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Why we should listen to Sabio on customer engagement p30



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# Ofcom CEO resists Openreach sell-off

Ofcom resisted the full separation of Openreach from BT Group in last month's 'shake-up' and its proposals have riled key industry players.

**SPECIAL REPORT**

Regulator Ofcom has stopped short of enforcing the sell-off of Openreach but ruled that BT's infrastructure division should become a legally distinct company within the group that owns its own network and has its own branding, culture and board of directors not affiliated to the parent company.

According to Ofcom's CEO Sharon White (*pictured*) these measures provide the benefits of independence and structural separation but without the time delays, complexities and costs of a sell-off.

She stated: "We're pressing ahead with the biggest shake-up of telecoms in a decade.

"Openreach will become a distinct company, legally separate from BT and obliged by law to act on behalf of all customers and the whole industry."

According to Mark Collins, Director of Strategy and Policy at CityFibre, Ofcom's proposal does not address the regulator's objective to reduce the country's dependence on Openreach and encourage investment in fibre.

"It is hypocritical of Ofcom to focus on a restructured Openreach as a panacea," he said. "Navel-gazing about the appropriate structure of BT will continue to create a period of uncertainty at a time when the industry needs clarity, direction and competitive investment.

"Openreach has a critical role to play, but it is not prudent to entrust it with sole responsibility for our digital future."

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## EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

APPARENTLY the biggest shake-up in the comms industry for a decade happened last month. But despite the bluster that went hand in hand with Ofcom's proposals to make Openreach a distinct operation within the BT Group, I'm left wondering who pulls the strings. It seems to me that

BT Group has assumed institutional status, a national treasure, untouchable, therefore Ofcom tip toes on egg shells and roars like a kitten when pressured to squeak.

Its mastermind of a 'shake-up' came soon after the CMS Select Committee report criticised Openreach for its poor service and BT's under investment into the UK's digital infrastructure. What better time, some say, for Ofcom to announce a highly visible ruling on Openreach that is more a self-affirming gesture than a strategic directive made for the greater good of the nation. Are we being led a merry dance? Perhaps we must accept that institutions have deep and often immovable foundations. To read more industry reaction to Ofcom's proposals see pages 37 and 50.

Meanwhile, there really was an industry shake-up last month. CityFibre kicked off a dark fibre revolution. Its disruptive ambitions were boosted by a dark fibre launch event at the LSE where a compelling case was presented to delegates including me. CityFibre's Gigabit City initiative has already transformed the digital future of whole regions. To find out how, see page 28.

Ofcom trumpeted its 'shake-up' with great energy and the news wires were abuzz for an hour or two. It was, after all, the biggest seismic shift in comms for ten years, apparently, but it looks a little overstated when juxtaposed with the revolutionary fibre infrastructure builds being advanced by the likes of CityFibre. It's a UK fibre first, and could well be coming to a doorstep near you.

Publicised gestures or shovels in the ground? If you wanted to shake-up the industry, which would you choose?

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

# Microsoft on call for lines

MICROSOFT'S UK channel ambitions have intensified following the launch of Skype for Business (S4B) PSTN calling.

The man at the centre of Microsoft's new channel campaign is Ian Woolner, Senior Product Marketing Manager (UK), who said becoming a provider of phone lines was a natural progression for Microsoft following the development of its S4B telephony platform.

The new cloud services enable customers to acquire and assign numbers and provide inbound and outbound calling over the PSTN on mobiles or softphones via MS Office 356.

Speaking at the Cisilion-TeleWare 'Voice in the Cloud' event Woolner said: "We have built relationships with key telcos and are effectively wholesaling their minutes and bundling them to make it cost-effective for customers."

He said that subscribers to Microsoft PSTN services would have 'no concept of phone lines or SIP trunks' and would just pay for bundled domestic or international packages.

There would also be no differentiated rate for calls to landlines or mobiles within the bundles under what he described as



Ian Woolner

a 'fair usage policy'. "If I have 1,000 people in an organisation and they take the 1,200 minute bundle, that organisation has 1.2 million minutes of domestic calling at its disposal," he said. "It means predictable costs for CFOs and departments."

Woolner's channel strategy hinges on the formation of collaborative partnerships such as the link-up with MS Gold Communications partners Cisilion and TeleWare and jointly staged launch events targeted at end users.

"There is an opportunity to grow our partner channel massively," added Woolner.

"Customers are moving away from on-premise telephony. Some may become Skype for Business users, others may want to develop converged solutions. We're building a channel that can remove the complexity."

## Arrow's in buy mode

ARROW Business Communications has returned to the M&A trail buying Cambridgeshire-based Comms-Solve, its seventh acquisition in six years, boosting revenues and extending its reach into eastern England.

The deal increases Arrow's turnover to £27m and brings in additional UC expertise.

Arrow MD Chris Russell said: "Comms-Solve has an award winning team which is engineering focused and well recognised in the industry.

"The company shares our ethos of customer care while complementing our existing Mitel skills."

Comms-Solve's employees will continue to operate from the Cambridge premises.

### SHORT CALL

Ofcom's ruling on Openreach is a 'fantastic opportunity' for new broadband solution providers to make their voices heard, according to Jaime Fink, co-founder at Mimosa. "Openreach must look at new technologies that can enable it to profitably deliver a sustainable broadband network," he said.

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COMMENT: A GREATER BRITAIN?



Richard Carter

IT'S BEEN a tumultuous few months for the country with the political landscape slowly taking shape following the somewhat surprising Brexit vote. Since I last wrote this column it seems everything has been turned on its head with the fallout affecting many aspects of daily life and prompting the arrival of a new Prime Minister. It's little wonder the stock markets have been spooked by all the uncertainty, but in time they should recover.

After initially being ready to vote leave, I changed my mind in the run-up to the referendum as I was worried about what would happen to UK plc. For me, instability throughout the world is now at its greatest levels since the Second World War and that could be bad news for business. The impact of Brexit on the European Union and conflicts elsewhere in the world mean we live in uncertain times.

It's said that consumer purchases such as new car sales are dramatically down and business investment is likely to be hit too, so for the reseller community they may have a tougher job than normal when clinching orders. I think we will make the best of things going forward and the next few months and years will be interesting.

We're only at the beginning of a bold new journey and no one really knows where that will lead us. The road ahead will remain rocky but the time has come for us all to pull together and move forward in a new direction. We are 'Great' Britain after all.

**Richard Carter, Group Sales and Business Development Director, Nimans**

• ANYONE seeking a foretaste of the future role of analytics in shaping the customer experience need look no further than last month's round table discussion hosted by TeleWare (see page 40).

# Excell Group bags audio-visual firms

EXCELL Group's acquisition of London-based City Voice and Data and City AVS adds considerable audio and video conferencing expertise to the business and boosts revenues to over £30m.

The Group will retain both teams of field engineers and ICT consultants and a London-based service desk.

The existing senior management team will continue to run the business led by directors Robert Boyne and Alex Smith who will report into the Excell Group board.

Darren Strowger, Chairman of Excell, said: "The acquisition provides a strong foundation for Excell Group in the audio visual space and is a great strategic fit for the evolution of our business, helping drive further cross selling opportunities while giving City Voice and City AVS customers direct access to the Group's portfolio."

Excell Group's Finance Director Edward Pettit (who heads up the firm's acquisition strategy) added: "We are continuing to pursue our acquisition strategy with growing intensity. The Group has strong cash reserves, meaning that we are well placed to quickly capitalise



Darren Strowger

on other opportunities in the near future."

Robert Boyne, co-director of both City Voice and City AVS,

commented: "Excell Group will allow us to continue nurturing our expertise and resource, while growing our offering."

## comms dealer

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# Solar Comms picks up RDC



Jason Evans and John Whitty

SOLAR Communications has furthered its ambitions in the managed services space following its acquisition of Essex-based Response Data Communications (RDC) for an undisclosed sum.

Solar is ShoreTel's largest partner outside of North America, while RDC is a ShoreTel Circle of Excellence Gold Partner and holds the vendor's Cloud Business Excellence 2016 award.

The acquisition gives Solar a software defined WAN platform and partnerships with Pure Storage, Rubrik, Nimble Storage, Balabit and Palo Alto, all boosting its ambitions in the cloud and managed services SME market.

RDC's MD Jason Evans and staff will remain with the organisation. He said: "The time was right to take the next step. The

introduction of Solar's telecommunications, WAN, cloud and managed services will allow us to provide a more comprehensive offering."

Solar CEO John Whitty commented: "RDC is a capable and exciting business with a talented team.

"Following our acquisition of Armstrong Telecommunications in 2013, Solar Communications has established the platform, people and services for growing the business organically.

"Over the last 12 months Solar has transitioned from a telephone system reseller into a managed service provider.

"This transformation has been enabled by the development of our managed services portfolio and acquisitions, as well as the procurement and development of new technical services and product sets."



OVER 100 partners of the Fidelity Group and Fidelity Energy enjoyed a 'totally mad' day at the Henley Regatta last month, all based around an Alice in Wonderland theme. The day kicked off with a Mad Hatter's Tea Party at the Group's Henley headquarters before guests embarked on a pleasure boat that ran alongside the regatta giving them the best view possible of the races.

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COMMENT: STRATEGIC TALK



Alex Tempest

CYBER security is a big issue for businesses worldwide, and it is no different in the UK, with businesses having lost over £1 billion in the year between March 2015 and March 2016, according to police figures compiled by GetSafeOnline. This is why, drawing on our own experiences, we recently worked with Vanson Bourne and Juniper Research to survey how British companies approach the issue of cyber security, and what they are doing to ensure they are reducing the risks of a breach.

Our survey found that almost three quarters of businesses felt they are currently secure when it comes to digital threats. In contrast, the same survey also found that 50 per cent of businesses reported a cyber attack in the last 12 months. They tend to underestimate the threat of cyber attacks, and many still focus on being '100 per cent secure' without knowing how they will achieve that, even if it were possible.

The research shows that businesses shouldn't treat cyber security as a 'safe or not' scenario. Given the ever evolving nature of cyber crime no business operating online can ever be 100 per cent safe. The issue for businesses is whether they are aware of the risks they face and what they are doing to mitigate them. When it comes to cyber security, we would recommend organisations focus on the following: Plan, defend, detect, respond and recover.

The entire business must participate in implementing these steps; and understanding that responsibility for cyber security rests on the shoulders of every single department, not only IT, is key to mitigating cyber threats. Education and ownership at all levels is required to minimise security risks, and also to catch and fix any issues early if they do occur.

**Alex Tempest, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business**

# Portal eases energy sales



Rob Baldacci

FIDELITY Energy has introduced a price comparison portal designed for ICT resellers looking to add energy services to their portfolio.

The portal allows resellers to compare 14 energy suppliers instantly, add their mark-up and send directly to customers.

Rob Baldacci, MD at Peterborough-based GreenCity Solutions, says the portal has already given his business an edge over the big power firms.

"Selling energy is simple and transactional, and because we are dealing with existing customers we have already developed a trust relationship which puts us ahead of faceless energy brokers and companies," he commented.

"Adding energy to our portfolio made perfect sense. We can now offer our customers a fuller range of utility services.

"We know that our customers are being poorly served by their energy providers and are not being offered the best rates, sometimes paying up to 60% above the market rate.

"Following recent acquisitions we can support our communications solutions with a nationally based team of technicians and engineers, and the addition of energy to the mix means our offering is rounded and thorough."

Sean Dixon, Partner Account Manager at Fidelity Energy, said: "GreenCity has been on the energy journey since the start of the year having fully grasped the energy proposition.

"The company's success is also due to long-standing customer relationships."

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SHORT CALLS

**Vaioni Wholesale** has launched a campaign to help partners win more connectivity business through its 100Mb and 1Gb promotion. MD Sachin Vaish said: "Our promo runs until 31st December and offers a free router on all 100Mb and 1Gb connections, and includes features such as free SIP trunks, free backup connection, free QoS and a 30-day money back guarantee."

**SoftBank** has acquired ARM Holdings for £23.4bn in a move that bolsters the Japanese giant's presence in the IoT and AI markets. The deal sees SoftBank pay £17 in cash for each share in ARM, marking the largest ever purchase of a European technology firm.

**Kevin Gaskell** has joined ITS Technology Group as Group Chairman. His experience includes leading brands such as Porsche, Lamborghini and BMW. He was recognised as a 'top 40 leader under 40'. Gaskell said: "I have been involved in founding and growing a number of companies, and ITS is a business with an energetic and innovative approach to the market."

# Industry heavyweights launch 'fix it' campaign

TALKTALK, Sky, Vodafone and the Federation of Communication Services (FCS) have joined forces to launch the Fix Britain's Internet campaign in response to Ofcom's decision not to separate Openreach from the BT Group.

FCS CEO Chris Pateman commented: "Openreach customers have had enough, and they are not willing to put up with another 10 years of fudge and compromise.

"Ofcom needs to deliver an Openreach that is fit for the



Chris Pateman

future. That means a much stronger response, not a compromise. This campaign is our only chance this decade to move the industry forward."

Pateman believes that Ofcom's proposals do not go far enough to avoid another 'undertakings' situation. "Slapping a fresh coat of paint on the ship

and re-arranging the deck chairs won't help when the crew's all working to rule," he stated.

"Ofcom's focus on creating competition at the reseller level has been a great success.

"But its failure to promote competition at the wholesale, network and backhaul level has played to BT's monopoly, stifled innovation and short-changed business customers who have no choice but to buy the connectivity BT chooses to make available in their area with unthinkable lead times."

The FCS also says Ofcom's proposals fall short on the make-up of an Openreach board and a lack of full budgetary autonomy. "It is nonsense to talk of 'functional separation' when the Openreach CEO is appointed by, and reports to, the BT Group board," said Pateman.

"It is hard to see how Openreach can be simultaneously independent and tied to a 'spending envelope' and associated cost of capital which might bear no relationship to market rates." See page 37



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COMMENT: BANKING ON REALITY



Clifford Norton

THERE is a popular saying among marketers – ‘turnover is vanity, profit is sanity, but cash is reality’. Simple as that may sound and as obvious as it may be, in our industry it is often disregarded. Is it time to re-evaluate how we operate and rid ourselves of the ‘vanity’ culture we’ve created? Having been in the industry now for a number of years, what is clear is that

we (and I’ve been guilty of this myself) spend our lives chasing a golden figure, ‘I want to reach X or Y turnover’, but in reality it counts for nothing. Ultimately, if you are operating at a loss your turnover counts for very little.

The biggest contributing factor is the misplaced importance we put on percentages. At a recent product launch one delegate announced that he would be able to sell the new product immediately at a 100 per cent mark up. Great! But the true value of the sale was not considered, nor the fact that he was replacing a higher value product. He wanted a great mark up, but in real terms he would be making less physical cash per sale.

At every industry event I hear the same conversations about company turnovers, but the profitability of a business is never discussed. We place so much emphasis on what businesses turnover the whole thing becomes one big blur. Of course turnover is important, but what must come first and foremost is profitability. As a channel only business I want to make sure that we maximise the margins and not the mark up. It’s not numbers, percentages or ratios we put in the bank. It’s cash!

**Clifford Norton, Managing Director, Channel Telecom**

- COLT is targeting a new set of agents and ramping up its channel activity following a sustained period of double digit growth driven by partners (see page 32).
- DECISIVE action should be the only response to the fizzing M2M market, says Comms365 MD Mike Van Bunnens (see page 48).

# BT criticised in gvt report

CITYFIBRE reaffirmed its commitment to building future proofed fibre networks following last month’s report from the Culture, Media and Sport (CMS) Committee criticising BT’s under-investment in the UK’s digital infrastructure.

“Legacy networks are not able to meet the requirements and demands of businesses, local government and consumers,” said Mark Collins, Director of Strategy and Policy at CityFibre.

“Competitive investment in ‘fit for purpose’ fibre infrastructure is now critical, and this need must be recognised and supported by the Government and Ofcom.

“Ofcom’s historical desire to regulate to lowest prices and devalue infrastructure investments must be curtailed.

“We need a regulatory and policy environment that underpins the building of new digital networks across the UK.

“A restructured Openreach will have an important role to play in the future. But it should not anchor the entire UK broadband infrastructure alone.

“The report recognises the need to foster a competitive environment where the role of alternative network providers are encouraged and supported to ensure the UK’s digital infrastructure meets current and future demands.” See page 28

# Virtual1’s free offer

VIRTUAL1 is providing free routers on all Internet and cloud-ready circuits up to 1Gb. “This is all about enabling an easy upgrade over the term of the contract for our partners’ customers,” commented Tom O’Hagan, CEO of Virtual1. “By choosing to move to 1Gb now they future proof their requirements and, with our free router offer, all we need to do is up the bandwidth as required.”

James Hickman, Virtual1 CTO, commented: “Looking at the trends of the last three years these routers will take our partners to the next level of their bandwidth needs. With an eye to the short-term future, we are already working on 10Gb models which launch next month and we had our first 100Gb opportunity last quarter.”



ORPINGTON-based Telecoms World provided the freephone number for the Ghostbusters ‘Who you gonna call?’ main promotional campaign in the UK. The movie opened last month and was promoted at Waterloo station via a striking marketing installation (pictured). The number also appeared on phone boxes across the country and callers were routed to a voice message from cast member Chris Hemsworth

who plays the secretary at Ghostbusters HQ. Sam Diamond, Director of Telecoms World, said: “Working with the Ghostbusters promotional team has been an adventure. With the majority of movies now being wholly promoted through digital channels it was refreshing to see the use of a freephone number as the main point of contact.”

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COMMENT: BUILDING RESILIENCE



Chris Smith

MOBILE technology is evolving at an incredible rate and the mobile industry is in a constant state of flux. We endlessly adapt to the latest technologies and the services needed to support them as well as unpredictable market shifts. Because of this, here at plan.com we talk a lot about business resilience. Typically, we mean resilience in the technological

sense – how do we make sure that business critical technologies such as our portal are online 24/7? Or how do we ensure that our VoIP service operates seamlessly when servers or underlying providers fail? We also look at resilience in a business sense to ensure our company is well positioned to withstand internal and external shocks.

In our experience, the key to building a commercially resilient business is to ensure that it has multiple sources of income, so that if one source dries up the others keep things afloat. This is of particular strategic importance in the mobile industry where the market is saturated, competition is fierce and there are giant gorillas lurking in the mist (the MNOs).

We have all heard stories of successful companies doing thousands of connections per month, whose collapse makes the headlines. If these companies had invested time and a small amount of money in bringing other products on-stream rather than focusing solely on connecting mobile, they may have been in a better position to withstand an attack on their mobile business.

Of course, selling new products such as hosted VoIP and IoT is a challenge, but once you're over the initial trepidation you'll discover that selling other telecoms products requires roughly the same systems, processes and skills as selling mobile. Darwin taught us that evolution has its winners, but it also has many losers. The survivors are those who are willing and able to adapt to change.

Chris Smith, Head of Business Development, plan.com

# Investments boost Sabio

SABIO has swung into acquisition mode following a multi-million pound investment from Lyceum Capital along with £30m funding to help it double in size over the next three to five years.

Lyceum's investment builds on Sabio's average 25.4% annual international sales growth for the last two years.

Following the deal Sabio's COO Andy Roberts becomes CEO while Lee Shorten continues as Chairman. Sabio's team of founding directors – Paul Began, Adam Faulkner, Sebastian Henkes and Kenneth Hitchen – will remain invested in the business and support the company in its next phase of business growth.

"Partnering with a growth investment firm makes sense for Sabio at this stage in our development," stated Roberts. "It gives us access to both the funds and expertise we need to accelerate our growth strategy."

"How organisations engage with customers has never been more critical, and there's international demand for a technology specialist such as Sabio that can help businesses close the gap between digital and traditional contact channels."



Andy Roberts

"It's an opportunity where Sabio can add value for our customers and, with Lyceum's support, we're looking to double our business over the next three to five years."

According to Simon Hitchcock, Partner at Lyceum Capital and leader of the Sabio investment team, Sabio is well placed to help organisations, both in the UK and internationally, as they evolve to meet the changing demands of today's increasingly mobile and socially connected customers.

"Sabio is at the heart of this transition and is the type of high growth business that will strengthen Lyceum Capital's portfolio of technology services businesses," he said. See p30

# Gamma's revved up for Rally!!

THE countdown to Gamma Ball Rally V has begun with 35 teams set to converge on Dover (14th September) for the three day event that kicks off with a 'best dressed' competition.

The spending cap for each car is £500 and event sponsors include BroadSoft, Polycom, Akixi and Genband.

Overnight stops at Brussels and Bonn will round off a visit to the Nürburgring and a treasure hunt along the Rhine river.

The final evening will be marked by a black tie gala dinner and the Auction of Promises.

Gamma COO Richard Bligh said: "The rally is a great opportunity for our channel partners and sponsors to enjoy themselves while raising lots of money for two great charities, Action Through Enterprise and SpecialEffect."

Russell Attwood, CEO at Unify, enthused: "We enjoyed taking part in the Gamma Ball Rally last year and can't wait for this year's event."

"It's great to spend time with so many like-minded people, having fun and raising money for such good causes."

Got a news story? email: [sgilroy@bpl-business.com](mailto:sgilroy@bpl-business.com)

# CityFibre stages first Dark Fibre Symposium

THE first Dark Fibre Symposium held by CityFibre at the LSE on July 20th signalled a new phase in its ambition to provide cities outside of the M25 with a much needed pure fibre infrastructure.

The event brought together local authorities, MNOs and CPs and demonstrated the benefits of a well planned Gigabit City build with enough fibre to serve all parties and future proofed by unlimited capacity.

"This collaborative approach creates connections between

the potential beneficiaries of a new network build and connects people from the outset to make that network the best it can be, while ultimately bringing down costs," commented Rob Hamlin, Commercial Director at CityFibre.

"This was the first time we brought together a cross section of partners and prospective customers to share our vision for a dark fibre future for the UK."

"We were blown away by the support and enthusiasm from everyone who attended and are



Rob Hamlin

following up on a number of mutual opportunities."

CityFibre's vision is for every building to be connected to fibre and with sleeves rolled up the company is not afraid to dig and create a modern fibre

and duct network architecture. "We are not shying away from doing something disruptive and often difficult in the short-term to deliver transformation for the future," added Hamlin.

"We are funded to keep building out to 50 cities and extend existing builds as part our business model."

According to Hamlin, CityFibre is turning conventional R&D on its head when bringing dark fibre to a city.

"Flexible access to an abundance of low cost pure fibre

capacity renders R&D investments in traditional networks, especially copper, to deliver more capacity an exercise in strategic and commercial folly," commented Hamlin.

CityFibre is also taking a lead on other matters of importance including regulation, holding high level discussions with Ofcom, and driving reform of fibre tax, aiming to establish an 'enterprise zone' that helps rather than hinders investment in infrastructure.

Full event report on page 28



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COMMENT: PERPLEXING TIMES



Pete Tomlinson

WHO in the dotcom era predicted that infrastructure would end up owning content? There is something slightly unsettling happening when Yahoo winds up joining fellow Internet pioneer and one time arch rival AOL as part of the telco giant that is Verizon. In much the same way, BT sold O2 (Cellnet at the time) then bought EE years later for billions more

pounds, and Cable&Wireless sold a mobile operator only to be acquired by one down the road. It's all rather perplexing.

The truth is these deals are all part of a predictable cycle in an industry where innovation happens at ever increasing pace. There are market makers and consolidators. There are creators of disruption and there are those who can monetise it. Sadly, perhaps, they are all too rarely the same.

Whatever the size of your organisation, creating and retaining value in the long-term will always mean being able to pivot your business around an ever-changing market. We've seen this demonstrated brilliantly by some in the channel where the best plays are now successfully bringing together historically separate worlds of communications and IT managed services – with a host of great recent transactions adding both scale and capability to their businesses.

As you go up the supply chain you also see an increasing march towards a convergence of infrastructure and services, as well as content and delivery. Software Defined Networking and Network Function Virtualisation are fast becoming the buzzwords of the moment and for good reason. Meanwhile Microsoft is fast merging software and what was once hardware into a services play that is making it the *de facto* host for customers' data.

One thing that never changes however is that businesses will always need good partners to help them deliver and make sense of it all.

Pete Tomlinson, Director, KCOM

# Novosco inks NetDef deal



CHESHIRE-based NetDef has been acquired by Novosco in a seven figure deal that boosts the managed cloud provider's headcount to 140, bolsters its security credentials and extends its reach in the English market.

NetDef's customers include two Premier League football clubs, a number of metropolitan police forces, NHS trusts and financial services organisation.

NetDef will continue to trade under its existing name.

Novosco's MD Patrick McAliskey said: "NetDef is an established provider of network and security solutions to some of the UK's high profile organisations, and its expertise has seen it entrusted with data and projects of public sensitivity."

NetDef MD Dave Beesley added: "Novosco is a business

that we have long admired, and we felt that there was a strong cultural alignment between the two companies. Our complementary expertise will allow us to enhance the services we offer to existing and new clients."

NetDef was founded by Beesley in 1996 and employs 20 staff with an annual turnover of £4m-plus.

Novosco has offices in Belfast, Manchester, Dublin and Cork and its clients include health trusts, universities and housing associations, plus more than 50% of Northern Ireland's top 100 companies and some of the largest organisations in the Republic of Ireland.

Pictured above (left-right): Dave and Sue Beesley of NetDef with Novosco's John Lennon and Patrick McAliskey.

# App aids behaviour of drivers

PROVIDER of driver behaviour and fleet management solutions GreenRoad Technologies is aiming to build a partner channel for a mobile application that is designed to improve the performance of drivers.

The campaign follows the launch of GreenRoad Mobile, an app that warns drivers in real-time when they stray from a safe, smooth driving style.

In practice the application monitors 150 vehicle movements, detecting risky manoeuvres such as harsh braking, sudden acceleration, sharp cornering and swerving.

Drivers download and run the GreenRoad app on their smartphone or tablet and place the device in the cockpit of the vehicle. GreenRoad also compiles reports on driving performance for fleet managers.

Chris Horbowj, GreenRoad's UK Director of Sales, said: "GreenRoad Mobile works on smartphones and tablets so it makes sense to offer it through telecoms resellers as an added value proposition, giving customers the opportunity to join this revolution in telematics."

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## Do you want to click with the Channel?

In another industry first, we are delighted to publish an ABC (Audit Bureau of Circulation) certificate for Comms-dealer.com showing that between January and December 2014, the website attracted a monthly average of 10,883 unique Browsers.

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# Step change stirs revamp of Coms plc



Mark Braund

COMS plc has rebranded as RedstoneConnect following its acquisition in March of smart building software applications provider Connect IB in a £1.32m deal.

Connect IB's wayfinding solution and its frictionless car parking system extends RedstoneConnect's OneSpace capabilities that help organisations manage the occupancy and use of their buildings and beyond into the car park.

Connect IB brought with it a number of long-term blue chip customers including GlaxoSmithKline, Meyer Bergman and Westfield Corp.

Connect IB's MD Keith Jump joined Redstone Connect as CTO. The Group's priorities include building on its presence in the smart buildings and smart technologies arena and capitalising on cross-selling opportunities throughout the client base.

Also top of the agenda is expanding the Group's annuity revenue streams in software, managed services and support and maintenance.

The Group will broaden its intellectual property applica-

tions to a wider spectrum of smart environments and invest in research and development.

Mark Braund, CEO of RedstoneConnect, commented: "We have successfully repositioned the business to focus on a defined strategy to use technology and innovation to make buildings and commercial spaces smarter. Our new name and identity reflects this strategic direction.

"At the core of our offering is the Redstone operation, an IT network and smart building systems integrator, with a blue chip customer base and a 30 year heritage. This has been enhanced through the acquisition in March of Connect IB, a smart buildings software and solutions business.

"The opportunities for deploying smart technology into buildings and commercial spaces continues to grow at pace and we are delighted to have already secured a number of new contracts which utilise services from across the Group."

Future acquisition opportunities that support the Group's strategy will be considered.



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# Ardenta snared by 8x8 expands IT services provider in key regions

CLARANET has bought-in website management skills with the acquisition of Ardenta for an undisclosed sum.

Ardenta manages e-commerce systems and has expertise in high volume transactional database management.

The Surrey-based company was established in 2001 and has annualised revenues of £6m.

Ardenta operates in a number of sectors but has a focus on media and e-gaming, and counts the BBC, ITV, Ladbrokes and William Hill as customers.

The firm's co-founders, Neil Truby and Scott Hanson, will work alongside Claranet's senior management team to integrate the business.



Michel Robert

Michel Robert, Claranet UK's MD, commented: "Ardenta's experience with e-commerce systems and database management will complement our in-house expertise.

"This acquisition represents the latest in a line of strategically important deals that we've

made over the past two years across Europe."

Ardenta MD Neil Truby added: "There are cultural and strategic similarities between Ardenta and Claranet, and the move will allow us to capitalise on the economies of scale that a larger company affords."

SIGNIFICANT new investments in Europe, Asia Pacific and Latin America have expanded 8x8's international footprint as it meets demand from global and distributed mid-market and enterprise customers.

The move includes three new data centres in Singapore, The Netherlands and Brazil, localisation capabilities for an additional six languages and new support centres in the Philippines and Romania delivering 24x7 support.

With this expansion 8x8 will have a total of 12 data centres in eight regions of the world.

From a localisation perspective, 8x8 will support 13 languages in addition to English

for its desktop IVR services by the end of this calendar year, including Japanese.

The company is also opening new support hubs in the Philippines and Romania, bringing the total number of centres to seven.

"Our mid-market and enterprise customers demand the highest levels of service with minimal latency across the globe," stated Bryan Martin, Chairman and CTO, 8x8.

"These new investments will better enable us to support the global and regional efforts of our customers."

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NINE Pennine Telecom staff are limbering up for Trekfest on 3rd-4th September, aiming to raise over £1,000 for the Bury Hospice. Commenting on the tough 50km hike across the Peak District team member Belinda McGee said: "We are all looking forward to the challenge, especially as we know that our efforts will ultimately benefit the Bury Hospice, a cause that is close to many of our hearts."

Trekfest is the latest charity effort from Pennine in support of the Bury Hospice. In 2013 the company gave a £20,000 boost when it waived its project management and installation fees for equipping the hospice with a new VoIP telephone system.

## Yodekoo ramps up

A1 COMMS is ramping up its strategy to cost-effectively simplify the provision of comms solutions to organisations of all sizes under its Yodekoo brand.

The brand was launched in April across all channels including digital, high street retail, corporate and partners.

CEO and owner Paul Sisson said: "Yodekoo is targeted at the B2B sector and its watch-

words 'business communication made easy' reflects our mission to demystify hosted telephony, broadband services and solutions such as UC. It needn't be an expensive or time consuming chore to equip a business with the latest technology"

A1 Comms is currently recruiting for resellers in a nationwide campaign to further expand the Yodekoo brand.



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# Vodafone to put focus on proficiencies

VODAFONE UK's revamped partner programme puts a spotlight on capability and customer experience rather than volume and kicks off early next year.

"We've been readying ourselves and our partners for the launch of the new programme with convergence capabilities and customer experience at its heart," stated Nick Birtwistle, Partners and Alliances Director.

"We've invested time and resources in the tools, training and marketing materials to support partners as we move to a capability model."

The Platinum, Gold and Silver designations will be replaced by capability tiers called Approved, Specialist, Advanced and Total Communications.

"The new programme is open to all Vodafone Partner Services (VPS) partners, both fixed and mobile," added Birtwistle.

Vodafone UK has also adopted a more regional focus, reflecting a wider move to a regional business support model in its direct enterprise channels.

Jan Collins, Kathryn Platt and Oliver Lofthouse are now heading up Vodafone Partner Services, which continues to be overseen by Birtwistle.

"We know that SMEs want a relationship with a local supplier or partner," said Birtwistle.

"Businesses need to be agile, they need to respond quickly to changes in their own industries and they need to be able to meet their customers' demands. There is an increasing uptake of UC and converged communications among UK businesses, along with demand for cloud, hosting and IoT services.

"Communications, and particularly total and converged communications, has a big role to play in helping UK business-



Nick Birtwistle

es to tackle these challenges, which is why capabilities are vital for our partners and a key focus in our own business."

Not all partners will be skilled in UC, prompting Vodafone UK to create a suite of training and certification materials.

For the first time partners will be able to gain Vodafone certification across the Vodafone fixed, mobile, converged and cloud portfolio. "Because of the scale, our training and certification programme is the result of 12 months work and provides over 150 hours of learning materials," added Birtwistle.

## Commsworld aims at Scottish legal market

EDINBURGH-based Commsworld has made great gains in the Scottish legal market and is claiming to provide 20% of the country's top legal entities with network and comms solutions.

Commsworld CEO Ricky Nicol commented: "Fast and secure communications are vital for the smooth running of legal practices and the privacy of their clients.

"Our market share in this profession is indicative of the growth we're seeing throughout the whole business.

## Syscap set for portal upgrades

USERS of Syscap's beefed up partner portal are set to close more deals faster following the introduction of 100-plus improvements, claimed the IT finance provider.

The online platform enables partners to obtain a quote for extended payment 24/7, 365 days a year. Mobile responsiveness has also been improved, alongside new quote templates and search capabilities plus simplified document uploads.

"By providing an instant online quote the Syscap Partner Portal removes the administrative burden on vendor sales staff so they can accelerate their deal cycles," commented Philip White, MD of Syscap.

"IT vendors and resellers can manage their own opportunities while having complete visibility of every one, from entry date through to current status and historical transactions.

"All proposals in the Partner Portal are supported by Syscap's account management team."

The portal forms part of the Syscap Partner Programme which includes training, account management and a rewards and incentive scheme.



Ricky Nicol

"The resurgence of personal communication along with a growing appetite for a service that fits each specific business has helped us expand as we diversify our services."

# Marke urges digital drive

DAISY Group's Chief Digital Officer Nathan Marke has urged UK plc to fully grasp the digital transformation agenda.

His rallying call follows a survey that showed 73% of SMBs and 45% of large enterprises are unable to keep up with the digital revolution despite the overall majority wanting to transform their businesses.

The study (commissioned by Daisy Group and conducted by Vanson Bourne) also found that 52% of large enterprises and 40% of SMBs are looking to digitise both their front and back office functions as quickly as possible, but issues around resource and time, strategic direction, skills and legacy technology are holding them back.

"Businesses large and small must embrace digital transformation if they are to grow their market share," said Marke.

"While the majority of businesses recognise a need to change, their lack of a strategy is potentially holding them



Nathan Marke

back. Businesses of all sizes still face considerable technology and resource challenges if they are to achieve their digital transformation goals.

"Through working with expert technology partners, businesses can ensure they are equipped with the right tools and knowledge to make their digital journey a success.

"Orchestrating and facilitating this digital shift shouldn't be taken lightly. But, ultimately, those businesses that fail to get their digital strategy right risk getting everything wrong."



A STAFF BBQ hosted by Nimans raised £3,000 for Macmillan Cancer Support and included a wet sponge throwing contest that saw Sales and Business Development Director Richard Carter (pictured) get a soaking. Head of Sales Operations Mat Weall and Investors In People Manager Sue Goldfine acted as chefs for the day, feeding 150 staff at the firm's Manchester HQ.

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# CDO appointments set digital agenda

A STEEP rise in the number of Chief Digital Officers (CDO) across Europe over the past 12 months signifies a ramping up of the digital transformation agenda, according to Claranet.

A survey by Vanson Bourne found that 95% of European businesses have a digital strategy, with 15% of them led by a CDO, up from 6% in 2015.

This trend is especially noticeable in France and Portugal where CDOs head up 22% and 20% of digital strategies respectively.

CTOs and CIOs are still most likely to drive digital strategies but the rise of the CDO is indicative of wider trends across IT departments, believes Andy Wilton, CIO of Claranet.



Andy Wilton

“The fact that we are seeing a broad split in leadership between CTOs, CIOs and CDOs shows the different approaches organisations are taking toward digital transformation,” he said.

“It is also indicative of a changing IT department where traditional roles are becoming more hybridised.”

IT is progressing from a support function to a value creating role of strategic significance, emphasised Wilton.

“The IT department is undergoing a period of accelerating change,” he added. “Where IT used to play a supporting role to business strategy, it now has the opportunity to drive it.”

# Utilize buys a big C2 stake

UTILIZE has acquired a 50% stake in fellow Microsoft partner C2 Software in a deal that gives Dundee-based C2 access to Utilize’s managed IT solutions, infrastructure and cloud, telephony and comms services, as well as Sage consultancy.

Both C2 and Utilize believe that the increasing emphasis on cloud and mobile working will play a key role in the future of business computing, with a significant portion of Microsoft’s investment budget allocated to these areas.

Utilize Operations Director Guy Hocking stated: “C2 is a specialist in CRM, SharePoint and web development. The knowledge and new skill sets acquired through technologies such as Microsoft Dynamics CRM Online, SharePoint and



Warren Davies

Power BI provide a powerful combination that can transform a company.”

Utilize MD Warren Davies said: “This acquisition adds a new arm to our portfolio of services and skills, paving the way for us to deliver new business solutions to our customers.”

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# CityFibre links up with Gigaclear

PURE fibre broadband providers CityFibre and Gigaclear have joined forces to bring ultrafast pure fibre broadband services to rural areas.

CityFibre’s national footprint will be used to facilitate Gigaclear’s deployment of rural pure fibre networks.

CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch said: “Gigaclear shares a com-

plementary agenda. We have long been aware of the huge levels of demand for better Internet connectivity in rural areas surrounding our urban network projects.

“It is a national embarrassment that residents and businesses in rural areas, and indeed many of those in towns and cities, have been left in the digital

dark ages. Pure fibre infrastructure is the 21st century utility and is an essential component to everyday life.”

Gigaclear CEO Matthew Hare commented on the link-up: “This partnership with CityFibre gives Gigaclear access to more capacity, faster delivery and more flexible bandwidth across the country.”

ADEPT Telecom’s full year results to the end of March 2016 show revenues up 31% to £28.9m and EBITDA UP 34% to £6.15m. This is the 13th consecutive year of rising EBITDA. Ian Fishwick, Chief Executive, said: “It has been a good year with EBITDA once again rising faster than revenue. Over the last two years we have transformed the business and with the acquisition of Comms Group post year-end, 47% of our revenues are now from managed services. We are increasingly providing complex UC solutions that don’t just connect desk phones with tablets and smartphones. We are also integrating our UC solutions with Wi-Fi, SIP and a range of customer management systems.”

## SHORT CALL

**Entatech** UK has sealed a new distribution deal with Veracity, a provider of IP video surveillance solutions. Dave Stevinson, Entatech’s MD, said: “We have worked hard to build our networking reseller database, and the inclusion of Veracity will provide high margin opportunities for customers and open up opportunities for Entatech which is in a position to provide large scale project attachment prospects.” See page 46

# Daisy in BT Wholesale hosted deal

DAISY Group and its customers have access to BT’s Wholesale Hosted Centrex platform following a six year cloud partnership agreement worth £70m.

The platform delivers UC services and cloud call recording, HD voice, call analytics, web collaboration, and uses the BroadSoft plug-in to support apps from the MS 365 suite such as Skype for Business.

Daisy’s services will be migrated to BT Wholesale’s cloud platform over the coming 18 months.



Neil Muller

Gerry McQuade, CEO of BT Wholesale and Ventures, said: “Many businesses are now hosting their communication services using cloud technol-

ogy to make them accessible to all, using any fixed or mobile device, at any time, wherever they might be. We believe the rapid pace of change will con-

tinue over the coming years, and we’re looking forward to helping Daisy and BT customers reap the benefits that change will bring.”

Neil Muller, CEO of Daisy Group, added: “This collaboration with BT ensures that we are providing the latest in cloud solutions. This is an opportunity to enhance our capability.”

The deal also allows Daisy Group to re-sell BT’s platform services to Daisy Wholesale partners and through Daisy Retail direct.



## These are Rob's golf clubs.

As a bit of a Tiger Woods wannabe, Rob loves to take an afternoon out of the office to play a round of golf with his key customers. Luckily, it's easy for Rob to be away from the office as he receives all his provisioning updates by SMS, keeping him up to date on important orders anytime, anywhere. So Rob can stay in the loop, build great relationships and develop a pretty tasty swing all in the same afternoon.

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# French boost for Claranet Knight wants more runners



Olivier Beudet

CLARANET has extended its reach into the French hosting market with the acquisition of Diademys, significantly expanding the company's size and influence in the country.

Diademys is based in Suresnes and Caen and has an annual turnover of 26m euros, employs 120 staff and works with 200 clients from a range of sectors.

Diademys is the latest in a series of acquisitions made by Claranet across Europe over the past 18 months.

The deal boosts the Group's annual revenues to £192m and increases the staff headcount to 1,100. The firm now boasts 5,500 customers in the UK, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands.

Diademys' CEO Fabrice Tetu said: "We are backing Claranet for a number of reasons. The company has an aggressive strategy and wide presence across Europe, but, critically, it has retained its independence and is able to be agile in the face of changing market conditions."

"Claranet's ethos matches that of our own, and becoming part of the Group will bring significant opportunities for both our employees and customers."

Olivier Beudet, CEO of Claranet France, added: "This is an opportunity for Claranet to strengthen its position in the French hosting market. We now have nearly 400 employees in France, a turnover of 76m euros and one of the broadest hosting portfolios in the country."

KNIGHT CF is putting its financial muscle behind one of the fastest growing running events in the north west.

The channel M&A specialist has secured lead sponsorship of the English Half Marathon Corporate Challenge and has put out a call to the ICT industry to enter teams in aid of Comms Dealer charity Sparks.

The Knight team of trained athletes, featuring Tom Jones (Guinness World Record Holder for the fastest marathon dressed as a musical instrument) and Paul Billingham (runner up in Little Houghton Junior School's cross country race in the 70s) want as many channel businesses as possible to enter and challenge them in the Corporate Challenge League table.

"We hope many other organisations in the channel follow our lead and get involved," commented Knight CF Director Paul Billingham.

"Promoting physical activity and teamwork is more than a 'nice to have', it's a necessary step towards a cohesive, resilient and fit workforce."

"Mass participation sporting events are a terrific way to help businesses meet and create long lasting relationships."



Paul Billingham

"The Corporate Challenge connects companies with each other and businesses with their employees. We hope to get lots of teams running in Sparks vests and supporting the cause."

Email [run@knightcf.com](mailto:run@knightcf.com) for full details on the event.

Got a news story? email: [sgilroy@bpl-business.com](mailto:sgilroy@bpl-business.com)

## SHORT CALLS

Strategic Imperatives has been shortlisted in the Best Newcomer category at the 2016 international SaaS Awards for its Elevate telecoms platform. The company goes up against contenders from North America, Australasia and EMEA. The winners will be announced on 9th August.

Skyscape Cloud Services has launched an 'Ideas' portal that enables customers to input their ideas and influence the firm's product development roadmap. Simon Hansford, CEO, said: "We're always looking for innovation that delivers value to our customers and this portal will help us do that."



CHESS Partner Services is offering its partner base a wider range of airtime solutions, more choice of tariffs, converged mobile, data and cloud solutions following a new distribution agreement with Vodafone UK. John Pett (pictured), MD of Chess Partner Services, commented: "Chess is focused on growth, and along with our recent IoT launch,

Cloud PBX offering, wholesale and our own billing platform ebillz, we have a product set that gives us a strong foundation in the UK distribution marketplace." Chess will host a series of webinars to help partners sell Vodafone's range of products, and offer co-branded materials and promotions.

## SHORT CALL

In a decisive move to simplify group activities TTG Global has disposed of its Indigo Telecom division and associated subsidiaries, enabling it to focus on the core businesses Affini Technology and Simoco Group. On the disposal TTG Group CEO Mike Norfield commented: "The increased focus that this allows TTG to give to its two core businesses is fundamental to driving long-term shareholder value."

# IoT goes mainstream claims report

IOT SPENDING is on the up, driven by the promise of significant ROI and business transformation benefits, according to Vodafone's fourth annual IoT Barometer Report.

The study found that 89% of companies investing in IoT have increased their budgets over the last 12 months; while 76% believe that taking advantage of IoT technologies will be critical for the future success of any organisation.

The study also revealed that 63% of IoT adopters are seeing



Erik Brenneis

significant returns on investment, up from 59% last year.

IoT investment now accounts for 24% of the average IT budget, on a par with cloud computing or data analytics. And IoT technologies are playing a key role in mainstream business activities with 48% using the IoT to support large-scale business transformation, rising to 61% in the Asia-Pacific region.

More than half of consumer electronics companies questioned in the survey are using IoT technologies as the basis for a new generation of applications for connected homes; and 46% intend to develop new IoT-based products and services over the next two years.

Vodafone Group IoT Director Erik Brenneis said: "Three-quarters of the companies we interviewed now recognise that the IoT is a new industrial revolution that will change how people work and live forever. "Over 50% of the companies surveyed across multiple countries and sectors told us they're already planning to bring connected network intelligence to millions of devices and processes over the next two years. 2016 is the year the IoT entered the mainstream."



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# Avnet offers cloud bundle

AVNET partners are set to bundle services from different cloud suppliers, combine them with its IT services and offer one-stop-shop solutions via their own branded cloud shop front following the launch of the distributor's Cloud Marketplace across the UK and France.

The Marketplace offers products from AWS, Avnet, Brocade, Cisco, F5, IBM, NetApp, Oracle, SoftLayer and VMware; and payment options through a consumption or subscription-based model with tools to monitor cloud consumption and optimise cloud solutions.

Michael Fischermanns, VP Cloud Solutions, Avnet Technology Solutions, EMEA, commented: "We've designed the Marketplace based on our



insights across a range of public, private and hybrid cloud environments, creating a one-stop-shop for partners to deliver solutions that help organisations make the transition to a cloud-based business model."

Rollouts to other countries including Germany, Netherlands and Poland are planned over the coming months.

# Action for women in IT careers

TIMICO has ramped up its mission to balance the number of males and females working in the technology sector.

The firm has taken on 42 female recruits this year, representing 60% of all new starters.

Flying the flag for women in IT Timico has also joined forces with Microsoft as sponsor of the Women in Technology community within the International Association of Microsoft Channel Partners (IAMCP).

Last year saw 400-plus women from over 30 countries share their experiences and explore how the IT community could change the male-female balance of the industry.

Lucy Butcher, Microsoft Alliances Manager at Timico, said: "The tech industry has been largely male dominated but it's inspiring to see a gender shift with more women coming into the industry from a range of different backgrounds."

Timico works with local schools and The Girls' Day School Trust (a Timico client) to encourage young females to consider a career in technology or pursue STEM subjects.

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# Mitel-Polycom deal off

MITEL'S merger deal with Polycom is off following the Canadian vendor's refusal to match a superior proposal from PE firm Siris Capital. Polycom will pay Mitel a \$60m termination fee.

Under the terms of the new \$2bn deal outstanding shares of common stock of Polycom will

be exchanged for \$12.50 per share in cash on completion.

Rich McBee, President and CEO of Mitel, said: "The agreement resulted from a process that we feel accurately determined fair value for Polycom. It would not be in the best interest of Mitel shareholders to adjust the existing agreement."



ESSEX-based reseller Dataphone's DR plans paid dividends after its new office in Hainault was flooded during a storm early on referendum day. "We came in to a flooded office which had of course affected the floor wiring and all the computers were down," said MD Chris Wilce (pictured alongside the dehumidifiers). "Our engineers kicked in the DR plan and thanks to SIP we were up and running by the start of the working day. Ironically, we moved into the new office after 25 years in Riverside House next to the River Roding - we never got flooded there!"

## SHORT CALLS

8x8 has been awarded three new patents relating to networked contact centres, data storage and conferencing, bringing its number of patents to 121.

Broadband cable network transmission technology firm Technetix has raised £7.5m in funding from Liberty Global Ventures. It supplies headend and access transmission systems for fibre and HFC (hybrid fibre coax) networks.

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# Oriium bags Slough set to be smart city

ORIIUM has bagged London-based application transformation and cloud migration firm add3 in a seven figure deal.

Oriium, a channel-only infrastructure and data management company, has extended its capabilities to include cloud migration, application transformation and application packaging as portfolio services.

The combined businesses provide Oriium partners with a route to capitalise on the growing trend of application migration to cloud providers such as Amazon Web Services (AWS), Microsoft Azure and private cloud suppliers.

Oriium MD Chris Kiaie commented: "We have gained an application practice with a southern presence and high profile customer base.

"While some businesses may be apprehensive in light of recent political and economic events, we are confident that we have created the foundations for a solid, scalable business, and this acquisition underlines our confidence."

The founders of add3, Danny Clarke and Andy Hopkins, retain an interest in the company.

Clarke said: "Oriium is a complementary fit to our appli-



Chris Kiaie

cation practice and we share the same values.

"Having worked together on a number of occasions we have a proven model that delivers increased value to our customers and partners."

Oriium Chairman Ryan McCarry added: "This acquisition is the first of several that delivers against our strategic growth objectives.

"We are well positioned to take advantage of the growing trend of transitioning applications to cloud.

"In the last few years, AWS and Microsoft Azure have extended their market dominance and the add3 acquisition ensures we are aligned and will benefit by providing complementary services."

FIBRE-fed wireless connectivity and smart city solutions are to be delivered to Slough residents and businesses following an agreement between Slough Borough Council and Angie Networks, part of Angie Communications International.

"Slough is strategically placed as a leading business hub," said Bob Snowden, CEO UK, Angie. "We are working with Slough and partners to bring the latest smart city technology to the area.

"Angie will finance the entire project, ensuring that Slough will have all the benefits and none of the financial or operational risks."

Angie has signed up Colt and Zayo to build fibre infrastructure deeper into all Slough neighbourhoods off their existing infrastructure. The connectivity for the last hundred feet and into homes and business will be achieved through wireless technology. "Once installed, these 5G-primed fibre-fed networks will revolutionise the way people go about their business," added Snowden.

Neal Lachman, Group CEO of Angie Communications International, stated: "With the likes of Zayo and Colt and



Bob Snowden

several others already coming on board as partners, we plan to emulate the Slough models, principles and modus operandi across the world."

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## SHORT CALLS

Data centre firm MIGSOLV is on a hunt for partners to resell its colocation services following the roll out of its first channel programme. CEO Alex Rabbetts stated: "We've launched the reseller programme as the next phase of our company's growth."

**Telematics** Wireless and Pangea have joined forces to provide cellular connectivity for smart street lighting solutions. Telematics Wireless is a specialist in smart lighting, network and energy management systems, and Pangea will deliver a cellular solution for Telematics' lighting gateways over a secure private network.



A MANCHESTER trade counter opened by distributor Nimans has exceeded growth expectations by 30% just a few months since launching. The 10,000 sq ft unit in Trafford Park is managed by Geoff Wilde and Bob Hinder who boast more than 40 years combined data infrastructure industry experience. "Demand has exceeded expectations and business is growing each day with a steady stream of new and existing customers arriving," commented Wilde. "Our new stock profile is proving a big hit and has captured the imagination of customers."

## SHORT CALL

A UK&I distribution agreement between ICON and COBS AB sees the St. Albans-based distributor ship the Swedish alarm and messaging provider's SMART1 System in Q3 2016. Mark Shane, Sales Director at ICON, commented: "The SMART1 solution complements our existing offering as well as our core skill set. It combines DECT and Wi-Fi technology into a single device."

# Acquisition brace Oak's on course

ELITETELE.COM has extended its cloud capabilities with the strategic acquisition of NetCentrix and SystemHOST.

Carnforth-based NetCentrix provides bespoke cloud platforms to public and private sector organisations and was founded in 2002.

Two years later system-HOST was set-up as a wholly owned subsidiary specialising in hosted IT solutions.

NetCentrix is Elite's eleventh acquisition since 2008 and more M&A activity is in pipeline.

Elite founder and CEO Matt Newing said: "This acquisition brings a third data centre on-net to Elite's UK-wide NGN core network. We have increased our capacity to offer IT and cloud solutions and we have plans for further innovation in the market with NetCentrix and SystemHOST on board."

Phil Scanlon, MD and founder of NetCentrix, added: "Our products complement Elite's existing solutions and we are launching the combined offering into the market."

OAK Innovation's expansion into the mid-market will be supported by a new technical apprenticeship scheme developed with training provider New Horizons Computer Learning Centres and Highbury College, both based in Portsmouth.

The course is a Level 3 Advanced IT Apprenticeship Programme in IT Systems and Networking and will be accredited by City & Guilds.

Joint-CEO Phil Reynolds said: "Upskilling will help our team be better equipped to deal

with the complex business and product scenarios that the mid-market entails."

First Line Support Technician Daniel Sosnowski is the first to be enrolled on the year-long scheme that will see him gain vendor certifications from CompTIA and Microsoft as part of his Level 3 award.

Annie Turner, HR Manager, added: "In terms of training, this signifies a new direction for Oak that will benefit our people and add significant strength to the service we provide."



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# GCI rolls out Azure range



Adrian Thirkill

GCI's acquisition of Outsourcery's assets in June has enabled the firm to roll out the first of a new range of Microsoft Azure related services targeted initially at the partner channel.

GCI can now resell and support Azure virtual machines, storage and connectivity, either as discreet Azure services or hybrid deployments with its own accredited IaaS.

GCI is now one of ten UK Microsoft Cloud Service Providers able to create and manage Azure tenants for partners who can in turn manage and deploy Azure services for their end customers.

GCI CEO Adrian Thirkill commented: "We have strengthened our cloud services and

deepened our strategic relationship with Microsoft."

Scott Riley, Chief Strategy Officer at GCI, added: "We are already a Microsoft Gold Partner for Cloud and Communications, and we have a substantial footprint in Skype for Business with 120,000 deployed seats. So the investment in our Microsoft partnership runs deep.

"For many reasons – including security, latency, redundancy or sovereignty – customers will invariably have a blended infrastructure environment.

"That hybrid environment may be a mix of private and public cloud alongside on-premise infrastructure. GCI is able to provide Azure as a true hybrid deployment."



AS THE political world split asunder a triumvirate of companies forged a partnership at Westminster to help resellers fully understand and embrace the hosted telephony opportunity. On

referendum day, network provider Marston's Telecoms, hosted software specialist MyPhones and distributor SOS Communications joined forces to stage a partner day on the House of Commons terrace. "The aim of the event was to bring our partners together on the most important day for decades to fully understand the enormous change happening in telecoms and outline the opportunity to vote 'in' to hosted telephony," said Marston's Sales Director Rob Derbyshire. Pictured above left-right: Rob Derbyshire, Marston's Telecoms; Colin Hepher, MD SOS Communications and Phillipe Matos, Business Development at MyPhones.

## MK gears up to get pure fibre

MILTON Keynes has joined the growing list of Gigabit City projects led by CityFibre which is making over 160km of pure fibre network available to businesses, schools and colleges throughout the city via launch partner dbfb and education partner Exa Networks.

Milton Keynes is a leader in smart city technology but the region suffers from inadequate Internet speeds.

Brian Kingston, MD of dbfb, commented: "Having consistently fast access to the Internet is crucial to driving productivity and the bottom line.

"Connecting to a pure fibre network will make it easy to harness solutions like VoIP and cloud services that may otherwise be unavailable."

Greg Mesch, CEO of CityFibre, added: "Despite leading the way in smart city thinking, this city is yet another example of those still strangled by poor digital connectivity.

"Our pure fibre network will catapult Milton Keynes to be alongside some of the best connected cities in the world."

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### SHORT CALL

A growing number of contact centres are wising up to the financial and productivity benefits of home working, according to research by the UK Contact Centre Forum. Almost 60% of contact centre operators involved in the survey employ home workers/agents, and 69% say it creates happier and more productive staff, while 74% believe it enables them to schedule agents more flexibly to meet expected customer contact volumes.

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# Connectivity providers s

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

**C**urrently or once-distressed telecoms assets continue to be theme of corporate activity, following the previous quarter's Maintel/Azzurri deal, with GCI taking over Outsourcery's assets and Pinnacle reinventing itself with the sale of existing activities and the acquisition of three managed services companies, including adept4 whose name Pinnacle has now adopted.

Meanwhile, private equity interest in UK telecoms and networks continues, with Lyceum backing an MBO of contact centre specialist Sabio and Livingbridge buying a minority stake in Southern Communications. Superfast broadband remains in vogue, with Hyperoptic receiving 25m euros funding from the EIB, following Gigaclear's 24m euros equity raise and similar 25m euros EIB loan earlier in the year.

Outsourcery's sorry AIM experience finally came to an end with BGF-backed GCI picking up the assets for an undisclosed sum after major channel partner and creditor Vodafone triggered a sale to protect its customers. GCI will pick up about £8m revenues at about EBITDA break-even, versus the £4m loss Outsourcery suffered in 2015, boosting its revenues

by about 15%. Assuming that GCI picked up the assets for no or low cost, this looks to be a strategically sensible deal, with GCI having the routes to market to leverage Outsourcery's Cloud platform.

Another buy and build failure, Pinnacle, completely reinvented itself in the quarter, selling its softswitch-based £6.7m revenue subsidiary Pinnacle CDT to Chess for £2.8m, giving away its problem child security business RMS Managed IT Security Limited for £1, and buying two Leeds-based IT services companies (Anca-B and Weston) for £5m and managed services provider adept4 for £5m. The rejig was part-financed by a £4.5m equity fund raise and an investment from the BGF, and Pinnacle has now adopted the adept4 name.

Private equity investor Lyceum Capital acquired a majority stake in contact centre specialist Sabio in a deal valued at £50m, or about 10x current year underlying EBITDA. New CEO Andy Roberts updated us on continued solid organic trading and how the MBO is expected to accelerate Sabio's development through the use of M&A for the first time, but still with its contact centre focus. Business comms provider



Philip Carse

Southern Communications secured a minority investment by Livingbridge and new bank facilities to fund M&A. The firm told us that revenues were up about 30% to £30m to March 2016, mostly M&A-led, with rising margins.

#### Front runners

The standout results/updates this quarter came from companies focused on connectivity, including Exponential-e, euNetworks and Virtual1. For example, network and cloud specialist Exponential-e maintained its exceptional growth record in the year to January 2016, with revenues up 28% organically to £77.3m and rising EBITDA margins, albeit with the usual recycling of EBITDA into capex. More of the same is expected this year.

Redcentric reported revenues to March 2016 up 16% (8% organic) to £109.5m, driven by recurring revenue growth, and EBITDA up 21% to £25.8m as the company benefits from M&A synergies, including last year's Calyx and City Lifeline deals. However, net debt rose £18.1m to a higher than expected £25.3m due to cash collection issues, higher capex, exceptional costs and M&A. The outlook is for continued strong organic growth.

Alternative Networks' first half results to March 2016 reflected February's mobile-driven profit warning, with EBITDA down 27% to £7.5m on revenue down 4% at £69.3m. The good news is that the company seems to have stabilised the ship, with new Mobile commercial

arrangements, while growth in Advanced Solutions and an overall healthy backlog point to a stronger second half. The company has also significantly enhanced its bank facilities for M&A. Alternative Networks is the main share price faller over the last year, down 51%.

TalkTalk issued an in-line first quarter 2017 update (to June), with overall revenues down 0.4% (to an estimated £447m) but good Corporate and TalkTalk Business performances, while reiterating second-half weighted full year guidance of modest revenue growth and £320-360m EBITDA. The company has also given some details of the York FTTP trial including (jointly with Sky) 12% penetration three and a half months after launch and a cost per premise below £500, which it believes proves the concept.

Adept Telecom reported a strong cash-generative, M&A-driven year to March 2016, with revenue, EBITDA and the dividend all up 30-37% to £28.9m, £6.2m and 6.5p respectively off the back of the acquired Centrix's managed services contribution. Its shares are up 22% over the last year.

Megabuyte also covered results and/or updates from Adept Telecom, Arrow, Charterhouse, Evolve, GCI, IP Solutions, Intercity, Kcom, Onecom, Southern Communications, Timico, BT, Vodafone and Virgin Media among others. ■

**IS Research publishes [www.megabuyte.com](http://www.megabuyte.com), a company analysis and intelligence service covering over 400 public and private UK technology companies. [philip.carse@megabuyte.com](mailto:philip.carse@megabuyte.com).**



# et growth pace

## COMPANY NEWS ROUND UP

### IP Solutions growing in the cloud

The first set of accounts for hosted voice provider IP Solutions since the Baronsmead/Livingbridge-backed MBO in December 2014 show EBITDA of £0.2m on revenues of £7.3m for the year to November 2015, an estimated -84% and +21% change versus the previous year. Notwithstanding some post-deal management issues referenced in the accounts, IP Solutions' high exposure to hosted/cloud voice has resulted in another year of strong organic revenue growth, while the decline in EBITDA suggests increased investment which should sustain growth this year.

### Another flat update for Manx Telecom

Isle of Man incumbent telco Manx Telecom has said that trading is in line with expectations for the six months to June 2016, with revenues to be slightly lower and EBITDA to be in line with the same period last year (2015, £39.8m and £13.8m respectively). The reduction in revenue is due to a fall in kit sales. However, Global Solutions has returned to growth following a 25% decline this time last year. Management also note that free cash flow has increased and there is a reduction in net debt.

### Elitetele.com back on the M&A trail

Business comms service provider and contact centre specialist Elite Telecom has returned to the M&A trail just over two years after the Qualitel deal, buying near Lancashire neighbour and IT and cloud service

provider NetCentrix for an undisclosed sum. We estimate from abbreviated accounts that NetCentrix has revenues of about £5m, versus company guidance of £32-34m for Elite for the current year to July 2016. Further deals are expected.

### Maintel confirms Jagusz departure

Business comms provider Maintel has announced that Azzurri CEO Chris Jagusz will, as expected, be leaving the business within the next few weeks having helped the initial integration process following the transformational £48m acquisition which completed in May. Prior to running Azzurri Jagusz was CEO of SSE Telecoms.

### CableCom doubles revenues with Glide buy

Inflexion-backed student accommodation broadband provider CableCom Networking has acquired multi-utilities service and billing provider Glide for an undisclosed sum, doubling revenues to about £40m but at substantially lower EBITDA margins. The move broadens CableCom's addressable market from the niche student accommodation used typically by first year students into the second to fourth year students in shared accommodation, as well as to landlords of shared accommodation.

### FPE Capital invests in Optimity

FPE Capital, the private equity business backed by the Fleming banking family, has invested an undisclosed sum for an undisclosed stake in London-based ISP Optimity,

which offers 10Mb-1Gbps connectivity to businesses using a mix of fibre and wireless networks. Detailed accounts are not available, but we would guess at mid-high single millions revenues based on calendar 2014 accounts, while the company also invested £0.6m of capex in that year.

### Chess continues M&A strategy with Lanway

Chess acquired Burnley-based IT reseller Lanway for an undisclosed sum, adding around £21.8m of revenues (circa 20%+ to 2016 fiscal year) and increasing its headcount by 100 to 550. Lanway is a provider of IT solutions and services to mainly the corporate, education and social housing sectors. The acquisition will help to reduce Chess' reliance on fixed line call sales and increase cloud and ICT product sales. This deal, along with the recent purchase of Pinnacle CDT will take Chess' revenue to over £100m.

### Telecom Plus complains of energy new entrants

Multi-utility provider Telecom Plus, which trades as Utility Warehouse, has detailed a year of slower than expected growth to March 2016, as outlined in the mid-April period end update, with adjusted pre-tax profits up 4.2% to £54.4m on revenues up 2.1% to £744.7m. The erstwhile energy new entrant is now complaining of the tactics of other new entrants, with the ensuing tough energy markets dictating modest growth again this year, before a return to the higher growth of yesteryear at some stage. ■

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Since its inception, the CN Awards have been hosted by the best in the business and past masters of ceremonies have included Marcus Brigstock, Patrick Kielty, Rufus Hound, Hugh Dennis, Stephen K Amos, Michael McIntyre, Ronnie Corbett and Vernon Kaye. Guests can be assured that as ever this year the entertainment will be top drawer.

The Comms National Awards 2016 returns to the lavish ballroom at London's famous Hilton on Park Lane which plays host to the UK's top awards events and, as ever, the hospitality will be first class!

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## Awards Categories

### VENDOR AWARDS

#### Network Category

Best Mobile Network Provider  
Best Fixed Line Network Provider

#### Service Provider Category

Best Wholesale Service Provider (up to £10m t/o)  
Best Wholesale Service Provider (above £10m t/o)  
Best ISP

#### Telephony Category

Best SME Telephony System  
Best Enterprise Telephony System  
Best End-Point or Device  
Best Hosted Platform

#### Software Application Category

Best Call Management Solution  
Best Billing Platform

#### Distribution Category

Best Convergence Distributor  
Best Mobile Distributor

#### Partner Services Category

Best Channel Business Service  
Best Installer/Maintainer

### RESELLER AWARDS

#### Contact Centre Category

Best SME Contact Centre Solution  
Best Enterprise Contact Centre Solution

#### Vertical Market Category

Best SME Vertical Market Solution  
Best Enterprise Vertical Market Solution

#### IOT/Wireless Category

Best SME M2M/Wireless Solution  
Best Enterprise M2M/Wireless Solution

#### Cloud Communications Category

Best SME Cloud Solution  
Best Enterprise Cloud Solution

#### Unified Comms Category

Best SME UC solution  
Best Enterprise UC solution

#### Customer Service Category

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# national recognition

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## Nine takes top position again as headline sponsor



Mark Saunders

LEADING service provider, Nine Wholesale, is delighted to reprise its headline sponsorship of the Comms National Awards at The Hilton, Park Lane on Thursday 13th October.



According to Nine Group's Marketing Director, Mark Saunders, renewing their sponsorship of the awards for a fourth year was "a straightforward decision which reinforces our commitment to the channel and our love of a great night out".

The standard of entries was truly exceptional last year, so the winners will have had to work extremely hard to achieve success this year and Saunders stated, "I look forward to meeting and heartily congratulating them all. This is a truly memorable evening, reflecting the innovation, excellence and energy in our sector, with no doubt many well-known characters taking to the stage, as well as some welcome newbies."

Nine Wholesale also sponsors a special award to recognise outstanding customer service, which was won last year by Lily Coms. This award is presented to the reseller who can truly demonstrate that everything in their business is led by the customer's perspective and how they have remodelled and transformed their business to achieve this.

Saunders is a passionate advocate of articulating any business ambition in the customer's voice, claiming, "The availability of just about any information on line has finally enabled the age of the customer. Our award can only be secured if it is the customer who recognises the excellence of the service that is delivered, not the reseller who advertises it. Personalised customer engagement and messaging are now essential, while marketing teams who continue to broadcast indiscriminately across random media channels should consider themselves irrelevant, if not obsolete."

## Category sponsors recognise power of CN Awards



"Interoute is excited to be part of the Comms National Awards for the first time and is delighted to be sponsoring the Cloud Communications category.

"The acquisition of Easynet in October 2015 bought with it an exciting new chapter in Interoute's journey, a channel business encompassing over 1,000 resellers and partners. The Comms National Awards marks a great opportunity for us to build on this already successful business and further introduce all that Interoute has to offer, to the wider partner community.

"Interoute recognises the importance of change and with a significant portfolio of services from the ground to the cloud our goal is to help our partners innovate, to deliver technologies that will set them apart and help their businesses continually grow by evolving to meet the ever-changing demands of their customers.

"We are proud to be an integral part of the success of Comms Dealer and this year's Comms National awards and to share this success with our valued resellers and partners. We are looking forward to sharing the knowledge, insight and enthusiasm shown and shared by this community and help make the event one to remember.

"Good luck to all of those attending and who have been nominated for an award."

**RANDALL SMEDLEY** – SALES DIRECTOR–  
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"Samsung Electronics (UK) Ltd is proud to sponsor the Network Category's 'Best Mobile Network Provider' and 'Best Fixed Line Network Provider' at this year's Comms National Awards.

"Samsung strongly believes in recognising excellence and innovation, and we're proud to help recognise the success of our channel partners at this year's event. Our community of multi-skilled channel partners play a vital role in meeting our end customers' needs.

"We place great value in our relationships across the industry and support these with a large and committed R&D team who work tirelessly on product enhancement and development. It's these new and innovative products that will help us all work more effectively moving forward.

"Our broad portfolio of products gives us a view of the wider business landscape and the opportunities available across multiple markets. Opportunity is always there, but we all have to be adaptive and work harmoniously to drive growth and be successful. "We wish you all success and good luck to all the award nominees."

**WILFRED WOOD** – MARKETING MANAGER  
SAMSUNG UK  
SPONSOR OF  
**THE NETWORK CATEGORY**



"The difference between fantastic success and mediocrity in business is often down to making the most of opportunities as they arise. It's all too easy to look back and see



who capitalised on the then new opportunities and who didn't. At the time though it's far from easy. The good news is that today there seems to be even more opportunities than ever to generate new profitable revenues whilst delivering great service to your customers. At Daisy we're constantly striving to support our partners in maximising this potential whilst making the relationships with their end-users even stronger.

"As part of this we are delighted to again be sponsoring this year's awards. They recognise the entrepreneurialism and sheer hard work required to be the best in the channel. No easy achievement and one that deserves the recognition that these awards bring.

"The market is huge, the opportunities continue to grow for all of us and the Daisy team remains committed to helping our partners succeed and grow. We look forward to joining you all in a fun evening and sharing in the success of the award winners and the channel as a whole."

**GARRY GROWNS** – WHOLESAL SALES DIRECTOR  
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Network Category



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Unified Comms Category



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# Mesch gets UK's dark fibre

Shovels in the ground attract little glamour but the UK's digital future hinges on dark fibre being available in spadefuls according to national infrastructure builder CityFibre.

Following CityFibre's Dark Fibre Symposium – held at the London Stock Exchange on July 20th and attended by 75-plus influential industry players – the UK's legacy infrastructure suddenly seems older and more tired. But digging to create a modern fibre and duct network architecture now marks a very different connected future facilitated by the highly motivated national pure fibre infrastructure provider. In a keynote address CityFibre's CEO Greg Mesch delivered a jolt of reality to the sceptics who said at the time of CityFibre's inception that it could not compete with BT Openreach. The basis of their argument was that nobody confronts head-on the incumbent monolith. It's the same argument, ironically, that underpins CityFibre's strategy. Nobody else is competing, so competition is the only response. This simple law of economics is shifting the tectonic plates and there's no limit set on CityFibre's ambition.

"We're serious about building infrastructure that's fit for purpose," stated Mesch. "It's not about the next few years, it's about the UK's future. There needs to be more infrastructure, more ducts and more fibre in the ground. The UK must be diversified away from BT.

"This is not about fibre strands. It's about ducts and sub-ducts that are capable of running thousands of strands of cable. In York

we're using a two duct network sub-ducted four ways and we have enough capacity to connect every home and business, every cell site, every school, every single property on a purpose built infrastructure. That's what we mean by a new generation of future proof digital infrastructure."

CityFibre's intention is to show that unlimited fibre capacity is a national priority that rids the UK of an aging copper network that is ultimately holding back the nation. "Increased investment in digital infrastructure, primarily fibre, drives GDP growth, innovation and creativity," added Mesch. "Our vision is simple: We believe that every building should be connected to fibre. It's inevitable. We are not afraid of digging up roads and engineering a fibre infrastructure. How else can we transform the digital capabilities of citizens and businesses? Our mission is to build a next generation future proof infrastructure for the UK."

CityFibre's goal is to be in 50 cities across the UK quickly, offering dark fibre and associated products. The power of fibre is most evident in the projects already advanced by Mesch and the goal of CityFibre's endeavour is to scale those successes across a wider footprint. "We're connecting core networks and densifying more and more connections with a shared infrastructure model," he added.



Greg Mesch

## Our vision is simple: We believe that every building should be connected to fibre

Mesch's passion for fibre is also an invitation to the industry and potential partners to start thinking afresh about the UK's infrastructure. "We believe in sparking innovation," he stated. "We're preparing for 10 Gigs and terabit speeds because that's where the industry is going."

### Proven expertise

CityFibre's management share more than two decades experience in designing, building, operating and financing fibre infrastructures.

They established CityFibre in 2011 after a base acquisition that helped them develop and refine a shared infrastructure model that caters for the public sector, business, mobile and residential verticals in cities outside of the M25. Those are the most needy of a new digital infrastructure, believes Mesch. "That's what we're targeting, that's what we're building," he said.

Listing on the AIM market in January 2014 CityFibre grew rapidly and late last

year completed the £90 million acquisition of KCOM's national fibre and duct network assets, giving it access to 21 new cities. The company secured financing of £180 million to facilitate the acquisition and commercialise its national network. "In less than 24 months we went from a concept in a few UK cities to 37 cities and £90 million of unused facility to build infrastructure," noted Mesch. "And there's much more to come."

CityFibre's journey as a public company has been impressive, underpinned by international touchstones and learnings derived from markets more advanced than the UK. "Investors like our model," stated James Enk, Head of Corporate Development and Investor Relations. "The dominance of Openreach has until now meant service-based competition only, not infrastructure. Investors also bought into our strong recurring revenue yield and disciplined approach to growth. When we put a shovel into the ground there is a contract behind it."

Part of CityFibre's challenge when coming to public markets was to educate investors on its strategy, a learning process made easier by a number of international precedents that prove CityFibre's model by multiples. MetroWeb, based in Milan, provided a fibre overbuild in competition with Telecom Italia to bring fibre to the home. The company

# e ducts in a row

is now an astute, pioneering and adept player in the roll out of fibre in Italy.

Stockholm-based Stokab has traded for 22 years and represents the closest analogue to CityFibre's UK ambitions, providing a passive fibre network sold as a shared infrastructure and facilitating FTTP. Every business in Stockholm has a fibre connection. Four LTE networks also run off the network which has provided an overall 3x return on investment.

Like CityFibre, Eurofiber was born out of a series of acquisitions in the Benelux region. The company is focused on the business park and enterprise segment in Holland, primarily delivering dark fibre. Eurofiber has changed hands twice in recent years with handsome returns for investors. CityFibre therefore boasts a proven model backed by validation from international comparatives.

"CityFibre's here at a national scale and open for business," said Rob Hamlin, Commercial Director. "Dark fibre is available nationally from us and we are willing to keep digging because everyone should have access to dark fibre. Many have lobbied Ofcom for years to get access from BT, but challenges persist. We are ready to sell dark fibre at scale with a flexible approach and terms that work for our customers. We fully anticipate bringing in substantially more funding. We have a large financing stream in place to fund projects, with a remaining facility of tens of millions that customers can view as a capital stream to exploit for their businesses."

CityFibre is now connecting end users at volume through a growing number of channel partners. Already more than half a million school children are using its infrastructure, made possible through specialist partnerships. "The opportunity with dark fibre to flatten out the increasing costs of managed solutions is attractive in the market," added Hamlin.

"Three and EE have moved their backhaul architecture entirely to a bespoke dark fibre platform in Hull. Dark fibre is seen primarily as an engineering based product but its influence is felt right through to the user experience and improved top line performance. Public sector customers are deploying dark fibre for CCTV, traffic lights and Wi-Fi sites. We're pushing hard to challenge our design and delivery approach to start rolling out that infrastructure across our cities."

### Mobile revolution

CityFibre is putting in place an architecture that is perfectly positioned to support small cells for mobile operators. The expectation for small cells playing a huge role in the delivery of capacity and reliability in the mobile networks over the next five-ten years is becoming an ever-increasing theme. "We want to anticipate that in the design of our networks and products and start to lay the ground for something that will be revolutionary – a backhaul to support the future of mobile networks at the right cost and the right scale across a number of our cities," said Hamlin.

John Franklin, Operations and Engineering Director, explained that CityFibre's

'well planned city' design is based on a ring methodology with the ability to hand off to any particular location, buildings, towers etc wherever needed as the market expands. "We think in thousands of fibres, scale is key," he said. "Getting sufficient ducts in the ground at the right location creates the flexibility to extend a capillary network off the core that drives demand.

"CityFibre is developing a tool bag of architectures to address every possible opportunity, working with data centres on how best to optimise them via our nationwide infrastructure, looking specifically at strategies to connect in, through and across data centres, and continue to drive for automation, visibility and cycle time improvement."

There is a notion that dark fibre is a niche market and difficult to commercialise to different markets. But high capacity fibre networks are driving transformations across all sectors. This compelling message was underlined by the remarkable work undertaken by Commsworld in Edinburgh which is using dark fibre to transform the city's digital future.

"Our commercial approach comes down to us following our customers' strategy, understanding where they need network, on what terms and the nature of their financial and commercial goals," added Hamlin. "We recognise different business models. There is also an idea that the infrastructure status quo cannot be changed. That's not true. That's what's holding back the UK's digital future. Digging is a challenge, but it's what we do." ■

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# Why we must listen to Sabio

Sabio has become a master at marrying digital, social, mobile and traditional customer contact channels to create a seamless client experience, and incoming CEO Andy Roberts aims to double the size of the business based on its proven formula supported by new investment.

**S**abio's multi-million pound Lyceum Capital investment and £30 million funding along with last month's appointment of Roberts as CEO has given a green light to the company's drive for UK and international expansion. The customer contact technology specialist currently generates £40 million turnover based on organic growth but last month's developments mark a new beginning. "We'll be looking to accelerate our growth plans, action an acquisition strategy and identify more opportunities for international expansion," stated Roberts.

"Our goal is to double Sabio's size over the next three to five years. The acquisition strategy will help to broaden our customer base and provide a greater target market for our WFO, automation, digital and multimedia solutions. Then we'll begin to build out our global presence in European and APAC markets, expanding our 24/7 support capability for those organisations

seeking a single support partner for their customer contact technologies. The third part of our strategy is to investigate technologies that are adjacent to and complement our current portfolio, particularly those that help support our customers in bridging the divide between their digital and customer contact strategies."

Prior to his CEO appointment Roberts was a board director at the company since 2003 responsible for pre-sales, solutions delivery, managed services and support for the firm's UK and international operations. He also served as executive sponsor for Sabio's strategic partnerships with technology partners such as Avaya, Verint and Nuance. Roberts has been a member of the Avaya EMEA Partner Advisory Council and also served on the Customer Contact Association's CCA Supplier Council. He joined Sabio's Sales and Business Development team in 2001, and before that spent the previous ten years working in the financial services sector for LloydsTSB.



**Andy Roberts**

"Having begun my career in banking, joining Sabio and the communications technology sector in 2001 was a great opportunity for me to contribute directly in terms of growing a business," he commented. "As CEO of Sabio, my business development

experience and background in managing all parts of the business will be critical as we drive the company through its next critical growth phase." In recent years Sabio has grown ahead of the market, secured an increasing

market share and delivered a consistently profitable performance. However, there is also a real opportunity for the company to accelerate its business plans and build out in terms of addressing broader opportunities. "Securing additional funding and putting the



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# Sabio on client engagement

next generation of Sabio leadership in place will be instrumental in delivering on those plans," added Roberts. "In the short-term we're looking to accelerate how we execute against our current business plan, taking advantage of our new funding to make sure we have all the right resources in place.

"Longer-term we will focus on complementing our organic growth with a number of targeted acquisitions, both in the UK to gain a broader customer base, and internationally in Europe and APAC to support the growing number of customers with a global contact centre vision."

Sabio was founded in 1998 by Paul Began, Adam Faulkner, Sebastian Henkes and Ken Hitchen, all still engaged in the business. The firm has bases in the UK and Singapore and helps businesses to simplify customer engagement by enabling 'digital front door' strategies that create the right balance between self-service, assisted service and contact centre operations.

"From day one Sabio has always been dedicated to helping organisations deliver above-expected customer service by addressing their contact technology challenges," explained Roberts. "That's our exclusive focus area. And with over 17 years experience and a proven team of more than 200 solutions, services and support experts, we aim to be easy to do business with. It's an approach that works well for our customers as Sabio consistently achieves high CSAT support scores across our key technologies."

Sabio has been an Avaya Platinum Partner for over 10 years, a Verint Premier Partner since 2007, and a Nuance specialist since 2004. "We're also committed to high quality standards, holding both ISO 9001:2008 quality management certification for the provision of our customer contact technology strategies and solutions, as well as ISO27001 Certification for Information Security Management," added Roberts. "From our service hubs in the UK and Singapore we're able to provide contact centre technology support across multiple regions. We typically support at least three different technologies for each of our global customers, and now operate in 57 countries."

In 2015 Sabio was also named as one of the UK's Best Workplaces for the first time, and was also listed in The Sunday Times HSBC International Track 200, reflecting the company's performance as one of the UK's top mid-market private companies with fast growing international sales, delivering 15.4 per cent overall growth over the last two years and 25.4 per cent for the international business. "We've also grown successfully in terms of employees and now have 208 people across the business," added Roberts.

Sabio has also invested heavily in its partner technologies to deliver more flexible solutions. "For example, we've recently focused on the mid-market contact centre sector leading to the introduction of our Sabio OnDemand hosted solution that directly addresses the strong mid-

market requirement for cloud-enabled contact centre technology," explained Roberts. "Investment in the Sabio business will help to accelerate the Sabio OnDemand roll out on a broader scale."

## Key partnerships

Sabio also works closely with technology providers such as Semafone, Conversocial, LivePerson, RMG Networks and Gamma to address specific customer contact requirements. "Looking forward, we will continue to investigate adjacent technology across disruptive market areas, potentially in the digital arena to support the growing number of our customers requiring a more integrated approach to omnichannel engagement," noted Roberts.

How organisations engage with their customers has never been more critical, and there's a clear international

## Organisations can't just expect their digital or marketing teams to deliver on the omnichannel promise

demand for a technology specialist such as Sabio that can help businesses to close the gap between digital and traditional customer contact channels. "Given that 90 per cent of customers are now looking for a seamless engagement experience,

organisations can't just expect their digital or marketing teams to deliver on the omnichannel promise," added Roberts. "That's why Sabio is increasingly focused on helping organisations to optimise their 'digital front door' strategies, helping them to design customer journeys that create exactly the right balance between self-service, assisted service and the contact centre."

After effectively running parallel digital and contact centre strategies, more and more organisations are now recognising that all their different service channels – traditional and digital – have an important and complementary role to play. "For example, if your digital journey isn't performing optimally you might offer additional web chat support or use a virtual assistant to drive customers to the right self-service sites," added Roberts. "That's why we're focused on helping organisations to enable this transition, whether that involves the latest digital assistants or supporting broader infrastructure developments around technologies such as WebRTC."

In a world where the customer service and the actual experience offered is often the only differentiator, it's imperative that organisations do as much as they can to get this right. Roberts commented: "That's where Sabio can help, regardless of whether you're wanting to adjust to the demands of today's increasingly mobile and socially connected customers, want to streamline complex customer journeys to reduce customer effort, or

simply need to close the gap between your digital and traditional customer contact channels.

"Whether organisations are simply looking to upgrade their existing contact centre infrastructure, evolve towards a next generation cloud architecture, or deploy a more comprehensive approach that addresses all of their omnichannel contact requirements, our challenge is to help them make sure that their customer engagement strategies are fit for purpose." ■

## Just a minute with Andy Roberts...

**Role models:** Mark Carney for his clear, reassuring and decisive leadership

**What talent do you wish you had?** To have some musical ability

**What do you fear the most?** I've never been keen on snakes

**Three ideal dinner guests?** Nelson Mandela, Winston Churchill and Ian Botham

**Your greatest strengths and what could you improve on?** I bring passion, determination and a can-do attitude, but in my new role as CEO I need to be smarter at delegating to the senior management team with a greater focus on empowerment

**One thing you could not do without in your job:** The right people to drive the business forward

**What possession could you not live without?** Family photo albums

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** I love comms but my ultimate ambition is to own a vineyard in South Africa



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# Colt ramps up channel

Colt is targeting a new set of agents and ramping up its channel activity following a period of double digit growth via partners.

**T**he man at the centre of Colt's channel expansion bid is James Kershaw, Sales Director for the Indirect Channel. He joined the company in 2010 and manages channel development across its northern region. Previous roles include stints at Lixus and Claranet; and he's seen a big shift in the market with customers wanting more consultancy and independent advice before signing up to a service. "This is primarily due to digitalisation which has brought with it a myriad of companies offering a variety of services, creating more information to digest than ever before. So identifying the right partner is not always a straightforward task," said Kershaw.

Colt is hoping to attract resellers with the skills to help companies move to the cloud and digitally transform their businesses, as well as manage this process with IT services. "Colt will enable partners to have a wider conversation with customers through a consultative service around their business challenges," stated Kershaw. "And help them to scope out a project based on a business outcome, not a piece of telecoms equipment or technology.

"These new agents will be able to support the business with the right storage, IT virtualisation

and mobility operations alongside other solutions. Colt's high bandwidth network infrastructure will enable these information intensive businesses."

Kershaw has witnessed, in particular, greater usage of Colt's core data and voice products. "When looking at data, 1Gb and 10Gb circuits are now the norm, and we are continuously helping more of our customers connect to cloud providers," he said. "For voice, the migration to SIP/VoIP from traditional TDM has been significant year-on-year and, as well as immediate cost savings, customers have been able to utilise a wider range of features previously unavailable to them. These were the main contributors to the double digit growth Colt saw in its agent channel last year."

Colt's portfolio includes Software Defined Networks (SDN), Direct Cloud Access (DCA) and UC services. Kershaw says many agencies have won a number of complex pan-European deals and significantly grown their customer numbers by selling services such as these. "The agent model allows Colt to collaborate with customers on every level," noted Kershaw. "We must ensure that we can offer services to both our direct, larger and enterprise customers, as well as the vast number of SME accounts.



James Kershaw

## Companies want a combination of solutions to their business problems

Companies want support throughout a business project and not just to be provided with a product such as mobile working or just selling phone lines. Organisations are becoming less sensitive and loyal to a technology, but instead want a combination of solutions to their business problems. The push for consultancy is also driven by large companies moving their infrastructure into the cloud, or starting new IT projects. They understand that this can't be handled in-house."

Colt's new consultancy model draws on experiences gained

in the US and Germany where a fresh channel approach has already been deployed. "The agent model is well established in these two regions, and it has shown us that if executed and supported in the right way it is an invaluable route to market for us as a supplier and the end customer regardless of their size," commented Kershaw. "The 'sell with' model gets Colt closer to the end customers and allows us to better address the business need in every account, which means we can deliver a bespoke and relevant solution."

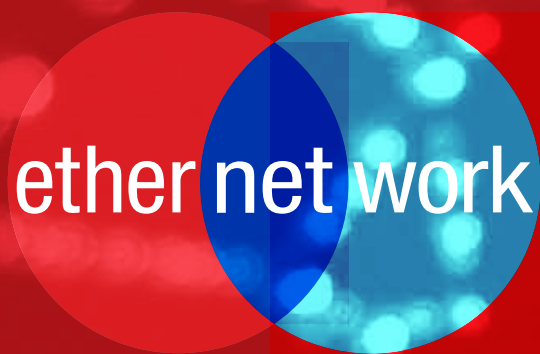
In the UK, the SME market accounts for 99 per cent of the operating businesses so companies like Colt need to adopt these types of agent models to increase their 'feet on the street' in order to grow the customer base. "Due to the vast number of companies in the UK SME market agents will help Colt to address a far wider proportion of businesses as an extended workforce," commented Kershaw. "At almost every level a customer now has far higher expectations from vendors such as Colt. Gone are the days where providers can set the expectations when it comes to initial delivery time, support hours or communication methods.

"Businesses now need services in days, or even hours, rather than months. They want to make a change in real-time without order forms or, in some cases, talking to us. Providers that aren't evolving or listening to the new fluid generation of CTOs, CIO and COOs will miss this natural evolution."

Colt's new partners enter the 'Flying Start' programme which offers a combination of learning platforms and materials. Portals keep partners and agents informed on the latest product releases, as well as educating them about related technical aspects that complement the product range. Colt has also introduced new measures to increase customer retention and minimise churn, covering the various customer touch points and the output score is reflected in an agent's development plan. "Colt agents, or trusted advisors, only need to focus on customers, everything else is covered," said Kershaw. ■



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# Funding still there for er

Held just a few days after the Brexit vote, the 'Get Backed, Get Big, Get Bought' seminar organised by Evolution Capital in association with Comms Dealer and NatWest was presented on a canvas of uncertainty, but one message was delivered loud and clear: There is still growth capital out there for ICT business 'fully prepared' to go and get it.

**A**ttended by over 70 ICT entrepreneurs, the seminar was held at the City of London headquarters of NatWest, which leads the field of banks willing to invest in UK SMEs and tech companies. Inevitably, the 'out' referendum vote gave delegates a lot to talk about on arrival, but there was a consensus of opinion from the panel of experts, questioned on the subject after their presentations, that the Brexit decision will not affect the availability of growth funding once the uncertainty dissipates. In the 2008/9 recession venture funding was sucked out of the economy, but there were no concerns that this will that happen again although there may be a pause in activity. Hans Prottey, Executive Director, Strategic Solutions Group at wealth management bank Coutts told delegates that his investor clients were likely to play a waiting game "I have had conversations around a few deals and one investor came back yesterday saying I am just going to think about it and come back in September and another guy said he was going to go away and have a pause. So there is uncertainty in people's mind but there is so much cash in our client portfolios and I can't see that drying up any time soon." Prottey was also confident that the Enterprise



Investment Scheme, designed to help smaller higher-risk trading enterprises raise finance by offering a range of tax reliefs to investors who purchase their shares, would continue to encourage investment. "EIS is here to stay, people still have tax to manage so I can't see the economy being seriously damaged (by Brexit) although there is some uncertainty in the short term.

"From hesitation comes opportunity so I am not concerned about Venture Funding or Angel investment. The UK has got some fantastic companies in it and they will still want funding, so I think people will continue to invest."

Chris Hodges, a seasoned investor with growth capital specialist BGF (Business Growth Fund), also sees the Brexit decision as an opportunity for investors.

"We have been entrusted with money from our

shareholder banks and they may well have some interesting strategic challenges, but wherever there is challenge there is opportunity, and what we are seeing is an opportunity to be more influential. Our proposition is based on a long-term minority partnership, and we recognise that BGF's opportunity was catalysed by the last credit crisis so we are looking forward to helping companies in the months and years ahead."

Ian Mason, TMT Relationship Director at RBS/NatWest was insistent that the business world was not going to stop as it did in 2008/9 even though the bank's shares were temporarily suspended after the exit vote.

"In 2009 we probably would have cancelled today but we are still open, nothing major is going to happen for two years as there is a hell of a lot of things to unwind. The majority of

people in this room sell to a UK customer base and are probably not exporting a great deal of goods and services so nothing will change for you dramatically. I think people will take a pause, they will look at what the impact is going to be for them and they'll be a little more risk averse. People may also change the timing of when they sell."

Ian Fishwick, CEO at AdEPT Telecom, who has made 21 acquisitions in the last 12 years, agreed that Brexit would not make a great deal of difference to M&A activity but urged delegates to focus on recurring revenues.

"There is no doubt that people will stop some Capex developments on new buildings etc. so I think directors should look at how their revenues break down in terms of recurring revenues and one off projects. Customers spending £1,000 a month is a lot better to me than a one-off project."

## Comments

### Kal Vaikla – Carbon Labs

"I found the evening very informative. It was interesting to understand that the principles covered apply across any business."

### Steve Walsh - Eze Talk Ltd

"Discussing business growth and the potential hurdles has given us some new ideas and encouraged us to take a different stance."

### Kevin Jauncey – Viatel

"Ian's [Fishwick] practical speech and case studies of real sceneries were very effective and food for thought."

### Duncan Murray – Tradenet Global UK Ltd

"I found the Buyer's perspective very interesting. Looking at different angles was thought provoking. The impetus to reassess our activity and our goals was very valuable."

### James Phipps – Excalibur Communications

"Believing the numbers as black and white and treating the money like your own was a useful idea to take away."

### Ronnie Lewis – Blue Saffron

"It provided a dose of realism and frank pragmatism which I appreciated."

### Simon Kelson - Evolution Capital

"This event has demonstrated that there is a variety of funding available for the right businesses and a quality proposition will help secure the right type and level."

# Entrepreneurs with a plan

## GETTING GROWTH FUNDING: THE EXPERT'S VIEW

In the main, entrepreneurs seek funding capital to hire more people, accelerate research and development, spread their wings into international markets, fund an acquisition, develop their customer base or drive business into converged arenas. When trying to hook an investor the experts agreed on two fundamental facts: you must know where you want to get to and you must back that vision up with factual and scrupulously honest details about your business. Think Dragon's Den scenarios and you won't go far wrong.



**Ian Mason, RBS/NatWest. Specialisation – debt funding**

"It is crucial for directors to demonstrate a track record of revenues and strong/recurring cash flows and show a clear understanding of how revenue is accounted for with strong billing expertise. The board and management team should ideally have experience through the business cycle and have a strong focus on financial functions. Operational diversity across a quality client base is vital and if you are reliant on a single supplier it is important to show that you can mitigate the risk."

### TOP TIPS...

*Demonstrate strong cash flow/recurring revenues  
Management must have good overview of finance  
Develop a sustainable, defensive and profitable niche  
If you rely on a single supplier, show alternatives  
Show how your service proposition is reliable  
Validate your share of a customer's ITC wallet?*

**Ian Fishwick, Adept. Specialisation – ICT business acquisition**

"I only buy 1 in 10 companies that approach me. If you go to lunch with people like me don't be surprised if they can smell b.....t before the main course arrives because they have probably met six businesses of your type in the last six months. Don't knock on a terrace house and try and sell the residents a Ferrari and if you can't decide where you sit in the market and what you do why are you turning up?"



### TOP TIPS...

*Acquirers don't like people seeking a 'valuation'  
Get tax advice before turning up  
Don't be self-obsessed. Think what a buyer wants  
Be clear about what you want to do next  
Plan your approach up to 18 months in advance  
Be prepared to sack your friends.*



**Chris Hodges, BGF. Specialisation, achieving venture capital for growth**

"We are supporting many exciting IT and telecoms companies including City Fibre, Olive and GCI which are part of a network of over 130 growth oriented companies that we have created over the past 5 years. There is loads of capital out there; the skill is marrying up investment appetite with the appropriate combinations of equity and debt to make sure that your business is as cheaply capitalised as possible, whilst maintaining optimum flexibility. Investors think in terms of risk and return and I would urge you to think along these lines when putting pitches together."

### TOP TIPS...

*Make sure shareholders are fully aligned  
Clearly explain what you need money for  
Demonstrate your tangible differentiators  
Show how you respond to business fluctuations  
Be honest about weaknesses and challenge investors to help  
Be ready to explain current trading versus budget*

**Duncan Gregory, Evolution Capital. Specialisation – developing funding propositions**

"Funders and buyers need to be clear what they are looking at. An equity provider will be seeking a racy investment return, whereas a bank will want to know how they'll get their money back. It is important to understand what your funder or buyer is looking for whether it be new markets, assets, a value proposition, a customer base or access to new products or services. Also, identify any downside; look at the risks and show how you will mitigate them."



### TOP TIPS...

*A business in good shape will usually attract investment  
Preparing an operational business plan is crucial  
Put yourself in your funder's shoes  
Show you are aware of market fluctuations  
Be honest and totally realistic  
Demonstrate you are not reliant on a few buyers.*



**Hans Prottey, Coutts. Specialisation - matching high net worth investors with entrepreneurs**

"We have hundreds of high net worth clients and every day we meet a new one. Some are private equity people, some are hedge fund people but 60% are entrepreneurs who have built and sold their businesses and are typically worth about £60 to £80 million and are looking to invest anything from £250,000 to £10m. Typically they say 'I just want a good deal'. You must have a good elevator pitch to hook their interest pretty quickly. If you don't they're gone."

### TOP TIPS...

*Build a strong elevator pitch or they'll lose interest  
Angels prefer to fund growth not a cash out  
High net worth's do not like de-risking founders  
Be transparent and clear on equity shareholdings  
Prepare clear, concise answers to likely questions  
Think through the due diligence process.*

# Brexit shock subsides

Britain won't officially exit the EU until Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty is triggered, but judging by new Prime Minister Teresa May's statements the die is cast and Brexit means Brexit. So what are the implications for the ICT channel?

**T**he Brexit viewpoints are still pouring into our inbox thick and fast and while comments remain polarised, there is a developing optimistic trend. From an investment perspective, Knight Corporate Finance partner Adam Zoldan believes it's important to play the long game. "There is a potential risk that M&A will be put on hold," he commented. "But given our focus is on a sector that has high levels of recurring revenues, long-term growth opportunities and has shown resilience to recession, we are quite relaxed. We have not seen any change in direction on the deals we're currently working on, and expect some interesting deal announcements over the next few months that demonstrate continued investment in our sector.

"There will clearly be a short-term negative impact, as we have already seen, due to the shock vote which most people were not expecting. This will result in some investment decisions being put on hold until there is more clarity around the way forward in terms of our relationship with the EU and its members. As long as any

new agreement between the UK and EU members is reasonable for all parties, longer-term this decision could be a positive."

Nigel Cook, partner at TMT M&A specialist Evolution Capital, observed: "Investment decisions will be delayed and therefore we should be prepared for a slowdown. Price and therefore multiples are big factors for investors, buyers and sellers. In the mid-market where debt is the main source of capital, reduced lending multiples may have an impact on company values. Uncertainty can be more damaging to business than reduced performance and I am pleased we are now hearing a positive vision of



**Stuart Griffiths**

**"We can turn a potentially negative Brexit situation into a positive outcome."**



**Adam Zoldan**

## We have not seen any change in direction on the deals we're currently working on

the future for UK business from the new Cabinet and the role we will play in the global economy."

### Mixed views

Stuart Griffiths, Managing Director at Dartford-based reseller True Telecom, is more pessimistic about the overall economy, but believes any recession that does materialise will be good for telecoms business. "In short, Brexit will of course damage our economy," he commented. "With the pound weakening to its lowest value in over 30 years, I imagine it will make the last recession look like a stroll in the park. At True, however, we feel we can turn a potential negative Brexit situation into a positive outcome. Our offering puts

us in a position to help SMEs reduce their telecoms outgoings and cope with the unrest and turmoil a potential recession could cause."

Dave Dadds, Managing Director at channel-only Cloud Communications business VanillaIP, goes further, believing Brexit will have a 'very positive' effect on the general UK economy and his company's growth prospects, although he is concerned about skill shortages in the future. "In the medium to long-term, Brexit will be good for our economy," noted Dadds. "The ability to manage our own affairs directly and trade with all of the world's markets on an equal footing is important. We expect it to have a positive effect on UK

VanillaIP business and our international Uboss brand, although it is important for the UK to continue to pull in migrant labour from all parts of the world on equal terms depending upon skills required."

Former Shoretel marketing chief Tom Perry, who now runs his own ITC marketing company Sherpa, is equally bullish. "My firm belief is that the channel has a golden opportunity following our Brexit decision to further develop and grow on a global scale," he enthused. "As the barriers to working internationally diminish we have seen the rise of the 'super VAR', and with huge political and economic change comes opportunity.

"When we exit, those companies that can think and act globally will have a fairer marketplace within which to operate and for some this will be enough to drive significant growth. For channel entrepreneurs there is a golden time just round the corner and for those companies like my own who help global technology companies expand, we just got a whole lot more to aim at."

The last word falls to Andrew Cooper, NEC Enterprise Sales Director UK&I, who urged the Government to act fully on the democratic decision taken. "The British people have spoken," he commented. "We have a moral obligation to respect their decision and to deliver the reforms required to ensure Britain remains a thriving and prosperous country. 'We're open for business' should now resonate from all sides of the political spectrum." ■



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Ricky Nicol

# Ofcom, BT, & the doubters

Regulator Ofcom 'took on' BT but its bigger test will be convincing a sceptical comms industry that it has gone far enough.

Ofcom's ruling not to split off Openreach from BT reflects the regulator's lack of strategic vision and its inability to take a tough decision for the better, according to Ricky Nicol, Chief Executive at Commsworld. He believes Ofcom's reluctance to break Openreach away from BT is more about the pension deficit within the Group and the financial issues this would create, rather than any real strategic play. He said: "This will be the last throw of the dice for BT to hold onto Openreach and is a result of short-sighted conclusions from Ofcom.

"It is wrong to maintain what is effectively a monopoly. This will not encourage investment in the critically important infrastructure the UK needs for prosperity and development. We have many customers still waiting, after more than two years, to get connectivity; and over 20 customers have been waiting for more than a year. The UK is desperate for an improvement and the best way is via a competitive choice for customers."

Full separation was never an option given the complications of pension fund obligations, noted Adept Telecom's CEO Ian Fishwick. "There are probably more ex-employees than employees and most worked before Openreach even existed," he said. "So if you break off Openreach how do you decide what portion of the pension issue it takes with it? Many have been under the false impression that Openreach was a separate company with its own financial accounts. It never has been and it is amazing Ofcom has allowed this for so long.

"Perhaps the biggest issue is how the cash generated from Openreach's profits is used. Should BT be allowed to treat it as Group cash and fund areas like football TV rights? Or should Openreach be forced to spend its own cash on improving the UK's infrastructure? I sit firmly in the latter camp. Whether anything changes depends on how this will be enforced. The devil is in the detail."

SAS CEO Charles Davis called on Openreach to rethink its

future role in the industry. "A fundamental mind-set change is required by Openreach to show that the carrier industry can enable UK businesses rather than be seen as a limiting factor," he stated. "The status quo that BT has been able to sustain has delivered little improvement to businesses and consumers. Of course there are complex issues for Openreach to resolve in a BT-exit such as who to manage the pension fund, but just like Brexit workable solutions can be found."

## Level playing field

According to Ralph Gilbert, Director at Focus Group, there is a long way to go to level the playing field, a situation not helped by Openreach being under the umbrella of the BT Group. "I am concerned about the proposal," he commented. "It would seem the larger CPs such as BT Retail, TalkTalk and Sky will be major Openreach customers which means smaller CPs may struggle to compete if there are preferential rates on infrastructure services."

These issues ultimately depend on how Openreach operates as a distinct company and how its leaders make decisions. Under Ofcom's proposals non-executive directors,

including the chair, will form the majority of the new board and be appointed and removed by BT in consultation with Ofcom. The regulator recommends that Openreach should develop its own strategy and annual operating plans within an overall budget set by BT Group.

Ofcom's CEO Sharon White added: "The new Openreach board will have to take investment decisions as a matter of law and the decisions must work for the whole of the UK. I understand why people see the attraction of selling off Openreach. It seems straightforward, but, for example, pension issues could take years to resolve. These new rules provide all the benefits of separating Openreach and can happen straight away, without delay."

Ofcom will monitor the 'new Openreach' and board level decisions and judge whether they are being taken in the interest of customers. "If this does not deliver independence, faster broadband and better service we reserve the right to revisit a sell-off," added White. "There needs to be more investment in fibre to the doorstep, with engineers arriving on time and doing the job first time."

In February Ofcom made it easier for telecoms providers to invest in competing infrastructure by improving access to Openreach's network of telegraph poles and its ducts. On 31st July new rules came into force giving telecoms providers further rights to access physical infrastructure. These measures are designed to reduce the cost of deploying broadband networks by sharing access to infrastructure across different sectors.

Ofcom also announced a range of measures to ensure that all phone and broadband companies provide an expected quality of service. Since then the regulator has taken more steps to improve services as well as boosting coverage, such as automatic compensation and easier switching. Ofcom has set out stricter minimum requirements for Openreach to repair faults and install new lines more quickly. From next year, the regulator will publish tables on communications providers' quality of service.

Ofcom's new plans followed last month's CMS Select Committee report which criticised Openreach for its poor quality of service and BT's under investment in the UK's digital infrastructure. ■

# Dark fibre vision: A disrupt



Platforms for success and dealing with disruption in the digital age are two big themes at this year's gold standard Comms Vision event, and according to Rob Hamlin, Commercial Director at Gold sponsor CityFibre, dark fibre platforms fit the vision perfectly.

**S**eismic change in the telecoms industry is happening right under our noses, at both a regulatory and technology level. But it's important to recognise just how epochal the copper to fibre revolution is for the UK. It's the first time in history that the telecoms industry has moved from one set of infrastructure to another. "Not only does this switch mark the beginning of the end for copper based networks and technologies, it fundamentally changes what the most successful comms and IT channel businesses are focused on selling day-to-day," said Hamlin. "For others it points to a need to upskill sales teams to extol the benefits of pure fibre-based solutions, platforms and applications, just as proficiently as they sold PBX technology in its heyday."

But change is nothing new to our industry and those who have thrived historically are the ones who see it as an opportunity to differentiate, not as a threat to the status quo. "Dark fibre as a platform for change is a vital part of this," added Hamlin. "It's already available in 37 cities from CityFibre with more set to follow. Dark fibre is an

infrastructure revolution that simply cannot be ignored.

"Traditionally, comms providers have differentiated themselves by packaging up fairly standard products in different ways. As they evolve to using dark fibre platforms and related products, fresh choice emerges and bandwidth problems simply go away. It's no longer a case of 'can I use this product?'. If you want it, it's capable of delivering all you can eat, all of the time."

A dark fibre platform gives ultimate control over equipment and services, setting forward thinking, tech-savvy comms and IT channel businesses free from the like-for-like managed services that are currently dictated to them. "Those who ignore dark fibre and continue to try to squeeze out extra margin from, or differentiate themselves with the same old products are going to find themselves competing against a wave of rich, innovative services, delivered over a modern network architecture that are truly fit for the future," commented Hamlin.

"Adapt and embrace it though and they become ambassadors of the



Rob Hamlin

## "Those who ignore dark fibre are going to find themselves competing against a wave of rich, innovative services"

revolution, transforming the digital futures of millions of homes and businesses, today and for years to come."

### Movers and shakers

Examples of CityFibre's partners differentiating themselves with dark fibre-based active products include Diva Telecom and Triangle Networks. "Recent

feedback to Triangle from one media sector customer was crystal clear: Triangle's ultrafast, gigabit capable products are walking all over every other service they've ever used," said Hamlin.

Those who are able to develop their own dark fibre based products – owning the level of service they

provide alongside – will reap the greatest rewards, according to Hamlin. "You only need to look at what our partners Exa Networks are doing in the education sector and how Commsworld is transforming the digital future of Edinburgh," he added. "The key message is that investment in dark fibre infrastructure can benefit everyone. What it boils down to is staying abreast of change and being willing to embrace something new. There is plenty of support for those who choose that path."

Digital technology advancement continues to evolve the way people and businesses communicate, transact and manage their lives. It's revolutionising the way children learn and the way public services are delivered. It's also enriching our lives more and more every day with a depth of information that is becoming more accessible through more and more connected devices and 'things'.

"Digital tools mean that small businesses are no longer small," said Hamlin. "They can punch well above their weight and compete on a level playing field. Just like their larger

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# otive platform for change

competitors they can be available to the customer 24/7 through automated web interfaces and cloud subscriptions. With the right capacity, their capability becomes almost limitless."

As fibre network infrastructure continues to underpin digital technology advances, David and Goliath stories about small businesses will become the norm. They will be fuelled in parallel by the intelligence and capability of the equipment that lights the fibre, keeps connections secure, splits/shares bandwidth, boosts it on demand and more besides. And, while infrastructure based services are waiting to be provisioned, intelligently deployed alternative technologies like 5G can also be used to bridge the gap and demonstrate true service and value to customers.

"As dark fibre becomes even more widely available, managed service equipment suppliers who previously relied on relationships with network operators for the lion's share of their business are also recognising the need to serve a far wider range of companies with a more varied product set," noted Hamlin. "These suppliers are already hungry to almost 'leapfrog' their former customers and work direct with dark fibre strategists to help them differentiate and win."

How they deliver at scale to UK comms and IT channel businesses large and small is yet to be fully realised. This in itself offers those businesses

a chance to influence the future and make sure the needs of their customers are properly heard and met, in the most cost-effective way.

"Although we were founded to deliver dark fibre we've recognised that not all of our partners are ready to consume it in its raw form," explained Hamlin. "To help them we've developed a range of differentiated active products that operate across our network. These are services that challenge the need for a traditional leased line, EFM or Ethernet service – bridging the gap between broadband and delivering enterprise-grade reliability and service at a fraction of the cost."

At a network build level, insight and intelligence is at the heart of every 'well-planned' Gigabit City build. Knowing where businesses congregate, where public buildings, exchanges and mobile sites are located is always the starting point. "Armed with that information we gather demand data to spot other nearby clusters that would benefit from our network build," added Hamlin. "This can include areas with a history of poor connectivity provision or where copper based network reliability has been susceptible to external factors far too often, such as regular flooding."

According to Hamlin, CityFibre is a 'living example' of the vision it has for all of the businesses in the UK. It is not burdened by 20 years of legacy systems development.



## IT TAKES VISION TO BE A LEADER

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"We live in the same digital world as our customers," said Hamlin. "Our enterprise-grade systems are modern, online and in the cloud which means we're able to adapt and respond far more rapidly.

### All systems go

"Those same systems provide our partners with access to intelligent network-asset aware tools and checkers and facilitate accurate online order progress and in-life reporting. With easy interfacing our systems have the capability to serve the information needs of our partners and provide service upgrades at the click of a mouse."

Speed of development also characterises the fast moving

mobile world. But when it comes to the vital role that mobile plays in our connected futures, there is a hurdle. Legacy network and product choices aren't designed to support 5G in the most cost and performance effective way. "But investments, such as ours, in alternative modern fibre infrastructure is already enabling mobile network operators to use dark fibre platforms to connect masts and plan for wide-scale small cell deployment," explained Hamlin. "And deep within that is a partnership model with the potential to anchor many brand new city network builds."

Hamlin cited Hull as a 'great example', where, through MBNL, Three UK

has transformed its network infrastructure, moving away from a capacity constrained tactical network to a dark fibre platform-based solution that has boosted network performance by 380 per cent and delivered notable cost savings.

"It's painfully obvious that legacy infrastructure simply can't cut it," said Hamlin. "We've got where we are by understanding the frustrations that exist in the market and by nurturing strong, insight-rich relationships with partners that allow us to design and build with confidence. It ensures that once our dark fibre platform for transformational change is in place, those partners will sell across it at scale." ■

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# Analytics: Industry branch

Anyone seeking a foretaste of the future role of analytics in shaping the customer experience need look no further than last month's round table discussion hosted by TeleWare in association with Comms Dealer.

It is beyond argument that big data – universally acknowledged as a boon to the industry and a sector obsession – has brought with it real challenges when harnessing, segmenting and monetising the expanding sea of information that sits both within and outside an organisation's network. The round table discussion shone an overdue spotlight on the intrinsic potential of big data and the industry's efforts to fully realise the commercial value of deep and useful insights provided by analytics.

The issues revealed by the debate are as fundamental as the freedom of customers to persecute organisations that provide a bad contact experience. Disaffected clients can easily post negative social media reviews in real-time and switch to competitors at the drop of a hat. Not for nothing therefore will analytics and systems integration become a dominant theme. But what is to be the nature of the new reign?

"We work in the customer engagement contact centre

world," commented Martin Taylor, CMO at Redwood Technologies. "We're seeing demand for voice-type control and service levels, such as monitoring and recording, applied across all channels including email, web chat and social. Customers want to achieve this without creating too many silos and inefficiency, and integrate more closely with information systems, particularly CRM. This is a business level decision rather than an IT function because it introduces more automation while reshaping the entire organisation."

#### Multi-channel

Customer interactions have in the past been constrained to a traditional phone call, but digitalisation and social media have let loose the fall-out of a bad customer experience across numerous channels. Much of the impact of this multi-channel environment comes from how data is managed and handled. Not surprisingly, data analytics has assumed a unique potency in the industry's mind. "There is strength in understanding your customers quicker than anyone else and adapting to



them," said Derek Watson, Managing Director at Aurora. "Knowing customers is your biggest asset, along with your speed of learning."

What also matters is how organisations react to their customers as individuals, and how the industry enables businesses to deliver an impeccable customer service. "The conversation is different, it's based on the company's aims and objectives," said Peter Gee, Managing Director at NIU Solutions. "We work with financial organisations. This sector is competitive and acquiring customers hinges on the digital customer experience. It's about how we can help their business as a trusted advisor. Technology is the enabler, not the answer. Customers see value and differentiation in this approach."

**The rapid rise of analytics is like a hit over the industry's head, powerful enough to cause a re-examination of traditional modes of operation and influential enough to redefine the customer experience**

Analytics and the customer experience are inseparable and represent a new direction for the industry that will see data scrutinised with the sublime concentration of a scientist and the results applied in imaginative ways. What matters most is how the industry responds. Rob Quickenden, Chief Strategy Officer at Cisilion, cited one example of how

the company is helping customers play the analytics trump card. "We're currently working with a large fitness company," he stated. "This is a competitive market and the organisation is struggling to keep members. It therefore wants to analyse how sales teams are interacting with the consumer base and how they integrate with Facebook and Twitter.



# es into customer science



"Joining up data with different medias across the whole customer journey, including information that sits outside of the organisation such as social media, is a challenge," stated Steve Haworth, CEO at TeleWare. "There is a lot of data external to businesses that can be pulled in."

The rapid rise of analytics is like a hit over the industry's head, powerful enough to cause a re-examination of traditional modes of operation and influential enough to redefine the customer experience and how that is best delivered. Why? Because those who live by the loyalty of their customers can easily die by their inability to give customers what they want, which is likely to be increasingly complex, according to Quickenden.

"But the social media team is not aligned to the sales department. Analytics are applied to sales calls only, while other contacts between staff and customers are unmeasured. That data is out there and we need a mechanism to join it up. Because of this we are seeing high level conversations outside of IT. It's about having an open infrastructure that harnesses every part of the customer journey. It's also about understanding not just the business's behaviour but also how consumer behaviour impacts their organisation."

Finding a way through the thickets of an information forest towards the sunny uplands of effective data analytics poses a strategic obstacle for any organisation. It's a difficulty TeleWare is addressing with gusto.

"One of our customers wants to integrate LinkedIn and their CRM system," he added. "They want a system that automatically updates



Steve Haworth

**"The capability to analyse data at a granular level, understand individual preferences and drive recurring revenue will increase the value of an organisation."**

itself to let them know when a key customer contact moves job. Losing a head of purchasing or CFO can have a big impact in the B2B market and affect relationships. This is how analytics and system cohesion works. Not having this information could give business rivals an edge, and also bring new opportunities for companies that have strong relationships with key people who move on."

### Integration

Tightly integrated systems also enable organisations to become adept at giving customers what they want first time around and draw strength from the customer experience they offer. But strengthening their ability to deal with high numbers of contacts is a different matter altogether. "You can have qualified people dealing with a small number of enquiries, but what some of our customers in the health sector face, for example, is massive volumes of demand and the only way to scale the knowledge

is to automate it," said Taylor. "You can't possibly provide a knowledge-based service at great scale."

The implications of automation may seem a distraction from the personalised intelligence offered by deeply segmented analytics but it is nonetheless a direction of the industry. "There is a rise in demand for self-service automation, especially in B2B," observed Graham Harris, Product Director at Daisy Wholesale. "In B2C this has already been delivered. We can book so much online for example and it's a painless experience. In B2B we will see growing demand for self-service interactions."

Just as intriguing is the gradual development of commodity-type products. It won't be long before big networking solutions will be built via a portal with drag and drop control of routers and security apps etc. "This 'build your own' network model with auto configuration is coming through," added Harris. "That's an interesting dynamic in the VAR space, very different from vendors telling VARs to skill up and make money from professional services."

The potential shrinkage of revenue steams derived from professional services adds more emphasis to the role of analytics in generating incremental growth based on a differentiated customer experience. Whether customer contacts are automated or personalised the quality of the experience remains crucial. "If you can't change the user experience customers will move elsewhere," added

Gee. "The challenge is to service multiple customers. Agents are able to conduct a number of chats at the same time rather than one phone call. It's a shift that cannot be ignored. A big finance company we work with conducts 80 per cent of contacts online and 20 per cent on the phone.

"Budgets are tightening and competition is increasing. The hospitality sector for example is super competitive and there's pressure on IT budgets to come down and be more efficient. At the same time I've got to innovate and differentiate my business. Doing better with less money is a massive problem. You can't do it just through technology, you have to work on partnerships that help to sell and apply information and data."

**Continued on page 42**

### BITES FROM THE TABLE

"We don't script our technical support. This may not be the most efficient way but it pays dividends in quality, loyalty and the experience our partners receive."

**Martin Clarke, Head of Channel Sales, Zen Internet**

"There's a lot of revenue in this industry, but sometimes there's too many costs supporting that revenue."

**Ian Fishwick, CEO, Adept**

"Budgets for spending on technology are not increasing, and the influences over that budget are now outside IT."

**Peter Gee, Managing Director, NIU Solutions**

Continued from page 41

All of the above are issues and challenges that no channel business can realistically avoid, and they must show courage in uncertain times. "Post-Brexit fear is affecting how people make decisions," pointed out Bill Smith, Director at STL Communications. "We are seeing an over reaction in the market that puts people off making decisions. In 2008 buyers sat on their hands which didn't help us sell. This will be the case for two tough-ish years and could be a catalyst for change as organisations seek to do things better and cheaper to mitigate the effects of Brexit."

**Positive action**

Rather than default to a defensive position and cave in to economic insecurities in the wake of Brexit, channel firms must shun uncertainty and take positive action to harness the untapped data that exists. This agenda is already set by Zen's partners, noted Martin Clarke, Head of

Channel Sales. "Our partners want greater access to our data and our analytics," he said. "There's a lot of data in the business but external access to detailed analytics has been limited. Now the partner base is showing big demand for more insights to be presented to CRM systems. This is an interesting dynamic and something we're keen to exploit."

This push for more insights is symptomatic of an industry in a state of permanent flux, and signifies that whoever finds differentiation, by whatever means, is in control. "Our industry has grown accustomed to rapid change but it is increasingly difficult to differentiate against competitors and generate revenue by monetising our offerings," stated Mark Rosson, Managing Director at Connect North. "The smart organisations will embrace analytics as a means of getting closer to customers and partners, both of which are ultimately our most valuable business assets."

The rise of data analytics is a stroke of good fortune for the channel, and a welcome antidote to a number of challenges that is starting to deliver results. Sensing the way the wind is blowing, Haworth showed a determination to lead the industry. "We're investing heavily in analytics," he said. "The capability to analyse data at a granular level, understand individual preferences and drive recurring revenue will increase the value of an organisation. It's about rich data and knowing how to segment it in the right way. The challenge is working out where that value lies, how we use data, what can be charged and where that money comes from. As well as investing in the analytics piece TeleWare is betting heavily on Skype for Business. We see a massive industry shift into the IT world, away from pure comms."

# A strategy for differentiation

A test for all channel companies is to recognise and act on the ever closer relationship between customer service and differentiation. Here, John Murphy, Customer Service Director at Gamma, discusses the primary driving forces propelling his service strategy.

**W**ith service moving up the strategic agenda and businesses hungry for greater differentiation, big investments in research and system upgrades are wholly justifiable. "More companies are waking up to the competitive advantage that good customer service brings," stated Murphy. "It's already high on the agenda for a lot of prospective customers and businesses are thinking more about how they can differentiate themselves from competitors with the service that they provide."

"Customers now expect quicker responses, especially to online channels like email and chat. They also want more of a self-serve experience which puts them in control. Customers in the B2C markets expect to be able to buy, sell and manage products online as standard, and customers are now asking more questions of the B2B markets to provide more automation and richer portals."

Gamma has developed a range of new tools for its portal to help partners provide a more competitive



John Murphy

**"More companies are waking up to the competitive advantage that good customer service brings. Businesses are thinking more about how they can differentiate."**

service. These include fault diagnostics (product health checks and online ticket management), solution deployment (automated pre-port test calls and online numbering tools) and quicker portal journeys.

**Feedback**

"We need to constantly think of ways to evolve our service," added Murphy. "Much of this development process is based on the feedback we get from our channel partners. For

example, another new development is the upcoming launch of the Gamma Academy, an initiative to offer partners online, interactive and bite-sized training across our range of products and services. We are also holding support roadshows in October where our progress will be measured against the previous year's feedback."

A primary objective for Gamma is to be seen as a trusted partner. "By that I mean trusted to manage the risk of service failure or delay," commented Murphy. "We also need to have the right skills and knowledge to support our customers and to understand the different needs of each organisation we deal with. Finally, we want to be straightforward to do business with, which means we keep things simple and think about the effort we place on our customers through every interaction."

"We place equal importance on the support that our teams provide and our portal services. Service is part of our culture and not contained to any one team or department. People across our business are constantly thinking about service and challenging each other to do more."

**BITES FROM THE TABLE**

"We've got to be smart. The best thing we can do is educate our teams to have an intelligent conversation with customers."

**Charles Aylwin, Director, Channel & Public Sector, 8x8**

"Brexit will force change so we need to adapt quickly and focus on the positives."

**Paul Taylor, Sales and Marketing Director, Voiceflex**

"The structural and technological changes in our own sector alongside external influences such as Brexit represent an evolutionary opportunity, not an existential crisis."

**Paul Cunningham, Blue Barn Consulting**



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# Customers on call for tot

In a communications environment growing in complexity it's refreshing to note that the market for conferencing solutions is not only easier to address but also growing faster than ever, according to Konftel's Regional Sales Director Jeff May.

**R**esellers are never happier than when market dynamics converge on a no-brainer product, and according to May the conferencing market is such a gift, driven in particular by mobility, flexibility, all things IP, wireless and UC. "IP platforms and UC clients provide low cost, high quality connectivity," said May. "Wireless solutions support the flexibility and immediacy that the market demands, and together they open up more applications and provide us, the vendors, with ever more opportunities to develop increasingly flexible and seamless solutions. Conferencing really is just an extension of normal communication and meeting behaviour."

These platforms mean that video communication is becoming universal on desktops and mobile devices, enabling remote meetings to become more interactive and widespread because participants can join from literally anywhere and on any comms device. "We need to support and enhance these devices and applications by offering audio solutions that ensure group conferences are as effective as private calls," added May.

Sound quality is the *de facto* consideration over video during a conference, according to 80 per cent of respondents in a survey by

Konftel conducted early this year. "Sound is the basis of every meeting," noted May. "The other elements can be worked around, but if you cannot clearly hear, then the meeting is over. In our survey results only two per cent value video as the most important enabler in remote meetings and six per cent screen sharing."

Meanwhile, hosted and cloud-based services will increasingly present new deployment opportunities, believes May. "At the moment, peripheral products such as conference phones are often purchased as separate items on an ad hoc basis by SMEs, but as hosted solutions penetrate this sector conference phones will also be an obvious add-on to the bundle from day one. Cloud-ready IP conference phones give customers the same seamless zero touch installation process as their other IP devices."

Konftel's strapline, 'Get Together', reflects the ongoing rise of remote meetings in a whole range of environments from the boardroom to the bedroom. There was a time when conferencing was dominated by large boardroom solutions, but today smaller devices are used by SoHo workers, and even personal devices designed especially for people on the move. "Every business will have some conferencing need at some time and many



Jeff May

Much of Konftel's development strategy is shaped by customer feedback and the new Konftel Unite app, which is free, illustrates this approach well. "With the increase in web-based conferencing, customers and resellers report back to us that simply joining the conferences is a major problem, with customers bombarded by pin numbers, access codes, user names and different clients to install," explained May.

"Konftel Unite is a single touch app that links to a user's calendar, sends alerts when meetings are due and in the case of webinars will automatically call the conference number and enter the user's own name and password. This way conference calls start on time, no matter where a customer is or what device they are using. We want all resellers and their customers to use the app and experience simple conferencing."

Konftel is a channel-only firm that addresses all vertical markets, supported by demo units, a 'try and buy' evaluation service and new apps designed to help customers get the best possible conferencing experience. Perhaps the biggest growth sector right now is personal conferencing devices, and Konftel recently introduced the Ego product to meet demand, functioning as a portable battery

## In the conferencing world hearing is believing

have different requirements at the same time, so it is important that we offer a range of solutions that all

provide the same service over potentially different networks and in different environments," added May.



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# al conferencing

powered USB and Bluetooth conference pod that turns any smartphone or tablet into a conference quality device. "The Ego ensures that any VoIP or mobile call can now be held with crystal clear HD audio for one or several people to work hands free and efficiently around it," added May. "The LCD display shows which application is in use, and it connects to the customers' own device which is familiar to them."

According to May this tangible sense of familiarity is driving new solutions for offices and boardrooms. "We know from customer feedback that users want three essentials when it comes to conferencing," said May. "Quality and flexibility are obvious, but ease of use is becoming a critical factor, particularly as more people are using conferencing, many of whom are not regular conference attendees and therefore are unfamiliar with their operation. Ease of use is ensured if people can use the same tools and user interfaces on large group conferences as they can on their own smaller and private calls."

"With more and more individuals using personal conferencing devices we will encourage them to take the same approach in larger meeting rooms and use their own devices to convene calls for bigger groups. As such our portfolio will increasingly allow customers' own devices like smartphones to present the user interface and act as a remote Bluetooth device to a central Konftel conferencing unit."

"Calls will be initiated from the smartphone, contacts can be selected and added

to a call from the phone book and the whole call control is effected from the device. Konftel will have a mix of interfaces for network and device connection so that any mix of call can be convened, be it audio, web or video, and presented to the room accordingly."

The portable nature of modern conferencing units with multiple network and device connections enables resellers to leverage the power of demonstration to the max when selling conferencing solutions, noted May. "Resellers should use them to demonstrate to their customers the superb sound quality that can be achieved," he added. "It is so much easier than referring to PDFs or data sheets, and in the conferencing world, hearing is believing."

#### Instant demos

May is also a great believer in leveraging existing assets and making them better. "In just a few minutes a reseller can visit a customer's site and connect a conference of different people across different networks," he explained. "For example, a Skype For Business call can be set up via a Bluetooth or USB connection to a laptop, and the audio channelled through a wireless unit such as the Konftel 55Wx or 300Wx."

"Any number of participants can join the call and, for example, a second group of callers on the telephone network can be bridged in. Mobile calls can also be bridged into the conference. In minutes a reseller can recreate how many business meetings are taking place in every company and demonstrate how much they can be improved."

The demand drivers in the conferencing market include cost control, reduced time away from the office, increased business efficiency, collaboration for risk sharing and education, immediacy of access to information, and the rise in personal conferencing, all of which will ensure sustained growth. "The market is growing," enthused May. "The desktop conferencing market has witnessed double digit growth every year for the last 20 years, and is forecast to continue growing by all of the analysts for the foreseeable future. The market has grown in times of recession as well as the boom years. More businesses are conferencing than ever before, and more individuals are using conferencing, so demand will continue to increase and proactive resellers can make huge sales."

Conferencing also represents significant attachment and bundling opportunities with other products and services that resellers will already be providing. "In a hosted environment conference phones can be added to a customer's check list like any other device," added May. "If resellers are selling laptops or web cams, then add a product to complete the web-video-audio conferencing capability. With every PBX CCU, include a conference phone and conference pods for different rooms. If reseller's are selling minutes, SIM cards or mobile phones, add a mobile conference phone that offers free inter-SIM conference calls and uses prepaid minutes in their call plans. If reseller's do not act on these opportunities customers will buy from somebody else." ■



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# Transformational times



Dave Stevinson

To say that 2016 has been a milestone year for Entatech UK would be to greatly understate the nature of the key events and developments catalysed by business turnaround champion Dave Stevinson.

In February 2016 IT distributor Entatech UK settled its lengthy legal battle with the liquidators of Enta Group company Changtel and is now solely owned by Stevinson Capital, a business controlled by Entatech Managing Director Stevinson. The settlement was a long running, challenging and complex deal involving

multiple firms of lawyers, and Stevinson ranks the outcome as his best career achievement to date, even bigger than growing GNR from a start-up in his bedroom to a multi-million pound European company within two years.

"The settlement eradicates all uncertainty and has the vital components of affordability

and flexibility, enabling Entatech to go forward with purpose and confidence," he said. "We spent a long time working on our turnaround and transformation plan and have adopted a '4S' strategy to be delivered over four years based on the action words – Stabilise, Structure, Strength and Solutions. We have completed the Stabilisation phase in the first year and are now embarking on the Structure element. Here we have five cornerstones – the people structure, capital structure, data structure, product structure and ultimately the customer structure."

In further structural planning Entatech UK condensed its divisions from nine to four – PC Components & Gaming, Systems & Peripherals, Networking & Connected Home, and Retail & Software. "My vision with Entatech is to sharpen the focus and only compete in areas where we have a significant and demonstrable competence in the eyes of the customer," added Stevinson. "Our vision is where we want to be and our mission is how we are going to get there. There are two areas where we see huge potential – the connected smart home and virtual reality for the PC gamer."

Dabs.com founder David Atherton shares Stevinson's vision and he joined Entatech as Chairman two months ago. Dabs.com was one of the earliest online retailers of IT equipment, growing from scratch to over £200 million revenue per annum. Atherton sold the business to BT in 2006. This key appointment followed the naming of Grant Thornton as auditors for the distributor in April. According to Stevinson the

reputation of Grant Thornton signifies the improved governance and controls he's imposed on the business.

He says the company has come a long way since it was established in 1990 as an Anglo Taiwanese venture. Today, Entatech represents 70 brands in the UK, is 100 per cent trade only and has a base of 3,500 active resellers. Stevinson expects revenues to exceed £80 million this financial year and return to profitability following a period of decisive action that saw the entire board of directors changed. Alongside these developments Entatech has invested in new ERP and data analytics systems.

#### Early promise

Stevinson is well qualified to drive organisational transformations and exhibited strong business and managerial skills early in his career. After graduating he joined the European branch of a Taiwanese IT company as sales executive while waiting to find a career in the City. "My initial plan was to be a stockbroker, but over time the company grew quickly and I became Managing Director, learning all of the skills needed to run a large company in the technology space," he commented.

Fast forward to today and Stevinson's current priority is focused on getting the people structure right. "We need to ensure that we have the right number and quality of people and that we have our aces in their places," he added. "Our challenge and opportunity is to be different from the big four competitors. So we are becoming more relevant to our clients and working smartly in

niche sectors, using digital technology and advanced analytics as differentiators and accelerators.

"Another challenge is the lack of trade credit in our sector. We are addressing this by honing our product portfolio, reducing the cost base and improving efficiencies. These measures are augmented by our use of advanced data analytics across the company."

#### Just a minute with Dave Stevinson...

**Role model:** Elon Musk for his phenomenal work ethic

**What talent do you wish you had?** Perfect hand-eye co-ordination for real tennis, or the ability to time travel

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** PG Wodehouse, Dave Atherton, and my father. They are all fine orators with a good sense of humour

**Your biggest opportunity:** Leveraging our position in the PC gaming sector

**Greatest strength and weakness?** Clarity of thought, tenacity and kindness (I'm told) are my strengths. My greatest weakness is impatience, but I'm working on it

**One example of something you have overcome:** Solving the huge (seemingly impossible) legal case facing Enta

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I won £500 for solving the Rubiks Cube the fastest in a competition

**What possession could you not live without?** A credit card or smartphone

**How do you relax?** Playing rackets and real tennis, and reading a PG Wodehouse book



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# M2M: It's decision time

Decisive and dynamic action should be the channel's only response to the fizzing M2M market, according to Comms365 Managing Director Mike Van Bunnens.

In this time of M2M and IoT expansion it would be foolish for the channel not to play to its traditional strengths of agility and adaptability; and the biggest threat to a reseller's business is to ignore what could be their greatest opportunity for years, believes Van Bunnens. It is clear to him where the future lies. "There is a chance for resellers to grab a share of this market, add value to the existing customer base, increase differentiation while gaining a foothold in a fast moving dynamic sector," he stated. "It's time for resellers to get serious about M2M."

This is no time to be impartial, according to Van Bunnens, who two months ago instilled a bias towards M2M in the Comms365 business following the appointment of two IoT heavyweights, Nick Sacke as Head of IoT and Products and Situl Shah as Head of Business Development, all part of a push to drive IoT solutions via partners.

They bring 45-plus years joint experience including expertise in developing and implementing IoT, M2M, wireless, IT security and managed ICT solutions. The move is a clear sign of the future direction of the business, focused on enhanced connectivity, M2M and cloud solutions.

Decision time is here and there's no place for half-hearted gestures. "What is holding the reseller community back?," asked Van Bunnens. "Why are resellers not leveraging their experience in both mobile telephony and corporate communications to deliver high value M2M deployments? Even those that have dabbled in mobile data, including broadband and Internet services, are typically opting for a turnkey solution and reselling a carrier's bundle with no added value or differentiation. They should step back and consider the opportunities that exist even within their current client base. It will soon become clear that most resellers could rapidly identify mobile data opportunities, from remote monitoring and management to backup."

From smartphone enabled bike locks and talking vending machines, to remote management of water treatment works and CCTV, M2M comms is transforming life for businesses and consumers. Yet to date, few traditional telecoms resellers have addressed this market. Van Bunnens insists that M2M offers a 'fantastic opportunity' to add significant revenue and create a 'compelling and differentiated offer'. "Whether you call it M2M,



Mike Van Bunnens

the Internet of Things, telematics or pervasive Internet, the truth is that the ease, speed and security of the latest generation of mobile data technology is opening up great opportunities for innovative businesses," he said.

#### Gaining traction

M2M now underpins a raft of business applications – from EPOS and ticket machines to CCTV, digital signage and parcel tracking – but the majority of such implementations have been carried out by the main service providers. Few resellers have gained traction in this market despite the opportunity. Perhaps their slow reaction is due to the practical challenges associated with entering this market.

"While M2M offers opportunities not only to add revenue but also to create clear market differentiation, it is not a straightforward transition from mobile voice to mobile data," stated Van

Bunnens. "And the lack of reseller friendly education and support has without doubt constrained M2M market development.

"This is an area that has been dominated by a small numbers of players, primarily the service providers. To gain a share resellers will need to consider an evolution of the business model and some investment in additional resources. Data is certainly more complex than voice. Applications, security, hardware, configuration, support, monitoring and management are all essential components of a successful M2M deployment, and resellers can also benefit from reusing existing skills and capabilities to add value into the marketplace."

Van Bunnens emphasised that it is important for resellers to understand where value can be added and the types of applications or connectivity that can be successfully introduced to a portfolio. "M2M has

been based traditionally around small packets of data and therefore relatively low cost but high volume connectivity," he explained. "How easy would it be to gear up to manage thousands of connections transmitting 1MB or 2MB of data a month and the associated support that follows a large deployment? Or, is the existing model perhaps more suited to providing larger data requirements where the end application includes Internet access, video and other more bandwidth hungry services?"

Resellers can continue to ignore M2M or simply opt for the basic reselling of a carrier's turnkey solution. But for those that want to actively embrace this rapidly developing market and gain some clear differentiation, there are a few key steps to take. Firstly, understand the opportunities. "This requires a partner with a demonstrable track record across the board in M2M/IoT deployments, from fixed IP SIMs to wind turbines, and one that can highlight potential pitfalls and wider opportunities within a deployment," stated Van Bunnens. "Also, remember that M2M requires a multi-year commitment from both sides including daily support. After all, this type of service is long-term, not just a quick fad that can be started and stopped at will.

"M2M will continue to evolve at pace and the next wave will see applications and security become prominent factors for differentiation. Right now, the market is dominated by a few companies, many of which are not always providing the depth of service required." ■



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# Was this an intelligent



MARK RIDDELL  
ABZORB

“ This news is a long time overdue and very welcome, however all of us who have suffered the pain and frustrations of dealing with BT Openreach including BT Wholesale, will understand this is only one small step. Having greater access to the infrastructure is one thing, while providing the resource, the management and the accountability is key to the rose tinted world we seek. The carriers will have to provide the capable engineering resource and manage accordingly. For so long contractors for Openreach have been a law unto themselves and this a key area that has to be corrected as it inflicts pain and frustration on all parties.



ADRIAN BARNARD  
TECH ENTREPRENEUR

“ I welcome Ofcom’s decision and hope for positive results within a year. Forcing Openreach into greater separation along with broader industry input is at least a pragmatic and sensible first step. So congratulations to Sharon White and Ofcom. That said, many will still feel that BT has ‘dodged a bullet’. Given BT’s recent vocal support of the Government’s Remain position and it’s intensive lobbying for the status quo perhaps we can all now see how it’s defended itself against more radical action.



**W** eek after week and at most of the networking events we host, we consistently get moans and groans about the service Openreach provides to comms providers trying to do the best for their customers. The frustrations are understandable, but on the flip side of the coin Openreach is a massive engineering organisation with 30,000 employees covering the length and breadth of the UK and is akin to the NHS: we all moan about it but what if it suddenly wasn’t there?

At the same time, it’s worth remembering that maintaining the country’s national telecoms network is a complex job and extreme weather (e.g. flooding, wind, snow etc.) can often cause significant disruption. Similarly, any operator that covers the whole country is bound to attract quite a few gripes when its carrying out 29,000 field visits a day!

While some of our contributors see Ofcom’s decision not to liberate Openreach as a massive lost opportunity, others



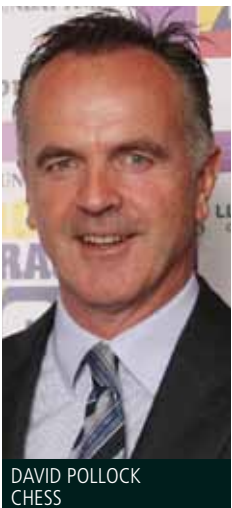
FRASER FERGUSON  
KUBE NETWORKS

“ From the compliance and legal responsibility angle, we shouldn’t underrate the impact the reforms will have. BT is now under serious pressure on three fronts, customer experience for providers, investment focus on network enhancement and innovation. These three aspects will become the responsibility of new directors and once a board with personal responsibilities is in place for any company they tend to feel the weight of expectation. Secondly, it will be much harder for BT to disguise just how much it is putting in and taking out of Openreach and thirdly it will be able to go to market as a ‘utility’ to raise and offer returns to investors on a more appropriate basis.



BOB FALCONER  
GAMMA

“ Generally, I see this as a step in the right direction and would make any subsequent full separation somewhat simpler. The devil is in the implementation plan and the detail on many areas including such issues as Openreach branding. Business and consumer customers don’t appreciate and are probably not interested in the subtlety of all this and still perceive advantages in buying it all from BT when an Openreach van rolls up anyway.



DAVID POLLOCK  
CHES

“ Once again Ofcom have missed the opportunity to fast track the UK economy. Yes, they’ve laid down numerous markers most of which BT won’t agree to and they have failed to force investment in the broadband infrastructure. The UK falls well short in the league table of high speed economies and will not be rising quickly. All because they can’t agree a deal on the cost of historic pensions. - how incredibly short-sighted. Post Brexit we could have done with a boost to the economy with investment in our infrastructure, sadly we haven’t got it. This was not a great decision for our industry or our country. Opportunity missed.



CHARLES DAVIS  
SAS

“ As a £20bn behemoth, BT is too large for Openreach to sit within and reach its full potential. In reality how much of Openreach is subsidising other BT Group businesses and limiting UK carrier competition? Of course there are complex issues for Openreach to resolve in a BT-exit such as who to manage the BT pension fund, but just like Brexit workable solutions can be found. A fundamental mind-set change is required by Openreach to show that the carrier industry should be enabling UK business large and small, and not be seen as the limiting factor. This can only come about by external pressure and regulation.



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# move or another fudge?



ANDREW DICKENSON  
JOLA

“Ofcom should be applauded for removing the influence of BT Group which has so far kept Openreach’s fibre roll-out away from business areas in order to protect their legacy leased line base. However, Openreach will still have a virtual monopoly on the local loop and it is monopolistic inefficiencies that have made for a non-responsive organisation with a very poor delivery record.”  
Ofcom penalties will introduce artificial accountability but real competition is the longer term solution and infrastructure must be made available to other operators at a comparable cost.



CHRIS GOODMAN  
FOCUS GROUP

“Call me a sceptic but until we see what the consequences to Openreach would be for failing to meet Ofcom’s targets, we won’t know whether the legislation has any teeth. While service levels and response times from Openreach ‘must’ improve, I expect that any forced requirement imposed by Ofcom will just lead to an increase in the wholesale costs charged to resellers, forcing up the cost to the consumer. A control preventing this would be greatly welcomed. They say ‘an Openreach that works for everyone’; let’s hope that ‘everyone’ includes the reseller community who suffer equally while entrenched between Openreach shortcomings and Ofcom regulation.”



believe the regulator has gone farther than they ever believed they would in enforcing a spin off within the BT Group

Telecoms analysts maintain that it was never likely Ofcom would go the whole way. It would seem that Ofcom’s determined and highly driven CEO Sharon White has taken the path of least resistance in pushing for better broadband service across the UK. BT rivals say she has been too lenient and indeed the Federation of Communications Services which represents the independent telecoms sector, has pulled together industry giants Vodafone, Sky and TalkTalk to push for stronger Government action and fight what they see as a diluted option (see page 6).



DAVID ALLDRITT  
HIGHNET

“We’re pleased that Ofcom recognises the extent of the problems that CPs face with Openreach. However, the proposed solution is undoubtedly a compromise between BT Group’s desire to maintain the status quo (whilst making their usual platitudes and promises about improvement) and the need for full structural separation. The latter would not be without difficulty but it is possible, and the ‘10-Point Plan’ put forward by the largest possible consortium of Openreach customers provides some clear proposals backed up by careful legal research. We would like to see full structural separation and the change in culture and corporate objectives that only this action can deliver.”



SHAHRAM BAGHERZADEH  
LOOP VOICE & DATA

“I absolutely agree with separating the Openreach name from BT Group but I’m not sure how this would work in practice and at what cost! The main question is by doing this will it help to reduce the install time for the lines or ADSL/fibre rather than waiting nearly four weeks and having a faster repair time (SLA) for ADSL/Fibre and lines? Otherwise we will be complicating things too much. What would happen next if Ofcom separates Openreach from the BT Group and they don’t achieve what Ofcom was hoping?”



The bottom line is that post the Brexit vote a slowdown is on the cards and getting the nation better connected could create the opportunities necessary to prevent full blow recession. Let’s hope a ‘semi-independent’ Openreach board will heed the calls to get things done.



NEIL BARRALL  
TELECOMS WORLD

“For customer facing companies, like ours, that survive on their ability to deliver an expected quality of service, this is great news. Ofcom’s planned redefinition of Openreach is a step towards a truly unbiased entity whose core focus is the development of the UK’s infrastructure, opening the door to innovation and progression. This levels the playing field allowing SME’s to compete fairly with BT, resulting in a boost to the UK economy. Competition is a catalyst for progression, opening up the market will help drive investment in infrastructure as providers compete to deliver a better of quality of service. BT’s degree of separation from Openreach can only be a positive for the industry.”



MARK SAUNDERS  
NINE GROUP

“The reaction to Ofcom’s proposals oscillates between pragmatism or just another fudge – it actually strikes me as avoidance and a missed opportunity. Yes, the full separation route would unleash complex issues around pension liabilities and ownership of property, which may slow down implementation, but it could still be done. The weight of public and business opinion has created the momentum for a more radical change, so our role is to shout loudly and seize the moment. Ofcom may have noted that its proposals align in many cases with the 10 Point Plan drawn up by industry, but they are not as strong or clear as I would like.”



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# Entanet lands COO



Paul Diamond

FORMER RAF squadron leader Paul Diamond has joined Entanet as Chief Operating Officer with a remit to drive efficiencies and quality assurance. Diamond said: "Having celebrated its 20th year in business earlier in 2016, Entanet is now looking to achieve significant financial growth and operational maturity. We have a great team in place and I'm excited to have been given the opportunity to help Entanet embrace continuous improvement, deliver more value to its channel partners and achieve its full potential."

Entanet's Chief Executive Elsa Chen added: "Entanet is now at a key stage in its evolution as a business, and future proofing our organisational strength is critical to fulfilling our long-term strategic ambitions. We see some exciting prospects ahead and Paul's experience in driving operational development in the hi-tech sector brings renewed energy and momentum to Entanet."

Diamond spent 19 years as a Communications Engineering Officer with the RAF before joining Airbus in 2001. Prior to joining Entanet he was VP at Rapiscan Systems, a global supplier of security inspection solutions. Diamond played a key role in driving annual revenues from \$46 million to \$200 million in under three years.

# Rose set for MS CEO job

CINDY Rose has joined Microsoft UK and will take over UK leadership as CEO from Michel Van der Bel on November 1st. Van der Bel will move into a new role. Rose joins from Vodafone UK where she was Managing Director of the Consumer Division. She will be responsible for all of Microsoft's product, service and support offerings across the UK.

Jean-Philippe Courtois, President of Microsoft International, said: "Cindy brings a real strength in driving complex, customer-focused businesses and a deep understanding of the digital space."

Rose's previous roles include Executive Director for Digital Entertainment at Virgin Media and Senior VP and Managing Director, EMEA, at Disney Interactive Media Group. She said: "I'm excited by the possibilities of our mission to empower every person and organisation on the planet to achieve more, and I look forward to working closely with our customers, partners and employees to do just that."



Cindy Rose

## Also on the move...



Enda Kenneally

MAGNETIC North has appointed Enda Kenneally as VP of Sales and Business Development. Her past roles include UK MD of Mitel and most recently she was responsible for Avaya's global BT partnership. David Cottingham,

Senior VP, West Corporation, said: "This is an exciting time for Magnetic North. The market opportunity for our cloud-based platform is huge and the timing couldn't be better to welcome Enda to the team. She is a seasoned player and well respected individual with a track record of success. I have no doubt she will help to drive further success for the business."

VIRTUAL1'S David Marchment has been appointed to the newly created Jeopardy Management role. "This is an important element when coordinating the delivery of simultaneous projects and larger scale solutions," said Marchment. "The delivery may require a pool of resources from the wholesale provider, partner and end customer across the scope of works, order management and install. Jeopardy management enables the provisioning team to concentrate on fluid projects, maintaining volume and revenue."



David Marchment

Tom O'Hagan, CEO, said: "David will provide the strategy and leadership we need to streamline our WIP pipeline and push through projects."

# Setterfield in shift to Akixi



Kay Setterfield

KAY Setterfield has joined Akixi as Operations Manager responsible for overseeing the firm's Crawley office including administration functions, HR and finance. She brings eight years comms

industry experience in building sales support teams plus operational and finance roles.

She said: "My experience includes putting processes in place for working with SIP providers such as Focus and Gamma, and managed services with Calyx (now Redcentric Solutions)."

Managing Director Bart Delgado added: "Kay has a proven track record of strengthening and improving internal processes and we look forward to the new processes she will put in place at Akixi."

ESSEX-based Frontier Voice and Data has named Jason Brant as incoming Sales Director. Brant was previously a master locksmith until he decided to turn the key on his comms sales potential in 2010, embarking on a career that saw him become an expert in the mobile sector as a Vodafone One Net B2B specialist. Peter Southgate, Managing Director, said: "Jason has proven himself to be an excellent sales person and we hope he can transfer that success to our company."

# Top exec hired by Ultracomms

INCOMING Ultracomms CEO Derwyn Jones intends to leverage his 25 years industry experience to quickly raise the company's profile as an agent of tech-driven business transformation. "We want more organisations to be aware of how Ultracomms can help them achieve improvements in productivity and learn how the right choice of technology can have a positive impact on both customer and employee experience, as well as optimising costs and remaining compliant with all the key industry regulators," he stated.

Prior to joining Ultracomms Jones held a variety of non-executive, board advisory and C-level roles with blue chip organisations. Ultracomms Chairman Robert Bates added: "Derwyn brings a wealth of experience in the contact centre industry and a proven strategic background that will help us continue to grow the business and deliver a roadmap of features and services for clients."



Derwyn Jones

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