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This month's movers and shakers



Doors open up in home market

FOR most channel ISPs the residential market has been immaterial but now they ignore home users at their own cost, warns CityFibre Head of Sales for Consumer ISPs Emma Goodwin.

SPECIAL REPORT

Disruptive altnet CityFibre has kicked off a campaign that promises to unlock the residential comms market for ISPs that have a traditional focus on the business sector.

According to Goodwin times are changing and channel players would do themselves a big favour if their go-to-market strategies met growing demand from home users for access to the latest connectivity options.

"There is enormous potential for ISPs that have already honed their skills and experience in the business market to address the needs of today's consumers," she commented.

"For home users, full fibre is a new and exciting proposition, one that's radically different. It's effectively a new market for our traditional partners.

"By positioning themselves to be an alternative option business ISPs will be well placed to maximise the potential."

Goodwin noted that new opportunities in the residential market are starting to resonate in the channel as more domestic users seek out faster and more reliable services.

"Our aim is to accelerate ISPs' ability to serve these needs through an open access full fibre network, stimulating demand for partners as homes become ready for service," she added.

"CityFibre will work with ISP partners on a national and local level." **See page 26**

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

ALL attempts to equate the past 25 years in the comms channel with the next quarter century will fail on all counts – such has been the scale and rate of change. The last bastion – ISDN – has its days numbered, and 2025 will surely

draw a line under an era in comms that for me started out working for a reseller called Ansamatic based in north London, later to move to Hemel Hempstead.

The meat and drink of the business then was answer machine rental for large monthly sums, and just as large CPE call diverters primarily used by GP surgeries. One morning the Finance chief, Norman Bookbinder, dashed into the office waving a newspaper that detailed the industry's deregulation – he was near uncontainable in terms of the opportunity it presented the company which went on to become a leading Panasonic and Siemens reseller, building on a small group of existing DeTeWe user customers. I would not be surprised if a number of these green and brown phones are still in use today somewhere.

This in many ways is the story of the channel – small businesses in the right place at the right time suddenly being able to exploit a once in a generation opportunity. All these years on, it is fair to say that the channel faces a similar unlocking of business potential as full fibre continues its march and the all-IP world is within reach.

At these times of reflection, memorable moments are recalled with an immediacy that bridges time in an instant. One such memory for me was the salesman who sold a Panasonic KXT308 system to a taxi company in Birmingham for almost £15,000. How did he sleep at night? Another was the arrival of the Mercury Smart Box, probably the best margin maker for resellers at the time and for a long time thereafter. For more comms channel recollections see pages 18-20.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

• KALEIDOSCOPE: Times have changed but the comms industry will always innovate – see page 38

Focus on the march north of the border

FOCUS Group's UK expansion plans have shifted up a gear with the acquisition of Scotland-based connectivity and telephony specialist HighNet. The deal builds on West Sussex-based Focus Group's acquisition of Exeter located swcomms in February this year.

As well as extending Focus's geographical reach the Highnet transaction strengthens the product portfolios and capabilities for both brands.

HighNet, which had been seeking investment opportunities to drive its growth plans, will continue to operate under its brand name with David J Siegel remaining as MD alongside his existing management team and employees.

The family run business was founded in 1984 and has offices in Inverness and Glasgow.

Chairman David M Siegel continued with his plans for retirement last month.

Commenting on the deal Focus Group co-founder Ralph Gilbert said: "There is a perfect fit between the two companies that will create great opportunities for collaborations and business development in Scotland.

"HighNet has a strong core network of Internet services



Ralph Gilbert

together with proven channel partner expertise which will provide Focus Group with the ability to advance further in this field. Working together will speed up our growth plans."

David Siegel commented: "It was important that we found a pairing that allowed us to do what we do best.

"We also wanted a culture that matched our own and to benefit from all that comes with the support of a larger business – namely the investment and expertise to transition to a £20m turnover company.

"There ended up being only one partnership that ticked all the boxes and the next phase of our journey sees us joining forces with Focus Group."

Focus Group was founded over 15 years ago and is now a £120m revenue business with a 550-plus headcount.

HighNet was advised by Paul Billingham from Knight Corporate Finance. Focus was advised by Roxburgh Milkins and RSM UK Group.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

ISLE of Man-based Plan.com was pipped at the post in this year's Sunday Times BDO Profit Track 100 league table, taking second place. The ranking measures profit growth over a three year period for private companies across all sectors with Plan.com hitting 65% above the Top 100 average. CFO Neil Kelly said: "Winning the Sunday Times Tech Track 100 in 2018 was an achievement and to be recognised with another top placement three years later is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our team."

THE UK Government's Competition and Markets Authority has provisionally cleared the proposed merger of Virgin Media and Virgin Mobile with O2. A Phase 2 investigation by an independent group of CMA Panel members concluded that the deal is 'unlikely to lead to any substantial lessening of competition in relation to the supply of wholesale services'. Martin Coleman, CMA Panel Inquiry Chair, said: "Given the impact this deal could have in the UK we needed to scrutinise this merger closely. The evidence has shown that the deal is unlikely to lead to higher prices or a reduced quality of mobile services."

Fulcrum's Pure Tech purchase

NETHERLANDS-based Fulcrum Technology has acquired Pure Technology Group (PTG) in a move that PTG CEO Stephen O'Brien claims will propel the firm to the premier league of IT services providers.

O'Brien was attracted to Fulcrum's focus on a pan-European strategy and capacity to give PTG access to a broader customer base and broaden its product and service portfolio. PTG's senior management team and all 140 personnel will remain in place across bases in Leeds, Wakefield and Wigan.

PTG was established in 2007 by O'Brien and generated £39.7m revenues in its latest financial year.

"We had many approaches over the last couple of years but Fulcrum's pitch was different," said O'Brien. "It has a strategy that will propel us towards being among the top echelon of UK IT service providers."

Fulcrum CEO Shane Maine commented: "We see clearly the expanding capabilities we can develop together in secure remote working and enterprise service management."

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TelcoSwitch in buy mode



Russell Lux

TELCOSWITCH has added 32,000 new users and a posse of channel partners following the acquisition of Coventry-based PBX Hosting in a £4.5m deal. PBX Hosting was founded in 2007 and will continue to trade independently post-acquisition to retain its regional brand presence but with greater support from the parent company.

The deal is TelcoSwitch's second this year, following the OneVoice acquisition in January. It also comes after TelcoSwitch secured a £4m funding round.

TelcoSwitch CEO Russell Lux said: "Acquisition activity is key for us as we expand our UCaaS intellectual property and footprint of channel partners."

"The PBX Hosting team have built a successful business and we are exploring the opportunity to add value to their cus-

tomers and partners through the wider product portfolio."

PBX Hosting CEO Stuart Gibson commented: "Both companies are well aligned on ethos, technology and how we support partners."

NEWS ROUNDUP

HATS off to Berry Telecom for being crowned Overall Reseller of the Year by Pragma in its annual reseller awards. Other winners included Lily Comms, BDR Group, Mint Telecom, Silver Cloud, Mtech Communications, Cloud Voice and Data, Excell Group and Southern Communications with 5G Communications and Focus Group bagging a brace of awards. The virtual event also raised £3,890 for St Peter and St James Hospice and Cancer Research. Will Morey, Sales and Marketing Director at Pragma, said: "The energy, positivity and momentum that our resellers have is infectious, and this event recognised some outstanding performances."

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Tectrix snaps up IT provider



Les Mitty

TECTRIX Solutions has completed the first of a possible three acquisitions within two years as the Manchester-based ICT business entertains the possibility of becoming a £10m revenue organisation.

The addition of Warrington-based IT solution provider Swan Solutions for an undisclosed fee brings seven members of staff and boosts Tectrix Solutions' regional presence.

CEO Les Mitty is aiming for post-acquisition revenues

of £1.6m in the first year and expects cross-selling opportunities to significantly drive value.

"This acquisition has nearly doubled our size overnight," he said. "We hope to have two more done within the next 20 months and I do not see why we cannot hit £10m."

Mitty also noted that Swan Solutions will retain its branding for the foreseeable future.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

CONTENT Guru parent company Redwood Technologies has acquired US-based Potomac Integration and Consulting (PIC), a consultancy organisation to US federal government agencies. The move is part of the group's US expansion drive and follows a ten year partnership between the firms. Sean Taylor, CEO of Redwood Technologies, stated: "Our business has seen exciting developments in the US marketplace and PIC will enhance our public sector credentials."

PACE Telecom's acquisition by Waterland-backed Enreach follows a long-term business relationship and sees Pace CEO Jamie Hughes step down. Duncan Ward, CEO at Enreach UK, said: "By adding Pace Telecom to Enreach UK we are able to improve on the products, services and the overall experience we provide our customers. Together we will focus on our portfolio of cloud solutions, broadband and mobile, as well as the new products, integrations and platforms we are set to launch over the coming months."

YouCloud Solutions netted by fast growing Connectus

IT MANAGED service provider Connectus' influence in the northern region is set to strengthen following the acquisition of YouCloud Solutions.

Connectus has offices in Salford and Doncaster and will retain the YouCloud office at Daresbury to increase its presence across Cheshire, Liverpool and Manchester.

Mark Wiseman, founder and CEO of YouCloud, joins Connectus as Commercial Director. CEO Roy Shelton said: "The pandemic has reinforced the need for robust, secure business grade connectivity and



Mark Wiseman and Roy Shelton

proactively managed services solutions. The addition of Mark and his team allows us to realise our vision."

Wiseman added: "Becoming part of the Connectus team

allows us to build on our approach and enhance the overall value proposition."

The deal adds 100 clients to Connectus's existing 250-plus customer base.



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NEWS ROUNDUP

LIVERPOOL-based SysGroup is opening a new sales and marketing hub in Manchester City Centre to attract local talent and beef up its influence in the north west. "We are keen to expand further in the region geographically to meet a growing demand from new and existing clients, while also opening ourselves up to the talent pool in Manchester," said CEO Adam Binks. The AIM-listed IT managed service provider is looking to recruit 10 new roles in the north west during the next 12 months and a further 20 in the next three years.

WELCOMM Communications' Bake Off and auction event has raised £10k for Leicestershire-based LOROS Hospice which provides care and support to terminally ill adults, their families and carers. The funds will help LOROS Hospice provide its usual service despite a £2m drop in funding due to the pandemic. Rachel Williamson, Operations Director at Welcomm, said: "We smashed our £10k fundraising target with the Bonkers Bake Off and this could rise to £12k once the final auction lot donations are in. Hopefully people will continue to donate to the amazing folk at LOROS."

Westcon ties up with 8x8



John DeLozier

8X8'S global presence and Westcon's influence in the UCaaS and CCaaS markets are set to strengthen following an agreement that gives distributor Westcon partners access to 8x8's public cloud solutions via a wholesale model.

John DeLozier, 8x8 SVP & global channel chief, said: "As organisations shift to distributed workforces and an operate-from-anywhere model, the need for integrated cloud communications and contact centre platforms for enhanced employee and customer engagement is increasingly in demand."

Commenting on the link-up, Rene Klein, Senior Vice President, Westcon Europe, stated: "We have been appointed by 8x8 as a strategic partner in driving the growth of the company's channel business in the UK and Ireland.

"Our track record in collaboration and communications technologies, combined with our recent growth in cloud and managed services providers puts us in a position to support 8x8's business goals."

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PRD cloud billing aids Westcoast

PRD's cloud billing solution has been credited as a catalyst for distributor Westcoast Cloud's scale up from £18m to £80m per annum in billing over the last four years.

The platform was designed by PRD at Westcoast's request to aid its resellers in billing cloud services, licences and cloud usage. Westcoast now plans to introduce the solution to its network on a resale basis.

PRD MD Simon Adams commented: "An increasing number of our telecoms customers are diversifying into Microsoft Azure and cloud consumption services, and our converged platform enables resellers to deliver one bill from a single platform.

"With a billing system for subscription and consumption services we want to take the unnecessary layers of admin and margin for error away from distributors and resellers."



Simon Adams

NEWS ROUNDUP

LONDON-based tech provider Redsqid has earned Carbon Neutral status after offsetting 100% of its 2020 emissions and hopes others in the industry will follow suit. CEO Sohin Raithatha said: "In the UK, businesses account for over 85% of total greenhouse gasses, and I feel that every business owner must live up to their responsibility." Through a partnership with Carbon Neutral Britain, Redsqid is currently supporting reforestation in Nicaragua, wind power in the Philippines and hydroelectric power in the Amazon.

ROSSENDALE-based reseller Matrix247 has kicked-off a buy and build strategy with the acquisition of Task Office Systems to add Microsoft Office products, IT support, digital photocopiers and document management to its current range of services. Matrix247 is working with growth consultants Cube Thinking to target £10m turnover by 2024 and expects more acquisitions in the coming months. The Bolton-based print specialist takes Matrix247's total headcount to 40 and has prompted a company restructure into three divisions – telecoms and mobile services, managed IT and digital print with document management.



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In developing the proposition, we worked with the team at Knight Corporate Finance

performance assessment.

3. Recurring revenues generated through a new service like Candio drives organic growth performance. This is a hugely important metric especially for those "buy and build" operators out there.
4. Digital transformation – Candio is a simple way for technology resellers to start to deliver digital transformation to their customers, something that is becoming an increasingly important area.

Performance Analysis

We've undertaken an analysis of our customers and grouped together resellers into three logical groups. Within these groups, we've then analysed the average reseller performances achieved through Candio's products.

The three groups we created are based on customer base size:

	Scale (10,000+ customers)	Major (1,000+ customers)	Target (250+ customers)
Monthly revenue	90,000	9,000	2,250
Monthly GP	45,000	4,500	1,125
Annual revenue	1,080,000	108,000	27,000
Annual GP	540,000	54,000	13,500
EBITDA Impact	540,000	54,000	13,500
Valuation Impact	6,480,000	378,000	67,500
Assumed valuation multiple	12x	7x	5x

to understand how Candio's services could really drive a resellers' business model and value.

We identified 4 key areas:

1. Increased recurring revenue provides tangible benefits for resellers and massively impacts valuations and strategic value. Adding Candio's services helps drive up the percentage of recurring revenue within a reseller, immediately makes their business more attractive and improves multiples available from private equity investors or enquirers.
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Thank you to Paul Billingham, David Middleton and the Knight team for helping us develop our Candio proposition and identify the positive impacts that Candio has on the resellers we work with.

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Omnichannel's key to win CX success

BUSINESSES risk losing client loyalty unless they harness a joined up and innovative omnichannel CX experience, warns CCaaS specialist Content Guru.

In an Insight Session last month the company cited data from The Institute of Customer Service showing that in January 2021 customer satisfaction in the UK registered a four year declining trend, its lowest since July 2015.

Content Guru believes this dip is due to organisations building a 'patchwork' customer experience rather than a joined up approach that aligns with customer expectations.

This gives resellers an opportunity to work with clients to build a holistic experience that offers customers more control over how they communicate with organisations, according to Sam Fuller, Content Guru's Customer Success Director.

He said: "The opportunity is to create a transparent customer experience that empowers customers to choose how they interact with the company.

"If organisations can build an omnichannel experience where you switch between channels then that is a chance for organisations to transform CX."



Sam Fuller



Edward Winfield

Content Guru also advocates that resellers keep up with the latest tech and consider how it can add value to customer interactions to keep partnerships alive for longer.

"To maintain a long-term relationship with opportunities for retention and growth resellers must continually consider an organisation's challenges and think about how new technologies can be used to solve these issues," said Fuller.

Examples of new technologies cited by Content Guru include augmented reality, sentiment analysis and natural language processing, which all work together to ensure a seamless and immersive customer experience, says the firm.

Content Guru also highlighted the usage rise in digital channels compared to 2019, with a 55% increase in email customer usage and webchat channels up by nearly 50%.

Furthermore, data also shows that the 55-plus age groups were the biggest adopters of digital channel usage over lockdown, with 82% expressing intentions to continue.

Edward Winfield, Director of Global Partnerships at Content Guru, urges resellers to take digital seriously, and issued a warning. "If you do not see digital as a viable channel to reach out to customers you will quickly see your reputation in tatters and brand loyalty impacted," he stated.

Home Telecom on the rise

A DECADE after its foundation and just over a year after the directors repurchased the business, Home Telecom has hit 50,000 live broadband connections to homes across the UK.

The Horsham-based utility business, part of Nigel Barnett's Global 4 Communications Group, specialises in providing broadband, energy and media services to over 4,000 letting and estate agents. It now has a £12m turnover.

According to Barnett, a breakthrough for the business

came with introductions from leading tenant referencing agencies that work solely on the agent's behalf and allow them to be rewarded without any hassle.

"We still work on the promise that broadband is live when you arrive and finishes the day you move out, cutting out any settlement of outstanding contracts, including matching any break clauses – 63% of people continue to take out our service at their new property," he said.

Barnett and his fellow directors sold the business to Spark

Energy, now OVO Energy, which owns SSE Energy.

In January 2020 the business was repurchased by the original directors to add to their other brands, Fleur Telecom and Weekly Broadband.

Home Telecom still supports its original agents through the OVO Tili operation.

In March 2020 the company secured a contract with green energy supplier ESB.

"We are continuing to grow and have several acquisitions in the pipeline," added Barnett.

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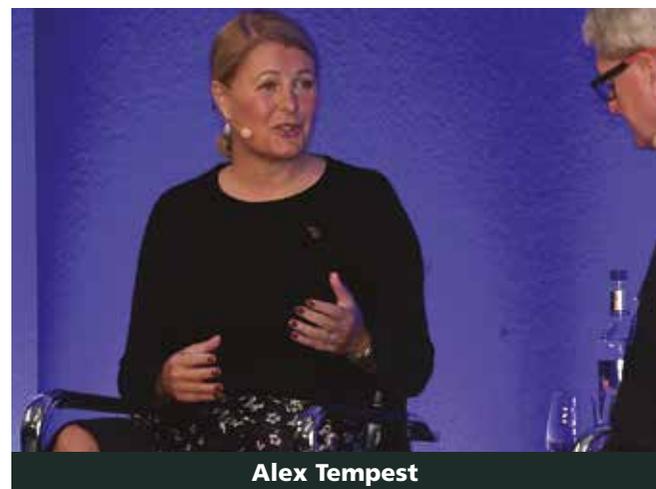
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BT revamps programme



Alex Tempest

EASE of doing business is one of the foundation stones of BT Wholesale's new three tier partner programme, according to MD Alex Tempest, who pointed out that feedback played a telling role in shaping the scheme that also gives partners closer brand association with BT and deeper integration with services.

"It is important for us to lean into customer feedback on more simple ways of working with our business, providing easy access to resources, more personalised support and an enhanced digital customer experience," she stated. "This is a step change in how we do business with our BT Wholesale partner community."

The tiers – Partner, Premium and Elite – include benefits such as commercial support, sales and marketing resources, learning tools and access to events.

Members of the programme will also be able to use BT Wholesale branding in their marketing for the first time, following 70% of partners asking for closer association.

Spitfire is BT Wholesale's first Elite Partner on the programme. MD Harry Bowlby said: "As an Elite partner we are able to provide additional reassurance to customers that they are partnering with an established and trustworthy business. For us, that is a huge commercial and marketing benefit."

NEWS ROUNDUP

GRAPHITE Capital-backed UC specialist Babble has completed its eighth acquisition since the start of 2020, adding CCaaS solutions provider Sesui. The deal brings 50 new customers mainly in the travel and health sectors. The acquisition also advances Babble's buy-and-build strategy and follows the 81G Blue transaction in March which boosted its cyber capabilities. CEO Matt Parker said: "Our strategy has moved at pace in 2021. We have more acquisitions in the pipeline as we continue to seek high quality, innovative businesses that have the potential for further growth."

CONTENT Guru has become one of the first CCaaS providers to be certified for the Microsoft Teams Connected Contact Centre Certification Programme. Content Guru's storm CCaaS solution has been tested and verified to integrate with Teams. Martin Taylor, Deputy CEO and co-founder of Content Guru, commented: "We are rolling out enhanced storm Teams integration to more of our global customer base over the coming months, then expanding our integration portfolio as Microsoft releases additional APIs."

Mitel's new partner rewards

MITEL'S new partner programme introduces a particular emphasis on rewarding resellers who own their customers' full communications lifecycle.

The vendor has brought in a Customer Lifecycle Engagement Certification to support partners in their overall management of customers during the client lifecycle.

Mitel will also reward partners who 'go above and beyond' minimum certification criteria to achieve advanced sales and technical competencies.



Lana King

New performance points will also reward partners for accelerating cloud sales and subscription services.

"The way the world works shifted dramatically last year," said Lana King, VP Partner Programmes, Training & Enablement. "As the workplace becomes more unique to each organisation, the expertise and insight our partner community brings will be more critical than ever to customer success.

"Mitel's goal is to help partners strengthen those relationships and maximise revenue."

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Dos and don'ts in gearing for UCaaS

Success in the provision of UCaaS ultimately boils down to having a full understanding of the market and a specific approach to customers, says Justin Hamilton-Martin, Sales Director, Enreach for Service Providers. Here, he lays out the key consideration points he believes should be at the forefront of a reseller's strategic UCaaS thinking...



Justin Hamilton-Martin

Do blending...

Most UCaaS offerings still revolve around PSTN and SIP, but the focus needs to be more on connections within UCaaS to enable users to contact and collaborate through websites and apps, blended with traditional contact numbers. Bringing more social channels into the mix is important, particularly for millennials who are less dependent on voice and email than previous generations. This evolving environment is enabled by APIs which will help resellers to develop specific packages, or even solutions tailored to each business customers.

Do APIs...

The combination of bringing in new communication channels – such as contact initiated or responded to via websites and apps – combined with API integrations and new AI capabilities are a powerful recipe for even more UCaaS innovative services. These new approaches will also give resellers more options to differentiate their offerings. While APIs are about technology they open doors to more OEM business models too, so in other words, a vendor's UCaaS components are

used under the hood of someone else's offering.

Don't relinquish...

There is a trend towards an agency model, but that has dangers for resellers because they are effectively handing over their relationships with customers to the vendor. We believe that ownership of the customer should stay with the reseller, including the contract, so that they maintain control of how they work with their end users.

Don't limit differentiation...

I would argue that the agency model being pursued by some vendors jeopardises the ability for resellers to achieve that differentiation because they may have to sacrifice flexibility and agility to work within the restrictions of a vendor. For instance, there may be a contractual agreement between the vendor and the reseller that prohibits the latter from taking on competitive products. In this fast changing and challenging marketplace resellers should not relinquish control of their destinies.

If you pass the keys to a vendor you're giving up on

your ability to put in place the right solution for the customer, or to decide how you pivot in response to change. Also, by transferring customer support to a vendor resellers will waste the skills and resources they have developed over the years because these assets are no longer needed. However, those assets should be treasured because they can really help resellers stand out from the crowd.

Do mobile...

The mobile UCaaS space is greenfield territory. There are very few mobile UCaaS offerings out there and not many customers using them so far. However, mobile is definitely a big trend. For example, UCaaS doesn't work well when on the move, but add in mobile and the situation transforms. Resellers with experience in UC are ideally positioned to take advantage of mobile UCaaS, versus mobile operators who are traditionally more focused on selling simple voice and data contracts. Plus, resellers have the proximity to a customer that mobile operators often lack.

Do innovate...

Resellers can also be more agile compared to a big mobile operator and depending on the chosen UCaaS platform can flexibly and rapidly devise their own white-labelled attractive commercial bundles. Of course, resellers are going to be competing against other companies who see the same mobile UCaaS opportunity. We expect to see a brand new generation of MVNOs being launched in the coming years. ■

More on UCaaS – page 28



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Full Fibre poised for sup

Full Fibre's roll out strategy is the shot in the arm that the UK's 'forgotten' market towns so badly need, according to COO James Warner who brings the altnet's accelerating scale-up plan into a wholesale-only context.

There is little doubt that one of the comms sector's most pressing challenges is achieving nationwide full fibre coverage. As an urgent response to the task in hand, altnet Full Fibre has grabbed the bull by the horns and is accelerating its scale up strategy and targeting 'forgotten' market towns in a wholesale-only context. "Our strategy is simple, to build a challenger fibre infrastructure wholesale business," stated Warner. "We will do this by enabling a minimum of 500,000 premises that can be accessed by more than 50 per cent of retail ISPs."

Warner was appointed in January to deliver this target within five years. "The key focus is scale and bringing in the right resource and business partners to drive our growth plans," he added. "The first year is all about embedding the systems and processes to really grow. We have opened three offices in the last six months and there are two more to come in the next six months."

Warner noted in particular that the biggest challenge is resource, ie, having the skills to deliver infrastructure at scale. "We are addressing this through technology and

What got you into comms?...

I STARTED in the comms space working for Eclipse and moved into fibre infrastructure through my time at WarwickNet, which later rebranded to Glide Business where I moved into an MD role giving me exposure to the end-to-end operation and running of a fibre business.



James Warner

Our strategy is simple, to build a challenger fibre infrastructure wholesale business

the automation of certain tasks," he stated. "This doesn't work everywhere of course, but it has allowed us to get a far greater output from our teams."

Wholesale-only

Underpinning Warner's faith in automation as a route to growth is his belief that Full Fibre's key differentiator is its wholesale-only approach. "Being a retail ISP is a specialist area in its own

right," he explained. "As a business we don't want the distraction and complex task of running a retail ISP. That does not support the long-term trajectory of the industry and would distract from the most important task of reaching as many homes as quickly as possible. We leave the customer relationship with the channel ISPs who have honed their expertise in this area."

As things stand Full Fibre's fibre footprint extends to five towns. "The plan is to build, build, build! We have announced our first 11 towns already and are actively building in five right

now," enthused Warner. "Our roadmap is aggressive and there is a lot more to come. As our footprint continues to grow so does the size of the channel partners we support."

The lack of fibre deployment in the UK has created the space for altnet providers like Full Fibre to take a lead on fibre deployment, claims Warner. "Most of this has been concentrated on dense urban and city landscapes, leaving market towns behind, which is where Full Fibre has concentrated its strategy

What were you doing 25 years ago?...

Learning to ride my first motorbike.

to date," he commented. "We also see a requirement to move into more rural deployments, filling in the rural areas surrounding the towns where we build. That will likely form the natural evolution of all our fibre deployments. This means a channel partner can be confident that when we start to go live in a town they can market to everyone in the geography, knowing that we will reach them at some point in the near future."

Appealing vision

As mentioned, Warner joined Full Fibre at the beginning of 2021. He was attracted by the firm's vision, strategy and funding. "The business strategy is well-formed and aligned to how I believe the market needs to mature," he said. "Our plans mean we build to 100 per cent of the towns we identify, not just cherry picking the easy bits.

"We operate as a true wholesale-only operator, meaning we are focused entirely on the long-term outcomes of a fibre infrastructure business. And most importantly there was a funding partner willing to enable these developments to happen without the usual altnet funding hurdles of having to demonstrate retail sales in order to unlock build – meaning we can go fast and scale the business at pace."

erfast scale-up

The business landed investment in December 2020 from Basalt, enabling the expansion of the plan and overall strategy that proved magnetic to Warner (who has always had business growth at the forefront of mind). "We opened two new offices in quick succession – a HQ in Exeter and a second regional office and warehouse in Telford, in addition to our existing base in Herefordshire," he commented. "Plans for our fourth and fifth regional offices are underway and there will be more announcements to come, including a recruitment drive. At the beginning of 2021 we had just 20 direct staff, we are now over 60 and will be well into the hundreds by the end of the year as we continue to scale and build the operation."

Strategic planning

The factors that are influencing and shaping the evolution of Full Fibre's expansion plans also include matters surrounding DCMS's intervention strategy (The Outside in Programme) to deliver gigabit capable services across the UK. This will determine how much commercial deployment is justifiable in certain locations.

"We are fully committed to delivering against the initial 11 towns we have recently announced to build," confirmed Warner. "However, the large intervention areas recently announced create questions on previously interesting build locations – this may reduce the commercial appetite. The WFTMR (Wholesale Future Telecoms Market Review) also has a number of elements that will define certain parts of our roadmap, specifically

on the incentivisation of Openreach to build area 3."

According to Warner, the full fibre message is hitting home in the channel, helped by high profile developments such as those outlined above. The key of course is the opportunity for the partner. "Some have capitalised on fibre early and are therefore able to offer services that give them a genuine edge in their product offering," he said. "Those that don't do this soon will be left behind."

Despite the urgency there still needs to be some common alignment of standards and operations between full fibre providers to make it easier for partners to consume, observed Warner. "Unique systems, processes and price points across the providers will generate a confusing landscape for partners and the consumers," he stated.

"Fibre adoption is critical to all altnets but the key is how we empower the smaller retail ISPs to take market share from the big four. We will be spending significant sums and time in marketing to our areas and raising awareness of the newly available services, and pushing these interested parties to our partners.

"Our most significant opportunity is built into our strategy. As a wholesale-only provider we can concentrate efforts on enabling build at pace and setting up all our systems and processes, removing the complexity and work for partners to enable them to serve the end customers, rather than it being a secondary consideration to appease the need to be seen to be offering consumer choice." ■

Just a minute with James Warner...

Role model: My Dad: He came from very little to provide his family with everything we ever needed.

What's the biggest risk you have taken? I moved countries to set-up a new business. If it had worked it would have provided an incredible lifestyle and family business.

If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing? I'd be a management consultant.

Your biggest opportunity? Our wholesale-only strategy.

Name three ideal dinner guests: Robin Williams, Chris Rock and Ricky Gervais – I like to laugh.

Your strong points and what could you work on? Being logical and solution orientated comes easy to me. But I need to work harder on emotional and heart-over-head style thinking.

The hardest decision you made last year: Deciding which venture to take on.

Best piece of advice you have been given: The only race is against yourself.

Biggest career achievement: When I was a ski instructor, taking someone from not being able to stand up on skis to diving down a Red run within their first week always gives me the greatest pleasure.

Who do you admire most in the channel? Mike Wardell, CEO of Giacom. I briefly worked with Mike previously and he has done an incredible job building that business.

Comms industry wish? To accelerate the copper switch off programme, we must not allow apathy to hold us back.

Lesson learnt? To concentrate on what really matters. Not sweat the little stuff.

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Calling all golfers! Swing into action and support MHA

Brocket Hall in Hertfordshire is not only one of England's finest stately homes, but also home to two of the finest golf courses in the UK and ICT mental health charity MHA is giving you and some colleagues or clients a unique chance to play there. The courses are appropriately named after the Prime Ministers who once resided at Brocket Hall, Lord Palmerston and Lord Melbourne. Both are quintessentially British by design, but at the same time offer a completely different challenge for golfers of all abilities. Both courses regularly play host to professional and members' tournaments as well as Pro-Am tournaments where members can meet and play with professionals from around the world.



MHA tees up Brocket Hall charity golf day

The MHA golf day will be staged exclusively for golfers in the ICT industry on 13th September 2021 offering the following:

- Twenty teams of four (individuals can apply)
- Corporate opportunities to sponsor a hole
- A great day of golf in wonderful surroundings
- A chance to catch up with industry friends and colleagues
- An opportunity for MHA to say thank you for the support it has received
- Dinner with some football legends to end a great day.

MHA founder Peter Orr commented: "Not

surprisingly, fundraising has been difficult over the course of the pandemic and we wanted to celebrate the return to some kind of normality and look forward to a brighter future, by staging an ITC golf day that raises money for an ITC charity. We hope people will sponsor a hole or enter a team to give us the financial boost we need to help anyone in our industry struggling with any kind of mental health issue."

MHA provides listening support and signposting to anyone in the industry suffering with poor mental health and anxiety but funds are needed to keep providing:

- MHA training for local Associates who provide peer support
- The MHA telephone listening service
- An MHA In house trainer and administrative support
- MHA Awareness days and workshops.

Orr stresses that after a year of virtual working, checking in on the mental health and wellbeing of staff has never been more important. "Isolation is a

theme emerging from our calls and workshops, and staff are feeling the impact of the national restrictions and trying to deliver work targets without regular face-to-face contact with their team," he said. "It is so important to recognise this and to encourage people to talk.

"We believe companies would really benefit from MHA workshops and we are keen to reach out and offer these to small and large ITC organisations. We can also join an existing meeting for a short agenda item to discuss mental health awareness. Early detection of poor mental health can help your teams get back on the road to success."

- **To book your team or sponsor a hole at the MHA golf day go to:**
<https://tinyurl.com/golfdaybooking> or <https://tinyurl.com/holesponsorshipbook>
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Productivity in focus

Covid-19 enabled the channel to solve a national crisis and underpin the big shift to home working as lockdown descended. More than that, the hybrid working era is a boon to a nation requiring a productivity boost, writes Richard Roberts, Mitel VP UK, Ireland and Northern Europe.



Richard Roberts

In the coming years you can expect this toolset to both broaden and become more refined. Mass usage of existing collaboration tools has already highlighted areas technology firms can go further, like intuitiveness and spontaneity for even greater productivity.

What can business and IT leaders do? In February, the UK Government announced a roadmap for a return to normality. When this comes to fruition, many workers will surely return to the office, at least some of the time. But we can't turn back the clock on the past year – and nor should we. For many businesses, the pandemic has been the crash course they didn't know they needed. Remote working has gone from being a nice-to-have work perk for employees to underpinning much of the global economy.

Fortunately, it's not only proven effective – but it's demonstrated many of the benefits it can bring over and above office-based work. Over the past year, savvy business leaders will have identified the value employees give to flexibility, autonomy and independence. They should continue to respect this and will reap the performance benefits if they do.

Economists agree on a few things when it comes to Britain's productivity crisis. One is that there's no simple solution for it. Another is that spending money on innovative technology is a tried and tested way of getting more bang for your buck. The key takeaway for business leaders? Invest in your people by investing in the appropriate tools. ■

UK productivity has been stagnant for much of the past decade. At first, Covid-19 seemed it would deal it another blow, but recent figures from the ONS showed a three per cent uptick when compared with the year before. It's too early to say whether this is a direct result of the shift to remote working, but it raises an interesting proposition. Covid-19 has upended our working lives. It's revolutionised how we think about where we work and accelerated digitalisation. Could the situation be harnessed to rejuvenate Britain's flagging productivity?

Britain, along with many of the advanced economies of the world, has been locked in a productivity trap for decades. Economists have pointed to several possible causes, from the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent austerity policies to Brexit and slow growth in consumer demand. Yet they've had much less success in identifying and enacting solutions. In short,

it's not a problem that can be solved by a single solution – and working from home will never be a cure-all.

But there is evidence dating back before the pandemic that remote working can at least contribute to better productivity. Stanford professor Nicholas Bloom published a now-famous paper in 2015 showing a substantial productivity lift from home working. This was partly due to workers taking fewer breaks and sick days, and partly because employees were happier working in a quieter, more convenient environment.

Since Covid has forced many of us into a massive remote work experiment, several studies from academia, researchers and industry analysts have reinforced the Stanford professor's findings. And with remote working likely to remain, companies are set to continue to invest in new tools and technologies designed to make remote working more efficient and collaborative. This

creates a great opportunity for businesses to use this momentum to drive productivity improvements.

Technology innovations have always played a crucial role in historical productivity spurts, from the invention of the steam engine to computers. Before the pandemic, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, an economic think-tank, identified the need to invest in research and development to turbocharge productivity. Now is the perfect time to do so and use technology as a catalyst for boosting productivity and aiding the UK's economic recovery.

Pivotal time

When it comes to remote working, we're at an exciting point in time: We've entered an era of ultrafast connectivity with 5G and other new technologies; and once the UK has fully rolled out 5G, for instance, we can expect download speeds up to 1GB a second. Then there's WiFi 6, a less publicly known but still important development that

means speedier connectivity, better battery life for user devices and improved performance in crowded areas. These connectivity enhancements will play into the development of faster and more reliable technology.

It's easy to say the pandemic shone a spotlight on video conferencing solutions, but what I think is interesting is how mass remote working has shown the need for applications with a diverse set of collaboration features to maximise productivity. Video calls are great for client meetings, but internal day-to-day communication needs a variety of collaboration tools that cater to different needs – like chat or file sharing. And standalone videocall software isn't powerful enough to handle more complex team activities. Having an integrated business communication platform that incorporates a comprehensive communication and team collaboration application can enable businesses to streamline teamwork, improve efficiency and drive productivity.

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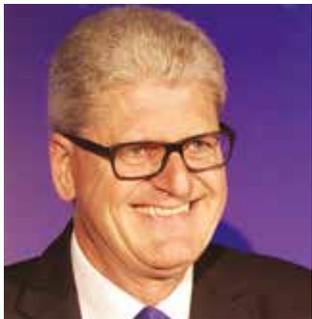
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All our yesterdays: 'surviving'



Another transformation of comms is fully underway and, as the channel's leading publication, it is our ongoing responsibility to report on the changes it will bring and the opportunities ahead, once Covid-19 has truly been beaten.

By Nigel Sergent, Founder and Editorial Director

That said, on our 25th anniversary, we feel there can be no harm in turning our lens on the past, so to those of you who were not in the industry in 1996, forgive this indulgence.

Like so many business ideas, Comms Dealer was conceived 'on the back of a fag packet' over a pint or two and through a combination of luck plus very good friends and supporters it survived its formative years and has grown to become the magazine of choice for vendors seeking to impress potential partners and resellers seeking knowledge and understanding of profitable opportunities. It has published every month through feast and famine and has spawned the UK's leading awards and thought leadership events such as The Comms National Awards and Comms Vision.

We're proud of that legacy and we're confident we will continue to educate, motivate, inform and entertain the channel community for another 25 years via whatever media platforms develop in the years ahead.

One thing remarkable about the pilot issue we printed in April 1996, not really knowing if the magazine would take off, was the

front page lead we ran based on an interview with Paul Smith who was the CTi Divisional Manager at IT distributor Northamber (which is still going strong). We quoted him thus: "The PABX is dying if it isn't dead already. Dealers need to be out of the proprietary switch business and into the server and software business."

Smith was farsighted and although it's taken 25 years for his vision to become reality, it's nice to look back and see we had our finger on the pulse of market changes ahead then and we will continue doing so in the massive sea change facing us.

Northamber was not really addressing comms resellers in a big way then - there was a wide gulf between the Comms and IT sectors that has only just started to narrow. Then, it was the 'dyed in the wool' comms distributors that developed partnerships which have matured into what the channel is today. This magazine owes an enormous debt of gratitude to Bob Old at Rocom, Martin Hatcher at MTV, the late Julian Niman at Nimans and the late David George at Crane for loyally supporting Comms Dealer in its early years. Bob Old and David George were saviours of the magazine on many occasions, taking out full page adverts when



Comms Dealer's pilot issue

our revenues had hit the rocks. I well remember them saying our industry needs to support a magazine that has strong editorial values and

I'm pleased to say we have stood by that fundamental adage since day one. Up to the millennium, we

We're confident we will continue to educate, motivate, inform and entertain the channel community for another 25 years

rode the wave of network independence when the likes of WorldCom, Energis, RSLCOM and Thus emerged to take on BT dominance in the infrastructure space. In those early days the internet was a blue-sky theory that many believed would never take off and hosting was a term salespeople used for entertaining clients! Then, the likes of Panasonic, SDX, Toshiba, Samsung, NEC Infrontia, Phillips, Olympus, Plessey, Mitel and many others were fighting for market share selling on-prem PABXs and faxes (remember them!).

Hardware ruled the roost and the integrated software solutions we have now were a pipedream. Bolt-on call management hardware from companies like long-term supporter Oak Telecom plus music on hold and recording devices were huge and CTi was in its infancy. On the mobile side the Nokia 6310 put the Racal-Vodafone brick- phones into the bin of history and texting was revolutionary!!

From then to now, many companies have picked up on the channel support model built by leaders like David George (see Pragma's tribute on Page 37). Gamma, lead by the irrepressible Bob Falconer, is a prime example and its growth into the £350m LSE listed business it

'Survivors' reflect on early years

is today is testament to the success of the channel-only model it and many other companies now adopt. Some have been equally successful taking a hybrid path such as Matthew Riley's Daisy Group whose DWS wholesale division is thriving under the leadership of channel disciple Terry O'Brien. Others have successfully diversified into new areas like Simon Payne and Alan Shraga's Fidelity, whose energy business is prospering under the stewardship of John Haw, and Andrew Dickinson's Jola, which is recording exponential growth in the mobile data/IoT arena.

Many resellers and so-called super resellers have flourished in this cauldron of enterprise. We have witnessed and reported on the incredible growth of Focus Group, OneCom, Adept, Southern, Arrow, Comms World, SW Comms and Elite to name a mere handful.

There are a quite a few 'survivors' from those heady days of 1996 who, like us, have doggedly worked through the industry's fluctuations and continue to deliver quality solutions to resellers and customers alike. Here are some inspirational recollections from 'survivors' of these early days on the evolution of comms and the journey they have undertaken personally.

ANDREW DICKINSON, MANAGING DIRECTOR, JOLA

"I fell in love with this industry as soon as I walked into my first Brighton TMA, and it only got better when the channel started to develop into the highly professional and efficient network of resellers and



Andrew Dickinson

MSPs we have today.

"25 years ago, I had just come back from working for C&W in the States. I joined Mercury a month before we launched a switched-services duopoly and made the first (legal!) telephone call in the UK, not originated by BT. I was part of the strategy team in the early '90s that created Mercury Dealers, initially bartering Telephone Rental leads for DASS2 PSTN connections and later introducing revenue sharing for the first time to the UK channel.

"When I started my first comms company, I remember my mother saying to me 'so you're leaving a highly paid job with a company you love to start a specialist ISP on a chicken farm, paying nothing? Are you out of your mind?'"



David Dadds

"Having built that first company up to over £30m valuation, to see it virtually destroyed by the dot.com bubble bursting in 2000 was heart-breaking. The team I now have at Jola makes every day a highlight. You just need to keep learning and keep going."

DAVID DADDS, CEO, DRD COMMUNICATIONS (VANILLA IP) AND CHAIRMAN, FEDERATION OF COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES

"My original introduction into the comms industry was via BT, which I joined in 1984 as a 'Sub-Subs' engineer, basically fixing faults in homes and business. I left BT in 1986 on the back of the money I made when the government sold shares in BT.

"25 years ago, my company DRD was up and running,

busily selling SDX Index and Panasonic phones systems and getting very excited about how we could sell ISDN with DDI numbers. On a personal note, my first wife and I were expecting our third child. On a sporting note, I was supporting the original Wimbledon FC and, just like today, trying to master golf!"

"If I could go back 25 years, I wouldn't change much and my advice to others would be to always trust your gut feeling. It's rarely wrong.

"Like many, my family are my biggest success



Richard Tang

with five children and a very compatible and understanding wife second time around. I enjoy the business now as much as ever. Hanging up the gloves and travelling around the world is not for me just yet but an extra round of golf a week would be nice!"

RICHARD TANG, FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN, ZEN INTERNET

"I remember sitting in a pub in 1995 and I asked my brother Dan if he thought this new-fangled thing called the Internet would take off and he said 'yes'. So, I started Zen Internet, putting my life savings of £5,000 into the business.

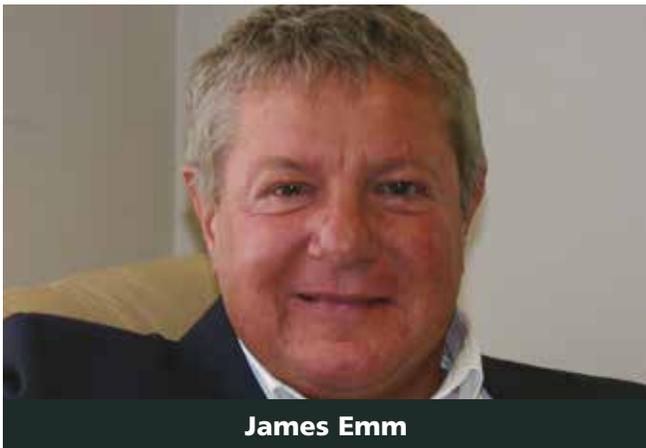
"25 years ago, we had been around for six months. There were just four of us back then and I had to continue my work as a software contractor to fund Zen's early beginnings. Since then, it's been a great adventure. We have built a business with a very special culture that puts people first and money second. It's a formula that has proven itself to be very effective.

"One of my best experiences was a paragliding trip to Bhutan in 2008 and the birth of Zen's most fundamental long-term objective of 'Happy Staff,

Happy Customers and Happy Suppliers'. The King of Bhutan decided that the population's happiness was the most important thing for the country and that really struck a chord with me. I returned back to Zen and introduced the happiness objectives, and these continue to be at the core of our culture today.

"I have come to realise that experience in both life and business can offer priceless learning opportunities. In the words of author H. Jackson Brown, Junior, 'Opportunity dances with those already on the dancefloor', so get yourself on the dancefloor."

Continued on page 20



James Emm

**Continued from page 19
JAMES EMM, CHAIRMAN,
OAK INNOVATION**

"I always wanted my own business and I selected comms randomly in a way, and I am so glad that I chose this industry! I like the ethics, the camaraderie, and the constant opportunities. I love the channel.

"25 years ago, Oak was already nine years old! In some ways time has flown, in other ways, it has been a very long journey which has been a great one, albeit with ups and downs...but far more ups!

"If I could wind the clock back 25 years to 1996, the 41-year-old me would say to the 66 year-old me... hey - you made it! I was always scared Oak would fail, which ironically was a constant motivator.

"The best and worst of the last 25 years? 2000 to 2015 were golden years. We then made some wrong decisions and fell behind. Tough times. With new

products and partnerships ironically aided by Covid, we are now running downhill with the wind behind us. From now on we will focus on leading edge as well as legacy technologies."

**PAM BLANCHARD,
DIRECTOR, ICA**

"25 years ago, I was just starting out in the world of telecoms. As a first-time mum, I needed to earn more money and an opportunity presented itself to become a trainer, so with a VHS player and some poor-quality videos, I taught myself how to train users on the Alcatel-Lucent phone system and became a freelance trainer.

"The following year, I trained as a field engineer and never looked back. Engineering did not come easy to me and once I had invested time and commitment this only motivated me more and more to progress my skills to eventually build my own company, which I did later that same year.

"ICA started life in my front

room, upgraded to a small garage, then a flat above a shop, then a two-storey office, to finally purchasing our own detached 3,000 square metre offices (although for most of 2020 it was back to the front room!) The second major milestone was the first time we reached a million-pound turnover, and with retained profit!

"The pace of technological change and the people I have had the privilege of working with over the last 25 years has kept me loyal to the industry. I'm not sure I have

heart of comms, which is such a motivating and fun industry to be a part of.

"The worst experience of the last 25 years has to be the recessions we have traded through and, of course, the pandemic. As humans, we have a fantastic way of bouncing back and the knowledge advancement will always drive humanity forward.

"The best is seeing teams of people build wonderful brands and grow in their capacity

industry after a chance reading of the classified ads in the Sheffield Star in 1984, shortly after failing my second year at Leeds University. studying engineering. The market had just been liberalised and it seemed an exciting prospect. Why Nimans? Well, BT turned me down for a job in one of their phone shops at the time. 'Sliding doors' as they say.

"25 years ago, bizarrely I was in the same job as Sales Director at Nimans. I've done it for 35 years now. From memory we were turning over less than £10m at the time but had big ambitions, good leadership and a great team. I've stayed around comms because what I do continues to put a smile on my face each day. Simple as that. One message I would like to give to others is to stop doubting your ability - others may not be as talented as they first seem.



Alan Shraga

another 25 years in me, but I have an amazing team that will support the continued growth and success as we continue on our journey."

**ALAN SHRAGA,
FOUNDER AND
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
FIDELITY GROUP**

"I started my career in telecoms at Pink Telecoms in Bow Road, London, working with Mercury Communications alongside Andrew Dickinson and running a pilot to recruit graduates and teach them the art of selling.

"25 years ago, I was working for Annodata, now owned by Kyocera, building their telecoms division, selling SDX 180s bought from the Rochester based distributor UTL. From then on, I've worked with some fantastic people and built some great companies which has kept me at the

to go on and develop their own companies.

"If I could rewind the clock 25 years, I would say to myself, "You will never get everything right, focus on the thing your teams do well and enjoy every minute of your success."

**RICHARD CARTER,
GROUP SALES &
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
DIRECTOR, NIMANS**

"I entered the comms

"The best moment of my career was achieving £100m group turnover in 2017. We had come a long way in 30 years and done OK for a back street Manchester wholesaler.

"The worst was undoubtedly falling out with Julian Niman in 2005. Thankfully, we had time to make up, reform our working relationship and achieve further success before his untimely death in 2018. Fortunately, he lived to see the £100m best moment." ■



Pam Blanchard



Richard Carter



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Roan's disruptive mission

On the back of growth investment from PE group Waterland, European UC provider Enreach acquired Network Telecom in 2019 and, last month, Pace Telecom. The company is now aiming to fatten up its sales in the UK market led by Roan Pratt, recently recruited from Gamma.

Roan, who has joined as Director of Sales, is no stranger to the reseller community having held channel product sales development roles at Gamma since 2008. Before that he helped build an indirect channel for Marc Thompson's Avant following business development roles at Thus and Buzz Media. He admits that leaving Gamma was a wrench but the lure of joining a disruptive international conglomerate was too big an opportunity to miss. "I had a fantastic 12 years at Gamma and met some great people in the channel along the way, many of which have become friends for life," he said. "I went on a wonderful journey but when the opportunity at Enreach came knocking, it was the perfect next step for me."

"It's a new entrant to the UK market, so the move was always going to be an exciting one, but what attracted me most was its own proprietary cloud solution, a growing product portfolio and the desire to be a real disrupter in the UCaaS and CCaaS space. I wanted to be part of a company that was going to challenge the norm and cause a stir."

Enreach has a channel operation but for now Roan has switched to end user sales while the company pursues a focused acquisition strategy, and he's made an

impressive start, achieving two consecutive record-breaking sales months in his first two months. "Switching to end user engagement was a lot easier than I expected as there is a well established sales engine at Enreach UK," he added. "The team have made the transition easy. I'd like to think that, with many years of experience in the industry and in management, I've brought additional insight, structure and a new energy to the business."

With his channel experience it would seem likely that a partner development strategy will follow soon, but Roan says it's on the back burner. "It's on our radar but, for now, we're focusing on expanding our product portfolio while also looking at additional acquisition opportunities," he said.

So, what attracted Enreach to Wrexham-based Pace Telecom? "Pace was a customer of Enreach so we already knew a lot about them and their customer base," Roan explained. "They were looking at next steps and we knew it would be a great match for both parties. It means the team is already confident in taking our cloud solution, Enreach Contact, to market. The purchase will also help us to achieve our 2021 product roadmap, including connectivity, mobile, EPOS, contact centre solutions and conversational AI."



Roan Pratt

I'd like to think that with many years of experience in the industry and in management, I've brought additional insight, structure and a new energy to the business

"The acquisition will enable us to further improve on the products, services and the overall experience that we provide our customers. Together we will be focusing on our portfolio of cloud solutions, broadband and mobile as well as some exciting new product launches."

Roan is now concentrating on making the most of the sales opportunities created by the pandemic by driving UC sales into the SME market. "In the last year, changes in

the market have accelerated beyond all expectations and we need to pivot quickly to meet the changing needs of businesses," he added. "With our product portfolio, we can offer a business everything they need to keep connected, whether at home or the office, and can pair that with expert advice, dedicated account management, 24/7 customer service and the security of being part of a wider group. These solutions will make the digital transformation of businesses that much easier."

Just a minute with Roan Pratt...

Role model: Michael Jordan. Who didn't enjoy The Last Dance?

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I coach my daughter's U11s football team. That tests my patience but can be hugely rewarding.

Your main strength and what could you work on? A strength is providing structure and a drive to get things done. But I could work on accepting that not everyone can meet my (sometimes too) high standards.

Best piece of advice you have been given? You only regret the things you don't do.

Who do you admire most in the comms channel: Our industry is packed full of inspirational people, but I'd have to say Marc Thompson at Avant. He was my mentor in my early years in the industry and sent me on my way.

The biggest risk you have taken? Going to Hillsborough and expecting Sheffield Wednesday to put in a performance!

What talent do you wish you had? To be a magician. There are lots of things I would like to make disappear.

What gets you out of bed in the morning? Each day gives me the opportunity to make a positive difference.

Your biggest achievement? Personally, it is my two fantastic children. Professionally, it will be when we make Enreach the leading UCaaS and CCaaS provider!

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3CX

The latest 3CX PBX connects customers like never before!

A 'full blown' omnichannel communication system has hit the channel with the launch of 3CX V18.

The new release will seamlessly connect co-workers with customers like never before, according to 3CX Channel Sales Manager Natassia Allery, who anticipates big channel demand for the solution considering the march towards hybrid working and greater emphasis on enhancing the customer experience.

"Gone are the times that resellers' customers just want to make a call. They now want to be able to connect via Live chat, social media and SMS," said Allery.

"Using disparate systems is no longer practical. As trusted advisors, reseller teams would need to check separate systems – phone, live chat, helpdesk. And customers would need to administer these separate systems. Unified reporting is near impossible and the business will have to pay for all these systems as well!"

"It's not practical for your customers' customers either. If businesses use different systems, their customers will be talking to different agents each and every time, and it will be more difficult to track their history. And frequently, a customer who gets in touch via chat needs to be

escalated to a phone call so they can better explain their issue. Directing the customer to a call centre at this point will frustrate them and make resolving the customer issue inefficient. To make matters worse, competition is intensifying so businesses must up their customer experience game."

3CX's product development team sped into action during the winter months to meet these issues and they believe the resulting solution will shake the market.

"V18 is an efficient, easy to manage and low-cost system. Where our competitors are still very much focused on just connecting co-workers, 3CX connects employees to customers, allowing them to work more efficiently and make customers happier," Allery said.

Improvements

Overall improvements within the V18 PBX will include:

- Enhanced security via Debian 10 (Buster)
- A revamp of overall performance and smartphone apps for a more reliable experience
- Improved audio quality
- A 20% reduction in memory consumption

- Better compatibility with more providers
- Improved accuracy of reports
- Ability to record only internal/external calls.

Improvements in manageability and deployment include:

- Single Sign-on for the web client and management console
- Caller IDs can be converted into standard e164 format
- System changes are logged (who changed what and when?)
- A DNS Helper service removes the need for specifying the local and remote IP, easing deployment, and simplifying a move from on-premise to the cloud
- Ability to provision a Raspberry PI remotely as either a PBX or an SBC, meaning resellers can ship a device to a customer without needing to connect a keyboard or monitor to install 3CX.

Improvements to contact centre implementation include:

- Improved Live Chat box themes
- Improved collection of email and name
- Different start-up modes
- Better overall configurability.

Improvements to the 3CX Onboard Webmeeting Portal include:

- Storage of meeting data locally and therefore completely confidentially
- Unification of Click2call and click2meet URLs
- Utilisation of public or private MCUs
- Better dial in capability.

Improvements to the Video Conferencing platform (formerly 3CX Webmeeting) include:

- A complete redesign focused on



- features and data privacy
- New apps facilitating content sharing (including screen, pdfs and whiteboard) and participation in polls
- Extended video conferencing functionalities enabling hosted to moderate meetings easily and effectively
- Storage of data on the client's 3CX NOT 3CX cloud guaranteeing better privacy
- Video conferences can be enabled or disabled on a per-user basis
- 'Your-Name' can be set to represent a brand/company so users will have a higher trust in joining meetings.

With these improvements, 3CX has focused on customer service, creating a complete, omnichannel solution that businesses can use to communicate internally and effectively assist customers. This includes a big focus on customer chat: live chat, Facebook Messenger integration and

business SMS.

Help desk solution

Bundled in with V18 PBX is a helpdesk solution enabling users to communicate with their customers and efficiently manage that communication too.

"This means that resellers can offer customers a true all-in-one solution at a very competitive price. Customers can get all the features they need without having to implement multiple solutions and without paying extortionate amounts for several licenses and overpriced software," said Allery.

"It makes customers' deployments much easier for resellers to manage - which also ties in with our hosted solution. Resellers are free to host their customers' installations in their own private cloud, but if they want to offload some of the monitoring and maintenance, as an option they can host with us, without losing control of the installation, she added.



Fazelynia on her 'special

Zest4 Managing Director Mandy Fazelynia has embarked on the next logical phase of growth, aiming to double revenues and value within three years.

The writing was on the wall the moment lockdown forced a big shift to home working wherever it was possible, a move that did little to dint Zest4's pandemic year performance, nor its ambition to become the 'wholesale partner of choice' to the channel. The company grew revenues by 10 per cent to £11.7 million in its latest financial year despite the impact of an estimated £1.25 million hit due to Covid travel restrictions. "We are targeting revenue growth of over 30 per cent in FY 21-22 and beyond with growth across all three indirect channels – mobile, cloud and connectivity and IoT," explained Fazelynia. "EBITDA growth is expected to continue and remain in excess of 14 per cent of revenue at circa £1.85 million. The business continues to expand and headcount across the functions of sales, operations and finance is set to continue as we eclipse the 50 heads mark."

Resellers who want to maximise the full range of market opportunities know they must face a transition, one that is made easier by forging well chosen channel partnerships,

My industry wish...

TO HAVE more females entering into the industry and holding senior positions. The sector is traditionally male dominated with some headway being made in recent years. Within Zest4 we have a good split, but still often find recruitment challenging with only male candidates coming forward. I'd like to see more work done in schools and colleges to promote the industry and attract a diversity of talent.



Mandy Fazelynia

We have seen many more partners step forward with a desire to learn and grow

believes Fazelynia. "Resellers and SIs have to become knowledgeable trusted advisors that can offer multiple solutions and support, all on one bill and with a strong service wrap," she said. "The ability to do this sets resellers apart. Their strategy should be to invest in resource, education and training to ensure they are best positioned to offer key services in a growing market."

"As a service provider of multiple services I feel we have a big opportunity in

each area of our business due to new tech, the retirement of old technologies and the rise in demand for our services as we come out of the pandemic. The fact that we have invested in getting the right team in place to support all of this upcoming change represents a great opportunity."

Priorities

Fazelynia's immediate priorities include growing the partner base for cloud, connectivity and IoT. "The challenge this presents is often around education of the opportunity and partners investing in specialist resource to sell technically more complex products than traditional telecoms," she added. "On-boarding involves an investment of time and energy for all

parties, but the rewards are strong. We have seen many more partners step forward with a desire to learn and grow in these areas. Our other priority is to make an acquisition this year to add capability and scale and to complement our current organic growth plans."

Expansion of the product portfolio to provide more to partners has helped to drive growth, and expanding the IoT portfolio to offer e-sim and unlimited data propositions have been key. "We also focused on cloud telephony, and building a dedicated team within the business to provide expertise, training and guidance for

What were you doing 25 years ago?...

I was 21 – we were setting up our first service provider business, 3a Telecom.

partners to capitalise on growth in this area," added Fazelynia. "We are so much more than a mobile service provider now, offering unified communications products with a full support and service wrap for the channel."

Key technology partners include the mobile networks, 8x8, Arkessa and Kore. "Our target markets are really defined by our partners and their specialisms," added Fazelynia. "We work closely with them to identify products they feel they need for their clients. New technologies offer a growth opportunity, especially in IoT with the roll out of 5G, NB IoT and LoRawan."

She also pointed to the significant opportunities presented by the ISDN switch off, full fibre roll out and the post lockdown hybrid working solution demands. "This has influenced where we have added additional products, resource and expertise to put our partners in the best position to benefit from these changing circumstances and growing demand," commented Fazelynia. "Increased demand to view things remotely and track more elements in the field has boosted our IoT sales, and we recently launched our e-sim proposition to meet this demand and offer a network agnostic global solution."

touch of Zest'

Zest4 itself was launched in 2012 with an aspiration to become a leading wholesale provider to the UK reseller market for unified communications. "Having built two previous service provider businesses I had lots of experience in building a channel and providing mobile – the change this time being that we were going to offer a broader set of products and technologies," explained Fazelynia.

Strong pedigree

She set up her first service provider business in 1995, called 3a Telecom, and sold to Vodafone in 2000. Then

working in different sectors but agreed we missed telecoms and wanted to do it again," added Fazelynia. "We approached Rob and Nicola who were with Vodafone after it acquired Yes Telecom. We all had a vision to provide the channel with support and service across a wider portfolio of services than just mobile.

"One of the main turning points was recognising that wholesale was going to be the big growth area. Our other businesses were based on dealer models with us doing the billing. The key to growth was recognising

New technologies offer a growth opportunity, especially in IoT with the roll out of 5G, NB IoT and LoRawan

established Yes Telecom in the same year and built a bigger and better version of 3a Telecom. "I stayed with Yes Telecom for three years and after the birth of my second child decided I wanted a change and a role that allowed me to work around and spend more time with the children," noted Fazelynia. "I completed a PGCE and did lecturing for 10 years in Sport and Fitness Development. Teaching young adults was both challenging and rewarding in equal measure. It stood me in good stead for managing a large team of young dynamic people at Zest4."

The company was founded by Freddie Fazelynia, Kevan Wakerley, Rob Foster, Nicola Bryan and Mandy Fazelynia. "Freddie, Kev and I had all had a few years

the desire for partners to bill all services themselves, and developing our systems, portals and processes to support this. We will service more partners across more products while maintaining strong business relationships and service levels."

Fazelynia's growth projections are in large part based on uptake of cloud telephony and complementary connectivity, 5G roll out and the impact on IoT, and servicing the need for mobility. "We will get there with the same hard work, determination and team effort that have brought us to this point," she added. "We will work with quality networks, platforms and providers to bring best of breed products to the channel with a special touch of Zest." ■

Just a minute with Mandy Fazelynia...

How did you get into comms?

I fell into telecoms while at university. My friend, and now brother-in-law (Freddie) had a mobile phone shop and was looking to go into service provision. He persuaded me to help set it up.

What's the biggest risk you have taken? Establishing Zest4. We had been out of the industry for a number of years and we set up with no channel, not even a secured mobile SP licence, just a vision and desire to achieve.

If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing?

Something involving coaching, training or mentoring.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I've become a little bit obsessed with yoga during lockdown.

Name three ideal dinner guests: George Michael, just to see him and ask him to sing live one more time; Michelle Obama, she has a fascinating career history, is a strong advocate for womens' rights and could offer some great advice and inspiration; and John Bishop, I love his humour.

Your strong points, and what could you work on?

My strong points are idea generation, taking a chance and motivating people; but I could work on keeping my emotions in check and public speaking.

One example of something you have overcome: My husband and I opened a restaurant in 2008 having done a six month re-furb and launch. The market crashed and we headed into a hard recession. Staying in became the new going out and we had to re-invent ourselves and the space to survive. It was tough but rewarding to come out the other side.

See you "in person"



Adam Zoldan

In the financial world there is an old adage "sell in May and go away" relating to traditional stock market performance in the Summer months. However in 2021 May feels like the month that will really start the year.

So far, the year has been a challenge and whilst we have seen business performance remain high and M&A remain at last year's levels, it has not been particularly enjoyable from a personal perspective. However as lock down restrictions lift and vaccination levels increase, there has been a palpable positive change in attitudes, and it can't just be down to the pubs re-opening

Whilst the Teams/Zoom meetings continue day by day, increasingly we are talking about having the next meeting "in-person" - a suffix that would have been ridiculed a year ago but is now rather exciting.

In our day-to-day role we have continued to deliver deals with six transactions completed so far in 2021. Our team live and breathe every transaction alongside our clients and in lock-down we have learned the subtle differences and intricacies missing from developing relationships remotely. It's

often those informal moments or conversations where you build a connection and trust with people.

This has materialised in an increased focus on results of due diligence over the course of our transactions and the inability of having everyone in the same room for issue resolution has resulted in delays to a number of our deals. Fortunately, high levels of motivation on all sides has seen us through to deal completion. The reliance on due diligence is not going to disappear with the end of lock-down so it is always worth considering whether your business would pass the test.

The outlook remains extremely positive, with valuations on deals remaining high alongside continued high levels of funding in the sector. We are recruiting to ensure we have the resources available to meet the volume of deals and we are always available for an informal conversation for anyone looking to understand what options are available for your business.

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CityFibre rallies ISPs to light

It won't be long before business ISPs will be besieged by enquiries for full fibre home broadband according to CityFibre's Head of Sales for Consumer ISPs Emma Goodwin. Here, she outlines how CityFibre's status as a market disrupter in the business sector is being replicated in the consumer space as the fast expanding altnet ramps up a partner recruitment campaign.

CityFibre is ratcheting up its strategy to enable traditionally business-focused ISPs to address the rapidly expanding residential market. With an open access network set to reach up to eight million premises over the coming years, it says it is paving the way for partners to make significant gains in the towns and cities where they operate. The opportunity is as broad geographically as it is enticing, according to Goodwin. "As one of the leading players in driving the roll out of full fibre in the UK CityFibre is set to reach a third of the country in the years to come," she commented. "With 69 locations previously announced and in build, CityFibre recently announced plans to reach another 216 locations."

For a decade CityFibre has worked with a number of partners in the business market to drive its full fibre message across the towns and cities in which the altnet already has infrastructure in place. "The reason was simply that the business market is where there has been the most urgent requirement for full fibre speeds," added Goodwin. "But that message is evolving as more domestic users seek out faster and more reliable services."



Emma Goodwin

There is enormous potential for ISPs that have already honed their skills and experience in the business market to address the needs of today's consumers

She noted that today's consumers need faster connectivity, not just to meet family-wide entertainment needs but to fuel much more definitive and sophisticated needs such as fully enabling video-intensive home working and access to cloud-based services and information. "As such, home

users' hunger for bandwidth is even greater," she added. "Our aim is to accelerate ISPs' ability to serve these needs through an open access full fibre network."

Channel push

CityFibre wasted no time in embarking on a campaign to work with ISP partners

on a national and local level that want to drive their penetration and presence in the residential market. "We're already moving fast but we want to move even faster," added Goodwin. "Our build programme is progressing swiftly. Typically, we will reach almost every premise in each of the towns

and cities we're building in, so there is every reason for our ISP partners to offer and provide full fibre services to consumers."

She added that the move is reflective of CityFibre's 'strong belief and passion' in driving competition in the market. "There is enormous potential for ISPs that have already honed their skills and experience in the business market to address the needs of today's consumers," explained Goodwin. "If they are already serving the business community in a town or city they have the foundations to also serve consumers in the same areas."

"It's a great way to diversify their business, generate a new revenue stream and create greater business stability. Ultimately, it's about giving our channel partners and their customers more choice. By fostering and nurturing competition, and by giving our ISP partners the products and tools to compete, we can move everyone towards a full fibre future that much faster."

According to Goodwin, consumer appetite for full fibre is gaining in strength. Nonetheless, she acknowledges that some ISPs addressing the business market might need persuading before they are

Light up home user market

prepared to swing their sights onto the consumer space. Her argument is that by making that move now, they will gain an early mover advantage in a market that is primed for 'exponential growth'. "Consumers need the greater speed and reliability that full fibre delivers," commented Goodwin. "That demand is currently not being met sufficiently in most of the country."

Goodwin also explained that an important aspect of CityFibre's proposition is that it is providing Layer 2 connections to its full fibre infrastructure. "This leaves plenty of scope for ISPs to differentiate and add their own value," she said. "We provide the connectivity platform but the ISP partner is in control of what they take to market. They can make use of their existing skills, investments in infrastructure, management, billing and other capabilities to offer a bespoke full fibre proposition. We work with them to interconnect with us locally or nationally, before then supporting them with their own propositions."

CityFibre's partner support programme provides a leg up to its platform, followed by support with project management, enablement and delivery, marketing, service management and billing, all aligned to the build process. When selling full fibre, Goodwin noted that marketing is a particularly important element. "In our cities we're constantly marketing to residents about the CityFibre network, thereby stimulating demand for partners as homes become ready for service," she stated. "It

supports partners' own marketing significantly."

"Aside from propositions from emerging alternative providers there is little choice for consumers in the full fibre broadband market, and what competition there is comes mainly from the established big players. CityFibre has done a lot to raise its own profile and recognises the need to support ISPs to achieve a similarly high profile in the market."

Case study: Opening the door

Several ISPs have already started addressing the consumer market with CityFibre, including Inverness-based HighNet which is focused on the Scottish SME market. As an existing CityFibre business partner it has now launched a consumer offering under the brand BrawBand and is seeing early success in its target areas. David Alldritt,



David Alldritt

consumer customers and how the business processes and the economics could be managed. "That was a big unknown and a concern initially," added Alldritt.

launched in mid-January 2021 and it quickly attracted customers," noted Alldritt. "By the springtime, HighNet was comfortably on target to achieve its goal for the year."

and easier to support than copper, so managing a large number of customers will equally be much easier than it would those on copper services. It means they can scale up without the costs getting out of hand."

For home users full fibre is a new and exciting proposition, one that's radically different. It's effectively a new market for our traditional partners

Technology and Innovation Director at HighNet, said that the on-boarding process and the results to date have been promising. "We knew CityFibre well and already had the network infrastructure in place," he said. "It was just a question of making the transition from our comfortable B2B environment into the B2C market."

HighNet was principally concerned about the challenge of supporting

"We took the decision to automate as much as possible and put a zero-touch provisioning service in place."

It took around four months to hold discussions with CityFibre, crystallise the strategy, come up with a brand, develop a website, design the business processes and carry out the integration work needed for the automatic provisioning – and then run a pilot. "The BrawBand service was fully

As part of the on-boarding process CityFibre held various sessions with a number of HighNet's departments, covering the end-to-end process – including ordering, installation, customer service and every other aspect of working with consumer customers. "HighNet is an example of a proactive business ISP entering the consumer market with real gusto," stated Goodwin. "There are plenty of other locations across the UK where CityFibre has already begun, or will be, building our full fibre platform, creating a ready market for more ISPs.

"There is also a critical difference and clear benefit that full fibre broadband offers to ambitious ISPs. Full fibre is much more reliable

Goodwin claims that CityFibre's Gigabit City Investment Programme catalyses partner access to the near-untapped consumer fibre market. "For home users, full fibre is a new and exciting proposition, one that's radically different," she commented. "It's effectively a whole new market for our traditional partners.

"Aside from a few national broadband players consumers don't have much choice right now, but by positioning themselves to be that alternative option business ISPs will be well placed to maximise the potential, and scale up as more customers seek to upgrade their homes to full fibre." ■

Building strength in the h

The language of UCaaS is familiar but the sudden activation of a slow market in many ways presents new ground to cover. Here, our panel of industry experts take stock and assess the current and future trends and demands of a market lit up by an overnight Covid-catalysed boom.

The comms channel is now over a year into one of its biggest growth opportunities in modern history, opened up by the tragic Covid-19 pandemic. It is a fact that the shift to home working finally brought home the benefits of UC and cloud to many organisations, and the task now is to answer the question – ‘what next’?. In the coming years UCaaS’s true benefit will be the consistency and continuity it provides, believes Terry Hughes, UK Cloud Lead, Mitel. “If you’re always working from the same place – at home or the office etc – you mostly stick to one device,” he said. “But a hybrid worker may switch between their laptop, their work phone, their personal phone, an office desktop and more. Workers will want to use the same tools, with the same interface and the same experience across all those devices. UCaaS needs to offer that.”

According to Nick Riggott, Country Sales Director, UK

& Ireland, Mitel, remote working tools have proven their value tenfold during the pandemic. “But we’ve all missed real-life collaboration,” he added. “That’s partly because there are aspects of working in a team that digital tools can’t ever replace – and we wouldn’t want to try. It’s also because remote working is still relatively new for many people.

“Although we’re over a year into lockdown and we’ve learnt a lot, we’ve still got much more to do. Remote working tools can be made even more intuitive, natural and effective to support enhanced interaction and collaboration, while at the same time ensuring the experience is as frictionless as possible via a consistent and reliable product delivery.”

Hughes noted that resellers need to fulfil three requirements. Firstly, they need to provide business continuity. “We live in unprecedented times and customers are looking for



Terry Hughes

reliability,” he commented. “Secondly, they must choose wisely where they invest their money: While UCaaS solutions are constantly evolving, partnerships work best when they are long-lasting. Thirdly, they must ensure they keep up with the needs of their customers.”

Partnerships

In terms of achieving these goals in a channel partnership model context, resellers should avoid any kind of cookie-cutter approach, warned Riggott. “Every partnership is unique and solutions must be tailored to the customer,” he added. “Partners should look at models that allow them to continue to own the relationship with end customers while providing consultancy and integration expertise. We recognise that our partners are on their own journey, and we want to enable that. It can’t be done overnight so it’s

important to continue to nurture relationships that are long-term and sustainable.”

Riggott also believes that among the biggest mistakes a reseller can make would be to focus solely on what’s in their portfolio today. “Just trying to build out an A-Z of products and solutions from the big vendor names is the wrong way to go,” he stated. “Resellers have to determine what their customers need and work back from there. Resellers would have an interest in partnering with vendors who don’t have a one size fits all approach.”

With the increasing shift to hybrid working, Jon Dailey, Channel Director, Nfon UK, predicts that there’s going to be a host of innovation in enabling people to make it look and feel like they are working from the office, when they are actually communicating on the move or from their own home. “We are seeing the germination of this with Microsoft Teams and Zoom backgrounds, but in the future we could potentially see amazing breakthroughs via the likes of augmented reality,” he said.

Channel models

To realise this future, vendors need to offer an array of models that best suit the partner needs – from wholesale to commission-based options where the vendor bills the customer direct, says Dailey. “However, the key factor that partners want and need is to have control over their customer,” he added. “Furthermore, there are two factors that can help maximise success – firstly, you typically get what



Nick Riggott



Jon Dailey

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astening UCaaS gold rush



Paul Taylor

you put in, and engaging in training is important. Secondly, it's key to remember that the customer is king. Delivering the best customer experience will differentiate your company and your value add."

Education

For resellers wanting to strengthen their position in the UCaaS market the key considerations and priorities are education and due diligence, pointed out Paul Taylor, Sales and Marketing Director, Voiceflex. "There are many products in the market yet few offer a complete wrap – and the ones that do are expensive," he explained. "The questions to ask yourself are – what experience do I have in-house, and what experience do I need to buy-in to provide a complete and manageable UCaaS solution? With the market changing rapidly, it's also important to keep talking to potential suppliers."

Taylor believes that the next wave of UCaaS will be HR applications to monitor staff wellbeing. "Apps linked or embedded within UCaaS will enrich the user experience and monitor staff welfare," he said. "As a result of Covid we are aware anything can happen, and we now need

to plan for any eventuality. Usually, the more disaster recovery implemented the more the cost. Companies will be investing in UC&C, it is not going to be the cheapest application that wins the deal, but the application that covers the 'what if' questions.

"The network topology is also paramount to have any chance to deliver the all-important user experience. So plan and plan again. Don't skimp on network foundations as you will be forever chasing your tail. Any application is as good as its weakest part. You could have the sleekest, quickest road car in the world, but if you live in a remote location and at the end of a dirt track, the car is useless."

Recurring revenues

Building strength in a congested market requires the right foundations, noted Paul Gibbs, Sales Director, MyPhones. "Growing your recurring revenues is key," he stated. "As we have all collectively navigated Covid it has become glaringly apparent that having over 70-80 per cent recurring revenues puts resellers in a strong position. Working with chosen vendors to achieve high levels of technical and sales

accreditation can also add to differentiation, which in turn strengthens a business."

Gibbs believes that the evolution of UCaaS is taking the comms industry into an 'extremely exciting time'. "The impending switch-off and the advancement of MS Teams means that we are at the cusp of a big step-change in the adoption of cloud, and also UCaaS," he said.

"Having a platform that can elegantly integrate with MS Teams is now paramount as end users want to adopt the technology without losing the core telephony functionality.

"And as we move towards richer integration with Microsoft it is key that resellers have both sets of skills and can speak both languages. We have seen a big skill gap around working with MS so end users are now perhaps looking to partner with someone that has demonstrable skills in both arenas.

"It is now more important than ever that we show strong roadmaps and be open about where we are going, and share the rationale behind our thinking. Listening to resellers is also important as they are at the coalface and can tell us the real demands of end users. So having a solid long-term partnership is key for growing and strengthening a reseller business."

According to Barry Ward, Head of Disruptive Technology, Wavenet, UCaaS has undergone rapid change in recent months. Previously, an audio-first approach based around the migration of legacy PBX functionality was the typical driving factor. "Now, with



Paul Gibbs

the explosion of collaboration and video-first, the move to an integrated experience is critical," he stated. "Many software vendors are utilising voice as a simple add-on to their collaboration suites and software is delivered directly as an OTT solution such as Zoom.

Evolution

"Looking at Amazon with Connect, and Microsoft's efforts with Azure Communication Services, we can see the UCaaS evolution is gathering pace. The ability to develop applications and services using their infrastructure and integrate with services such as AI solutions brings a different way of thinking. It is an exciting time with opportunities to differentiate becoming more achievable. The battleground is now more focused on the desktop. If

we can integrate with the applications customers are using on a day-to-day basis, then we can add value."

It is clear that organisations are now looking for integration with collaboration and other third party applications to help streamline their customer experience and process. This has pushed interoperability and integration as key differentiators in the marketplace, noted Ward, who also pointed to the growing role of information management as we move to remote and hybrid working. "This has increased the need to access information easily from multiple sources," he stated. "We have invested heavily in developing our API and PowerBI templating to help deliver management reports and to enable partners to provide personalised reporting." ■



Barry Ward

Jola on growth path

With a £10.25 million investment from PE house BGF under his belt Jola CEO Andrew Dickinson has reaffirmed his commitment to help partners exploit ever growing mobile data opportunities.

Our interview with Andrew Dickinson conducted over Zoom was interrupted momentarily when he sped off down the garden to grab his errant dog. This was somewhat ironic given the latest project Dickinson and his team of experts are working on with a partner – a tiny SIM that owners will be able to insert into a collar and track their pet's location via a mobile device for up to 10 years. There even plans to implant them, as they do now with microchips.

Many resellers believe that the revenues to be earned from these types of implementations are too small to consider, which is an assumption Dickinson is keen to debunk. The growth and success of Jola backs up the team's commitment to helping channel partners identify mobile data opportunities and monetise them effectively.

In only its sixth full financial year Jola will hit a turnover of nearly £7 million and an EBITDA run-rate of £2 million – it's hardly surprising that investors and would-be purchasers have been courting the business for some time. A recommendation from Virtual1 CEO Tom O'Hagan put private equity firm BGF on the list and the ink has just dried on a deal that buys BGF a minority stake in the fast-growing business for £10.25 million. "We



Andrew Dickinson

haven't issued any new shares," said Dickinson. "We didn't need to raise money to grow, we will be doing that on our own. We're generating cash every month and we're investing that back into the business."

Those founders driving the growth include Cherie Howlett (marketing), Adrian Sunderland (technical), Lee Broxson (sales) and Antony Dearden (Chairman). Rob Stevens (operations) joined in 2016. They all worked alongside Dickinson at service provider Griffin which was bought by MDNX in 2012. "The main benefit of having all functional leaders as major shareholders is

you are able to hire the very best people in every position," said Dickinson. "With such a strong team the business can adapt quickly to take advantage of new opportunities, which crop up frequently in ICT. By extending share ownership to every employee in Jola we maintain the highest standards in leadership and delivery.

"The BGF deal validates what we've achieved at Jola and it's a great advertisement for the business. It's not easy to get an investment like this. The due diligence process you go through is a real tick in the box for our people. BGF hired very

senior, very smart people to look at the Jola business in absolute detail. And they came back and said, yes, this business is worth £40 million, which, after only five years of full trading isn't bad."

Organic growth

The typical return required from a growth fund is three to four times the investment which would indicate an exit value of between £120 and £160 million in three to five years. To hit this kind of target many companies would launch an immediate buy-and-build strategy like Wayne Martin's GCI, which was also backed by BGF, but that's not a path Dickinson and his

fellow shareholders intend taking, supported by BGF.

"While I'm sure we could raise money for a buy-and-build, there are very few assets in our space at present worth buying and actually I really enjoy organic growth," added Dickinson. "Also, the easiest way for us to expand internationally is to follow our customers out there and that's what we're doing. If we sign up international MSPs and distributors we will naturally expand internationally. We don't need to go and buy assets in different countries or try and do a start-up in France or Germany. It's very high risk, and it's just not our thing."

On private equity markets Dickinson is upbeat: "The ICT sector, and particularly the channel, is very hot now," he commented. "There is plenty of dry powder PE out there looking for a home and heads are turning to resellers and their suppliers that have demonstrated resilient recurring revenues and margins. Valuations are finally reflecting the true value of these companies."

Dickinson believes the success achieved by Jola is a wake-up call to any channel players that see mobile data as complex and unprofitable, especially those who missed out on the opportunity when Covid-19 hit. "This a beacon for those resellers that have been thinking about getting into mobile data, IoT, M2M, **Continued on page 32**



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A spiral-bound notebook with a white page is open on a dark wooden surface. The page contains the handwritten text 'Some things just work brilliantly together.' in black ink. A blue pencil lies vertically to the right of the notebook. A glowing purple arc is visible on the right side of the image.

Some things
just work
brilliantly
together.

Points to consider when setting out your UCaaS plans

For resellers wanting to toughen their sinews in the UCaaS space key strategic decisions must be made. Here, Zest4's Head of Cloud & Connectivity Adam Hart highlights the action points that will help resellers plan ahead with confidence.

Resellers need to consider their UC offerings carefully due to the myriad of choice in the market. Some things to consider would be: Is it sustainable? I expect some consolidation in this area as there are too many offerings right now and customers will gravitate to the best known and best rated solutions.

Is it robust? Even 15 minutes of downtime will cause a customer significant concern. I would be looking for a product that offers 99.999 per cent uptime and verified with tools like downdetector. Another consideration is scalability. Can the customer grow with the platform? Can they add more features or services such as contact centre? Also, can it integrate? Customers are demanding more interoperability and platforms that can't offer out-of-the-box integrations will not survive in the long run.

In terms of the evolution of UCaaS, I would expect to see the continued decline of deskphones. Users



Adam Hart

that have laptops and smartphones should not be consuming more plastic that has less functionality

Customers want to talk to resellers that fully understand the UC landscape

than a softphone! Smartphones rarely leave our side, so expect to see more mobility options around UC, particularly with work applications on your smartphone.

The next wave should see a greater focus on the customer journey and satisfaction. The phone is the key to immediate resolution, not email, and

using intelligence to route calls to the right team or person will be key.

Understanding your product set is also important. Customers want to talk to resellers that fully understand the UC landscape. I see too many resellers struggling to understand a broad range of UC offerings which results in a confused message to the customer, and even worse, a nightmare to support. Pick two and get knowledgeable on both. Also, UC should

be considered alongside connectivity and mobility – they are interwoven.

To strengthen their position resellers are well placed to offer boutique services and should remain nimble. Networks struggle to react to changing markets. Don't underestimate the power of local. Customers like buying a recognised brand from a local company. ■

Continued from page 30 whatever you want to call it," added Dickinson. "It's so scalable. We put on 10,000 SIMs in one day, in fact, in about 10 minutes at the beginning of January. And we didn't have to add any more people in billing or accounts to support it.

"Unlike something like Ethernet, SIMs provision is immediate using our Mobile Manager solution, so you don't have to wait three months to start generating recurring margin. As soon as customers put that SIM into their device you're billing for it."

Jola took on just under 300 new partners in 2020 to add to the 600-plus it already had, which Dickinson attributes to the pandemic factor. "We added a huge number of partners in 2020,"

During the height of the crisis, Jola also acted to help resellers that had back-to-back 12 and 36-month contracts with, for example, retailers who just stopped doing business. "We thought, do we really want to hold them to that? So, we talked to our suppliers, most of whom were supportive and, where we could, we let them out of their contracts," stated Dickinson. "It's worked because they've come back stronger. Resellers will remember suppliers that supported them during the crisis.

"People like Terry O'Brien at DWS need to be applauded for what they did. They worked with their suppliers, to come up with schemes to help resellers who had lost end users due to the pandemic. I remember Terry saying it's not going to be

Resellers will remember suppliers that supported them during the crisis

he said. "They couldn't sell leased lines, they couldn't sell broadband and they couldn't sell hosting because there was no-one in offices. And because Openreach was unable to send engineers out, not only could they not install new services they couldn't fix broken ones either. So there was a sudden shift towards mobile broadband. Everybody wanted a 4G router to work from home.

"Then companies started to look at projects they had on the back burner like cost-saving IoT solutions. We recently put 30,000 multi-network SIMs into iPads for one public sector project. People look at IoT as being very low revenue and you've got to win hundreds of thousands. You don't. You can often get a decent ARPU of £10 to £15 and sometimes margins in excess of 40 per cent, so it's an attractive thing to pivot into."

him that makes any resellers go bust. And we thought, he's right, so we passed on tens of thousands of pounds of refunds, too.

"Not many end users went bust but it was enough to really hurt. Some resellers are quite small and cannot afford to lose £20-30,000 in early termination charges. Those suppliers that gave money back to their resellers should be applauded."

And those that didn't? "I've been in this industry long enough to know that resellers have long memories and what goes around comes around," said Dickinson.

He started his first business in 1996, the same year as Comms Dealer magazine launched, and you get the impression that like us, this entrepreneur will always be at the centre of our industry's ongoing progression. ■

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Future of voice and collaboration



Gavin Jones
Channel Director at BT Wholesale

The way businesses collaborate and communicate has changed dramatically in recent times, with the coronavirus pandemic altering how we work – it is no longer somewhere we go, but something we do. Recent research in partnership with leading analyst house Cavell found that 20% of companies had over half their workforce working remotely in 2019, but by the following year, that had increased to 41%. With this, new communication challenges have arisen – and new opportunities for channel partners (CPs) and businesses alike.

Whilst many of us have spent the past year working from home, the continued roll out of the vaccine and easing of restrictions means that a flexible, hybrid working model will be preferred by many moving forwards. Businesses have embraced the use of digital collaboration tools to maintain face-to-face conversations and meetings with colleagues and customers, and with flexible working, this need will continue. Video adoption for businesses has increased from 26% in 2018 to 51% in 2020, showing a clear need for businesses to invest in cloud-based communication solutions that best support their workforce.

Just add Webex

That's why we've added Cisco Webex to our Wholesale Hosted Communications (WHC). It's a collaboration tool which excels at keeping workforces connected, to help customers work better from anywhere. It offers a flexible path to digital transformation, especially pertinent as Cavell predicts the UK cloud communications market is forecast to grow to over 14m users by end of 2025. Customers can switch to all-IP voice services with Hosted Centrex, or they can keep their PBX systems but replace ISDN

with Hosted SIP Trunking. Either way, they get access to all the benefits of the cloud, like increased mobility, call recording, CRM integration and more. And for partners, it offers easy deployment, scalability and the chance to sell tailored solutions through optional add-ons.

As well as enterprise-grade video conferencing, Cisco Webex delivers instant messaging, file and screen sharing, whiteboarding, collaborative spaces and IP calling features. It's cost effective, easy to deploy, and backed by one of the biggest and most trusted names around. And with a range of different packages to choose from, customers have more ways to serve their base.

It's not just remote working that is driving a need for change. This is all underpinned by the 2025 switch-off of the UK's public switched telephone network (PSTN), meaning that in less than 5 years, support for the traditional, copper-based analogue network will be withdrawn, signaling a shift for businesses to all-IP.

Right partner for collaboration

Many businesses are currently using various collaboration apps on the market. These are certainly fine as

short-term solutions during the pandemic, but industry experts have predicted that remote collaboration is here to stay, and that means preparing for the future. Cavell's research found that collaboration and video adoption is skyrocketing, with 46% of businesses expecting to use more video in 2021. As hybrid working becomes the norm, customers will be looking for longer-term solutions, ones that are built with resilience and security in mind. As an enterprise-grade collaboration tool with built-in security and privacy, Cisco Webex meets those demands as standard, with a range of packages to best suit customer needs.

Cisco Webex is built to play well with third-party solutions. There are more than 2,000 integrations available, so you can optimise your workflows with the tools you know best. As well as integration with Microsoft Teams, it works alongside solutions from companies like Salesforce, Google, Atlassian and Apple. Users can bring content and information from these apps into Webex spaces, and they can even make calls from third-party tools.

Choosing this platform was simple: It has been recognised by Gartner as a leader in its field and it's cost

effective. The intuitive interface means customers can get started right away with instant messaging, video calling and more. The integrated solution is built on the BroadWorks platform, which provides extra functionality, security, and rich features and the collaboration packages are made to be flexible. They can be paired with any of the WHC licences, and there are no limits on upgrades or downgrades, which is great if customers' requirements change.

Jed Pell, Service Provider Collaboration Leader at Cisco commented: "Over the last year we've seen colossal changes in how, and where, people work. As UK businesses strive to maximise productivity, adopt new flexible hybrid working models and keep their employees connected, no matter of their location, we've seen an accelerated adoption of integrated cloud collaboration solutions. To help meet this need, Cisco is very excited to partner with BT to bring WHC with Cisco Webex to market, in conjunction with BT's channel partners. Cisco and BT are committed to enabling seamless collaboration with a secure, scalable, future-proofed solution available in a range of packages designed to meet different customers' needs."

Understanding the benefits

For organisations to migrate to cloud communications, especially with the 2025 PSTN switch-off looming, it's important they understand what it means for their business.

CPs have a role to play helping them gain that understanding and make it easier for them to adopt the right products and services. For instance, when explaining the benefits, CPs should focus less on the advantages for the IT Manager – ease of upkeep and cost – and more on those for the end-user, the stakeholder who will be using products day in, day out. When teams are provided with a tool that truly helps them to perform their roles more effectively, it greatly benefits the business.

Ultimately, the future of collaboration and voice is here. Digital transformation is rapidly evolving the workplace, and as it changes, those who embrace the right technologies under the guidance from CP, will be the ones who flourish. With the 2025 switch off on the horizon, hosted voice and collaboration solutions will ensure businesses are prepared for the future. The new way of working is here. Just add Webex.

SiPalto in full voice

SiPalto was founded on the principle of doing things right and is now poised to exert an ever growing influence on the channel as its campaign gathers momentum and goes international, according to co-founder Ahmed Murad.

The test of any start-up business lies first in realising its founding mission and then in its capacity to continue giving the market what it wants. SiPalto has done both and was founded on the principle of doing things right, a motive that took hold when Murad first worked for a VoIP provider. He observed bad practices and without the power to implement remedial measures he decided that the sensible thing to do was to seize the initiative and take control. "I could see there were a lot of things being done badly and with no voice to make a significant change I approached my co-founder, Ian Rendell, and we decided to establish SiPalto in London in 2009. Our goal from the outset was to develop and operate our own platform."

Spin forward to 2015 and SiPalto was in full innovation mode, transforming away from being a reseller when it launched its own product. "Our core product is SIP Cloud, a hosted VoIP platform which has been enhanced by our new PCI compliant card payment system called ChargeSecure," explained Murad. "We plan to add more services, all developed and managed in-house."

"At the heart of every system we provide, and before developing any new features, we start with the question – what is the problem we are trying to solve? This way we

have been able to enhance our systems and ensure customers always have the latest features. We currently have a few products in the pipeline which are top secret, but what I will say is that no other company in the UK is supplying some of the products we plan to release. What is no secret is that we will soon be launching a video conferencing platform which has been in development for the last two years. Furthermore, VoIP is here to stay, but alternative communication and payment methods are of interest and something we are putting R&D resource into."

According to Murad there are a number of VoIP providers who are leap frogging the traditional telcos in terms of services. "As companies become more educated they will be demanding the features and services being provided by these more nimble VoIP providers," he claimed. "VARs will need to expand their portfolios and start using providers that can service their customers' requirements."

"Resellers are becoming more aware of smaller, more nimble providers who not only deliver the services they require, but the commercials and flexible contracts the larger telcos can't offer. Resellers are moving to us at a rate we've not seen before. The inability for larger telcos to quickly react to market shifts is our gain. There needs



Ahmed Murad

The inability for larger telcos to quickly react to market shifts is our gain

to be more investment in alternative products, they are out there but nobody knows about them."

Expansion mode

Murad says that SiPalto's approach to customers has taken hold and the company's client base continues to expand, which prompted a significant increase in staff numbers, doubling headcount during the last 12 months. "It's exciting having people with different viewpoints and opinions all contributing to projects," added Murad. "It develops you personally and makes you better at what you do."

What were you doing 25 years ago?...

I was 14 and spending most of my time painting Warhammer miniatures or playing on my Amstrad computer which used a cassette drive to load games. Kids these days will never know the struggle.

"The main challenge of the last 12 months has been around Covid and supporting our customers who have all been negatively affected. Now we are seeing a light at the end of the tunnel and feeling positive about future expansion."

"Last year we established SiPalto in Portugal and expect to open a few more offices over the next few years. We will also continue our growth by supplying our services to more international companies, and in particular working out of different offices throughout Europe. It is surreal that we are now an international company." ■

Just a minute with Ahmed Murad...

Role models: Ian Rendell, SiPalto's co-founder. He is an absolute gentleman and always has your back. I'm lucky to be able to call him a friend.

How did you get into comms?

Following a number of stints in telcos my first proper job was with NTL when I was 21, and I co-founded SiPalto when I was 28.

Name three ideal dinner guests:

My old boss David Cargill from Vonage who always tells a good story. Hayley West from Magrathea, she has the dirt on everyone in the industry; and my fellow SiPalto co-founder Ian Rendell – if you're out with him you know it's going to be a fun night.

Best piece of advice you have been given? Make hay while the sun shines.

Who do you admire most in the channel: It has to be Paul Gibbs, he's what I call a heavyweight.

How do you relax when not working? I'm a geek at heart, so when not officially working I'm generally working on some programming project related to open source communications.

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? Putting Tesla motors into vintage cars.

One thing you could not do without in your job: A Draytek multi-head screw driver.

How would you like to be remembered? As someone who always puts other people first.

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Engaging with UCaaS

The UCaaS market is there for the taking, so long as certain engagement-focused conditions are met, according to 8x8's Senior Partner Manager David Green, and Regional VP for EMEA Channel Sales, Wholesale, Graham Kedzlie.

Comms resellers can rely on the UCaaS market to deliver long-term sustainability and growth, providing key priorities underpin their go-to-market strategy. "There are two key considerations for resellers wanting to strengthen their position in the UCaaS market – employee engagement and customer engagement," stated Green. "How employees engage efficiently and collaborate is a key business priority for many, especially as we continue to operate remotely.

"Resellers need to offer organisations their knowledge in terms of the opportunities available to optimise their employees' engagement – such as deploying an integrated communications tool that works cohesively with other tools across the business, from CRM to contact centre operations. The second key priority needs to be a focus on customer engagement. Businesses need to differentiate how they treat and service their customers from their competitors."

Research by 8x8 conducted with the Call Centre Management Association (CCMA) found that 67 per cent of consumers surveyed have experienced more difficulty in receiving help from customer services since the pandemic. "Partners need to support businesses

to ensure the appropriate technology is in place to meet, and even exceed, customer expectations – from AI to multi-channel services, enabling customers to interact however they choose to – whether via phone, SMS, email or even social media," added Green.

Many market forces are at work right now, but a key driver in the evolution of UCaaS is the end user experience, observed Kedzlie. "The need to operate from anywhere in a hybrid work model has accelerated the transformation to pure cloud and multi-channel as a crucial factor in an organisation's technology deployment," he said. "There is a business need for a wider offering within the UCaaS space to connect employee engagement with customer engagement – and cloud contact centre functionality is a great example to facilitate contact centre agents to operate remotely."

Integration

In terms of the future development of UCaaS, integration is also key, emphasised Kedzlie. "For example, we see CRM as a critical functionality for UC and contact centre efficiencies, but its full capacity can be harnessed when it is integrated with additional business tools," he added. "As a service agent, CRM enables visibility of a customer's full profile



David Green



Graham Kedzlie

The need to operate from anywhere in a hybrid work model has accelerated the transformation to pure cloud and multi-channel

and touchpoints, while its integration with an internal communications tool provides the ability to quickly connect a customer to the right person internally."

Additionally, analytics and the capacity to pull out real-time insights are key to business optimisation. "From monitoring, reporting and improving business efficiencies, analytics are an essential tool for businesses as they navigate not just remote operations, but the entry to a hybrid world of work," stated Kedzlie. "Customers need to understand their technology and rely on partners to help them move beyond

legacy products which hinder such visibility.

"From cloud to voice and analytics, the UCaaS market encompasses many different technologies and the market is ever widening. Today, a channel partner needs to add more value than just product delivery. Businesses want to buy technology from people they trust, and the need to quickly deploy solutions has made the role of the trusted advisor even more fundamental. An integrated, single vendor UCaaS and CCaaS offering is crucial. With consolidation offerings occurring in the market frequently, partners need to have a breadth of

knowledge across a variety of products to meet the needs of today's business."

But too much specialisation can have the opposite effect for resellers, according to Green. A breadth of understanding and knowledge of offerings is key to success – being an all-rounder is no bad thing," he explained. "For organisations, a focus on digital transformation is what they are looking to achieve. When selling complex solutions resellers need to focus on the wider transformation goals, and this means engaging with all senior members of the business.

"Conversations often begin with those looking after the technical requirements, but resellers need to be able to support the delivery of solutions that enable the organisation to work towards its wider business goals. This can only be achieved if senior leadership buy-in happens early on before deployment. This is a necessity, rather than a nice to have."

Kedzlie noted that resellers that offer specific, granular expertise – such as technology solutions designed for legal services – can provide that extra differentiation to clients. "Giving customers vertical knowledge and value add insights underpins the reseller's status as a trusted advisor," he said. ■

Remembering a Legend.

Thanks from all the people whose careers you helped shape, businesses you supported to grow and nights out you made all the more memorable.

Founder, investor, mentor, friend and channel legend.

David George
1942 - 2015



pragma

Times have changed but this

As we introduced ourselves to the channel in the pilot issue of Comms Dealer, we wrote that to get started we had “begged and borrowed the valuable time of some industry professionals to give us their unbridled viewpoint on various issues”.

In the 25 years since, we have continued to question (and sometimes pester) our friends as the industry has warped and changed around us all. This peer contribution has helped Comms Dealer’s archives represent a history of the channel, written from the perspectives of those on ground zero, who have lived and breathed every twist and turn.

To catch up with some of our good friends, we asked a host of frequent collaborators to get nostalgic and take themselves back 25 years to remember some of the tech they were selling at the time. Some were already serving this channel in its infancy whilst others were blissfully unaware of what they were soon to step foot into.

We then supplied each contributor with a crystal ball to conjure their most ‘Black Mirror’ visions of how resellers will operate in the next 25 years and with visions of holographic conferencing to call-making contact lenses, they did not disappoint.

Whilst things have been all change for the past 25 years, and will continue to be for the next 25, one thing has remained consistent, and that is the support we have received from those who occupy this space with us.

Comms Dealer founder Nigel Sergent puts it in a nutshell: “This is a dynamic industry. Fast moving, creative, innovative and never, ever dull. The way the channel community reacted so positively when the pandemic first hit to keep the UK emergency services and crucial organisations communicating is testimony to that.

“But what makes it special is the relationships and friendships that have been formed. Of course, its competitive, but when support is needed, people are there for each other. You have been there for us for 25 years and we are very grateful for that.”



FRASER FERGUSON
KUBENET

WHO WERE YOU WORKING FOR 25 YEARS AGO?

I was the owner of KFJ Resourcing, one of Scotland’s largest recruitment businesses.

WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE?

I was a director of the business.

WHAT PRODUCT OR SERVICE WAS YOUR PRIMARY SOURCE OF REVENUE?

Perms and temps. I recruited for all the big telcos back then, like Telephone Rentals, Mercury, NTL.

WHAT WAS YOUR ABIDING MEMORY OF THAT TIME?

Telephone canvassing which was a great buzz and networking was non-stop. It seemed like you were at dinners and lunches six days a week!

WHAT ICT TECHNOLOGY DO YOU THINK RESELLERS WILL BE SELLING IN 25 YEARS’ TIME?

Smart technology and subscription everything.



TIM BROOKS
PRAGMA

WHO WERE YOU WORKING FOR 25 YEARS AGO?

Crane Telecom.

WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE?

Dealer Sales Manager, supporting resellers in London and the South East.

WHAT PRODUCT OR SERVICE WAS YOUR PRIMARY SOURCE OF REVENUE?

Goldstar GDK key systems. Then it was all about going digital, ISDN, voicemail and auto attendants.

WHAT WAS YOUR ABIDING MEMORY OF THAT TIME?

Long days in the car driving around London with a very large and heavy demonstration system, and lots of great nights out with resellers and colleagues.

WHAT ICT TECHNOLOGY DO YOU THINK RESELLERS WILL BE SELLING IN 25 YEARS’ TIME?

What a question. I wonder what we will be selling in five years’ time! Technology changes so quickly! What I am sure of is that resellers will still be guiding and supporting businesses to make the right technology decisions and being there when they’re needed if things go wrong!



ANNA ROPER
NINE GROUP

WHO WERE YOU WORKING FOR 25 YEARS AGO?

I was a receptionist for Swedish telco Telia AB in London.

WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE?

Front line operations at Telia. This experience was pivotal in enabling me to achieve my ambition of becoming a Sales Director.

IN YOUR EARLY DAYS IN COMMS WHAT PRODUCT OR SERVICE WAS YOUR PRIMARY SOURCE OF REVENUE?

Call traffic termination. There was no CPS or line rental back in those days, never mind ICT solutions!

WHAT WAS YOUR ABIDING MEMORY OF THAT TIME?

My first telecoms trainer gave a wild example of how in the future, we might be able to order shopping online. What’s now normal, once felt so impossible.

WHAT ICT TECHNOLOGY DO YOU THINK RESELLERS WILL BE SELLING IN 25 YEARS’ TIME?

Artificial intelligence. By using analytics, smart communication tools could eventually help anticipate user requirements. A long way from call traffic termination.



IAN FISHWICK
ADEPT TELECOM

WHO WERE YOU WORKING FOR 25 YEARS AGO?

I was at Telewest, London and South East Region. The business later merged with NTL and changed its name to Virgin Media.

WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE?

I was Managing Director.

WHAT PRODUCT OR SERVICE WAS YOUR PRIMARY SOURCE OF REVENUE?

Our primary source of revenue was cable TV subscriptions, but my team was also running the trials of 50Mb cable modems. Twenty-five years later, much of the UK still cannot get access to 50Mb. Absolutely ridiculous.

WHAT ICT TECHNOLOGY DO YOU THINK RESELLERS WILL BE SELLING IN 25 YEARS’ TIME?

The world will be even more connected, so we will still be selling connectivity in some form, although by then it maybe satellite and 6G as well as fibre.



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DAVID HUGHES
INCOM

WHO WERE YOU WORKING FOR 25 YEARS AGO?

Incom Business Systems Ltd.

WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE?

Salesman.

WHAT PRODUCT OR SERVICE WAS YOUR PRIMARY SOURCE OF REVENUE?

Aastra (Mitel) Telephone Systems, ISDN 2 and 30 via BT and Cable & Wireless.

WHAT WAS YOUR ABIDING MEMORY OF THAT TIME?

Being in awe of people who ran their own businesses.

WHAT ICT TECHNOLOGY DO YOU THINK RESELLERS WILL BE SELLING IN 25 YEARS' TIME?

Wow, what a question! I think it is safe to say that no matter what the technology is, end users will still need help, support and guidance to deploy and support it and therefore the role of the 'trusted adviser' and value add reseller will still be as important as ever!



DAVID ALLDRITT
HIGHNET

WHO WERE YOU WORKING FOR 25 YEARS AGO?

I was newly established in my own business.

WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE?

Supplying canoes, kayaks and associated clothing and equipment.

WHAT PRODUCT OR SERVICE WAS YOUR PRIMARY SOURCE OF REVENUE?

Sales revenues had nothing to do with tech but running the business did. I'd never have survived without a fax machine!

WHAT WAS YOUR ABIDING MEMORY OF THAT TIME?

Email was via dial-up so that was done at lunchtime. It would be a few years before I had a mobile, and a few years more until there was any reception in the Highlands!

WHAT ICT TECHNOLOGY DO YOU THINK RESELLERS WILL BE SELLING IN 25 YEARS' TIME?

The young entrepreneurs of 2046 will still be selling solutions for communication, productivity, security and data storage, but the keyboard will have gone along with the fixed handset.



ROB SIMS
ELITE GROUP

WHO WERE YOU WORKING FOR 25 YEARS AGO?

Telia, an international carrier based in London. It was part of the Scandinavian PTT.

WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE?

Business Development Manager, UK Resale Channel - my first job in comms and still one of the best.

WHAT PRODUCT OR SERVICE WAS YOUR PRIMARY SOURCE OF REVENUE?

Cheap minutes, the good old days of 35ppm for wholesale mobile calls!

WHAT WAS YOUR ABIDING MEMORY OF THAT TIME?

The best expense account you could imagine and a really great team to work with!

WHAT ICT TECHNOLOGY DO YOU THINK RESELLERS WILL BE SELLING IN 25 YEARS' TIME?

Holographic conferencing utilising AI for 'in room' appearances



CHRIS MORRISEY
LILY COMMS

WHO WERE YOU WORKING FOR 25 YEARS AGO?

I had just joined Genesis Communications, a mobile service provider in Manchester.

WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE?

Business Advisor

WHAT PRODUCT OR SERVICE WAS YOUR PRIMARY SOURCE OF REVENUE?

Mobile communications.

WHAT WAS YOUR ABIDING MEMORY OF THAT TIME?

It was the first fast growth business that I had joined, and it was so exciting and fast-paced compared to traditional industries like banking. I saw ordinary people earning millions.

WHAT ICT TECHNOLOGY DO YOU THINK RESELLERS WILL BE SELLING IN 25 YEARS' TIME?

Projectors or 'in air' comms i.e. no screens, touch and voice control. One provider will probably have a big market share.



PADDY COPPINGER
WHITE HORSE TELECOM

WHO WERE YOU WORKING FOR 25 YEARS AGO?

I had qualified as a helicopter pilot, just as a global recession hit. Flying jobs were hard to find so I joined a lovely, local company in Hungerford called Saxon.

WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE?

To flog as much as humanly possible to small independent motorist shops.

WHAT PRODUCT OR SERVICE WAS YOUR PRIMARY SOURCE OF REVENUE?

Magic Tree air fresheners, amongst other well-known car related brands.

WHAT WAS YOUR ABIDING MEMORY OF THAT TIME?

No smart phone, but a very cool, state-of-the-art car phone (incoming calls only due to poisonously high call costs!) and paper orders faxed through to HQ at the end of the day.

WHAT ICT TECHNOLOGY DO YOU THINK RESELLERS WILL BE SELLING IN 25 YEARS' TIME?

A White Horse injectable comms bot - touch your ear and make a phone call! Or perhaps a contact lens instead of a smart phone.



RICHARD ROBERTS
MITEL

WHO WERE YOU WORKING FOR 25 YEARS AGO?

I was Azlan Distribution, a network and communications IT distributor, based in Wokingham.

WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE?

I was the Business Development Manager responsible for launching their Cisco partnership here in the UK&I.

WHAT PRODUCT OR SERVICE WAS YOUR PRIMARY SOURCE OF REVENUE?

The full Cisco suite of products.

WHAT WAS YOUR ABIDING MEMORY OF THAT TIME?

Huge opportunity, hype days, the social buzz of distribution and the belief that absolutely anything was possible!

WHAT ICT TECHNOLOGY DO YOU THINK RESELLERS WILL BE SELLING IN 25 YEARS' TIME?

Communications technologies will always be central to the social and commercial fabric of the economy, and this will continue to develop. Better mobile connectivity will reduce reliance on hardware infrastructure. As the shift to service accelerates, resellers will play a critical role in consolidating those services into customised experience offerings.

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Craven charts extent of

In an often complex and uncertain market one thing is becoming more obvious by the day – that there is no better time to offer UCaaS to customers, writes Jane Craven, Sales Director Enterprise Solutions, UK & Ireland, EPOS. Here, she outlines how resellers have everything to gain – and much to lose – according to how they approach this burgeoning opportunity.

With an expected growth rate of 10.6 per cent between 2016-2022, the UCaaS market in Europe is soaring. UCaaS platforms have risen in popularity due to many factors - their proven scalability, cost-effectiveness and they have become an attractive proposition for businesses moving to a hybrid model. According to EPOS research, 64 per cent of business leaders believe that having quality audio technology today is now more important than having a quality laptop or PC equipment to facilitate communication with clients and partners, and is essential to business performance. On top of this, the majority of business leaders (78 per cent) are willing to pay more for audio collaboration solutions to get ahead.



Jane Craven

End users in the UC space are seeing an opportunity to purchase all the services they require online – this is forcing resellers to rethink their value proposition and go-to-market strategy

Business leaders are placing a premium on future proofing their companies and employees to enable a permanent shift to hybrid working, and this is affording resellers in the space a unique opportunity to capitalise on market needs. Ultimately, there is no better time to offer UCaaS to customers. However, securing a slice of the pie means understanding a customer's business and their pain points - particularly those that have arisen in the last 12 months.

Being able to evaluate the obstacles an organisation faces and pinpoint the right UCaaS solutions that will work in the long-run is key. At the start of the pandemic, offering free trials was a great way to onboard new clients. However, now it is about understanding what is preventing those businesses that haven't already, to make the transition to UCaaS.

Last year shone a spotlight on the importance of the cloud in UCaaS. Most organisations

using cloud-based services prior to the move to remote working were able to continue collaborating and communicating seamlessly without the worry of implementing new, unfamiliar systems.

Cloud transition

The transition to cloud is expected to surge this year and beyond, with businesses moving areas, if not all, of their communications to the cloud. From business continuity, enabling a

hybrid workforce to disaster recovery, cloud services have proven their reliability over the last year.

While we know virtual meetings are here for the long-haul, the user experience is far from perfect. In the coming months, we expect to see continued improvements including more automation and intelligence introduced to video meetings, increasing ease of access to more attractive layouts. Vendors are striving to make the virtual experience

more productive and less fatigue inducing.

Collaborating via video won't be limited to meetings. Instead we'll start to see a trend with the visual element being added to the customer service experience and contact centres.

The UCaaS market has endless possibilities to improve the collaboration experience by harnessing new innovations – from noise detection and reduction, transcription and translation services, meeting room scheduling and assistants – are just a few of the already established deployments. When it comes to new technologies like AI, we're seeing big brands experimenting with offerings. For instance, Zoom uses AI for its Zoom Rooms Smart Gallery to create a gallery-view of in-room participants, while Microsoft uses AI for its Together Mode and custom meeting layouts.

With some businesses planning for some sort of return to the office, the current focus is around maintaining health and safety. From a tech perspective, organisations want to limit 'touch' as much as possible which is where the role of voice comes in. Touchless tools and technologies will play a vital part in facilitating the

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UCaaS growth

return to the office. Smart personal voice assistants like Alexa for Business and Microsoft Cortana can help employees manage their devices, control conferencing systems, book meeting rooms, initiate conference calls, send messages, share files and set reminders – all through the power of audio.

Traditionally, UC vendors' brand and reputation have been partly built and reliant on relationships they had with members of their channel. More recently we've witnessed a shift as companies, like Microsoft, start to re-evaluate

master agent model which involves partners focusing on areas such as marketing and sales, while the vendor oversees securing deals. This could enable resellers to explore opportunities for growth in a market where self-service eCommerce options are becoming more available, while also working with vendors who are committed to a channel-only model. With customer expectations evolving so quickly, resellers may need to evaluate whether they're going to a single provider to offer everything or explore the opportunities offered by combining

existing processes. These platforms benefit resellers as they'll always be able to offer the latest range of intelligent features and tools to their customers.

Open platforms and APIs allow partners and customers to integrate the UCaaS features that suits their business needs. An example of this would be using immersive video conferencing from within a collaboration tool. With AI and APIs, resellers will have another opportunity to stand out from the crowd in the modern environment.

However, connecting with the right vendor is also key. These new solutions will only work if the vendor is prepared to allow for open platforms, immersive integrations and future growth. Having the ability to adapt quickly to changing customer demands and market trends will ensure resellers don't get left behind or lost in a sea of similar services.

Despite the progress made to enhance the customer experience, retaining customers continues to be challenging. According to McKinsey, three quarters of consumers have changed their brand preferences in the last year, indicating customer loyalty is on a downward trajectory. Resellers need to ensure they are prioritising customer relationships above all else. To retain customer loyalty resellers must showcase their ability to help organisations choose the right solutions by asking the right questions, but also remain agile enough to change services to fit in with the evolving market and consequent change in customer requirements. ■

With AI and APIs, resellers will have another opportunity to stand out from the crowd in the modern environment

relationships with resellers. For example, self-service eCommerce solutions are allowing some vendors to deliver cloud-based solutions to customers without any need for reseller input. So, what does this mean for partnerships going forward?

End users in the UC space are seeing an opportunity to purchase all the services they require online – this is forcing resellers to rethink their value proposition and go-to-market strategy. Instead, resellers need to assess and identify new ways to enhance their product offering through bespoke services, personalised customer packages and offer unique additions to the UCaaS solution.

We're seeing some resellers explore the concept of the

various offerings in a multi-vendor environment.

Differentiation

It's no secret the UCaaS market is crowded and competitive. Being able to differentiate between different resellers' and partners' UCaaS offerings is becoming increasingly difficult. As the market continues to mature, the need to establish USPs is vital. As a result, a new generation of UCaaS platforms has been ushered in, powered by open technology like multi-application integrations and APIs. This technology allows resellers to build tailored environments for their end users.

Instead of having to replace old technology, this process enables users to build new technology on top of

Property is prime marketplace for Keesource growth

KEESOURCE founder Karen Lumley has a simple philosophy to client relationships which has helped her business make its mark in the London Commercial and Property Management sector.

"For many businesses, managing telecoms and energy costs is a pain. For us, it is a passion," she said.

Karen has worked tirelessly to establish a strong foothold in a sector where unified solutions and great service is critical. Her team has risen to the challenge of reducing costs and releasing customers from the laborious task of checking bills and managing contracts. By improving tariffs and delivering cost-saving digital and cloud technologies, Keesource has built a reputation for driving down energy costs and improving ongoing service on a continual basis.

"It all comes down to what we do best and, most importantly, we put people first," she asserts.

This approach rings true with the service commitments provided by Keesource's energy partner Fidelity Energy, which has been a strong ally during the Covid-19 crisis.

"Despite the very real challenges of 2020, both emotionally and financially, Keesource continued to grow alongside Fidelity. We understood the difficulties our clients were going through and by helping them with a trusted and personal approach, even in these difficult times, we provided cost savings and good support which gave them the confidence to place their business with us.

"During the pandemic it was essential to continue with Fidelity's partner support and assistance. All marketing material and collateral was refreshed to reflect the current times which gave us the opportunity to connect with new and existing clients to deliver significant savings and benefits.

"There has been a great synergy between Keesource and Fidelity Energy and our Channel Development Manager, Zack Wootton along with the Internal Account



Karen Lumley

Managers, have been ever present during the pandemic. By utilising their expertise and the market intelligence that we have access to, we continued to analyse bills and support clients and drive profitability despite the market conditions.

"I'm really looking forward to the rest of 2021 as we move out of lockdown and look forward to meeting clients both old and new in person again. Especially to discuss new challenges and how we can continue to support and improve their business moving forward."

Karen offered this advice to any telecoms companies considering a Fidelity partnership as the best approach to adding energy to their products and services: "Since inception our partnership with Fidelity has been a very positive experience. The relationship has enabled Keesource to concentrate on our core business of improving business efficiency and profitability to a wide range of clients and with Fidelity's support we fully expect continued business growth in the years ahead.

"Keesource has always aimed to be a company that offers a simple solution to complex client problems and if we can do this and at the same time as providing a trusted and enjoyable experience then we will be just as happy as those clients.

"Adding energy to our business portfolio was simple and has strengthened the relationship with existing telecoms clients and has provided the opportunity to gain new clients," she added.

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 contact The Sales Team on 01895 454411

CHANNEL CHAMPIONS

1st July 2021, Regents Park, London

After lockdown let's toast our champions!

Channel Champions, the new event borne out of the Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards, has been re-located to Regent's Park, London and re-launched as an 'outdoor' extravaganza on July 1st.

This exciting event will recognise the impressive achievements across all functions of channel businesses, namely:

- Sales & Account Management
- Marketing
- Tech Support and Engineering
- HR, People & Culture
- Billing & Finance
- Executive Leadership

In line with Covid-19 restrictions, finalists will now gather at a celebratory summer garden party with the awards ceremony staged in an open marquee followed by networking in the glorious surroundings of London's most elegant Royal park.

Terry O'Brien, CEO of Channel Champions headline sponsor DWS, commented: "We are so pleased the Comms Dealer team is determined to give people in our industry the event they deserve after working so hard during the pandemic and helping millions of key workers to keep Britain working.

"As headline sponsor of both this event and the Comms National Awards later in the year, we are delighted to play our part in paying tribute to the amazing professionals in our fantastic industry. Staging Channel Champions in the open air with a festival atmosphere will make this an event to remember and I can't wait," he added.

Channel Champions Event co-ordinator Nigel Sergent confirmed that entries will be based on work and activities carried out between March 1st, 2020 and March 1st, 2021.

"This has been the most challenging time in the channel's history - when so many teams performed miracles to make sure the UK's crucial organisations could keep working and



millions of staff and management across all sectors could relocate to their homes," he said.

"It's been said many times in the last year, but the ICT sector has been Britain's fourth emergency service during the pandemic, providing vital communications to millions and we aim to reward these heroes at the Channel Champions event in Regent's Park, which promises to be a very different but very exciting day for our industry.

"Given the year we have been through, I am sure all ICT companies will want to take the opportunity to properly acknowledge their teams by entering and with the entry deadline extended to May 5th, there's plenty of time to get submissions completed," added Sergent.

Terry O'Brien urges all channel businesses to get involved in the process to recognise teams which do not always get the credit they deserve.

"Winning, or even being shortlisted for these Awards, will bring a huge uplift in morale as everyone feels valued and they can see how their hard work is paying off. Channel Champions will be a fantastic opportunity to recognise the contribution teams have made not only to their business, but to the wider Channel as well."

To enter go to www.channel-champions.com

AWARD CATEGORIES

RESELLER AWARDS

Reseller Sales & Account Management Team
Reseller Marketing Team
Reseller Technical Support & Engineering Team
Reseller Sales Support Team
Reseller Executive Leadership Team
Reseller Billing & Finance Team
Reseller People and Culture Team

VENDOR AWARDS

Vendor Sales & Account Management Team
Vendor Marketing Team
Vendor Technical Support & Engineering Team
Vendor Sales Support Team
Vendor Executive Leadership Team
Vendor People and Culture Team

SERVICE PROVIDER AWARDS

Service Provider Sales & Account Management Team
Service Provider Marketing Team
Service Provider Technical Support & Engineering Team
Service Provider Sales Support Team
Service Provider Executive Leadership Team
Service Provider Billing & Finance Team
Service Provider People and Culture Team

DISTRIBUTION AWARDS

Distributor Sales & Account Management Team
Distributor Marketing Team
Distributor Technical Support & Engineering Team
Distributor Sales Support Team
Distributor Executive Leadership Team
Distributor People and Culture Team

GENERAL AWARDS

Apprenticeship Champions
Event Champions
Charity Champions

Event Details

Thursday July 1st, Regents Park, London
For sponsorship and place booking details please contact:

Simon Turton on 07759 731134
email: sturton@bpl-business.com

Register now at:
www.channel-champions.com

SPONSORS LINE UP TO RECOGNISE THE CHANNEL'S AMAZING TEAMS



GAMMA

"It's an honour and a pleasure for Gamma to sponsor the 'People and Culture Team' category at the Channel Champions Awards. These awards celebrate many of those teams that don't often receive enough recognition for their hard work. People and culture teams have played an integral part within their business, particularly throughout the past year, and we're pleased to be able to celebrate their accomplishments at this important event. We wish all nominees, especially those within the Gamma partner community, the best of luck."

Daryl Pile, Managing Director- Channel



TALKTALK BUSINESS

"TalkTalk Business Wholesale is delighted to be the sponsor for the Sales and Account Management Team category for Resellers, Service Providers and Distributors at Channel Champions 2021. Comms Dealer does an amazing job at bringing the channel community together to recognise and celebrate success. We can't wait for the event as it will be an opportunity to meet old and new friends, after what has been a challenging year for us all."

Richard Thompson, Managing Director



MITEL

"This year, channel awards will mean so much more to many in our industry. It gives us all the chance to acknowledge what partners and vendors have achieved in what has been one of the toughest years for everyone."

At Mitel we didn't hesitate when we were approached to support the Channel Champions Awards in 2021. We are really looking forward to celebrating the success of everyone involved and being part of what promises to be a fantastic occasion. Best of luck to all the finalists!"

Nick Riggott, Country Sales Director, UK & Ireland



UNION STREET

"In an industry as competitive as the channel, effective billing strategies are essential for success. As the channel's leading provider of billing solutions, we know this better than most, and 2020 was a particularly challenging year. It's therefore a great pleasure to be able to recognise the channel's top performers in this critical area of expertise, as sponsor of the Channel Champions' Billing and Finance categories. We're greatly look forward to meeting with our friends and colleagues when we attend this spectacular event in July."

Vincent Disneur, Managing Director



MYPHONES

"MyPhones is delighted to be sponsoring the Sales Support Team categories and celebrating the fantastic work they do across the Reseller, Service Provider and Distributor channels, at the first year of the Channel Champions Awards. The awards ceremony promises to be a great event with recognition for those teams that work tirelessly behind the scenes, alongside those more prominent roles more regularly featured. Well done to everybody in this category. You all do a fantastic job and are essential in the effective delivery of products and solutions."

Paul Gibbs, Sales Director



ENREACH

"The Channel Champions event is arguably now more important than ever before and is set to be a true celebration of the hard work of the Channel"

after one of the most challenging years yet. As a new entrant to the UK market, Enreach is excited to be sponsoring the Executive Leadership Category to recognise those who have gone above and beyond and guided their teams, partners and customers to work wonders in the 'new normal!'"

Duncan Ward, CEO



VIRTUAL 1

"As a wholesale provider, the channel is the lifeblood of Virtual1 so we are keen and excited to support Comms Dealers' recognition of the Channel Champions. The decision to embrace all of the teams that contribute to the channel's success is a great step forward, and something we very much wanted to be a part of. I'm very much looking forward to seeing everyone at Regents Park in July and to toast to all of the hard work and dedication of the teams across the Channel."

Neil Wilson, Head of Products and Marketing



VOICEFLEX

"Without the people in the Channel our businesses wouldn't deliver outstanding products and services and flourish. CoVID-19 has bought unprecedented change and many unanswered questions. It has been a truly challenging year and so we are delighted to be sponsoring an event that recognises the hard work, dedication, and commitment of all teams in the Channel. We are looking forward to this fantastic opportunity to say thank you and celebrate the achievements of our valued teams and wish the finalists the very best of luck."

Paul Taylor, Sales and Marketing Director

ENTRY DEADLINE EXTENDED TO FRIDAY MAY 14TH

ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR AMAZING TEAMS AT THE FIRST MAJOR CHANNEL EVENT AFTER LOCKDOWN!

Register now at www.channel-champions.com

Wellness drives success

Taking care of your people is now more crucial than ever, says Zen Partner's Managing Director Stephen Warburton. Here, he shares insights into the Zen Partner wellness programme and opens up the scheme to all channel firms without the resource to develop their own staff welfare measures.

As we exit from lockdown, your people strategy and culture could play a key role in ensuring your workforce is in a good place to support business objectives. Getting the people strategy right can work wonders on company culture, but not all channel organisations have the departments or resources to develop a complete wellbeing strategy.

There's lots of webinars, programmes and strategic advice initiatives in place to support businesses as they continue to navigate through the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic crisis, with the more recent focus being around the exit from lockdown. But the same is not necessarily true in terms of supporting your peoples' wellbeing. And your people will play a crucial role when it comes to turning this strategic planning and exit strategy into reality, with people performance being directly related to company performance.

Creating a great culture, investing in your people, developing great leaders, championing diversity and nurturing the next generation go a long way in shaping business success; and mental health and wellbeing has become a crucial element in supporting a diverse workforce.



Stephen Warburton

Creating a great culture, investing in your people, developing great leaders, championing diversity and nurturing the next generation go a long way in shaping business success

For many, the pandemic has helped us slow down and find time for some of the simpler things in life. However, having extra time can also mean it is all too easy for minds to wander into negative thinking and this can affect a person's

wellbeing. That is why the team at Zen launched the Find your Zen wellness and wellbeing programme.

Though the programme officially ran throughout March, all of the materials and resources remain

available on the Zen Partner website for the channel to share on to customers, colleagues, family and friends. There's no charge to access the material, it has simply been compiled together as an accessible resource for you and your teams.

The programme focuses on a number of different areas of wellbeing, ranging from mindfulness exercises and meditation tips through to exercise workouts and mood boosting moves. It also features a series of inspiring videos from the Zen management team on where and how to find your zen.

Split into four distinct sections, the programme offers information and resources for exploring these different areas of wellbeing in more detail. The complete programme forms a ready-made package to deliver to your people as part of a wellness initiative that you might not ordinarily have the time or resources to put together as a business. Here are the key components in more detail...

Mindfulness

This part of the programme begins with an introduction to mindfulness video and also offers mindfulness exercises and self-care tips, encouraging small changes that could offer healthy life improvements.

Finding your zen

Have you ever explored what really makes you happy? This is all about focusing on the simple things and remembering to appreciate them. It always helps to focus the mind and identify the things that truly make someone happy. Maybe it's spending time with family or taking a stroll in a beautiful country park. You might be surprised at what you discover.

Exercise sessions (mood-boosting moves)

This isn't just about getting out there to exercise, but it's a reminder of how exercise can improve mood and boost wellbeing. There's two 20 minute workout videos that are simple enough for all levels and might be a welcome break from your usual exercise routine. This section also offers tips and advice on staying hydrated when exercising and eating a healthy diet.

And breathe...

The final section looks at the importance of stepping back from day-to-day activity and taking a moment to just breathe. It touches on meditation and just how easy it is to fit into a daily routine. It also encourages a digital break – reminding us of the importance of switching off from screen time when and where possible. ■

Find out more at: www.zen.co.uk/partners/find-your-zen

8th July 2021, Forest of Arden, Midlands

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

MANAGED MEETINGS

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

SOCIAL NETWORKING

Join us for the first business networking event after lockdown!

It's all in the experience...

Each year since the turn of the millennium, Comms Dealer 'Margin In' events have helped resellers addressing SME markets identify and open new doors to profit and truly understand the changing ICT environment.

This summer, as the UK slowly emerges from the Covid-19 lockdown, we are proud to announce that our latest 'Margin In' event – Margin in CaaS – will take place at the Forest of Arden hotel as a 'live' event (with social distancing measures in place).

The transformation to digital and cloud technologies has meant that comms solutions and the networks and software platforms they sit on are now being delivered 'as a service' and in this challenging economic climate customers increasingly value comms being delivered within Opex finance models.

The big issue for resellers is understanding how to present 'Comms as a Service' within these new frameworks and ensure that customers remain, happy and 'sticky' and would never consider going elsewhere for the comms solutions they rely on. And with 60% of organisations planning to move to hybrid working practices, wrapping connectivity and cloud-based hardware into bundled solutions billed as a service must be the way forward for channel partners.

The need to provide a holistic Customer Experience (CX) has become a fundamental component of a reseller's armoury and has been intensified as the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent work from home directives have transformed living rooms into makeshift offices, classrooms, and gyms.

That's why the theme of Margin in CaaS 2021 will be: **"Building the customer experience and engagement through communications"**.

Over the course of the MiCaaS educational seminar, leading industry 'as a service' providers will discuss and debate the following questions ICT resellers should consider to successfully garner long term, profitable customer relationships in the so called 'new normal':

A digital future

With the transition to 5G underway, utilities moving into broadband, and telecoms eyeing new opportunities in the energy industry, customer experience will become the next competitive battleground. How can ICT providers can help organisations prepare for the next wave of challenges, invest in digital transformation reshape businesses and boost productivity?

Putting CX first

As companies prepare to restart in 2021, telecom executives must ensure that COVID-era digital transformation projects fit this new framework properly. How can ICT providers gain competitive advantage through greater agility and scale and simplify the process of meeting the communication needs of customers?



Digitising the customer's enterprise

As 'trusted advisors' how can ICT providers unlock productivity through automation and orchestration of workloads across client departments and create great experiences for their customers and employees by focusing on what people encounter, observe, or feel when they interact with a service?

Simplifying systems with smart workflows

How can ICT providers apply intelligence to everyday processes— prioritising, categorising, routing workflows, and predicting anomalies? How data can be quickly and accurately correlated to identify common errors and predict remediations, freeing up employees to personalise the customer experience?

Margin in MiCaaS is an invitation only event for MD/CEO level directors representing reseller businesses up to c.£2m.

TO REGISTER GO TO: www.margin-in-caas.com

gold sponsors



silver sponsors



CFO Hastings hired



Roy Hastings

FLUIDONE'S expansion plans have received a boost following the appointment of Roy Hastings as Group CFO, reporting to CEO Russell Horton. The move is reflective of the network aggregator's latest growth push which kicked off with the acquisition of PSU in October 2020 followed by an investment in Cyber Security Associates.

Hastings will take a lead role in FluidOne's buy-and-build strategy, drawing on his experience which includes stints as M&A Director at a FTSE 100 company and over 10 years within the corporate finance advisory arm of a Big 4 accountancy and advisory firm. He has been involved in a range of corporate finance transactions with valuations ranging from under £1 million up to £5 billion.

Horton said: "Roy's experience and background in M&A will strengthen the team on our next stage of growth and ensure we continue to grow our healthy M&A pipeline which will be key as we scale the business."

Hastings added: "My background in corporate transactions, both as a principal and advisor, has seen me involved in over 80 corporate deals to date, which will complement the existing management team's skills and put me in a strong position to support Russell and the FluidOne board." FluidOne also appointed Phil Cordy as Cyber Security Associates' Head of Consultancy.

New CEO at Six Degrees



Simon Crawley-Trice

SIX Degrees CEO David Howson has moved into the Chairperson seat making way for promotee Simon Crawley-Trice who became CEO on May 1st. He

was previously Practice Group Managing Director. Howson said: "Six Degrees is now entering the next stage of its growth journey and we recruited Simon last year in anticipation of these changes. I am confident that his experience, knowledge and passion will help us accelerate our plans."

Prior to joining Six Degrees in October 2020 Crawley-Trice was on the EMEA Executive team at Rackspace where he led growth in public cloud, application, data managed services and professional services propositions across EMEA and the USA.

He added: "As our customers' digital transformation programmes move increasingly towards public cloud, data and security services, the experience and expertise Six Degrees has in these areas will be ever more vital."

Also on the move...

CITYFIBRE has pulled in comms industry veteran Matt Walker as Director of Customer Delivery and Assurance responsible for provisioning, customer service, the Network Operations Centre and technical support



Matt Walker

teams. He brings over 20 years industry experience and was Director of Customer Service for the consumer business at Openreach and also held senior roles in Group Strategy at BT Technology. "Transparency on performance is critical and I will build and develop relationships with partners to jointly innovate additional value," he said. Chief Customer Officer Elsa Chen added: "Matt will be instrumental in ensuring the quality of our customer experience across all of our operational teams as we continue to grow at pace."

SOUTH west broadband provider Jurassic Fibre has appointed Steve Garrood as Chief Commercial Officer. He brings 20 years sales and marketing experience working for global network



Steve Garrood

operators in FTTx, FTTC and FTTP networks, mobile telecommunications, OTT and IoT solutions. Most recently he was CCO for a Field Force Automation product which involved preparing the start-up company for

launch from incubation into the global marketplace. Michael Maltby, CEO and founder, said: "The timing couldn't be better as we extend our network. Steve will play a crucial role as our build gathers momentum." Garrood added: "Having the chance to help define our mission and be part of the company journey is not only a challenge but a career defining role."

A MANAGEMENT restructure at Nuvias Unified Communications sees Chairman Steve Harris and Non-Executive Advisor Rob Smith (both company founders) leave the business. John Taylor, a member of the Rigby Group, joins as Non-Executive Chairman. Harris, said: "Rob and I have made this decision with the confidence that Nuvias UC will continue to grow under the leadership of CEO Jeremy Keefe working alongside John Taylor."

INTERCITY Technology has appointed Christina Pendleton as Chief People Officer. She joined the firm as an HR Adviser in 2014 before being promoted to the Board of Directors as Head of People and Engagement in 2020. Her latest promotion follows the development and implementation of Intercity's people, engagement and CSR strategy during the pandemic. She said: "There has been a huge focus on wellbeing and our industry must rise to the challenge to ensure we meet the demands of our workforce during this critical time."

Timico pulls in strategist Vize



Andrew Vize

HORIZON Capital-backed Timico has appointed Andrew Vize as Strategy and Marketing Director to help drive its transition into a cloud-first Managed Service Provider. Vize brings 30 years industry experience including director level positions at Computacenter and Pulsant. The new appointment comes months after Timico acquired AWS specialist Arcus to bolster its cloud capabilities and add more digital services for its corporate enterprise and public sector client base. He commented: "Timico is making significant investments and strategic changes to become a cloud-first managed services company and help our customers drive recovery agendas and accelerate digital transformation."

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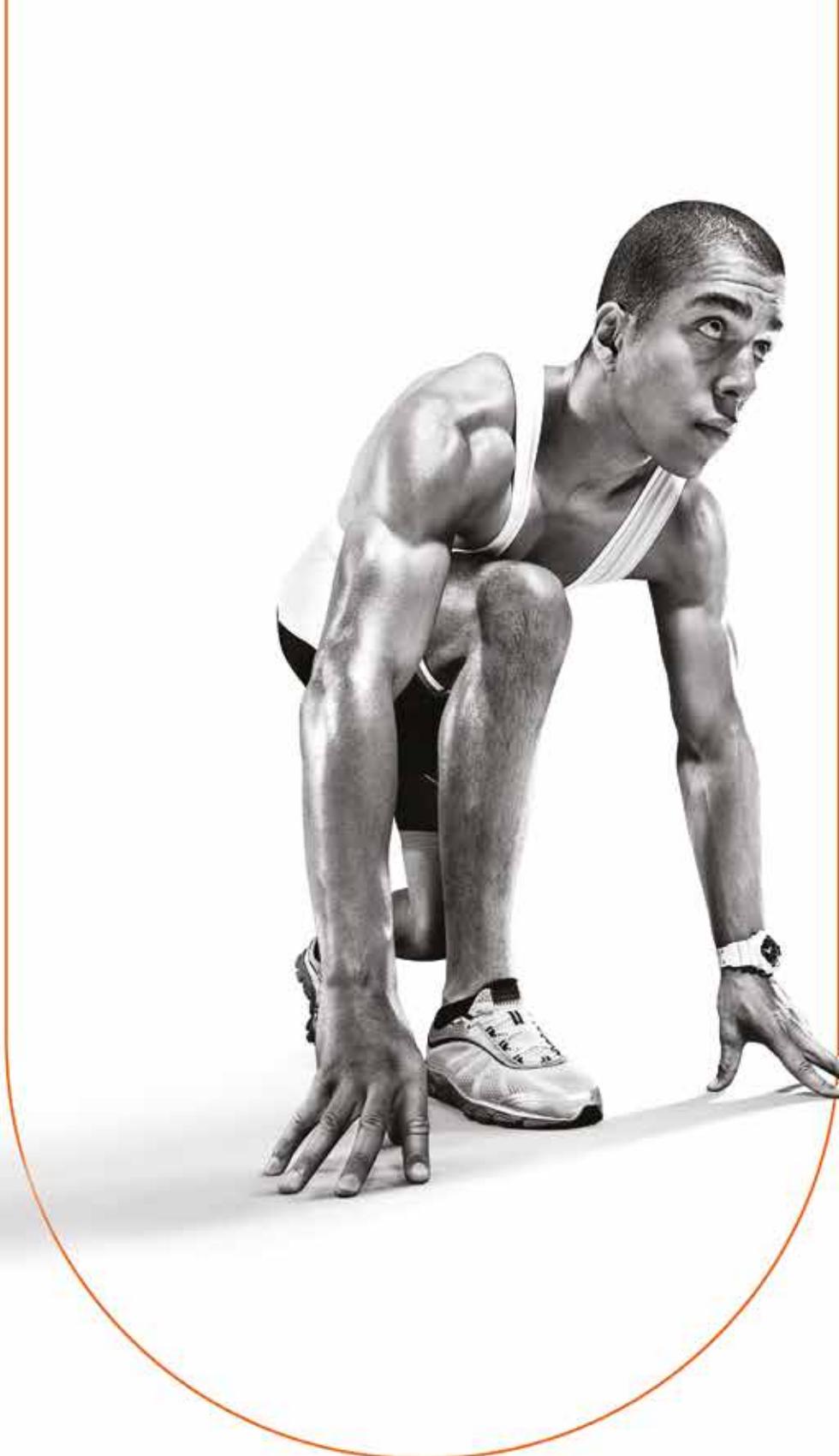
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