



Resetting core values in times of disruption p22

Realising social value through talent strategies p26



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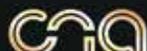


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This month's movers and shakers



CityFibre raises new mega-fund

CITYFIBRE has secured a capital raise of £1.125bn, the largest for a full fibre deployment in the UK. The deal enables the trail blazing altnet to roll out to a third of the UK market by 2025.

SPECIAL REPORT

CityFibre's record capital raise signals a strengthening commitment from global investors to catalyse the roll out of digital infrastructure in the UK. It also highlights how investment behind the UK's Digital Britain campaign is driving greater competition in the market.

"This capital raise is proof of the benefits of a truly competitive infrastructure market," commented CEO Greg Mesch.

"If nurtured and protected, infrastructure competition at scale will continue to unleash huge investment from the private sector and catalyse investment from incumbent operators.

"This new capital not only underpins our roll out to up to eight million homes across 285 cities, towns and villages, it also enables our participation in the Government's Project Gigabit programme to extend our infrastructure to rural areas and ensure no one is left behind.

"Ultimately, it is residents, businesses and the UK economy that stand to benefit with competition driving what has become the fastest roll out of full fibre in Europe."

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said: "The Government is committed to making high speed broadband available for every part of the UK. This investment will turbocharge the full fibre roll out, revolutionise peoples' lives and generate economic benefits, jobs and growth."



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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

IT IS QUITE ironic that the comms sector, which is relatively long in the tooth, could still be described as being early stage regarding many current offerings like fibre, cloud, UCaaS and CCaaS. Such is the fast evolving nature of technology

and industry developments, which together with other determinants impinging our space like sustainability and climate change create a right old melting pot. Indeed, the still waters of the PBX model are a distant memory, pushed further back in time by the Covid-19 pandemic.

That we have sped-read through many new chapters on industry progression was underscored by CityFibre's record breaking £1.125 billion capital raise last month which propelled the alternative network operator and the UK into another phase of digital expansion in a deal endorsed by Prime Minister Boris Johnson himself.

This mega investment comes at a time when the industry seems to be far more 2025-aware and when end users are far more tech and cloud aware. Indeed, such an input of funding has greased the wheels of the UK's digital transformation campaign and tugged closer a time when life may be more settled, solutions more defined and dare I say it, we will be approaching a state of maturity, even on 5G opportunities.

Where the next big disruptions will come from could involve familiar old world battles between different maturing technologies that deliver similar results. Therein might lie future stimuli to competitive growth.

A time of market stability and significant consolidation is on the horizon, but for now the race is on led in large part by trail blazing fibre providers.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

• Founded in 2014 digital transformation specialist AND Digital has expanded rapidly fuelled in large part by Employee Value Propositions (EVPs) that Chief of Consulting Stephen Paterson says will power the business towards tenfold growth by 2025. See page 28

Air-IT snares double deals

AUGUST Equity-backed Air IT's run of M&A deals spearheaded by CEO John Whitty continues unabated with the acquisitions of Reading-based MFG UK and Uttoxeter located Infinity IT Solutions. The financials of the deals – Air IT's seventh and eighth transactions – remain undisclosed.

The move boosts Air IT's headcount to 270 and strengthens its presence in the south east and midlands.

"We have found two more teams to join the Air IT Group, allowing us to expand our footprint and introduce skillful likeminded colleagues," stated Whitty. "MFG and Infinity are similar to us in terms of their service maturity, product set, client type and culture.

"Our aim is to be the go-to MSP and MSSP for SMEs across the UK delivering a local service on a national scale."

MFG MD Mark Flinders added: "Joining the Air IT Group helps us in several ways: Our management team can grow further, our people will have more support and opportunities to extend their skills and experience, and our clients will benefit from the growing services and technologies that



John Whitty

form part of the new digital way of working."

Infinity Chief Commercial Officer Simon McAlpine stated: "Our range of IT, security and communications solutions are similar to those delivered by Air IT. We can now expand these services with a deeper level of experience."

Air IT was established in Nottingham in 2005 and delivers managed IT and communication services including managed IT support, cyber security, business intelligence services, business continuity and cloud digital transformation.

In January 2020 August Equity invested in the business and appointed industry veteran Ian Brown as Chairman and buy-and-build leader Whitty to consolidate the IT MSP sector addressing SMEs.

NEWS ROUNDUP

CLYDESDALE Bank-backed MSP Prime Networks has pocketed Bournemouth-based G3 Solutions in a deal that extends Prime Networks' geographical reach and bolsters its engineering resource and client portfolio. MD Mark Simons said: "This is our third acquisition in recent years. We now have over 35 staff and service more than 300 SMEs and mid-market clients. With commitment from Clydesdale Bank to fund future strategic acquisitions, the company will look to grow organically and with more bolt-on MSPs."

BABBLE'S buy-and-build campaign continues apace with the acquisition of 8020. The deal adds scale and delivers a Scottish presence. More transactions are pipelined for 2021. 8020 was founded in Dumfries in 2005 and provides mobile, connectivity and IT services to over 750 customers across Scotland and the north of England. Babble has over 25,000 UCaaS, 34,000 mobile and 4,000 CCaaS users, alongside an expanding cyber, IT and MSP customer base. CEO Matthew Parker said: "This deal supports our drive to acquire high quality revenue tech businesses that will add significant value to Babble."



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NEWS ROUNDUP

COMPUTACENTER has reported a 29% rise in H1 2021 profits with UK revenues up by 9.4%. CEO Mike Norris said: "Most of our customers have returned to business as normal after the pandemic and Covid-19 is now having very little impact on our business. However, the ongoing supply shortages in the industry has risen to the top of our challenges. While we look forward to the supply chain issues being behind us, we are not expecting this until well into 2022."

BT HAS set a new 2030 net zero target for its own operations and a 2040 net zero target for its supply chain and customer emissions. Since 2016 BT has reduced the carbon emissions intensity of its operations by 57% and lowered supply chain emissions by 19%. In 2020 the company completed the switch to 100% renewable electricity worldwide and pledged to transition the majority of its 33,000 strong commercial fleet to electric or zero carbon emission vehicles by 2030. Andy Wales, Chief Digital Impact & Sustainability Officer, said: "As the world looks to recover from the pandemic we must remember that the global climate emergency hasn't gone away."

Small firms get leg up to digital future



Gavin Jones

BT WHOLESALE'S launch of WHC Express and Broadband One enables partners to target one-to-ten employee firms with a digital phone line and ultrafast full fibre broadband speeds.

"With an additional two million people working from home and remotely in the past 18 months, businesses need access to more flexible technology as they connect with their customers and colleagues when on the move," said Channel Sales Director Gavin Jones.

"With WHC Express, channel partners can offer a new digital phone line to small business customers that delivers digital calls over a broadband network, and replaces the analogue phone

services which will be retired by 2025."

WHC Express allows users to make and receive calls on the same number across fixed and mobile devices with the same call features such as voicemail, call divert, call transfer and call hold. The voice service is accessed, delivered and managed via an online portal.

Options in the Broadband One proposition include FTTP and SoGEA. Installations, upgrades and orders are managed via a self-service portal.

"When we talk about a digital future it's tempting to think

of it as a far-off date," added Jones. "But the reality is that it's happening now.

"Businesses of every size need to find a new way to connect when analogue lines are phased out by 2025, and yet there's still a staggering number of small businesses in the UK that are still using legacy lines.

"With our digital capabilities like BT WHC Express and Broadband One, channel partners can now offer their small business customers a voice and broadband combination to help them prepare for an all-IP world well ahead of that deadline."

NEWS ROUNDUP

RAZORBLUE'S Business Direction Manager Louise Gilbey, who joined the firm in May, has called on females to enter the ICT sector and help equalise the gender disparity. "The technology sector is largely male oriented, with women making up just 16% of the workforce," she commented. "To see a greater uptake of roles for females women must ignore perceived obstacles and follow their passion. If you are at the beginning of your tech journey, get experience and utilise contacts. It is a great sector that will continue to grow. So put yourself out there, work hard and ask for help when you need it. Remember that anything is possible."

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Utilize snaps up Sage firm



Guy Hocking

ESSEX-based Sage Business and Development Partner M2M Technology has been acquired by Utilize in a deal that boosts the MSP's revenues to over £19m, adds new capabilities and advances its ambition to become a regional leader.

Utilize MD Guy Hocking said: "This acquisition bolsters our team with specialism in the deployment of Sage services. The development team focuses on modifying and improving existing Sage functionality."

Utilize founder Warren Davies added: "Utilize has made six acquisitions – all have

increased bottom line profit and cash reserves within the first year of integration. Equally as important, all have built upon our teams and this acquisition is no different. It puts us up there as one of the largest Sage partners in the south with our vision to become the largest."

Rob Hardy, who is MD of M2M, commented: "We feel that the knowledge and new skill sets that M2M brings to the table through technologies such as Sage 200, Sicon, Draycir, Power Platform and Power BI, provide a combination that can really transform a company."

NEWS ROUNDUP

ASIDE from a leadership change the appointment of James Arnold-Roberts as Voiceflex CEO also signals a new phase of growth that includes potential acquisitions. He brings over 20 years experience in global telecoms and joined Voiceflex from FluidOne where he was Chief Revenue Officer. Prior roles include Group MD at Conn3ct and CEO of G3 Comms. Voiceflex Sales & Marketing Director Paul Taylor said: "The combination of James' experience and drive makes him an ideal fit." Arnold-Roberts added: "Voiceflex is well established and its applications present opportunities in a rapidly evolving market space. I am excited by the prospect of leading Voiceflex into a period of accelerated growth, both organically and acquisitively."



James Arnold-Roberts

Arrow takes Aimes to drive cloud and data centre play

ARROW Business Communications' presence in the public sector received a boost following its acquisition of Aimes Management Services. The deal beefs up Arrow's data centre and cloud services and is its third transaction this year.

Aimes has a particular focus on health, local government and social housing, providing Trustworthy Research Environments (TRE) for health and life sciences customers. All of Aimes' directors and employees remain in situ.

"The inclusion of a range of data centre and cloud services



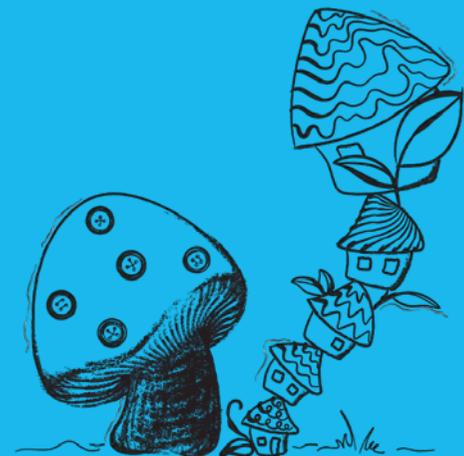
Richard Burke

adds significant value to the wider Arrow group," said CEO Richard Burke. "It supports our public sector and enterprise cus-

tomers and strengthens our portfolio in providing a broad range of collaboration, connectivity, core and cyber services."



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NEWS ROUNDUP

JOLA'S launch of intelligent 5G routers to the channel supports global 5G, 4G and 3G bands in one box, managed within a channel portal providing a choice of 5G SIM options. "Our new intelligent 5G routers have the e-Mark, meaning partners can create superfast smart solutions in buses, trains and coaches," said CTO Adrian Sunderland. "Primary and failover solutions can be designed for digital signage and POS systems in shops, car parks and offices. Our partners are winning more bids in both 5G enabled and 4G enabled areas as they are saving customers thousands on site surveys and engineers."

K3 BUSINESS Technology Group has sold its loss making Sage services business for £1.68m to Pinnacle Computing. K3 Chairman Tom Crawford said: "Following this transaction and other disposals over the last two years the group is more streamlined, market focused and strategically better positioned." James Spencer, MD of Pinnacle, added: "The Sage business will transition smoothly into our operations, benefiting from our scale and depth of focus, and bolstering our operations and delivery within Sage markets."

5G's 'critical' says Gamma



Andrew Robinson

5G IS SET to become one of the channel's biggest market disrupters, driving innovation and new revenue opportunities for partners based on 'high-power' services. Another key message from Gamma's first post-lockdown roadshow is that it will fully leverage its close relationship with 5G trailblazer Three to put partners squarely on the mobile revolution front line.

At the London leg of its 'fully live' 2021 partner roadshow (staged at Odeon BFI Imax in Waterloo, London), Andrew Robinson, Head of UCaaS Practice at Gamma, said: "5G will become a mission critical game changer and will be key for emerging technologies and apps.

"5G reliant technology will bring revenue opportunities for

Gamma partners through IoT, eSim and routers."

Over the course of the event Gamma speakers focused on other fast emerging opportunities it can help partners address across the entire business spectrum. These included Microsoft Teams, UCaaS, Cloud Communications, remote working and the looming PSTN switch off, which the company has addressed with its PhoneLine+ solution.

Concluding the event, guest speaker Dr Kevin Fong, who leads Major Incident Planning at UCL Hospitals, stressed that to survive mission critical situations leaders must 'commit early, delegate authority, defer to expertise, innovate, transform and iterate'.

See page 30

Fibre firm set for Q4 scaling up

FREEDOM Fibre is on track for a Q4 scale up to deliver 50,000 homes by mid-2022 following a second round of equity injection, with more growth funding anticipated from mid-2022 onwards, said the firm.

The altnet, which was founded in March 2021, expects to exit the year with £30m of capital and is currently delivering ultrafast broadband to an initial build of 5,000 homes in Culcheth, Cheshire.

A target to give full fibre access to 12,000 homes in Culcheth and other north west areas is on track for the end of this year.

The company has signed a wholesale agreement with TalkTalk to take its fibre optic connections and will be seeking to add other ISPs as it scales.

Freedom Fibre was founded by Neil McArthur, who has 30 years experience in the comms sector and founded Opal Telecom which led to the creation of TalkTalk Telecom.

"Freedom Fibre believes full fibre should be a right, accessible to all and not a privilege," stated McArthur.

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Connexin moves on Hull area



Furqan Alamgir

HULL'S fibre broadband market is set to get more competitive following Connexin's roll out of an alternative network.

It will be the first in the UK to be built over an existing full fibre network as the current infrastructure isn't shared.

Furqan Alamgir, CEO of Connexin, said: "The people of Hull and East Riding have had no real say on who provides their broadband and what network they want to use.

"We have decided to build an independent alternative full fibre network for the region.

"Our goal is to create new jobs locally, drive competition to improve services and to help grow and attract new and existing businesses as well as investment into the region."

The network is being built by SCD Group with phase one completion due by the end of the year. Connexin recently secured over £80m in funding from Whitehelm Capital.

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Convergence buys LinchPin

Free comms from Barclay

NEWS ROUNDUP



Danny Masters

CONVERGENCE Group has added connectivity supplier LinchPin to its acquisition tally, adding a network connectivity portfolio and access to its own UK network.

The deal follows the purchase of LAN3 in July which boosted revenues by over 15%.

LinchPin was a reseller for Convergence Group for over a decade and provides WAN and connectivity solutions with a focus on public services, health-care, education, local authority and manufacturing customers.

Convergence Group runs its own business-only network.

“The acquisition cements our commitment to expanding the business and offering our capabilities to new customers,” said MD Danny Masters.

“Through this acquisition we are building our customer base and expanding across several target sectors including health-care and higher education.”

Convergence Group provides connectivity services to public and private sector organisations and supports circa 800,000 business user connections.

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A £250,000 COMMS giveaway by Belfast firm Barclay Communications will be a welcome boost to NI businesses hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Barclay Backing Business Grant is targeted at NI companies that suffered a downturn as a result of the pandemic.

The scheme will provide free telecoms solutions for 12 months to successful applicants with no purchase necessary and zero obligation to continue with a contract when the period ends. The packages include fixed business landlines, broadband and VoIP services.

“Over the past 12 months we have seen our most successful period in our 25 year history, but we are aware that many other businesses experienced the opposite,” stated founder and MD Britt Megahey.

“Those businesses, especially when furlough ends and bounce back loans have to be repaid, will need every penny they have to thrive and invest in their business wisely.

“To help some of those in that challenging position we are offering to support their communication needs as they reconnect and resume business. It’s important that businesses



Britt Megahey

support each other as much as possible at this time.”

Barclay Group registered its most successful year in 2020 with a turnover in excess of £24m, up £8m (33%) on 2019.

OF THE five award categories Gamma was shortlisted for in the Carrier Community Global Awards 2021 (2nd September, Berlin) it walked away with the Best Innovative MVNO Operator of the Year and the Euro-Asia Regional Operator of the Year gongs. Account Manager Jack Graham represented Gamma’s Cloud and Infrastructure team with colleagues watching events unfold via video link. The CC Global Awards recognise innovations and achievements among telecom wholesale operators around the world. Mills enthused: “To have won two awards on the first time of entering is a real honour.”



IN A BID to tidy up its home town staff at tech provider ITVET hosted a litter pick on 4th September. The clean up operation in Bishop’s Stortford filled 12 rubbish bags en route from the firm’s head office on London Road to the train station, bus interchange, main high street and Sworder’s Field. MD Richard Fountain said: “After positive feedback from the local community we are looking forward to holding regular litter picks.” The company also supports local charities, provides the town with free public Wi-Fi and is organising Stortford Heroes – Party in the Park to be held on 23rd July 2022.







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NEWS ROUNDUP

THE Scottish Government has kicked off a campaign to bring full fibre to tens of thousands of island homes as part of its £284m Reaching 100% programme. More than 220km of subsea cables will connect 15 more islands across Argyll and Bute, Highlands, Shetland and Orkney. Chair of Scotland's Openreach Board Katie Milligan said: "As delivery partner we're designing a network that maxes full fibre for the north of Scotland. Residents will see a huge difference for life and work generally, but future proof connectivity will also boost fragile rural economies and address sustainability issues like depopulation."

AWS Premier Consulting Partner HeleCloud has been snapped up by SoftwareONE. The deal boosts SoftwareONE's AWS capabilities in the EMEA region. Dob Todorov, CEO and co-founder of HeleCloud, commented: "SoftwareONE gives us the opportunity to operate at scale. We will be able to amplify our capabilities and help a broader number of customers with their AWS-cloud adoption." HeleCloud's leadership team and employees will integrate into SoftwareONE's AWS practice.

Microtech MD opts for staff ownership

MICROTECH Group MD Chris McMail is basing the Ayrshire-based business's long-term future on employee ownership rather than entertain the multimillion pound offers made for his organisation.

Offers from international companies were seeking to relocate operations but McMail did not want to uproot the business after more than 30 years of operation in Scotland.

The Employee Ownership Trust (EOT) enabled Microtech to become a majority employee-owned company which meant McMail could keep the firm in Kilmarnock.

The IT services specialist, which supports NHS Scotland and services blue chip clients, worked with Ownership Associates to transfer 74% of the business' shares to an EOT. McMail retains a minority shareholding and remains MD.

The deal valued the business at circa £15m based on annual turnover of £5m in 2021. The firm has 70 employees.

"This is a great business with talented loyal people," stated McMail. "My prime consideration was that any action taken would not compromise them in any way nor disrupt the service



Chris McMail

we deliver to our clients. After making the initial decision to explore options for the future I received various competitive purchase offers.

"It soon became apparent that any sale to a third party would result in drastic changes to the company operations, including potential relocation and possible job losses.

"When the proposal of transitioning to an EOT was suggested, I knew this was the best way to secure the company's position in Ayrshire."

Ownership Associates founder Carole Leslie commented: "Microtech employees

now have reassurance that the company's long-term future is secured. Not only does the EOT protect the staff, but it will allow them to shape the future of this company.

"We are seeing more and more privately owned businesses opting to go down the employee ownership route."

The employee ownership trust was introduced in the Finance Act of 2014 to encourage companies to consider a sale to employees as a feasible succession solution.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

CRAYON has secured a minority stake in Bath-based Microsoft partner Cloud Direct following a £3m investment. Cloud Direct generates circa £20m revenue and has a headcount of 165. The deal also gives Crayon the option to invest in a majority ownership. Crayon CEO Melissa Mulholland said: "Initially, this agreement will largely focus on operations in the UK where most of Cloud Direct's customers are located. However, it can easily scale to customers worldwide as it has delivered more than 4,000 cloud migrations."

CUMBRIA-based tech business Miller Waite's acquisition by Intec Group boosts the Manchester headquartered independent consultancy's revenues to over £12m. The deal is Intec's eighth acquisition and adds mid-to-large enterprise customers and a software development capability including bespoke ERP systems. Miller Waite's founder David Miller will step away from operational issues and remain as a NED. Intec Group Chairman and CEO Simon Howitt commented: "We have a high number of possible acquisition prospects at developed stages and we plan to go into 2022 with projected revenues in excess of £30m."

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With the traditional phone network fast approaching 'end-of-life', Vodafone Business Partners understand that voice services in the UK are undergoing fundamental changes. Openreach has confirmed that the switch off of BT traditional voice services is planned for 2025, with no support for the ISDN or PTSN phonelines that are relied upon by many businesses to make and receive calls.*

We're already working closely with our Partners – facilitating innovative, scalable solutions to help their customers stay one step ahead of this challenging technological shift.

Small to medium enterprises (SMEs) still using fixed services will need to decide what's next for their organisation and how best to make the move to IP voice options. Migrating sooner rather than later can provide a quick win – delivering compelling benefits, fast.

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Vodafone Evolved Voice over Public Internet is our range of SIP trunking services, supported by our award-winning network. It turns physical phone lines into virtual lines using an internet connection – with a business grade SIP solution that makes more possible. It makes it easy for your customers to modernise business calling and make the move to IP voice.

Vodafone offers a great value SIP solution that delivers compelling cost benefits, while supporting high quality calls.

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SIP trunks can offer savings of as much as 50% versus traditional phone services. That means that the sooner your customers make the switch away traditional fixed lines to a SIP trunk solution, the greater their cost saving.

They'll wave goodbye to expensive landlines and ISDN lines, and reduce costly call forwarding costs with a service built for businesses who just need things to work. Inclusive calls to UK landlines and UK mobiles via their phone system means less bill shock and more good reasons to keep talking.

If you're working to build a better business and take advantage of this new frontier in connectivity, get in touch today and speak to our Partner team.:

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A scalable calling solution for SMEs

SIP connections give your customers far more flexibility to adapt and scale in response to changing business demands. As a Partner you'll be able to quickly and simply provision new virtual lines, with an ultra-scalable solution that can deliver up to 2,000 channels per SIP trunk to meet the needs of even your largest customers.

Once customers have made the move to SIP, it's easy to deploy cloud-based Unified Comms solutions to streamline communications and support new ways of working and collaboration.

Delivering a seamless SIP experience

We know how important it is for SMEs to ensure business continuity, that's why we offer end-to-end failover to keep your customers up and running. And should the worst happen, calls can be quickly diverted to a nominated number with our disaster recovery service.

Vodafone Evolved Voice over Public Internet is a worry-free solution, with high level encryption options and proactive fraud monitoring that's engineered for business and built to perform with maximum reliability.

Transforming the future of business calls

Our best-value SIP trunking solution is designed to maximise margin potential for our Partners. We offer clear, competitive pricing bands that reward volume and loyalty – and there are no activation charges as standard for all SIP channels. You'll even find a comprehensive set of resources available on our Partner Hub to help you sell and market SIP.

The Vodafone Business Portal puts our Partners in complete control: ordering is quick, easy and secure – and you can track and manage orders online and add new capacity and services whenever needed. All the expert support you need from our Customer Value Management team is just a phone call away, and we can work collaboratively with your team to identify and target potential SIP prospects.

Unlocking the value of innovation

Our Partners benefit from Vodafone's global investment in innovation across all communication technologies. From IoT, to 5G mobile and fixed connectivity, we're consistently investing in our product roadmap to bring you and your customers new features and capabilities.

By choosing Evolved Voice over Public Internet with Vodafone, you're supported in offering our extensive next-gen technology communications portfolio that can combine with SIP to create bespoke bundles. With custom solution bundles, you can sell more best-in-class services to your customers and maximise sales revenue for your business.



'Vodafone's SIP over Public Internet was developed with our channel partners. The solution lets businesses use their phone system to make and receive calls via their internet connection. This significantly reduces business telephony costs, while offering new levels of flexibility and scalability.'

Kathy Quashie
Head of Indirect Partnerships, Vodafone

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NEWS ROUNDUP

THE addition of 100 new roles over the coming year will spur Wessex Internet's full fibre roll out in Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire. The altnet currently employs around 110, up from 61 in August last year, and plans to have a team of over 200 within six months. The company recently won a three year deal to connect over 3,600 rural homes and businesses in south Somerset, and a contract to deliver full fibre to community buildings from Blandford to Sherborne by March 2022. MD Hector Gibson Fleming said: "Now is the time to strengthen our construction teams to accelerate our roll out."

JOLA has partnered with local universities in a placement scheme to develop young sales people in their sandwich year. Chief Sales Office Lee Broxson said: "We hired a graduate salesperson to join our team and he quickly developed relationships with key accounts, uncovering and winning mobile data opportunities. This success drove us to partner with local universities to create a 12 month programme for business students who hopefully come back to us after their final year as part of the graduate training scheme."

Partners protected from energy plight

FIDELITY Energy MD John Haw says his partners are cushioned against exposure from the UK's soaring energy prices because their customers will be locked into fixed contracts.

Reassuring resellers that have energy provision in their portfolio Haw said: "As a broker aggregator, Fidelity Energy is not exposed to any risks, unlike the suppliers.

"We sell fully fixed contracts to our clients which means, in the main, they are locked into deals that will see them through this crisis.

"Those customers not in contracts are facing massive price rises and need the channel's help in managing their energy more than ever.

"Furthermore, we have always been prudent with onboarding smaller niche suppliers. Most of our contracts are with global energy firms well placed to weather the storm.

"One of the advantages of the big players is that they produce a large amount of the energy they consume, which gives them greater protection to the market volatility."

Haw says the crisis highlights the value partners can add to their customers in lever-



John Haw

aging services such as Fidelity Energy's energy usage platform which gives customers a complete view of their carbon footprint and energy consumption.

"Soaring costs coupled with the climate crisis being at the top of the political agenda means businesses are really focused on reducing their usage," added Haw.

When asked how long he thinks prices will remain high Haw commented: "This is a

short-term supply and demand squeeze which should correct in spring 2022.

"However, if the UK has a cold winter, Russia continues to play politics with the Nord Stream pipeline and demand continues to surge, the UK faces the possibility of having to ask factories to stop consuming gas so people can heat their homes."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

CLOUD telephony provider Xelion has launched a ground-up redesign of its platform. Called Xelion 8, the latest iteration has the same user interface across different devices and includes new apps and functionality that aligns with the post-pandemic requirements of end users. The browser based video function and desktop sharing enable collaborative working for up to 16 simultaneous participants. Xelion 8 also provides full integration with Microsoft 365 including MS Teams. Xelion UK MD Dave Reynolds stated: "Xelion 8 delivers new functions that meet the needs of the post-pandemic WFH paradigm, including more flexible, mobile working patterns. Xelion 8 allows staff to work anywhere with full UC."

A SUPPLY chain service introduced by Digital Space (formerly Timico) is designed to manage the customer's end-to-end requirements from sustainably disposing and recycling old legacy hardware to delivering new IT equipment. Sarah Lambert-Gibbs has been appointed as Head of Supply Chain Tower to lead the division. "In today's digital era customers need new equipment quickly and efficiently," she commented.

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 2019, the website attracted a monthly average of 21,100 unique Browsers.

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£10k golf day boost aids key mental health charity

CHANNEL players teed up and swung into action for ICT charity Mental Health Associates (MHA) last month, supporting its inaugural golf day staged at the famous Brocket Hall course in Hertfordshire.

Nineteen teams participated, including foursomes representing Comms Care, Cisco, Daisy Group, Gamma, Oak Telecom, Restore Technology, Union Street and Virtual1.

Restore Technology won the team tournament, lifting the Nick Dutfield Memorial Trophy, with second place going to Union Street. The nearest-the-pin-prize went to Gamma's Richard Bligh.

The trophies were presented by former Essex and England cricketer Ronnie Irani. Organiser and MHA founder



Peter Orr commented: "The event was well supported and I would like to thank everyone who played, our hole sponsors Restore Technology, Restore Datashred, Comms-Care, Purity Hemp and Gamma, plus our long-term supporters James Emm from Oak and Jose

Sanchez from Cisco who helped promote the day.

"We raised over £10,000 which is a magnificent result and will help us fund the recruitment of more MHA Associates who will assist anyone in the ICT industry suffering from mental health issues. We look

forward to welcoming everyone again next year."

Pictured with Ronnie Irani (rear) are the Union Street Allstars (left to right): James Green, Boxx Communications; Daniel Alvarez, Glide; Carl Barnett, Global4 and Vincent Disneur, Union Street.

NEWS ROUNDUP

A LINK UP between Commsworld and Scotland's Towns Partnership (STP) will bring a sharper focus on technology among organisations in STP's Scotland Improvement Districts. Bruce Strang, Chief Operating Officer at Commsworld, said: "Together, we aim to ensure businesses in rural towns and villages throughout Scotland are fully aware of the benefits that high quality and highly resilient connectivity can bring. We want to educate every business on how a superfast service can be transformative, as well as being delivered at much more cost-effective rates to those in rural areas."

STP Chief Officer Phil Prentice commented: "Over the coming year we hope STP and Commsworld can deliver some innovative blueprints and provoke more collaborative approaches."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

8X8'S launch of Frontdesk enables partners to help organisations adapt the receptionist function to a hybrid workforce. "As businesses embrace hybrid work environments the traditional receptionist or front desk role requires the same flexibility as any other role within the organisation," said CPO Hunter Middleton. Zeus Kerravala, founder and Principal Analyst at ZK Research, added: "Organisations do not want cookie-cutter comms solutions for distributed employees. They are looking for an agile solution that meets specific use cases, such as high volume call handling to easily connect customers, partners and vendors with any employee at any time."

ASPIRE Technology Services has revealed plans to populate its new technology hub in Teesside with 150 new starters, doubling its current headcount. Aspire has been appointed by Newcastle City Council to deliver a full fibre network serving public sector sites across the region. Sales Manager Justin Godfrey said: "We have plans to improve the connectivity and cloud performance available to north east businesses and help the economy to recover post-Covid."

New CEO for Focus drafted in

FORMER Ensono SVP and MD for Europe Barney Taylor has joined Focus Group as CEO.

Taylor has 20 years experience across sales, operations and finance and will lead day-to-day operations, build the end-to-end strategy and drive organic and acquisitive growth.

MD Chris Goodman said: "Barney will help us accelerate towards being a more collaborative and integrated business."

"His track record of success, customer-centric approach and operational expertise are obvious strengths. Above all, it was immediately clear that Barney's style and approach would see us retain our entrepreneurial spirit and culture."

Taylor said: "Focus Group's portfolio has its foundations in telecoms but it is now capable of delivering wider technology solutions and services across multiple market sectors."

Co-founders Chris Goodman and Ralph Gilbert remain central figures as Founder Directors.



Barney Taylor

Gamma ups Teams offer



Chris Wade

GAMMA partners can expect more streamlined calling capabilities for Teams following Gamma's inclusion in Microsoft's new Operator Connect programme which provides integrated PSTN calling to Teams with less deployment and management complexity.

In the event of a service failure or outage customers can manage calls on the Gamma cloud using SIP Trunk Call Manager. Gamma has so far enabled 250,000 Teams seats across via its Direct Routing and managed service offering.

Chief Marketing and Product Officer Chris Wade said: "Over the past decade we've been supporting Microsoft services through various iterations, including Lync and Skype for Business. Teams is one of the most successful incarnations."

"By combining our expertise and reliability with Microsoft's

operator managed service, our customers will benefit from a reliable and secure service to maximise value from their Microsoft Teams environment."



THE pandemic called time on Digital Wholesale Solutions' Octoberfest last year, so the return of the event in the Pagola venue at London's revitalised Paddington Basin on September 30th was greatly appreciated by over 400 of the service provider's channel partners. DWS CEO Terry O'Brien enthused: "It was fantastic to be face-to-face again with hundreds of our partners and see everyone really enjoying themselves. We're looking forward to many more get-togethers." Pictured: Prost! Comms Dealer's Nigel Sergent and Simon Turton flank DWS CEO Terry O'Brien and Sales Director Garry Grows at the Octoberfest extravaganza.

NEWS ROUNDUP

IT MSP Redcentric has acquired Pikel Industry Solutions, a provider of application, public cloud and security with a particular focus on AWS and Microsoft Azure. CEO Peter Brotherton enthused: "This is a great acquisition and combines the secure, asset light, digital transformation capabilities of Pikel with the managed infrastructure, unified collaboration and network solutions of Redcentric. The combined portfolio will accelerate the group's ability to deliver transformative solutions and expands our capabilities in hyperscale public cloud and security."

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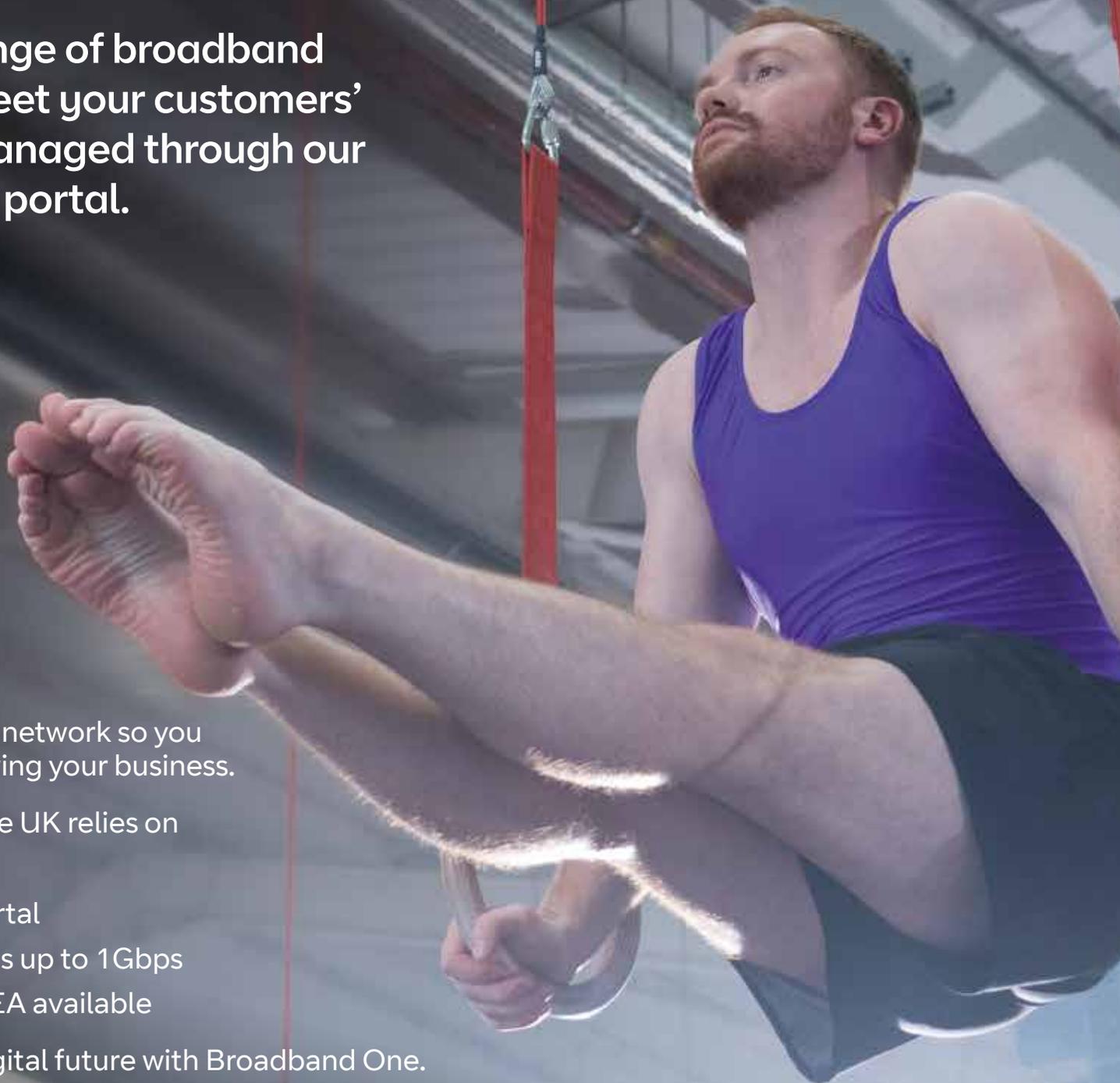
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Why it's time to move in

Managing the undeniable and multifaceted mobile data opportunity is simply a balance of wanting to grow the value of your business, understanding the requirements of customers and harnessing the power of mobile aggregators, according to expert speakers at last month's Margin in Mobile symposium (September 16th, Northampton Marriott Hotel).

There is no fine line to be trod in achieving the above mentioned balance – the answer just lies in following the mobile data opportunity and leveraging the available support. According to Pangea Managing Director Dan Cunliffe, mobile data and IoT are key to building high margin, recurring revenues and business value, all critical components for growth and exit strategies. Against a backdrop of rapid growth in mobile computing between 2014 and 2020 resellers would be doing themselves a big favour if they seized the opportunity at hand – which is global in nature and not restricted by boundaries.

"2020 witnessed a 28 per cent hike in mobile data usage driven in the main by a big increase in 4G consumption in the work-from-home environment, and also on the road," stated Cunliffe. "Meanwhile, outages from fixed line services cost £5 billion in 2020. 4G+ and 5G are credible alternatives to fixed lines. And mobile data and IoT offer a multiple three to five times that of fixed line implementations."

The mobile data opportunity does come with some challenges such as a low level of complexity, a need for knowledge and identifying



Margin in Mobile spotlighted big value building opportunities

You can have many suppliers, but they may not necessarily be partnerships that differentiate a reseller's proposition

the right solutions, but companies such as Pangea exist to shoulder these matters. It has direct relationships with all of the main MNOs and Cunliffe predicts a pivotal time ahead as we approach 2025 and the phase out of 2G and 3G, which will spark an upgrade requirement for utility companies for example.

To approach such opportunities with confidence requires differentiation from the large operators, noted Cunliffe, citing services like content filtering as strong attractions. "To compete with the operators resellers need to get into the detail

of customer requirements," added Cunliffe. "Success resides within the customer relationship and the partner's ability hold granular conversations that unearth new opportunities."

Broad market

With a refreshed and relaunched mobile proposition based on a strong relationship with Three, Gamma is beating the mobile and IoT solution drum which, according to Rob Kittler, Head of Gamma's Connectivity Practice, can be heard across all sectors and verticals. He pointed to figures that suggest there will be up to 139 million IoT connections

by the end of 2023, and he urged the channel to act now and secure a big slice of the pie. "It's not all about the MNOs," he stated. "We can get in there and do it."

Kittler also noted that mobile consumption rose by 27 per cent between 2019 and 2020 and that we are yet to see the full potential of 5G. That said, there is a 'perception issue' to overcome, believes Kittler. "Customers associate mobile data with apps in their pocket," he said. "But 5G will become mission critical and partners need to find opportunities that lie in new efficiencies. Customers need educating and holding

deep conversations to find efficiencies is key."

According to Kittler, an enhanced mobile network will 'kick fixed lines off the park'. "Fibre will be a back up line within six years," he claimed. "The issue is customers who do not know what they need. Resellers and their channel partners can overcome that."

That only 50 per cent of Gamma's 1,300 partners sell mobile is a telling point. Gamma's Head of New Business, Mark Lomas, noted that mobile is often seen as complicated due to multiple networks, numerous tariffs, the speed of handset changes and the prospect of 5G, for example. Mobile can also be an emotional product, he said, with FaceTime or Twitter glitches causing angst, for example. "Three has strong 5G capabilities," noted Lomas. "But I've not got a 5G device yet and my experience is still great. It's about what you can deliver today. 5G is for tomorrow."

For Jola's Sales Director Lee Broxson the route to mobile success lies in working with an aggregator because MNOs 'can't be everything to all men'. Among the attributes of an aggregation approach innovation is also key, he says. Moreover, aggregators make selling



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to mobile data

mobile relatively easy, supported by reliable APIs into networks and a range of channel support elements including a portal. "These all help resellers to make margin and increase the value of their businesses," commented Broxson.

He also pulled out another eye watering statistic, that today there are circa 20 billion connected devices but pundits reckon this figure will rise to as much as 70 billion by the end of 2026. "With such projected growth it is important for the channel to get involved," he urged.

Adrian Sunderland, Chief Technical Officer at Jola, noted that growth predictions like this are in part made possible because 5G is an ultra-dense cellular network that removes capacity problems which makes it an enabler for IoT adoption at great scale. He also suggested that MNOs may constrain the available market for resellers as no single operator does everything to solve all customer challenges. "It is also key for customers to trust their ICT providers to understand their problems and how mobile data solutions can solve them," added Sunderland. "

He claimed that aggregators such as Jola can gain an advantage because they operate as tech companies versus large utility-like operations that can be slow to move and heavily invested in large sale infrastructure products and have a broad focus in the consumer market. "An aggregator provides access to all of the networks and helps partners to identify and win sales opportunities," added Sunderland. "But

you will come up against an MNO, so differentiation through building a multi-network solution is key."

The role of the portal cannot be overstated, pointed out Sunderland, who said it is 'all about control'. "Customers fall into two categories," he explained. "Those that want to hand over everything to the provider and those that want access and control via a portal with real-time APIs. Accessibility for customers is becoming more important. The portal is no longer a tick box, it can be put through its paces and is critical in winning larger deals especially."

Control and value

As well as white labelling for channel partners to manage all elements of the mobile solution, end customers may also want to brand the service as their own. "Furthermore, every pound you sell of mobile is worth three times more than a fixed service – and partners can pull other products into that multiple, all increasing the value of their business," added Sunderland.

According to Rob Foster, Sales Director at Zest4, getting into mobile is as much about defining what you want to take to market as it is understanding end user requirements. "By engaging with the right suppliers and focusing on partnerships and the products they want to sell, resellers can define their service proposition and become experts," stated Foster. "You can have many suppliers, but they may not necessarily be partnerships that differentiate a reseller's proposition and help them grow. If a reseller already has a billing system,

why not sell mobile and differentiate with white label text alerts 24/7, for example. For those without a billing capability, to acquire one is far more affordable today."

Anton Le Saux, Head of M2M and IoT at Zest4, shared insights into the crossover between mobile and IoT. From the outset, he noted, IoT seemed like a dark art. This evolved into Machine to Machine communications, in other words, connected devices and small data packets. Today, it's about connecting intelligent devices, capturing data, running reports and making decisions. This means that devices are consuming larger bundles of data and sharing that information. Then there is the fixed IP factor, where a SIM has its own IP address which enables greater visibility and control over IoT devices. End-to-end security and encryption is also provided by fixed IP, allowing real-time data utilisation. "Control, measure and monitor is where IoT comes in," Le Saux told delegates. "The IoT world is your oyster." ■

Points to consider...

- The mobile data opportunity is not to be ignored
- Speakers advocated an aggregator approach
- Mobile adds significant value to a reseller's business
- 5G is coming, but sell mobile now
- Deep conversations with customers to unearth mobile opportunities are key
- Experts positioned mobile as a full fibre replacement opportunity
- It's time to harness ever burgeoning IoT opportunities
- The gap between resellers that sell mobile and those that don't is set to widen.

How to get paid quicker



Tamsin Deutrom-Yue

"Getting the order isn't the problem, it's getting paid." Sound familiar? Comms dealers up and down the country share the same pain, but not because customers can't afford the bills.

You're winning deals left, right and centre for hosted voice and UC – it's the growing backlog of customer onboarding and training that's stopping the cash rolling in.

Quote-to-cash delays are bad for business. Not just poor cashflow and disgruntled salespeople, but unhappy customers waiting around for installs and enduser training.

Internal bottlenecks

The challenge is similar to the lorry driver shortage that's hitting supermarket supply chains. Demand and availability aren't the issue, it's delivery.

It's usually because internal tech teams are getting pulled in different directions. Too busy helping with presales, doing project management, running maintenance and keeping themselves abreast of new products and technologies.

Too often this means no time for 'just in time' service delivery and nobody on standby to manage complete end-to-end onboarding without delays or interruptions.

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5 more signs you need UC professional services

Slow time to revenue is just one motivator driving ambitious comms partners to consider the outsourcing route. Here are 5 more:

Too many calls into the service desk

Your customer base may have outgrown your support capability, or there are underlying issues with your installs. Cut loose from operational overheads and skills shortfalls.

Increased customer churn

Competition is fierce and customers more demanding. You're acquiring and upselling customers but attrition is high because service levels have dropped. You need support to start delivering ROI asap.

Low customer satisfaction

Complaints are up, CSAT metrics have dropped and more resources are getting sucked into account management. Outsource to boost customer experience, retain customers and restore your reputation.

MS Teams voice integrations too problematic

The voice integration element of MS Teams is a can of worms. You've tried to do it internally, or gone into 'co-opetition' with rival IT/comms partners. Outsourcing to a technical expert is the smart move.

Locked-in to your current platform

Your long-term choice of technology and product platform may need to change for strategic reasons. Dare you migrate live customers without the right technical skills? Finding the right professional services partner holds the key to these new opportunities.

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IntaLAN CEO on navigating

In a serendipitous turn of events Andy Horn left the navy and found himself working in the comms sector. Here, the CEO of IntraLAN reflects on the move that changed the course of his career and shares insights into a growth strategy that he hopes will deliver national leadership.

Horn displayed an aptitude for navigating unpredictable waters while in the navy, a skill that would later enable him to chart a clear and determined course through the waves of comms market disruption. The experience continues to resonate many years after he left the navy and first entered the comms sector in a sales capacity. "Some of the roles paid only on commission," commented Horn. "That really helped to teach me that if you want it done, you have to make it happen yourself. At the time, the initial BT monopoly was being broken up and there was a host of challenging, disruptive and emerging technology that made the comms space intriguing, which is how I got into IT outsourcing when I moved to London."



Andy Horn

IntraLAN was established in 1995 and initially focused on support for Novell and NT3.51 networks before working with Microsoft, becoming a Microsoft Gold partner in 2003. The telecoms division has been running for nearly a decade, as has IntraLAN's Canary Wharf data centre. The company's merger with Transglobal helped bolster its telecoms expertise. And in 2017 it became part of the Global Growth Group of independent entrepreneurial businesses. Horn's appointment as CEO in 2019

Managed services make it easy to adapt to every workplace model and will be a major factor in IT as a Service for IntraLAN going forward

was another significant step forward for the company.

Refocus

"Outside of my appointment as CEO we have completely shifted both our sales and marketing leadership in recent years," he commented. "We have

moved our focus more on IT services and less on mobile and telephony. Our strength lies in being large enough to excel but small enough to care and we pride ourselves on offering tailored IT solutions and becoming an IT partner that businesses can trust."

IntraLAN covers a broad spectrum of IT services including fully managed IT, cloud services, Unified Communications, security and compliance, network and infrastructure. It has strong partnerships with Microsoft, IBM, Cisco, BT, Zero Networks, Darktrace

and Xarios, among others. "IntraLAN's key focus is making sure we are on the front foot when it comes to new and emerging tech and applying it to suit customer needs," added Horn. "We want to improve the depth of our relationships with clients and partners."



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ing disruption

Blipping large on Horn's tech radar screen are edge computing, IoT, and many other technologies that can't be brought to market due to a lack of reliable connectivity. Agricultural technology, GPU at the edge, and a new generation of gaming will all be enabled by these advancements, he believes. "Years ago, tech was seen as a cost to businesses, then as an enabler and now a blocker – a situation that was exacerbated by Covid-19," he

by organic and inorganic growth. "The pandemic has forced the acceleration of digital transformation for businesses, which means a lot more companies require us to serve as the driver behind their transformation," he explained. "The last year has been a busy one for us helping companies move to remote and hybrid working set ups. We launched WorkIN, an IT and connectivity service to enable employees to

The pandemic has forced the acceleration of digital transformation for businesses, which means a lot more companies require us to serve as the driver behind their transformation

stated. "Keeping an eye on the next stage of emerging technologies is key."

Hybrid working due to lockdowns has fast tracked the digital transformation of business practices and put a spotlight on agility. "It's all about flexibility, and because of that a company's IT needs to be both flexible and secure," said Horn. "Managed services make it easy to adapt to every workplace model and will be a major factor in IT as a service for IntraLAN going forward. The challenge for scaling up is the harsh market state we're currently in. Resources are a challenge for everybody at the moment."

Nonetheless, Horn expects IntraLAN to become a bigger national player, with expansion driven

work safely and securely from home. We continue to work with SMEs of all sizes and are working more with enterprises to adapt to this relatively new IT environment, moving away from a single, centralised IT set up.

"We have also been focusing on our cybersecurity offering. The move to remote working has made businesses think about their network security and this has become a significant part of our offering, to help businesses secure their assets and data. It's an ever changing market. You can never rest on your laurels, and when dealing with such a vast range of IT services I have no shortage of new innovations I must adapt to regularly. It's an extremely rewarding market if you can navigate it and handle the pace." ■

Just a minute with Andy Horn...

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I used to race motorbikes, and was pretty good at it.

Your strengths and what could you work on? One of my biggest strengths is leadership and rallying a team around clear goals. I could work more on sharing wins by celebrating goals before moving on to our next target.

Your biggest career achievement? Growing Exodus from zero staff to exit year one with a \$40 million run rate outsourcing business.

What talent do you wish you had? Reading minds would be the ultimate sales tool.

ICT industry wish: Take the geekiness out of it! It should be a more accessible industry to make it more customer friendly and business focused.

Best advice you've been given: To thine own self be true.

One example of something you have overcome?

Covid was an unexpected challenge. With the lockdown and the disruption it caused not long after I joined IntraLAN, it made me re-evaluate my goals and adapt our company focus.

Lesson learnt: To always be open to learning. I learn something new every day. Be humble enough regardless of your position to treat others respectfully.

Name three ideal dinner guests: My Grandfather: I've heard he was a great man but I never got to meet him; Winston Churchill, who could talk for England; and Billy Connolly.

If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing? A stuntman. I was about one TV commercial away from my Equity card.

Top tip for resellers? The three Cs: Communication, Consistency and Care.

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Resetting core values in t

There is no doubt that the comms sector is a dynamic place to be right now. Not just because of the shift to digital and all-IP: Other change factors including ESG, CSR, diversity and inclusion are all at play and Ultima CEO Scott Dodds' goal is to be carbon neutral by 2030 and continue developing a winning people-centric strategy.

Dodds energetically addresses key questions on Ultima's current strategy and future plans around ESG and putting people and communities first. With equal alacrity he shares insights into how he intends to continue nurturing Ultima's all encompassing business model...

Is corporate responsibility now a core business imperative rather than a nice-to-have?

It's easy for us as an industry to pay lip service to ESG issues. For me, it's critical we all set specific measurable targets to reduce our impact on the environment and improve diversity. And we need to hold each other accountable to those targets. CSR is now a business imperative and key to our business. We have just hired a new Head of ESG and have CSR policies and targets for the reduction in our carbon footprint and diversification of our workforce.

Tech companies need to demonstrate that we are taking sustainability and a reduction of our impact on the environment seriously. It's a huge subject and more and more we are seeing customers demanding to know what we're doing. We're looking at how to reduce our carbon footprint



Scott Dodds

In the future, companies won't be on a supplier list unless they can demonstrate their commitment to CSR

and using sustainability calculators to work out the impact of cloud services. Energy efficiencies, renewable energy, circular economies and asset disposal and refurbishment of technology are all key topics we're working on.

How do you go about realising your sustainability targets?

The industry can't keep taking raw materials out of the earth. Digital leaching is

also ruining our environment so we need to get better fast. We're looking at our social impact as a company and how we can give back to the local community and charities. In order to reach our sustainability targets we have identified key areas around transport policy, lighting and heating through our ESOS reports which will allow them to be achieved. We are also partnering with Ecologi to plant 15,000 trees by

2030. We're planting a tree for each new starter, each webinar or event registration and every virtual meeting. In the future, companies won't be on a supplier list unless they can demonstrate their commitment to CSR.

A growing number of workers and ICT buyers are showing loyalty towards organisations with a people first approach and a green agenda. How far have these imperatives

become a part of your decision making?

They're key: Our new ESG head is driving our green agenda and we are working hard to demonstrate how we're lessening employee impact on the environment as well as tech's impact. Employee wellbeing is at the forefront of our culture, which drives initiatives such as flexible working, wellness days, generous annual leave, sports clubs, development and training schemes, benefits platforms and more. We have High Impact Teams where employees across the business can have an impact on Ultima's future, setting goals and plans covering topics such as employee experience and environmental, social and governance.

I also believe it's important we support those in our surrounding community, so we give employees volunteering days each year and participate in several fundraising and awareness campaigns, such as sponsored walks and runs, sleep outs, food donations for the local food bank and providing mentoring in the local community as well as working with a dedicated charity partner.

We also have initiatives to encourage employees to make positive choices, such

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times of change

as our Cycle to Work scheme and the provision of reusable items including water bottles and lunchboxes. We run a paperless office and use eco-friendly cleaning products.

How are your talent needs evolving? And what are you doing to attract and motivate the people that you need, and keep them?

We need a more diverse workforce because it gives us diverse thinking and that's powerful. We have a target to recruit more female technologists. We've been gathering data on diversity within the company and have a range of multi-cultural employees from different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. However, we have a lack of female employees, as does the industry, and need to make sure we are working to change this. The more diverse the workforce the better, as it helps foster and promote innovation which is our life blood.

To do this we're going to work with local schools, colleges and the community to assist people in selecting their future career path and building skill sets. We need to show young people how exciting technology is, not just in the app development world but all the way down to infrastructure development too.

In some areas of an organisation, job roles and skill requirements are changing. How do you see this dynamic playing out in your business?

In the technology world, skill sets are constantly changing – it's the world we have lived in forever – so we are adept at living with the constant need for change. But there

has been an acceleration in our thinking around a global services strategy and hiring round the world.

Increasingly, in our business we are looking to support global cloud services which means we are creating global teams with skills that didn't exist 18 months ago, and this change will continue apace. Our acquisition of Just After Midnight has given us access to global skills and we will continue to build our global footprint to provide 24/7 cloud services from both a tech and sales perspective.

What are your biggest organisational challenges right now?

Our biggest challenge is the skills shortage in key tech areas including cloud, automation and new services. Increasing staff movement, due to the diversification in career opportunities as well as the desire for more flexible working and autonomy in roles is also a challenge. We need to make sure that tech remains an exciting place to be. We need to allow people to innovate and grow in their roles. They want more autonomy.

What staff attributes will be most in demand? And do you expect competition for the best talent to intensify as more staff value propositions will be designed to keep them longer-term?

Competition will absolutely intensify. We're looking for people who have passion, integrity, adaptability, flexibility and autonomy and who want to develop and grow. We're looking for global people and if they have the right mindset we will educate and train them in the right skill sets,

and help them continually evolve and grow. It's up to us to deliver the right environment for everyone to prosper in their careers.

For example, for younger starters we need to provide social interaction as they learn by watching others as well as provide the flexibility for people to still work at home. So it's going to be a juggling act that companies need to find their way through.

How do you ensure that staff reflect Ultima's core values?

You make sure your leadership live and breathe your values. We also ensure that we reflect the values in all the communication we conduct internally and with customers and suppliers. Our values are discussed at reviews and we have employee awards that everyone votes for around each value. Most of our employees live our values and are helping build a collaborative and inclusive community, because we employ people based on their passion, integrity, flexibility, adaptability and autonomy – all of which reflect our values.

What is your Green World message for business leaders?

We're at the edge of the precipice for the next generation. The time is now to ensure technology helps reduce man's impact on climate and still allows business and personal interests to flourish. Everyone has a part to play and the technology industry has an enormous responsibility as we can help with the reduction of carbon emissions by enabling effective communication globally. ■

Selecting your UCaaS Service Provider

UCaaS is growing at a phenomenal rate and provides significant opportunities for resellers to secure recurring revenue and add huge value to their customers. To provide a clearer idea of what to look out for in a UCaaS service provider, we've drawn attention to what we think are the most important.

Roadmap and innovation

are key: Your customers aren't just buying the product you've demoed today; they're buying into the innovation you'll deliver tomorrow. When selecting a UCaaS partner, make sure you can see a clear picture of their recent releases, what they have added over the last year and what's on their roadmap.



Stability, resilience and reliability:

One of the top reasons customers change their UCaaS provider is instability and user issues, so it's vital to understand the underlying infrastructure that the service provider has invested in. Ask lots of questions about their uptime, data centre and resilience.

Brand:

Give your customers the added confidence by showing them a brand they recognise and trust. They perceive the depth of resources and technical smarts needed to deliver their UCaaS solution and want to trust the vendor you've chosen to deliver it.

WebRTC, Collaboration, CRM, and vertical market integrations:

Customers are just as keen to adopt new technology as vendors and service providers. New technology such as WebRTC delivers benefits for businesses of all sizes, including the reseller. Its easy and quick deployment, along with simple access to UC and collaboration tools, will further enhance your customer's user experience. The ability to integrate all of this into their

existing systems will also be a critical component of the solution.

Differentiation is a double-edged sword:

Look for a product that gives you the best of both worlds and helps deliver a differentiated proposition that the customer will also trust.

Add-ins, value adds and ARPU drivers:

These are a great way to keep your onboarded customers engaged and recurring revenues increasing. Look for simple add-ins with a trial period that can help you drive up Average Revenue Per User. Tools like advanced analytics, collaboration, contact centre, call recording and other services will deliver huge value over the lifetime of your customer.

Support:

Knowing that there's someone there when a problem arises is critical, whether it's technically or commercially. Have you got relationships with real people from your UCaaS partner? You never know when you'll need some help or a favour. Also, look for a partner who delivers you tools that make your life easier – including portals, provisioning, pricing and proposal tools, marketing kits and sales training.



Will Morey, Sales and Marketing Director at Pragma Group

Before you make your final decision, look at their case studies and see who their partners are and if they are successful. Don't be afraid to ask to speak to their reseller partners, either.

If you think Pragma and Ericsson-LG Enterprise could be the right fit as your UCaaS partner, then contact us today. www.wearepragma.co.uk

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Preparing for all-IP

New solutions and innovations that solve PSTN switch-off challenges for smaller businesses are key to a smooth transition to an all-IP world, says BT Wholesale Channel Sales Director Gavin Jones.

Combining technology in an integrated, market-driven solution package that solves customer challenges and creates value for resellers is a must. And according to Jones, BT Wholesale's Broadband One and Wholesale Hosted Communications Express portfolio reflects these priorities. "As the PSTN and ISDN switch-off looms in 2025, small businesses need connectivity and VoIP services they can rely on to help future-proof themselves for both office and remote environments – which is where Broadband One and new Wholesale Hosted Communications (WHC) Express offerings come into play," he stated.

Broadband One is a managed full fibre connectivity package with multiple variants including SOGEA that allows small businesses to migrate to all-IP. WHC Express is a new digital phone line that enables users to make and take calls anywhere from any handset and from the same business number. Until now, believes Jones, partners may have been hesitant to leave legacy copper-based access solutions behind,

but as wholesale provision of FTTP becomes more prevalent evidence suggests that customers are prepared to pay more for faster more reliable connectivity.

"This presents an opportunity for partners to offer FTTP as it supports a wider range of all-IP services," added Jones. "Elsewhere, collaboration tools are increasingly important as we embrace remote and hybrid working. Digital tools such as Webex by Cisco are imperative to keep teams best connected and working collaboratively no matter their location."

Since the UK government asked people to work from home where possible an additional two million people have been working away from the office. "As we emerge from the pandemic and with the vaccine rollout underway, many employees have enjoyed the flexibility of being remote," stated Jones. "Research from Zoom suggests that many companies intend to adopt a long-term hybrid approach."

Jones also noted that it is important for partners to play a guiding role for customers along the journey to an all-IP



Gavin Jones

world. "Enabling our partners to have the best insight into our solutions will ultimately mean they are guiding their customers in the best way possible," commented Jones. "Navigating the all-IP pathway is imperative for partners to continue to thrive."

Differentiation

Jones pointed out that BT's network investment will continue to be the mainstay of how it can best support partners – and with its IP Transformation Services it is helping channel partners ensure that the shift to the cloud is a smooth transition. Furthermore, a

Hybrid working shows no signs of slowing down

report by PWC states two trends are transforming the telecommunications industry – commoditisation and convergence. The report suggests this will alter how telecoms companies operate and how customers use their services. It cites commoditisation as a loss of differentiation which leaves companies exposed to competition based on price alone.

"However, it's unlikely we will see these trends lead to fixed broadband commoditisation because at BT our differentiating factor is our network," added Jones. "Serving more than 99 per cent of all UK premises, our networks are built to levels of resilience offering 99.999 per cent availability and the capacity to handle the demands of the highest FTTP variants. For partners to differentiate within the market, being able to supply a full range of network products will help them to gain and retain customers."

Digital transformation was on the radars of many

organisations pre-pandemic, but the past 18 months have supercharged plans across businesses and industries. And there is no doubt that hybrid working and the shift to all-IP are two requirements that have been catalysed by Covid-19.

"Over the past year we have greatly developed our portfolio, spotting trends in the market and then

developing solutions to meet customers' needs," said Jones. "Take Webex by Cisco. We knew collaboration tools were a hugely disruptive trend. Research by analyst Cavell found that the cloud communications market in the UK had grown to 5.9 million users by the end of Q4 2020 – so we partnered with Cisco to offer Webex.

"Digital transformation has long been on the channel's agenda, especially with the 2025 switch off looming, but Covid-19 has brought it sharply into focus and accelerated the change. This has created huge opportunities for both resellers and vendors alike who have had to expand their portfolios to encompass these changes."

According to Jones, partners' biggest opportunity will be around the three Cs – connectivity, cloud communications and collaboration. "Hybrid working shows no signs of slowing down, and these are trends that partners will want to keep front and centre in the coming months," he stated.

"As we move to an all-IP future with the 2025 switch off, we are continuing to develop our Broadband One and WHC Express products with a digital experience that makes it easier for our partners to serve the needs of customers quickly and efficiently, which is crucial in an ever-evolving digital world. Our aim is to ensure our offerings are easy and frictionless to consume through our APIs, meaning partners can spend less time on ordering and more time on growing their business." ■



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Realising social value

Pressures to adapt our way of working and evolve business models have perhaps never been greater, and critical to success is attracting the talent that will move organisations forward. Here, UKCloud Chief Executive Officer Simon Hansford discusses social responsibility and sustainability and how they fit into long-term HR strategies.

To gain greater insight into current climate-related impacts on organisations and their operations we sought to showcase how UKCloud is promoting, advancing and monitoring adoption of ESG and CSR practices. Concurrent with this is also guidance on ways and means to attract the best people who are in short supply and far more aligned to matters that affect the planet.

“Every organisation in the world has a moral obligation to do whatever it can to reduce their carbon footprint to net zero as soon as possible,” stated Hansford. “We have long recognised this, and since 2011 have engaged Natural Capital Partners to independently certify our cloud services as carbon neutral. UKCloud’s presence at COP26 as a member of the E-Alliance is a marker of our carbon neutrality intent. Working

alongside partners such as Microsoft, Dell, IBM and BT we will help draw attention to the transformative role that technology can play in tackling the climate crisis.”

Corporate responsibility was woven into the fabric of UKCloud from day one. With investors and clients voting with their feet, modern businesses have to take notice of their footprint on society and act, believes Hansford. “Placing corporate responsibility at the heart of a business is essential if it is to thrive into the future,” he said. “Companies that are more diverse, inclusive and sustainable are more profitable and successful.”

Recent government policy requires public sector bodies to take account of social value and carbon reduction planning in the procurement process. If businesses are to win government work they must tackle climate



Simon Hansford

change, build new jobs and skills and foster innovation. But competition for the best talent continues to be a fundamental challenge in the UK’s tech sector. “In a competitive job market, a willingness to learn and grow with a company and truly invest in its culture and values will continue to be distinguishing factors,” stated Hansford. “In return, businesses must offer employees a nurturing environment, strong personal development opportunities, clear career progression and a strong set of values to align behind.

Investment

“We invest in our people to ensure that they stay with us for the long-term. We’ve spent almost £100,000 on over 400 training and professional qualifications for employees. And we offer

a collaborative, inclusive culture in which employees are encouraged to grow and work on the issues that matter to them. Every employee has shares in the business and has a stake in its long-term success.”

Talented employees have never been more conscious of working in an environment that supports their mental health, physical wellbeing, career development and aspirations. And according to Hansford, it is a simple fact that the top talent will not join a business that lacks a diverse, inclusive culture and a clear message about how it plans to tackle the key issues facing society.

“By placing our values front and centre and taking clear positions on climate change and corporate responsibility, our people reflect what we

stand for in their work every day,” added Hansford. “Our employees drive the values of our organisation rather than just reflecting them. An independent report found that every £1 spent with UKCloud generates £1.43 of social value. Our team has delivered 488 hours of volunteering to the local community and we achieved Social Value Quality Mark Level 2 for delivering a positive measurable impact across the country.”

As a company building the next generation of digital infrastructure it has been crucial for UKCloud to invest in training for specialist roles and build the knowledge required to have a national capability in the cloud computing space. One example is its Early Careers programme comprising apprenticeship and undergraduate schemes. Participants currently make up more than eight per cent of staff.

“We have geared our organisation – and the culture and values that underpin it – towards fostering education and skills and, as part of our commitment to delivering social value have pledged to drive an inclusive agenda for digital skills through our Early Careers programme, along with open community education to address the national skills deficit,” explained Hansford. “All our staff understand that we are a truly sustainable technology business, delivering measurable change that cuts through the alphabet soup of ESG and CSR requirements. To this end, we were the first carbon neutral cloud services provider to the UK public sector.” ■

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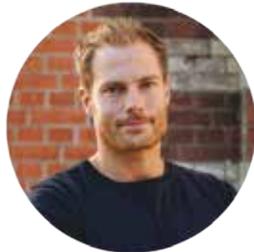


From an attic to European expansion – the Telavox story so far.



It all started with three students in an attic in Lund, Sweden, in 2003. Today, the Swedish UCaaS company Telavox is rapidly expanding in Europe, having recently acquired companies in Spain, Portugal and Belgium. Now they're looking for more resellers in the UK.

Viktor Karlsson is the CEO and co-founder of Telavox, and he was only 19 years old when he got the idea to create a user-friendly cloud PBX. Together with two friends, he founded Telavox in 2003.



The idea was simple enough: to sell easily accessible IP telephony. This idea quickly developed into wanting to create the world's best PBX solution for companies.

Today, with over 300,000 users in nine countries, Telavox has certainly made their mark. But they're not stopping there, and they want you – as a reseller – with them on their continued story of success.

But why go with Telavox? What makes them different?

For resellers and service providers, Telavox is flexible and gives you control: It's a solution that's built with scalability in mind, whether it's up or down. Customers can easily manage employees independently and assign licenses (so much easier than obnoxious subscriptions!). This allows for a solution that the customer can grow with, enabling your company as they expand.

It also doesn't hurt that the product comes in a nice package. The Telavox solution is easy to use and the interface is miles above the clunky and rigid user experiences of other PBX suppliers.

Join us at these upcoming events!

Did you know that Telavox is attending **Comms Vision** on November 10-12 at the Gleneagles Hotel in Scotland? We'll also be at the **Call & Contact Centre Expo** in London on November 16-17. Come by and say hello!

Top 5 reasons to partner with Telavox

1) Easy pricing and packaging

Telavox uses flexible licenses – instead of subscriptions – that include everything you need. No expensive add-ons nor hidden costs. Transparent packaging from day one.

2) 30-day rolling contract

Unlike most UK providers, Telavox offers all partners a 30-day rolling contract. This means you aren't tied into risky long-term agreements.

3) Full white labelling available

Brand our solution with your name, logos and corporate colours, allowing you to grow your brand awareness – without any of the hassles of building your own platform. Simply use the power of Telavox to deliver your solution.

4) Handle calls and traffic yourself

Do you have your own SIP network or carrier service? If the answer is "yes", you can connect this into the Telavox platform and carry the traffic yourself. This allows you to capture more revenue from our solution, benefit from lower license costs and gives you greater control over call routing and handling.

5) Fast time-to-market

Telavox is a complete self-provisioning portal that allows you to get customer systems live within hours instead of weeks.



If you're interested in becoming a reseller, visit us at <https://telavox.com/partner-with-us/> and contact us for more information.

A people strategy that p

Founded in 2014 digital transformation specialist AND Digital has expanded rapidly fuelled in large part by Employee Value Propositions (EVPs) that Chief of Consulting Stephen Paterson says will power the business towards tenfold growth by 2025.

Just seven years since launch AND Digital is now one of Europe's fastest growing businesses and welcomed its 1,000th 'ANDi' in June. The firm was established by CEO Paramjit Uppal to remedy the failure rate of many digital transformation projects. Today, AND Digital turns over more than £42 million and has secured an £11 million investment from BGF. "Our EVPs have been critical to the company's growth in recent years and will continue to be so," stated Paterson. "It's required serious dedication and focus to build out teams in a way that's authentic and sustainable."



Stephen Paterson

AND Digital's mantra is that it's human beings that truly unlock digital innovation. But the problem for any company working in the tech sector is that digital skills are hard to recruit and retain. "It isn't simply the case that companies can just offer the most competitive wage," added Paterson. "Throwing money at the problem will not wash with a pool of talent that is now more aware of a work-life balance, job satisfaction and the need for employer flexibility when it comes to office and home working."

The company's biggest challenge, given its current growth trajectory, is to keep its human-centric culture intact despite stellar growth.

Like never before, the way we operate and behave as organisations, right down to the principles and ethics that guide us, have been fundamentally questioned

"As the famous management consultant Peter Drucker said, 'culture eats strategy for breakfast', and we're firm believers in this," added Paterson. "Retaining culture in the current climate has been a challenge but one we've managed to transcend via our operating model."

Evolving policies

AND Digital wasted no time in adapting and evolving some of its policies to suit the factors that prospective employees value the most.

"For instance, we've introduced our blended working policy which empowers individual ANDis (the name we give to our people) with the option to work from different environments depending on the types of work they are doing," commented Paterson. "We give our ANDis 13 up-skilling and innovation days. These can be used by individuals to learn a new skill, develop a new way of doing things, or simply refresh their

knowledge and skills on a given aspect of their role.

"By offering these types of benefits we can help our people to stay at the forefront of their game, stay motivated and boost their job satisfaction. It's also a way to encourage new recruits into the business – supporting them to build a career, rather than leaving them to stagnate in an industry that will eventually leave them behind if they aren't continuously up-skilling."

Although businesses are always flexing to respond to an unpredictable world, the last 18 months have been particularly challenging given the unfolding climate emergency and Covid-19 pandemic. "Like never before, the way we operate and behave as organisations – down to the principles and ethics that guide us – have been fundamentally questioned," said Paterson.

A decentralised 'club model' has helped AND Digital to

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propels growth

keep its teams tight knit and in regular contact – something that has been worth its weight in gold over the last 18 months. People also count on the resources and support of a bigger organisation. “This operating model has been so successful that we now have 13 clubs in the UK and our first international club in Amsterdam which opened in March 2021,” added Paterson.

He believes that the most in demand skills will continue to be the most technical. “Cloud engineering will be fundamental to all organisational structures moving forward and the talent market is hugely competitive,” added Paterson. “Until there is a more level playing field when it comes to skills in this area we will continue to see shortages and companies battling for the best recruits.”

According to Paterson it’s up to companies to rethink their approach to the talent market and get under the bonnet of what matters to people beyond a regular salary. What’s more, in the battle for talent it’s not simply as clear cut as investing in recruitment per se.

“It’s also about nurturing the talent you already have, providing people with the career support and training opportunities they need to do their job better,” he said. “This is perhaps an element that many companies forget.”

Corporate responsibility is now a core imperative rather than a nice to have, emphasised Paterson, particularly when trying to recruit the very best talent.

“The newer generations of employees won’t accept or want to be associated with brands that don’t align with their own values, something that’s particularly apparent in the current climate when it comes to diversity and inclusivity in the workforce, along with sustainability and green credentials,” he explained.

“We run various training programmes and seminars talking about the issues surrounding workplace diversity. Not only is having a diverse company culture something that should be actively encouraged and nurtured, it’s been proven to positively impact the company bottom line too.”

All on board

In another initiative, one of AND Digital’s ANDis takes up a position on the AND Digital board. This sees an individual drawn from any level of the business help to shape the future of the organisation, while giving them the opportunity to voice the opinions of the rest of the company. “It’s a great way to ensure the senior team is constantly in touch with the needs of its people, and that it is being held accountable by the people that drive the business forward,” added Paterson.

“By sticking to our human-centric approach we’ve managed to attract and retain brilliant and curious minds, which has led to the natural development of a flourishing and supportive culture and explosive rate of growth in under a decade.”

Paterson warned that treating people as commodities will ultimately drive away game-changing talent that could

have a huge impact on a business and its growth. “It’s about seeing beyond the job title and understanding employees as their whole self as much as possible,” he urged. “For example, being genuinely interested in an individual’s life outside of work, while being attuned to their ambitions and aspirations, means that you can nurture and harness their unrealised potential. Doing this creates an environment of psychological safety and empowers employees to feel their individual contribution is meaningful – which is an important aspect of staff retention.

“Although we’re keen to encourage free thinking and creativity, both vital for success, we also recognise the need to ensure we remain collectively aligned, competitive and commercially minded in an uncertain market. A way of gaining the best of both worlds can be seen in our Big Hairy Audacious Goals (or BHAGs as they’ve come to be known) which are now set for 2025. One of our BHAGs is to grow by ten times. Another states our mission to help clients deliver tech that makes life better for 200 million people, every day.”

These mission statements provide people with a clear and concise set of goals to aim towards day in day out, ensuring that they are always focused on making a meaningful impact in every aspect of work – whether it be towards company growth or in the wider communities. “Having a thousand ANDis all focused and contributing to five company goals on a daily basis will inevitably generate a substantial positive impact by 2025,” stated Paterson. ■

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Opportunities aplenty

Propositions that were once beyond the reach of SMBs are now close to hand with a service wrap and price point to match, according to Gamma's UK Indirect Managing Director Daryl Pile.

Speaking at the London leg of Gamma's movie themed partner roadshow last month, Pile said: "Whether it's a full blown omnichannel CCaaS solution for small firms or a superfast 5G service, we're making these in-demand solutions available through our wholesale proposition. Yet, unbelievably, over 50 per cent of our partners still don't sell mobile because they cannot get the wholesale proposition they want. We've changed that."

The majority of customers are also overpaying for mobile usage, which Gamma claims to have cracked with its Tariff Optimiser solution. Mark Lomas, Head of New Business – Channel, explained: "Currently, 77 per cent of mobile customers with a SIM-only plan are overpaying for data they do not use, and 55 per cent of users on Gamma's mobile base are not on the optimal tariff. Our Tariff Optimiser gives resellers the security of offering customers the best possible mobile plan."

Andrew Robinson, Head of UCaaS Practice at Gamma, added: "The Tariff Optimiser removes any need for the 'play it safe' tendency which

tends to leave customers overpaying. It removes the demanding pre-sales analysis and auto checks tariffs each month, retrospectively paying you back should you use less than you have paid for." Pile said Gamma has ramped up its channel activities to make sure partners were getting as much support as they needed to address burgeoning market opportunities across the board. "We've reacted to partners' needs for more dedicated support by reducing accounts per head by 40 per cent and increasing Business Development Manager headcount from 17 to 51," he stated.

Pile also outlined the M&A activity that Gamma had been undertaking to the benefit of partners. "Gamma's acquisition of Mission Labs earlier this year and the purchase of Telsis back in 2019 were not done at the company's EBITDA peaks, but when Gamma needed their skills to help partners make the most of opportunities in the market," he said. "For example, we purchased Mission Labs in March to help partners leverage the CCaaS opportunities we saw growing in the UK's SMB market, and



Gamma's all star cast put resellers in the opportunity frame

we encourage partners to get involved in these."

Pile also shared some optimistic news for partners on valuation trends. "When looking at M&A trailing multiples, EV/EBITDA is on the rise this quarter for ICT and digital services and the gap is narrowing on software and digital platforms," he said. "It is the same story when looking at private equity trailing multiples where EV/EBITDA rose dramatically for ICT and digital services after dipping in Q1 2020, and has now drawn level with that of software and digital platforms."

Cloud boom

Pile also shared some data on the expected growth of the cloud communications market citing information provided by the Cavell Group. The statistics showed that in the UK in Q4 of 2020 cloud communications users sat at just under six million yet

was forecasted to be seven million by the end of Q4 2021. The forecast showed large growth trends looking into the future with expected cloud communications users set to be over 14 million by Q4 2025. "SIP has continued to grow and will do so, but not forever," added Pile. "We recommend that resellers consider the changing needs of their customers, as hosted may have become the solution they require."

Gamma also emphasised the importance of addressing the micro business market in advance of the PSTN switch off in 2025. Its PhoneLine+ solution is an all-IP replacement for the typical phone line designed with 'fewer bells and whistles' than Gamma Horizon.

Nikki Freeman, Regional Sales Manager, said: "There are 5.7 million micro businesses in the UK which accounts for 96 per cent of all businesses and 33 per cent of all employees.

More significantly, the micro business market represents three million phone lines which need to be migrated and a potential £12 million estimated monthly margin that resellers can get a slice of with PhoneLine+."

In addition to the London event at the IMAX cinema in Waterloo, Gamma presented its 'fully live' roadshow at the IMAX Vue Cinema in The Printworks, Manchester and the Vue Cinema in Glasgow Fort Shopping Park. Each event was concluded by guest speaker Dr Kevin Fong who leads major incident planning at UCL Hospitals. He gave the reseller partners who attended a sobering insight into the anxiety and pressure endured by health professionals at the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic. He also stressed that to survive mission critical situations, leaders must 'commit early, delegate authority, defer to expertise, innovate, transform and iterate'.



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3CX answers channel demands with new MS Teams integration

V18 of 3CX's software based PBX now brings one of the hottest additions for partners, namely full integration with Microsoft Teams.

Integrating Microsoft Teams with 3CX is crucial for businesses looking to simplify their working environments, according to Nick Galea, CTO at 3CX, who states that direct routing is a direct response to big channel demand resulting from the march towards hybrid working and emphasis on customer experience.

He said: "The final version of 3CX V18 is here offering best in class audio quality, performance and reliability. With customer communication at the forefront, V18 provides an all-in-one integrated solution to communicate internally and connect with prospects, via voice, live chat or video. A big keystone on our road map for the V18 has been Teams integration.

"The Teams integration offers a cost-effective alternative to MS365's Calling Plans. Via our Teams SIP proxy, we provide a seamless unified calling experience both for 3CX users dialling Teams users and vice versa.

Users can dial out via 3CX SIP trunks using low cost domestic and international tariffs offered by SIP providers in the region. Businesses can cut costs while having a much more powerful PBX to boot.

"3CX provides a seamless unified calling experience both for 3CX users dialling Teams users and for Teams users who can dial out through an interface they are already familiar with."

The MS Teams boom

"It is no secret that Microsoft Teams has seen a huge explosion over the past two years. It has been absolutely pivotal in the way businesses have weathered the storm and kept in contact during the pandemic," said Galea.



“They want their issue resolved and voice is often still the fastest way... for as long as we are human!”

Nick Galea

"New working strategies have been adopted to cater for the home working environment and because of this, it was only natural then for administrators to look at the Phone system side of Teams to see what it had to offer. No doubt thousands of users have now adopted the Teams phone system."

"However, the system is not as feature rich as many PBX systems and also has the main drawback that if you want to make a call over the PSTN, you have to buy very expensive calling plan directly from Microsoft or find a 3rd party who offers Direct Routing as a service."

The Solution – V18!

Galea believes the solution is to

keep 3CX in the background, offering all of the fancy features like call queues, digital receptionists and reporting etc, but link it to your customer's Microsoft 365 tenant and use Teams as the 'softphone' client, or the 'front end' to make and receive calls.

"The advantages are numerous including leveraging your cheaper preferred SIP trunk supplier to offer you that all-important PSTN breakout and unified call history," he said.

"Most importantly, admins can benefit from a full-featured PBX that's much easier to use and configure than Teams. This includes contact centre features such as advanced call queues, reporting, call

routing, and more."

Prerequisites for Microsoft integration

- Users with Microsoft business subscription plus a phone system license (or business voice) add-on
- A fully qualified (FQDN) email domain
- An SSL certificate covering the specific domain you have created from a certified provider
- SIP Port 5062 (TCP) is used if your 3CX is currently using a 3CX provided FQDN. Not required if you are already using your own domain
- Some patience to wait for Teams to refresh. It can take up to 24 hours to present a dial pad.
- Users must have their 'office phone number' section

configured in the Microsoft 365 admin centre.

- Imagining the V18

A single integration solution

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

"So what businesses need is a single integrated solution, allowing them to use the same teams to handle both messaging and calls. And have just one system to administer and pay. Most importantly they can close requests faster by elevating a message to a call if needed.

"Whilst people want to reach out via text, they frequently need voice communication to explain an issue or be explained the solution. They want their issue resolved and voice is often still the fastest way... for as long as we are human!"

3CX plans and vision

3CX's vision is to deliver this solution and become the number one customer Communication System. One that is not inwardly focused on just connecting the team but that also connects the team with their customers and allows them to help the customer faster, better and more efficiently.

"To get there, we need to perfect the PBX and modernize it further. We've already added remote users, cloud capability and integrated video and meetings. We will continue to push forward on this and extend our lead in the market. And integrate chat/messaging - extend our chat & messaging functionality to become amongst the best in the industry," concluded Galea.



Sign up to become a 3CX Partner today and unlock the benefits of 3CX.

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Optimising channel oppo

the future of work

A rising tide lifts all boats – but for the channel to ride the wave of growth and truly drive and benefit from the future of work requires collaboration, digital transformation and up-skilling, according to Comms Vision Platinum sponsor Alex Tempest, Managing Director, BT Wholesale.

Now that hybrid working is here to stay, businesses need to look to the future and invest in smart, secure digital collaboration tools that allow them to work together from anywhere, and on any device

As remote and hybrid working becomes the norm there is an increasing need for collaboration to navigate this evolution. Digital transformation has long been on the channel's radar, but the pandemic has only accelerated it. The tools needed in this new era of hybrid working combine the best of business and human interactions. Underpinned by the best available connectivity, solutions like hosted communication platforms and advanced collaboration tools are empowering companies on their digital transformation journeys. Solutions such as our recently launched WHC Express and Broadband One – a digital phone line allowing users to make and receive calls across fixed and mobile devices, combined with fast, reliable full fibre broadband with speeds up to 1Gbps – are creating an innovative, secure, and flexible way of doing business.

This requires channel partners to expand portfolios to meet customer needs. What's more, as new solutions enter the market, customers will look to partners for advice on what their needs are, and how to roll solutions out. That means the channel ecosystem needs to work closely together and take a more consultative approach to sales and customer support. There must also be a greater knowledge of different solutions and customer pain points, so that everyone is up-skilled to ensure all are well versed in the latest technology. With this deeper understanding comes increased revenue and growth.

That's why compelling events such as Comms Vision are so important. Providing a unique opportunity to network with peers and share knowledge, BT Wholesale is leading and participating in a number of sessions. Trevor Lovelock, our Senior Manager of Transformation,

is holding a boardroom session that will delve into the digital transformation trends in the market as well as what transformation means for BT and other businesses. Here, we'll also discuss how the BT Wholesale portfolio is evolving to enhance how partners can support customers on their digital journeys. While, Camille Mendler, Chief Analyst with consultancy Omdia, will discuss the outlook on enterprises' digital investment priorities over the next 18 months, highlighting areas where resellers and vendors can play a more consultative role.

New ways of working

Covid-19 changed the way we work almost overnight, forcing businesses to equip employees with communications solutions they could use remotely. Now that hybrid working is here to stay, businesses need to look to the future and invest in smart, secure digital collaboration tools that allow them to work together from anywhere, and on any device. Evidently, the technology landscape is changing so rapidly, and digital transformation is enabling businesses to make fundamental changes to the way they operate. At Comms Vision, Trevor Lovelock will focus on what that means for the channel.

Expanding portfolios to include Unified Communications is on the agenda for all, in particular, the inclusion of IP calling features are crucial in light of the impending switch-off of the ISDN/PSTN. Indeed, digital solutions in general, for example WHC Express (our new digital phone line service), are also helping businesses prepare for the necessary shift to an all-IP environment. These innovative propositions are a key focus area for BT Wholesale, as well as creating frictionless digital experiences (for

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example through APIs) and developing progressive partnerships through our new partner programme, Partner Plus. For BT Wholesale and channel partners alike, the aim is to deliver new value while driving down costs through automation and self-service, all of which will be explored in our boardroom sessions.

More than transactional

I think it is fair to say that in the past relationships between channel partners and customers were largely based on price and through face-to-face interactions. Today, though, with most conversations happening online, it's all about trust, guidance and support. Aligning to the new normal is a challenge for all businesses. They need genuine counsel from partners to make the right decisions. What this means in practical terms is what Camille Mendler, chief analyst with Omdia, will discuss in her session.

Trusted partners

With new technology comes the need for new knowledge and new skills. A constant process of up-skilling is crucial to ensure channel partners stay abreast of the latest developments and are able to provide necessary support. By offering access to training resources, as well as marketing support to help partners cut above the noise, programmes such as our Partner Plus programme can help ensure resellers continue delivering greater insight and services, demonstrating their value

on customers' digital transformation journeys. Even before the pandemic, some businesses had already embarked on this journey, of course. Those who were switched on to the switch-off were, and still are, one step ahead, planning a move to an all-IP environment. With Covid-19 forcing more to face this reality sooner than expected, we must continue to work together and up-skill to offer customers the best communication systems, underpinned by quality connectivity.

It's not just channel partners who need to up-skill, vendors do too. That's how you learn where the gaps are and where innovation is best placed, further inspiring digital transformation and driving value. No matter how big or experienced a company is, there is always room to learn. At BT Wholesale, we've invested heavily in this, for example with the introduction of APIs and digital hubs.

The way we work has changed – possibly forever. Partnerships are now more important than ever to offer customers enterprise-grade solutions for all work environments and up-skill to provide the ongoing supportive relationship customers seek. We're incredibly excited to be discussing all of this at Comms Vision, which we see as a hugely strategic event and a cornerstone of our marketing and engagement plans, as well as something that brings us all together. In this new normal, we realise the role of the channel partner has never been more important. ■

Aligning to the new normal is a challenge for all businesses. They need genuine counsel from partners to make the right decisions

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Why it's time to push for the impact of full fibre

Full fibre is underpinning the UK's digital infrastructure opportunity and has become of critical strategic importance not just for the UK, but for channel partners looking to optimise their connectivity portfolios and generate strong and predictable growth, according to Comms Vision Platinum sponsor Andy Wilson, Head of Wholesale at CityFibre.

There's no longer any argument that full fibre is the future. We know why it's so vitally important for Britain's economy, why our customers need it and why we should be championing full fibre

There's no longer any argument that full fibre is the future, we all know it. We know why it's so vitally important for Britain's economy, why our customers need it and why we should be championing it. Are all full fibre networks equal though? And what makes one stand out from another as the first choice wherever it's available? Now is the time to set new standards and push boundaries in delivering a full fibre infrastructure that Britain can depend on. A time that requires an infrastructure platform that's better because of the way it's designed, and partnerships that co-create an exceptional customer service experience.

We make no apology for blowing our own trumpet: CityFibre is at the forefront of the nationwide rollout of full fibre and we've made our intentions very clear by setting our goals to 2025. Our rollout is on track and, even in the face of a pandemic, our £4 billion programme of investment is already funding full fibre deployment across over 60 cities and towns, with 46 now delivering lit ultra-reliable symmetrical gigabit speed services.

By 2025 we'll be across 285 cities, towns and villages representing eight million homes, 800,000 businesses, 400,000 public sector sites and 250,000 5G access points. Underpinning this investment is the largest ever capital raise, at £1.125 billion, for UK full fibre deployment - adding two new major investors. Mubadala Investment Co and Interogo Holding join our existing shareholders, Goldman Sachs and Antin, as well as a number of new banks to ensure that we continue to build at scale. The new capital supports not only this

rollout to a third of the UK market, it enables us to participate in BDUK's Project Gigabit rural programme.

Commenting on our announcement, Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said that 'The Government is committed to making high-speed broadband available for every part of the UK, and this exciting investment will turbocharge the UK's full-fibre rollout. It will revolutionise people's lives and generate huge economic benefits, jobs and growth'.

Making a real difference

We believe it's not just getting there as quickly as possible that matters – it's about how we get there and the quality of service we and our partners deliver. That's what will make the real difference to end customers and to Britain's future as a digital competitor. It's vital that we enable businesses to have the performance, quality and reliability they need to run their operations successfully and compete on a global stage.

That's why we're on a journey to build a world class digital infrastructure platform for Britain, never standing still and constantly fine tuning everything we do across four pillars – physical infrastructure, platform and systems, service and innovation. For our partners it requires a hunger to join us on the journey and be part of co-creating this customer success.

World class means having the highest quality wholesale full fibre network that's ultra-reliable and purpose built to deliver symmetrical gigabit speeds, via Ethernet and broadband. It means using the best-in-class technology

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Boundaries and maximise



possible customer experience, because on their own, even state-of-the-art networks underpinned by smart systems aren't enough. That's why partnerships in the UK channel matter so much to us and where they make all the difference to local communities up and down the country. It's our partners who work directly and indirectly with end user customers and, whether they're serving consumers, small businesses, schools, corporate enterprises or public sector organisations, we believe they deserve the same top-drawer experience.

The solid value our partners add through their knowledge of what customers need and their expertise in delivering that, together with our own uncompromising approach to quality, are what make the prospects for the channel so exciting. For our part, we're here to serve the entire channel with an infrastructure platform that meets the individual requirements of our diverse partner base. In serving carrier and national aggregator partners we bring simplicity and opportunity to the resellers wanting to make the most of existing supplier relationships. Meanwhile, for those who believe working with us directly is strategically important for their business model, we can tailor support to help them achieve their goals and aspirations. Overall, our aim is to make the availability of CityFibre connections ubiquitous throughout the channel.

It's a big ask to trust us to deliver on our promises. This is an industry in which promises of 'better' have historically been broken. However, those of our partners who are already serving customers on our full fibre network are consistently seeing over 96 per cent of services delivered right first time and promised symmetrical speeds materialising. And faults are rare. All of this means fewer calls into call centres, happier customers and the kind of loyalty that wins yet more customers through word of mouth. Along with enabling products, it's a performance level that has allowed some business ISPs to confidently enter the consumer space for the first time - without fear of the entry costs to compete and the resource requirements associated with far less reliable legacy network architecture, infrastructure and systems.

Driving success

Ultimately, it is the customer experience that will drive and dictate the success of CityFibre and its partners and, just like we ignited the full fibre revolution we're now throwing down the gauntlet on network and service quality, challenging our industry to step up once again. Gigabit-capable full fibre connectivity is the future, and we continue to lead the charge in driving best-in-class rollout across the UK. Moreover, we are setting new standards in terms of what the customer can expect from their full fibre connections. This is an exciting time for us all, wherever we sit in the channel, and there are even more exciting times and opportunities to come. And, for all our endless collective energies and efforts, we deserve them. ■

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and smart platforms designed to harness the power of automation and provide on-demand data to keep our partners in the know, while providing them with complete control and visibility of their customers' accounts.

World class means doing everything we can to ensure entire communities are connected so that no one is left behind. And it means innovation in products, in mindset and in commercial support to ensure the best ongoing value for our partners. Finally, it's about delivering a friction-free service experience that raises the bar for our industry, reduces the cost to serve and achieves the highest levels of end customer satisfaction.

The last 18 months have seen a massive acceleration in digital transformation, with exponential growth in the use of cloud and managed IT services. Video conferencing and collaboration apps have become critical and workers' experience of the tools they use, whether at home or in the office, are now a key component of their wellbeing and performance.

To ensure optimum productivity, a connection must be ultra-fast and ultra-reliable – for the organisations and for the individuals that make them what they are. And for businesses, hybrid working and the real desire to be more sustainable and achieve net zero have become key factors to drive their future decision making and responsibility. Factors that rely entirely on dependable connections.

Redefining partnership excellence

This is why CityFibre is building a gigabit-speed full fibre network, one that's designed from scratch for the digital age and fully fit for the future. A fundamentally better network that's free from the shackles and restrictions of legacy technology and providing a firm foundation for business while allowing us and our partners to innovate. We believe it's also about delivering the best

This is an exciting time for us all, wherever we sit in the channel, and there are even more exciting times and opportunities to come

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How to succeed in an era of digital disruption and hyper competition

The channel is essentially a community of problem solvers but to match capabilities and solutions to evolving market opportunities requires a strategic rethink and sharper focus, according to Comms Vision Platinum sponsor Daryl Pile, Managing Director – Channel, Gamma.

The past 18 months have been characterised by profound change – change in customer and buying behaviours, change in ways of working and change in the way we communicate. But while it's safe to say that all change comes with its challenges, it can also present significant opportunities. For businesses, the shift to remote and hybrid working has intensified the necessity for agile and flexible infrastructure. Because of this, the awareness and adoption of cloud services in the business market has never been greater.

Now more than ever, customers expect more from their providers. When the pandemic hit, businesses adopted whatever solutions would keep the lights on. We are now witnessing a new wave of buying, as the platforms customers chose at the beginning of the lockdown period proved to be unsustainable long-term. After almost two years of crisis, IT managers and business decision makers are re-evaluating their requirements, and their needs are now clearer than ever before. For most customers, secure, reliable and high-speed broadband access is essentially just an enabler to ensure seamless business processes. However, the need to upgrade fixed and wireless broadband access to the latest technology will be a significant driver in the next stage of this journey, with fibre and 5G rollout presenting exciting opportunities for partners.

Ultimately, the way businesses communicate with their customers and within their own organisation will be key to determine what the future looks like – and whether it'll be a profitable one. Especially now, UCaaS and CCaaS mean success. For the channel, this is an opportunity to act as a trusted advisor to meet their customers' communications and IT needs and step out of the sole role of 'reseller'. Customers will be looking for partners

who can provide solutions to help them strengthen their competitiveness and enable them to manage their staff and their customers in a more flexible and agile way.

Delivering solutions, rather than products

If the past year and a half has proven anything, it's that one size most certainly does not fit all. While it's safe to say that most businesses, regardless of size, may have similar objectives – such as higher ROI, lower customer churn, engaged employees – the path to achieve them is distinctly varied. Across the different business segments, there will always be significant differences in financial and human resources, acceptance of new technology and the demands they place around the capabilities of a chosen product. The channel should consider how their proposition meets the specific requirements of each of these segments, considering all the aspects above – and whether they can rely on the support of their chosen partner to reach all possible opportunities.

Moreover, the channel should remember that most businesses don't necessarily want to adopt UCaaS, CCaaS or mobile products, they want to find a solution to their recurring business problems – reliable connectivity, seamless customer interactions, and connected employees, to name a few. Therefore, the delivery and provision of a product goes well beyond the sales process. Its success is determined by the way the 'solution' meets the specific need of a business. Providing a personalised experience, from marketing to sales and support, will be a big differentiator in an ever-so competitive market.

In this light, the opportunity for the channel to drive real growth and value in their businesses is significant. Unlike digital giants, they have the capability to provide local presence and local service to those

Providing a personalised experience, from marketing to sales and support, will be a big differentiator in an ever-so competitive market

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a of profound change



businesses that simply can't negate their issues alone. They have the capacity to truly understand their current setup, their problems and their needs, and provide the right solutions on a case-by-case basis.

Earlier this year we also asked our partners what percentage of business sales came from new customers, and while new business is positively growing again, it was clear that a big chunk of business still comes from existing opportunities. With a new wave of buying underway, it's never been more important to reconnect with the existing customer base, cultivate those relationships and understand how to enhance their current tech stack to deliver maximum value. The PSTN switch off is a great example of how supporting an existing customer base can bring real value to the channel. By helping your WLR base navigate this change, you'll automatically have a base to transfer to hosted when the time is right for them.

Adapting to change

It has become abundantly clear that consumer expectations have grown. During the pandemic, we've all turned to digital services to solve our issues and simplify our daily lives, and this trend will stick well beyond this year. Consumers are demanding more and more of brands. While larger enterprises, with more complex needs and existing infrastructure, might struggle to adapt quickly, SMEs have the benefit of being much more agile and flexible in their adoption of cloud technology. These businesses are turning to providers to solve their complex external communications requirements simply and cost-effectively for them. For the channel, this means adapting their approach and portfolio to serving them with products and applications to enable those needs.

Contact centre capabilities within the SME space can prove especially profitable to partners looking to expand their portfolio. Traditionally, contact centres

have been the sole domain of large enterprises, often too expensive or complex for smaller businesses to implement. When we launched Horizon Contact at the beginning of the year, we enabled the channel to unlock new opportunities in this market with a cloud-based contact centre solution designed for SMEs, at a price they can afford and that brings value to our partners.

Across all segments, the mobile market is also growing at an unprecedented rate, with data usage increasing by 27 per cent over the pandemic. More and more businesses are adopting a mobile-only strategy for their business communications – with the latest mobile technology often just as fast and efficient as fixed connectivity and traditional phone systems. 5G will become increasingly mission-critical for businesses with greater data requirements and will therefore present the biggest opportunity for partners to deliver truly game-changing technology to their customers. There has never been a more exciting time for partners to add mobile to their portfolio, and with our latest launch of Gamma Mobile they can rely on a product built on the fastest 5G network in the country, with one of the most flexible tariff offerings in the market, Tariff Optimiser – truly delivering value to their business and their customers.

From strength to strength

As the channel continues to navigate through some uncertainty, we are proud to continue to support our partners and to reassure them for the long term. This past year, we have made continuous investments in our portfolio and product strategy – also enabled by the many acquisitions of the past couple of years. Our acquisition of Telsis and its contact centre capability have allowed us to launch Horizon Contact and as mentioned before, further permeate the SME market segment. Similarly, through the investment in Mission Labs and its SmartAgent integration with Amazon, we have been able to meet the more complex requirements of the enterprise market. Finally, we have continued and are continuing to build on our relationship with Microsoft thanks to our acquisition of Exactive in 2020, with our latest accolade becoming part of a selected few providers on the Operator Connect for Microsoft Teams programme. Thanks to these acquisitions and our continuous investments in new solutions, we have increased our understanding of how to help our partners make the most of contact centre and Microsoft opportunities across different channels and market segments.

We continue to believe that the channel is perfectly positioned to truly reap the benefits of the changes in the market. By focusing on delivering a personalised, solution-driven experience through a wider portfolio, they can meet the growing requirements of their customers and differentiate themselves in one of the most competitive moments in the history of our industry. ■

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With a new wave of buying underway, it's never been more important to reconnect with the existing customer base

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Channel reaches 'critical

continue to gather pace

TalkTalk Business' name change to TalkTalk Wholesale Services reflects an evolved strategy focused around the critical requirements of channel partners as the UK leaps to full fibre, says Comms Vision Platinum sponsor Richard Thompson, Managing Director, TalkTalk Wholesale Services.

Our rebrand to TalkTalk Wholesale Services is much more than a name change. It marks a new chapter for our business, an evolution of the wholesale operation that has always existed in TalkTalk. And our long-term vision to deliver a fibre future has not changed, but we have positively refreshed our approach. In more exciting news, we recently became a private company, giving us the freedom to achieve our fibre goals more quickly. We have the undivided support of long-term shareholders who know us well and value what we have achieved and will continue to achieve. We can build for the long-term. It feels like starting all over again as a fresh challenger in a fast-changing market.

The full fibre future is a clear part of our strategy and as a private business we can focus on finding the best ways and the best partners to deliver that for our customers. We're proud to be the only major network-agnostic ultimate enabler, so we work with Openreach, CityFibre and many others because what's most important is availability and price to customers. TalkTalk Wholesale Services has also been working much closer with partners to sell with, to run campaigns together, to work out how to up-sell and how we unlock geographic capability as the footprint unfolds.

We are prioritising investment in all areas that matter for our partners and customers. Areas like our network, which we make sure is resilient and able to meet the 40 per cent surge in demand since the pandemic. We continue to ensure we have the headroom to withstand any peaks, which have been record-breaking over the last year. Where some operators are operating in a commoditised marketplace, we are differentiating. We are already set

apart from the rest by our network, our value and our overall offering and commitment to our Partners. And just recently we did more of the same by expanding our portfolio to include 10GB Ethernet. Partners and customers can future proof and scale their network with our new 10Gb bandwidth options: 1Gb, 2Gb, 3Gb, 5Gb and 10Gb. All options are available on a 10Gb bearer which allows partners to seamlessly upgrade their customers' network in line with their usage requirements. At a micro level partners will move end customers up the value chain towards higher bandwidth services either across FTTP or Ethernet.

Portfolio expansion

We've been busy trying to understand how we can provide a wider spectrum of services to our partners, reviewing what additional capability and expertise we can deliver to help partners win. This is where our Platform comes in, which powers TalkTalk Wholesale Services. Our Platform will provide partners with the ability to unlock services that can optimise their business, driving growth and cost efficiencies. Many of these services are ready to consume today, while others will be developed over time based on the requirements of our partners.

TalkTalk Wholesale Services has always looked to be a challenger and disrupt the market, and that's no different in this period of change we're entering as we move towards the 2025 switch off of legacy services. This copper cliff edge sees TalkTalk taking a more focused perspective this year: Full fibre roll out, also marking a new era as a private company. Our number one priority is reconnecting with customers in-person, coming out of lockdown and taking a much deeper look at how

It feels like starting all over again – being a fresh challenger in a fast-changing market

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point' as fibre roll outs



that we were doing the right thing for our partners and their customers during these challenging times. This, as mentioned, includes on Ethernet. We offered a High Level Escalation pathway for all Critical National Infrastructure projects and are proud to have supported our partners in delivering many important CNI projects too, including a significant number of hospitals, care homes and schools.

Demand for our services rose, just as reliability and speed of connection became even more important than it had been before. Two of our colleagues were awarded MBEs for the work they did connecting Nightingale hospitals and other critical care centres. For something that normally takes months they got done in as little as 48 hours. Other colleagues had to work flat out delivering nationally critical infrastructure, in tough circumstances, and I'm grateful to all of them.

Reconfiguring for 2025

Today, as we emerge from the pandemic, partners need to be thinking in a 2025 mindset and reconfigure their capabilities and processes to secure future success. Looking at the great transformative companies as examples, they are really quite narrow in their focus. It's all about doing what you do brilliantly. Our ambition is to continue to do just that, turbo charge our growth while navigating partners through our changing landscape in jointly going to market.

Capitalising on rising demand

TalkTalk Wholesale Services is well positioned to continue its strong growth pedigree and capitalise on the rising demand for business and consumer connectivity, and take partners to the next level. Eighty per cent of our revenue is through the indirect channel and this strategy is unchanged. But as the technology landscape is radically changing the role of the carrier is evolving. The need for fast, reliable connectivity is more important now than ever before and the pandemic has only strengthened our mission to deliver a full fibre future.

We need to provide more than just the pipe. We need to provide thought leadership, marketing capabilities and the wider ecosystem around the pipe to enable the end customer and the partner to transition with confidence. We're making significant investments in our business and in our marketing to enable us to do this.

We are at a pivot point and how we support future growth and connectivity services is more important than ever. There is going to be this fundamental change in the underlying access technology, and whenever there's a period to change, opportunities need to be identified and exploited. This requires a close working relationship. We're engineering our sales, marketing, and product functions to execute that go-to market in best possible way. Everything starts and finishes with the customer. ■

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We are at a pivot point, and how we support future growth and connectivity services is more important than ever

we support them through this transition from copper to fibre. Our strategy and all the changes we are making have a focus on delivering this fibre future and supporting our partners as they make this transition.

Reconfiguring

The team across TalkTalk Wholesale Services worked closely with DCMS, Ofcom and Openreach to ensure

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Unified firms create new t

The growth prospects from Blue Cube Solutions' strengthened cyber security proposition are tantalising for CEO Gary Haycock-West having joined forces with two complementary businesses – all former rivals.

In late August Blue Cube Security merged with its rivals Epaton and Next Generation Security (NGS) to create a new group with skills in cyber security, cloud, infrastructure and digital transformation. The enlarged business, called Blue Cube Solutions, will leverage Epaton's storage expertise and NGS's cyber security knowhow to offer a richer portfolio to businesses across London, Leeds and Sussex. "Blue Cube Security, NGS and Epaton have been sparring with one another for many years, but now is the time to work on the same side," said Haycock-West. "The convergence of cyber security, cloud, infrastructure and digital transformation is more relevant than ever and remains at the top of most boardroom agendas."

Founded in 2000, Blue Cube Security has steadily expanded organically – until the three-way merger – mainly through moving from product sales into services. "The threat landscape is a constant game of cat and mouse," added Haycock-West. "We traditionally worked with vendors to fix problems. This evolved into an amalgamation of products and our own services, put together to defend against cyber attacks. We have developed our services significantly and gone from being a vendor product sales business to sell more services than we do products."



Gary Haycock-West

We have been presented with a new landscape. It's now about having agility in your thinking and routes to market

Largely due to the growth of cloud platforms the cyber security arena is a continually evolving space, meaning that companies such as Blue Cube Security need to adjust their go to market strategy. "The distribution model with cloud solutions is changing, with the large cloud providers such as AWS not necessarily using a distribution model and third party vendors

not really knowing how to react," commented Haycock-West. "So we have been working with vendors and cloud providers, although predominantly AWS to find a solution for that."

Strong demand

Covid-19 had an upward impact on demand for Blue Cube Security's services, generating 66 per cent

growth driven by remote working and the increase of cyber crime due to people being forced to use technology new to them. However, it's a long time since technology was new to Haycock-West, having immersed himself in IT for nearly all of his working life. At school he studied computers and some family members were already

working in IT at that time. Large mainframe computing, all the rage before the arrival of distributed and personal computing, gave Haycock-West an insight and taster that put him on the pathway to a career in tech. His first job was on an IBM-based mainframe platform in retail, from where he moved into manufacturing and then financial services.



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"I became a salesman offering IBM related products and travelled the county meeting all sorts of different large organisations," recalled Haycock-West. "This gave me the wonderful experience of talking to many innovative businesses and understanding the stresses and strains different organisations undergo, which I didn't fully appreciate at the time. I then started working as a reseller of systems services and solutions which enabled me to adapt my own

to become a true services business. Our own SOC in Yorkshire adds greater depth to what we are able to offer to our customers."

Haycock-West's 21 year history with Blue Cube Security and prior experience as an early proponent of IT solutions means he is used to the rapid pace of industry change and how to meet the various challenges. "We have been presented with a new landscape," he stated. "It's now about having

Going into non-IT sectors has made me a more rounded and balanced businessman

skills from an operational and technical role into a sales role. This influenced some of what Blue Cube Security offers today."

Expansion

He noted that Blue Cube Security is displaying strong growth and that further expansion is on the cards, including a fresh recruitment drive for talent. "Having just brought together three strong businesses and with the synergistic way we plan to work we have enhanced our cyber security posture," commented Haycock-West. "With Next Generation Security bringing additional customers and product sets to enhance and bolster the cyber security arena, and Epaton having storage management, we can integrate and offer our own secure storage solution.

"We will promote these services to our enlarged customer base and a broader range of organisations which will enhance our footprint. It also allows us

agility in your thinking and routes to market. Cloud domination means we have had to reinvent some of our services. We've been on a journey with AWS to become a highly accredited partner. From that perspective we are in touch with our customers' needs, the vendor market and the available solutions."

Another opportunity Haycock-West recognised was the advantage of expanding his own keen interest into other businesses in executive, non-executive and director roles. "This has broadened my thinking, and going into non-IT sectors has made me a more rounded and balanced businessman," he explained.

"It helps me relate to different market sectors and how the challenges of one business are similar to another where, on the face of it, they appear distinctly different. I enjoy running a business, I enjoy talking to people and look forward to continuing to do so for many years to come." ■

Just a minute with Gary Haycock-West...

Roll model: Jeff Bezos: He took a massive risk when setting up Amazon and despite everyone saying it was a failing business, through sheer perseverance and tenacity he changed the way the world shops and thinks.

What do you fear most? Nothing.

What talent do you wish you had? To be a Ju Jitsu master. It gives better strength of body and mind.

Name three ideal dinner guests? Winston Churchill, a phenomenal leader for everyone to see in the face of adversity; Whitney Houston, I just love her music; and Mr Incredible because I appreciate the challenges of family life and by pulling the family dynamics together you can achieve all sorts of things.

In hindsight: I have never been shy about making decisions, but should have been braver quicker and done more earlier.

The hardest decision you made last year? It was linked to learning how to navigate the Covid-19 storm. More decisions had to be made than ever throughout last year. I didn't know what to do, and couldn't seek advice as no one else had been through it.

If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing? I'd be a barrister. I love a good argument and making a point.

Who do you admire most in the channel? We have far too many good suppliers and I wouldn't want anyone to get jealous.

How do you relax when not working? Spending time with my extended family and enjoying my motor cars and motorbikes, although I have just got into having an e-bike.

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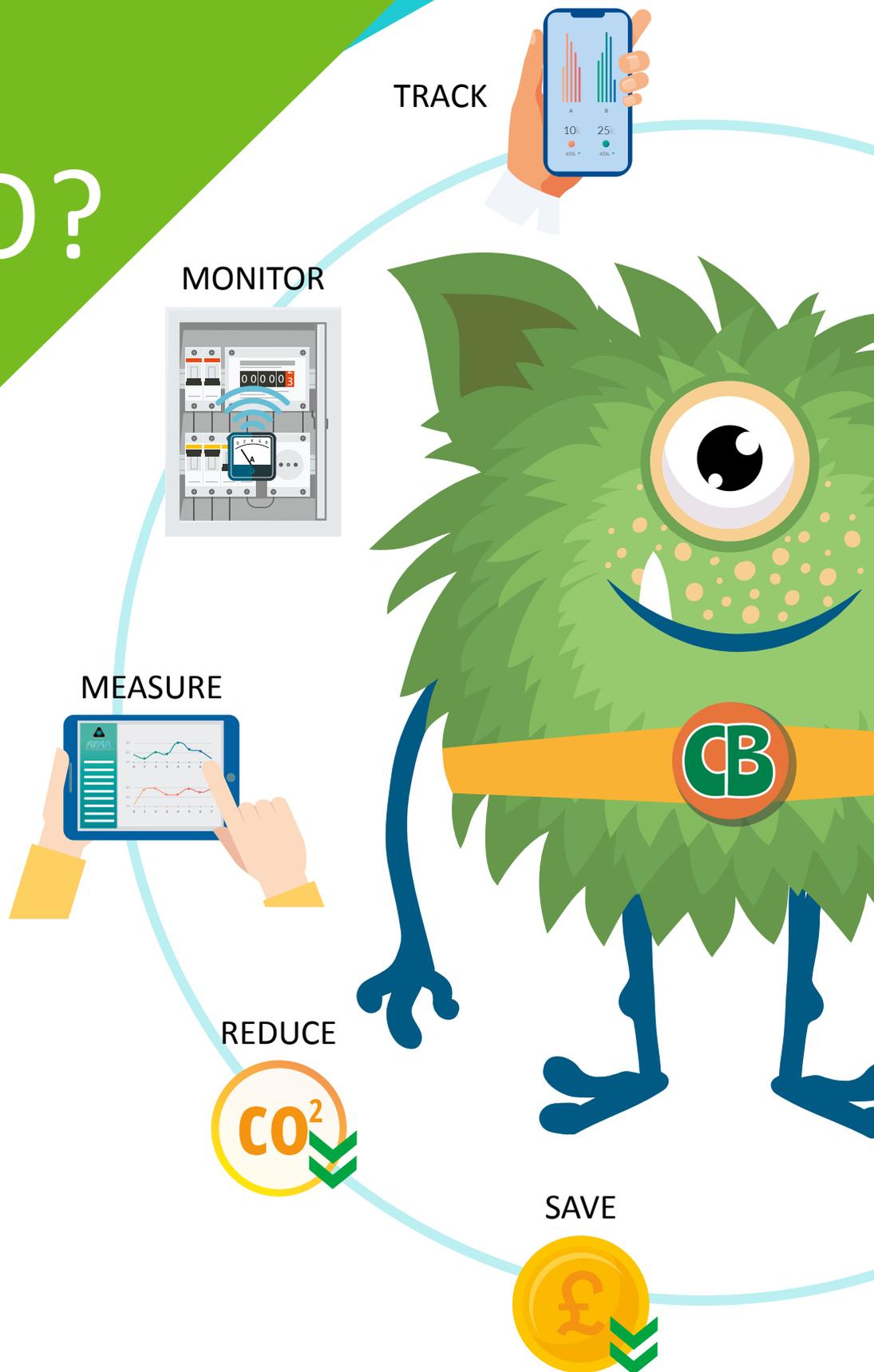
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With entries now closed and another record number of entries received, the Comms National Awards judges have now decided on the winners who will collect their coveted prizes at the glittering finals night to be staged at the Hilton on Park Lane in London's Mayfair on October 7th.

Sponsored for the second time this year by Digital Wholesale Solutions and independently judged by a panel of distinguished industry experts, the Comms National Awards recognises quality across the channel spectrum with awards in both reseller (customer solutions) and vendor (service to the channel) categories.

"The Comms National Awards is the UK's

leading awards process for the ICT channel and whether companies are winners or finalists, the prestige and PR they can gain from participating is huge. In these challenging times it will be even more important to acknowledge the amazing work channel teams have undertaken to keep Britain connected," said Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent.

Sponsors such as Jola support these awards because of the endorsement winning solutions provide for their businesses, As CEO Andrew Dickinson explained:



"With over 1000 partners, Jola is constantly collecting use cases to improve our understanding of enterprise needs in different industries. We chose to sponsor Best Enterprise Managed Customer Solution because there is no better case study than when a reseller provides a solution that's then voted best in class."

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"This is a fantastic awards process and the awards night itself is always the highlight of the year, bringing together everyone in the Channel for a night of celebration," said Digital Wholesale Solutions Chief Executive Officer, Terry O'Brien.

"The effort entrants put into these awards is exemplary and we know the value our teams place on being shortlisted. Our industry has done some amazing things during the Covid-19 pandemic, keeping the NHS and other key organisations communicating effectively, and the CNAs gives channel companies a wonderful opportunity to reward and recognise those efforts. It is amazing to see more organisations than

ever have entered this year to show the country what we are made of and what we have achieved during this challenging time.

"We were delighted to sponsor the awards for the first-time last year and, although it had to be run virtually, it was still great to see how the industry pulled together to celebrate our achievements. This year we're so looking forward to a fully live event and I'm sure the atmosphere at finals night will be extra special. We can't wait to celebrate and congratulate everyone in the channel at this very special occasion."

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A greener planet is in every

On November 1st, Glasgow plays host to this year's United Nations Climate Change Conference where the heads of international delegations will discuss sustainability and reversing environmental decline.

It has become urgent in our industry that we have the same discussions. According to a BCG report, the ICT industry accounts for 3 to 4 per cent of global CO2 emissions - about twice that of civil aviation. With global data traffic increasing by around 60 per cent per year this contribution is forecast to grow to 14 per cent of all CO2 emissions by 2040.

The report reads: "Within telecoms specifically, the issue of sustain-

ability has become urgent. The unprecedented demand for digital communications during the pandemic has forced telco infrastructures to consume more energy than ever, expanding their carbon footprint."

The telecommunication industry is also uniquely placed to help other industries become more energy efficient, providing customer enablement solutions to clients and securing reseller's role as a trusted and ethical partner.

We therefore asked our contributors, what steps can business leaders in the channel take to reduce their company's environmental impact, and can they benefit from the image of a sustainability champion?



GAVIN JONES
BT WHOLESAL

"There are multiple ways that we can overcome sustainability challenges in the channel. Firstly, investing in energy efficient and climate resilient networks will future-proof connectivity, revenue streams and the environment. This comes down to choosing materials that minimise energy outputs and supporting reuse and recycling initiatives to promote a circular economy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Collectively, we can reduce energy needs and decarbonise the energy we use and buy, including the purchase of renewable energy. Having a detailed understanding of power use is extremely valuable in helping businesses to control their energy use, understand implications of different deployment options, and to choose how to rationalise declining systems. At BT we have worked to reduce engineer visits to site when providing services and we have been developing a range of greener services to allow multiple tasks to be completed at the same time to keep down 'truck rolls'."



CAROL MCGROTTY
VAPOUR

"Companies often believe every sustainability initiative they roll out must be major if it is to have an environmental impact. Yet really, what's perhaps more powerful, is the collective effort of as many people as possible, and the continued achievement of even marginal gains. For example, using secure public cloud services rather than on-premise server rooms or private data centres can dramatically reduce carbon footprint. The wider consolidation of hardware can further lower power consumption, especially if more energy efficient models are chosen. Seemingly redundant kit should be disposed of responsibly, ideally using compliant yet environmentally responsible recovery schemes that prioritise reuse or recycling. A clearly communicated mission statement should encourage employees to also be considerate and responsible for their own behaviours at the workplace and at home. 'Green thinking' then stands a better chance of growing to become a mindset, rather than simply a fad."



SARAH PARSONS
CITYFIBRE

"Having a sustainability champion at CityFibre has enabled the importance of our environmental impact to be bought to an executive level and to be considered in decision making across the business. CityFibre has also ensured our Responsible Business strategy aligns with our existing business strategy and KPIs. We are aware it is our responsibility to understand the environmental impact of building a digital infrastructure and take the relevant steps to minimise this. At the start of 2021 CityFibre appointed Anthesis, a world-leading sustainability consultancy, to help collate and understand our GHG emission data. Now CityFibre has a clear understanding of our impact, we are working to identify what we are doing well and what we could do better. Identifying and implementing opportunities for reduction of GHG emissions is the next step CityFibre will be taking as part of our Responsible Business strategy, as well as setting some ambitious goals."



NEIL WILSON
VIRTUAL1

"Embracing cloud technologies will be our most effective means of combatting climate change as an industry. The promotion of UCaaS, SaaS and IaaS solutions are already a hugely more efficient use of resources than what we saw in the legacy world of dedicated, onsite servers - not to mention that they are also dramatically more energy efficient to run. This is all before the more obvious environmental benefits that the applications can deliver, such as less travel. We already see tender responses questioning the environmental impact and sustainability of suppliers, their supply chains and their solutions. In such a highly competitive industry, being able to deliver an effective and transparent message around this will undoubtedly help differentiate. By embracing cloud solutions, we can help businesses have a much lower environmental impact, and be more cost effective, which is exactly what will be needed to drive real change now and in the future."



JEFF MAY
KONFTEL

"Business leaders should be sustainability champions, as we all have a role to play and it is the collective actions that will have the most impact. Their involvement will lead and inspire all. In an era of agile working with huge demand for conferencing and collaboration hardware, caring for the planet is just as important as connecting the world. Konftel was the first in the collaboration devices sector to earn official Climate Neutral certification - recently extended for the second year in a row. This means all greenhouse gas emissions have been offset, across all aspects of the business, from manufacturing and packaging to transportation. Konftel continues to cut impact at source too with a series of new initiatives. We want to be part of the Green Recovery, rebooting the economy for a sustainable and climate neutral future, long after the Covid crisis is over. Together we can all make a difference."



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CHERIE HOWLETT
JOLA

"We all have a responsibility to reverse environmental decline. There are simple things we can do such as encouraging employees to leave the car at home. At Jola, we participate in the cycle to work scheme and from the start adopted a paperless office. We recycle all packaging and ensure any old hardware finds a good home. We encourage remote working and limit travel to try and reduce our carbon footprint. We are conscious of the impact increased mobile data usage is having on the environment and the challenges faced by the networks to become more energy efficient. We develop products to help partners dealing with environmental challenges, providing smart solutions to reduce the environmental impact. Our SIMs can be found in water and energy metres as well as air quality and parking sensors helping to reduce waste and energy consumption and improve traffic planning and air quality."



HELEN WRIGHT
WAVENET

"With so many businesses forced to adopt homeworking culture at short notice for the sake of business continuity, Covid-19 fast-tracked the move to cloud and the carbon impact associated with the use of office space has for many companies has been depleted. For most ICT businesses the greatest carbon impact is locked within their supply chain and addressing this should be a longer-term priority. Requirements for businesses to make carbon reduction commitments are becoming increasingly commonplace with a more selective approach towards a sustainable supply chain for goods and services that will produce long-term results. However, in the short term, business leaders should engineer change within their workforce by mobilising a sustainability champion to help gear their workforce towards a sustainable future, and to become an advocate for proactive change in all areas. Businesses must use their greatest assets – their people – to rise to the challenge."



DAVID WARDELL
EVOKE TELECOM

"It is unfortunate that in keeping UK plc connected during the pandemic we have seen an increase in CO2 uplift as a consequence. However, at Evoke Telecom we believe our industry can turn this negative into a positive. New systems have enabled us to dramatically reduce our travel footprint with less physical meetings, less events and most importantly supportive remote installations. We are also encouraging a move away from physical phones to drive the adoption of collaboration and reduce the climate impact of hardware manufacture and disposal. When added to electric fleet and sensible estate decisions, we can make a real difference. Driven by boardroom pressure, companies are become increasingly climate conscious and will be encouraged to work with like-minded partners. Without a doubt, if going green and supplying green is not on your agenda then you are in grave danger of being left out in the cold."



ADAM CATHCART
9 GROUP

"By giving your teams a directive to shape and support environmental initiatives within your organisation, you can make sustainability a genuine part of your culture. This shouldn't just be a token effort. Box ticking doesn't work when sustainability and culture are at play. Inspire your leadership team to introduce positive changes and encourage your people to be more conscious – even small changes can make a difference and should be recognised. Your management team should lead by example by acting as sustainability champions. Topics around social responsibility form part of our leadership discussions every month as well as our regular communications to staff. The environmental footprint of a business can provide an indication of how well it is being run and whether or not the organisation will provide strong, long-term results. It is no longer a 'nice to have', it is imperative to the success of a business."



SOHINI RAITHATHA
REDSQUID

"In the UK, businesses account for over 85 per cent of total GHG emissions – making corporate action the number one priority in helping stop climate change. It is vital that organisations within our industry step up to the challenge and review how we can contribute to driving positive change. As a business we wanted to do our part for the environment and we therefore partnered up with Carbon Neutral Britain, with the ambition to measure and offset our organisation's emissions. We are proud to say we became certified as a Carbon Neutral business in April this year. Since then, we have continuously been reviewing our processes and offices to improve our practices and reduce the footprint our organisation leaves on the world. While striving to make a difference, I find that every improvement and reduction counts!"



RICHARD THOMPSON
TALKTALK WHOLESALE
SERVICES

"TalkTalk is on a journey to reduce our carbon usage and environmental impact. One of the most effective strategies is the adoption of full fibre, our number one priority, which can reduce energy consumption by up to 80 per cent compared to copper. Having already reduced our operational carbon footprint by 60 per cent, we're exploring the entire value chain lifecycle, from our data centres and offices to our supply chain and use of devices by customers to minimise impact. TalkTalk Business' MD chairing BITC's Net Zero Taskforce has helped align our goals and share ideas with businesses. Our group of dedicated employees spread the word of TalkTalk's work - and their passion in driving changes is infectious. I would certainly recommend finding sustainability champions to bring that same level of devotion. We must work together to meet these environmental challenges."

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Grads pile on board



Verastar welcomes new graduates

VERASTAR'S ongoing investment into developing young talent saw 28 graduates join the firm across August and September with 12 more set to arrive in January next year. These 40 graduates follow the 200-plus new recruits brought in across all roles this year as part of Verastar's five year growth strategy.

Its graduate programme has been running for 14 years and alumni of the scheme now hold senior leadership roles within the company.

CEO Lee Hull said: "Our graduates have had a huge impact on the business in recent years, so it makes sense to increase our investment in that area. We're boosting our talent pipeline while supporting more young people to accelerate their careers. It's a win-win situation."

Hull also noted that there has 'never been more competition for talent' in the recruitment market, particularly in areas like Greater Manchester and Glasgow where Verastar is based.

"Sometimes businesses have to take responsibility themselves and invest in developing young talent in-house," he added. "Our graduates get exposure to multiple areas of the business during the 18 month programme giving them an understanding of the entire operation and the end-to-end customer journey. This experience sets them up for success in their own careers. Having the opportunity to work alongside our 40 graduates and supporting their development is one of the highlights of my role as CEO."

Also on the move...

FORMER Clearcomm Group Operations Director Gavin Davies has joined construction and engineering company nmcn as Managing Director for its telecoms business unit. In his 20 year career Davies was also Director of Network Build and Business at Comex 2000



Gavin Davies

and Operations Manager at Fujitsu. He said: "I'm joining nmcn as the company plays its part in moving the UK's infrastructure forward." CEO Lee Marks added: "Gavin's senior leadership experience in the industry will significantly contribute to our strategic plans as nmcn becomes one of the UK's fastest growing telecoms contractors. Gavin takes a pivotal role as we support the Government's ambitions for nationwide coverage of ultrafast full fibre broadband by 2025."

HAVING been an early user of Layer Systems' SaaS CRM platform Mat Whyman relished the chance to join the firm as Chief Commercial Officer. He moves from BT company Mainline where he was Regional Partner Manager and



Mat Whyman

previously Strategic Business Development Manager. He brings over 20 years experience within the telecoms channel and first used The Layer API-driven platform in 2014 at Tru Solutions.

CEO Michelle Livingstone stated: "Mat is a significant addition to our management team. He has a genuine passion for using technology to build leaner, stronger businesses. His ideas and direction will prove invaluable as we continue to rapidly scale." Whyman added: "I can't wait to get stuck in and start to make a difference."

GLIDE'S financial portfolio and future planning will be spearheaded by incoming CFO Chris Bates. He previously worked in PE owned businesses covering the tech, engineering, contracting and construction and service sectors. His 35 years experience in finance includes CFO roles at VPS Holdings, Survitec Group and Hydro International. Glide CEO Tim Pilcher said: "Following a strong first half to 2021 we are keen to continue the upward trajectory. Chris will play a significant role in helping us navigate the future."

ANDREW Dutton has joined Ask4 as CEO, replacing Jonathan Burrows who steps down after 21 years at the helm. Burrows continues as a no executive member of the Ask4 board involved in the group's strategic direction. "There is much more to do, and Andrew's experience and skills will take the team and the service we deliver from strength to strength," said Burrows. Dutton joins from Adare International where he was CEO.

North brings in chief of people

INVESTMENT from Livingbridge and the acquisition of Data Techniques have prompted IoT provider North to appoint Coreen Bone as Chief People Officer reporting to CEO Glen Williams.



Coreen Bone

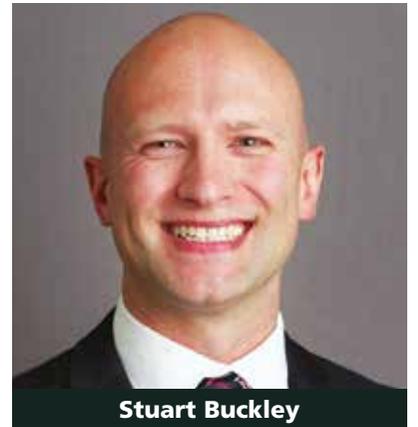
She brings more than 20 years experience working

across a number of sectors including executive roles at Xerox Business Services where she delivered strategic and operational people solutions at a global level, including the integration of acquired businesses. More recently she was CPO at Allvotec. "Following the Data Techniques acquisition it's the ideal time to be joining the business," stated Bone. "I will contribute to a culture that enables employees to reach their potential."

Williams added: "Having previously worked across similar roles within the technology sector, Coreen has knowledge of how to best devise and implement strategies that prioritise people. She also has a deep understanding of business integration and how processes are best streamlined and managed. Coreen will play a key role in building a strong company culture based on our core values of creativity, collaboration, community, humility and service."

Node4 signs sales leader for channel

NODE4'S appointment of Stuart Buckley as Channel Sales Director is set to boost the MSP's partner strategy and ISV development campaign. He joins from Starcom Technologies where he spent six years as Sales Director. Starcom was acquired by Node4 in February.



Stuart Buckley

Prior roles making up his 25 years experience include Head of Channel and Alliances at K3 Hosting and stints with Italik, Lanway CBS and Central Networks & Technologies.

"My key objectives include building on our understanding of partner requirements and working with my Node4 colleagues to enhance our solutions and channel strategy," stated Buckley.

Chief Sales Officer Shane Dove added: "Stuart has an impressive track record in building channel strategies and working with partners and their customers to ensure technology delivers the right business outcomes."

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