more thought. Our early steps were webchat and online portals for billing and service; more latterly, proposals are built via a bespoke, Cloud based 'workbook' with digital sign-off.

HOW DO YOU MONITOR YOUR ONLINE EXPERIENCE?

Advanced website analytics provide a profile of our online audience and an understanding of visitor engagement as part of the broader customer journey. Post-project, online questionnaires establish Net Promoter Score and form part of our ITIL and ISO compliant, monitoring processes.

HOW HAVE YOU BECOME 'CUSTOMER OBSESSED'?

The ethos of our company centres around providing outstanding customer service. We adopt a 'whole company' approach and our team are regularly commended for going 'above and beyond'. Customer feedback is shared via our internal social media platform.

PLEASE OUTLINE YOUR DIGITAL SUCCESS STORY?

Via integrated IT systems and collaborative tools our customers can log service incidents, access reports and project updates. Our bespoke CRM is integrated with those of several larger clients to automate processes and maximise benefits.



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STEVE MCINTYRE
NIMANS

HOW ARE YOU IMPROVING DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT?
We are redeveloping the Nimans website and ensuring we have all the tools our customers need to interact with us in the best way to suit them. They can phone us, have a live chat online or email us.

HOW DO YOU MONITOR YOUR ONLINE EXPERIENCE?
We regularly survey our customer base and gain feedback online and through our dedicated Account Managers. It's a continually evolving process.

HOW HAVE YOU BECOME 'CUSTOMER OBSESSED'?
Nimans continues to adhere to the principles of our founder Julian Niman, who built the business on a 'serve the customer' mission statement. Helping our customers grow is at the heart of everything we do.

PLEASE OUTLINE YOUR DIGITAL SUCCESS STORY?
IT plays a fundamental role here such as using EDI (Electronic Data Interchange) systems which make ordering from us easy and direct – helping us maintain our 99.6% on-time logistics service.



MARCUS HUNT
9 GROUP

HOW ARE YOU IMPROVING DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT?
The development team at 9 always ensure that our partners are the ones who remain in control. We also demand that a seamless 'Quote to Bill' process is central to the thought process across all our product portfolio.

HOW DO YOU MONITOR YOUR ONLINE EXPERIENCE?
Alongside website analytics, we are always seeking feedback from our Partners and customers, whether anecdotal, or through structured formal surveys. More importantly, we act upon it to deliver better solutions.

HOW HAVE YOU BECOME 'CUSTOMER OBSESSED'?
Our Free to Perform ethos encapsulates the fixation we have with our customers and partners. We develop systems that allow our partners to share usable information and tools with customers and we allow our partners to dictate the new feature development priorities.

PLEASE OUTLINE YOUR DIGITAL SUCCESS STORY?
To complement our series of self-serve tools, we have developed a series of APIs to automate the order process and present live status information, all supported by analytics that help us to spot where user journeys can be further improved.



NEIL WILSON
VIRTUAL1

HOW ARE YOU IMPROVING DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT?
Automation is at the heart of our business, from the connectivity we provide, through to the service experience we deliver. We work hard to make sure that manual processes are removed, and control is given to our partners.

HOW DO YOU MONITOR YOUR ONLINE EXPERIENCE?
We have always had a feedback mechanism within our customer interface, 1Portal, and paid close attention to the usage metrics. We are just launching a much more comprehensive feedback and NPS Engine to make sure that we better understand our customer satisfaction.

HOW HAVE YOU BECOME 'CUSTOMER OBSESSED'?
As a wholesale only business, in a highly competitive market, our customer experience is vital. When there is such a range of providers, delivering a market leading service experience is often the difference maker.

PLEASE OUTLINE YOUR DIGITAL SUCCESS STORY?
Using the power of our software defined network, we have put our Partners in direct control of the connectivity solutions we provide. Meaning that changes can now be made directly, in real time, a UK 1st.



CHERIE HOWLETT
JOLA

HOW ARE YOU IMPROVING DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT?
Our dealers create co-branded proposals for end users to accept digitally, which automatically triggers the provisioning process. Our resellers use Mobile Manager to send usage alerts and add bolt-ons automatically to avoid bill shock.

HOW DO YOU MONITOR YOUR ONLINE EXPERIENCE?
We run weekly reports to track number of users, quotes, orders and order value. Feedback is encouraged via webinars and training days, which is fed directly into our development projects. We run regular satisfaction surveys with users.

HOW HAVE YOU BECOME 'CUSTOMER OBSESSED'?
Customer First is our primary value. Our partners expect prompt, professional responses to support their end users. We hire against our values and regularly measure ourselves against them. Bonuses are also linked to partner satisfaction.

PLEASE OUTLINE YOUR DIGITAL SUCCESS STORY?
Our strategy is to automate as much as possible to give our partners control. Dealers visit customers, send co-branded proposals and receive commission automatically. By developing Mobile Manager, we overcame bill shock and enabled resellers to sell 4G easily.



VINCENT DISNEUR
UNION STREET

HOW ARE YOU IMPROVING DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT?
As a software provider, we've invested considerable effort into developing our support portal and online resources. From there partners can access knowledge articles, watch over 80 training videos, initiate live chat with our team and request support.

HOW DO YOU MONITOR YOUR ONLINE EXPERIENCE?
We closely monitor usage statistics and regularly survey our partners to gauge satisfaction. Our Account Managers are trained to respond quickly to digital enquiries and, to improve customer experience, we log all enquiry outcomes.

HOW HAVE YOU BECOME 'CUSTOMER OBSESSED'?
We embrace a culture of best practice and innovation in everything we do, encouraging our teams to be passionate and creative. Our core values are pivotal to ensuring a superb customer experience for every user.

PLEASE OUTLINE YOUR DIGITAL SUCCESS STORY?
Using CHEF, a configuration management software, we can ensure that the configuration of our software's hosted environment is automated and protected from human error, delivering high availability 24/7. If disaster occurs, we can replicate the exact configuration of our data centre at the touch of a button.



ANDREW WILSON
NODE 4

HOW ARE YOU IMPROVING DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT?
On top of our sales focused investment in portals, we have recently invested in new service delivery platforms, namely Service Now, Science Logic and Pager Duty. This will give customers and partners a clear glass window into our ticketing system and our helpdesk performance.

HOW DO YOU MONITOR YOUR ONLINE EXPERIENCE?
We take our NPS very seriously. Our satisfaction scores are key business metrics and we seek feedback from all customer and partner touch points within the organisation. We believe our Net Promoter Score of +42 blows our peer group out of the water.

HOW HAVE YOU BECOME 'CUSTOMER OBSESSED'?
Our company mantra is ESaaS. (Exceptional Service as a Standard). Our staff have monthly ESaaS awards for exceptional customer focused performance and we hold regular workshops on ensuring that we are 100% customer centric from the CEO to the graduates.

PLEASE OUTLINE YOUR DIGITAL SUCCESS STORY?
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The precision weapon

AI has been engineered as the precision weapon against poor customer service and inefficiency, with clients becoming low-hanging fruit whenever they come into contact with an organisation. How far away is this ideal scenario? It's here and now, says Tollring's Director of Strategic Alliances Carl Boraman, who cautions that while AI cannot fully replace human-to-human interaction it is already the Holy Grail in data capture and predictive analytics.



Carl Boraman

Predictive analytics is where the true value of AI lies, according to Boraman. "It helps contact centres to predict and handle demand better than current technologies," he said. "AI will also help to personalise the service through self-learning and gaining an understanding of who is enquiring on a near person level. This is the game changer."

Tollring's place in the world of AI is in big data and analytics which it leverages in its fraud and credit management tools to predict trends, learn patterns and make ongoing adjustments. "AI engines capture customer interaction data which we transform into something meaningful, providing insights into customer trends and behaviours," commented Boraman. "We then make this data available to our resellers and their customers. By combining machine learned data from AI with traditional comms data you start to create a real opportunity to offer new levels of customer experience."

Resellers need to look at their own day-to-day operations to understand where AI can help their business, advises Boraman. "It may be too early to replace an IVR system, but a chatbot might be perfect for servicing customers in some way," he explained. "Although AI and chatbots can be useful to contact centres, to add real value the chatbot needs to be staffed to handle customer questions that require more details or personal answers. Once resellers have experienced AI they can create use cases to share with customers and prospects." ■

Gone are the days when smaller firms had no access to contact centre technology; and of all the high tech methods to make customer experience targets more achievable we are reaching a point where none will be more effective than AI. For smaller businesses dedicated to serving their public with insight and sensitivity, a combination of AI and contact centre technology may well be within their resources and will ultimately redefine the customer experience they provide.

In assessing the impact of AI on contact centres and rethinking the customer experience, Boraman highlighted how the cloud is making the contact centre market more accessible to smaller organisations. "Cloud means little or no up front investment, affordable

monthly subscriptions based on the level of functionality required and the ability to scale up and down easily and quickly to meet demand," he said. "The drive for customer service excellence and the need to address increasing competition means that even smaller organisations without formal call or contact centres can access and benefit from this technology."

Although smaller businesses do not have formal agents in a dedicated contact centre, they do have customer facing teams either taking or making calls and speaking to customers, handling web enquiries, dealing with emails and monitoring social media. "Organisations want to know how many calls or customer interactions they are handling and how long staff spend on the phone or in chat," added Boraman. "They want this information to ensure customers are

being contacted and properly handled, calls are being answered, and to make sure that someone is monitoring the web chatbot at all times. Live stats on these channels provides valuable and timely data on the customer experience, on sales orders made or lost, unhappy customers, busiest times, hit rates and inbound/campaign performance effectiveness."

Early days

Right now though Tollring is currently seeing only large contact centres use AI, typically to replace IVR, ultimately removing humans from skills-based routing tasks. "AI is not the answer to everything, but it can improve certain customer interactions significantly," added Boraman. "24/7 access is one major benefit that improves the overall customer experience. However, the time is approaching when AI will truly be able to offer a

The time is approaching when AI will truly offer a better customer experience

better customer experience than speaking to a real person. Although adoption and acceptance of AI will increase significantly, there are certain products or services that can probably never be served as well with AI such as selling complex financial products. AI works well at the initial contact stage, getting people to the right place and speaking to the best person. But it will be a while before AI can fully automate the whole customer interaction cycle."





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Highlight hires three Aberdeen's fibre leader



Saunders, Rowan and Walters

HIGHLIGHT'S channel ambitions are clearer than ever following the appointment of three senior execs to support plans to add 30 new MSP partners by the end of 2018. Former Claranet Technical Director Martin Saunders has been drafted into Highlight's Product Director position, bringing 21 years experience in the service provider market including stints at AOL and Easynet.

Jon Walters has been pulled in as Head of Channel Development, joining from Solar Communications where he was Head of Business Development (formerly Head of Data Services). Previous roles include Channel Account Director at Exponential-e and Head of Sales

and Channel at 8el. And incoming Head of Engineering Martin Rowan brings over 20 years technical leadership experience in software development across a variety of functions while at Citrix Systems, including Director of Software Engineering for the XenApp and XenDesktop for the past six years.

Highlight's Chief Executive Officer Richard Thomas commented: "Martin will help to ensure the continuous enhancements of the Highlight product as we bring on new partners. Jon's appointment is critical as we undertake this major channel acquisition strategy. And Martin's role will focus on extending the flexibility of Highlight for our partners." Thomas expects new partners to come from the UK and Germany, Benelux, the Nordics and Middle East regions.

Aberdeen's fibre leader

CITYFIBRE has appointed Allan McEwan as Development Manager for Aberdeen following a £40 million investment in the roll out of full fibre connectivity



Allan McEwan

to nearly every home and business in the city. Aberdeen will be the first in Scotland to benefit from the partnership between CityFibre and Vodafone with full fibre set to reach one million homes and businesses across the UK by 2021.

McEwan will be the local point of contact for all city stakeholders. He previously served as Senior Business Development Manager within Petrofac, a service provider to the oil and gas production and processing industry. He said: "I want to ensure that everyone across the city is aware of the potential benefits of full fibre connectivity, not only to businesses but also to residents. I will be working closely with Aberdeen City Council and developing additional opportunities."

Also on the move...



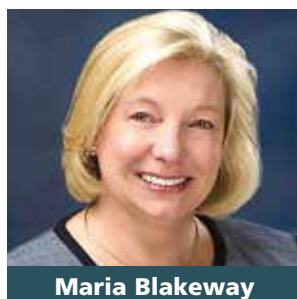
Jay Szanto

STL Communications' promotion of Jay Szanto to Provisioning Manager last month prompted a restructuring of the operations team and builds on the acquisition of SolvElT Solutions in April. Szanto joined STL in July 2016 as Project

Coordinator. Saul Branch, STL's Operations Director, said: "STL spends time and money investing in the development of its employees, so likes to promote from within whenever possible. Jay has proven his capabilities at the highest level and is a popular staff member." Szanto was also voted winner of STL's Q1 Customer Service Award by colleagues.

MITEL has pulled in Maria Blakeway as Vice President of Customer Success responsible for overseeing and expanding its Customer Success Team. She brings more than 25 years experience

in building and delivering customer support and success programmes and was most recently Senior Vice President at SaaS provider nThrive. Blakeway has also held senior leadership roles at General Electric,



Maria Blakeway

Intuit and Microsoft. "Customers still face challenges as they look to maximise the true value of their business communications," she said. "Our goal is to help them unlock business and competitive benefits with new faster and smarter ways of working."

Hatley joins up with TTB



David Hatley

ONE-TIME BT Wholesale Client Director David Hatley has joined TalkTalk Business as Account Director bringing experience in leadership, strategy and growth across large accounts and contracts. While at BT Hatley also completed a stint as Head of Sales responsible for EE

prior to its acquisition by BT. "TalkTalk Business is a disruptive challenger brand with a spring in its step, and despite the complex market it speaks in plain English to customers and employees which was a massive draw for me," he commented.

Hatley's appointment followed the arrival of Steve Orton who stepped in as Head of Service Providers, Partner and Sales, responsible for 80 of TalkTalk Business's top service provider customers. Previous roles include a two year spell at Logicalis as UK Sales Director, and an 18 year run at BT in a variety of roles most latterly running the IT Services sales teams focused on retail, banking and wholesale. "The changes in technology and how networks and infrastructure are now consumed by the market means there is an amazing opportunity," he stated.

Ex-Doro chief in new UK venture

FORMER Doro Group Director and UK Managing Director Chris Millington is spearheading Poland-based mobile device maker Maxcom's push into the UK market.



Chris Millington

Maxcom is listed on the Warsaw Stock Exchange and its products are sold in more than 20 European countries. As Maxcom's UK Country Manager Millington will target niche market segments via the retail channel and distribution.

"Not all mobile users are the same and their needs vary according to life stage, career status and domestic situation," said Millington. "Smartphones dominate our world today but this is not necessarily great for our overall wellbeing or work-life balance. This does however create an opportunity for non-smart or second-device ownership and the re-emergence of the dedicated work handset purely for making calls and sending texts."

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