



Employee ownership pays off for McMail p30

Comms National Awards honour industry leaders p34



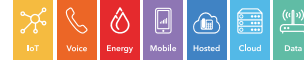
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## Recycle toxic mountain

to recycle defunct hardware piling up in IP or cloud communications solutions in

MD of Best 4 communications.

They bought two both had storage with unsellable it's a struggle to

the COP Climate Conference, resellers air lens towards initiatives as some more selective with green thinking'd like someone positively about

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Xelion UK MD Dave Reynolds added: "Cloud hosted telephony has had a terrific positive environmental impact for all customers. All companies are now conscious of the need to minimise their environmental impact and many tender documents require proof of sustainable business practices, especially in the public sector."

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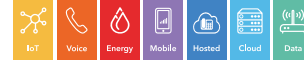
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Value creation in disruptive times



# VARs face toxic waste mountain

COMMS resellers have called for help to recycle defunct hardware piling up in storerooms as customers upgrade to VoIP or cloud communications solutions in the run up to the big switch to digital.

### SPECIAL REPORT

With the ISDN and WLR end of life scheduled for 2025, millions of lines will need to be upgraded across the UK.

This means at least the same number of telephones plus PBX servers will become end of use, creating a mountain of plastic, metal and toxic chemicals to be disposed of under WEEE recycling directives, which is costly.

"Old kit in the marketplace is massive at the moment," said

Freddie Hawker, MD of Best 4 Business Communications.

"We recently bought two businesses and both had storerooms piled high with unsellable hardware. It's a struggle to get rid of it."

In light of the COP Climate Change conference, resellers are turning their lens towards environmental initiatives as customers become more selective in dealing with green thinking providers. "I'd like someone to talk to me positively about

the environmental options for me and my customers," commented Armstrong Bell Director Will Copley.

Xelion UK MD Dave Reynolds added: "Cloud hosted telephony has had a terrific positive environmental impact for all customers. All companies are now conscious of the need to minimise their environmental impact and many tender documents require proof of sustainable business practices, especially in the public sector."



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# The right kind of partnership makes all the difference

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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.

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## EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

IN A ROUNDABOUT way it is perhaps good news that Chancellor Rishi Sunak's 2021 Budget lacked a major broadband announcement. We know that fibre broadband is a priority for Government, therefore we can only deduce that its

ambitions to deliver Digital Britain are on track – thanks in large part to the sterling efforts of alternative network providers and their magnetic appeal to investors with deep pockets – emphatically underscored by CityFibre's record £1.125 billion capital raise in September. The deal was officially signed at 10 Downing Street – and we can imagine the Chancellor's eyes spinning with amazement.

This was also quite a moment for CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch who was told, when he acquired CityFibre in 2011, that his business model would never work. Blimey... perhaps the detractors had experienced a foreboding nightmare in which a Labour Government had decided to nationalise broadband.

Thankfully, delegates at this year's Comms Vision Convention at Gleneagles Hotel (10th-12th November) will hear first hand how Mesch did make CityFibre work – and more. Conferees will also gain a handle on the broader Managed Services Provider competitive landscape, and witness an on-stage interview with Sir Charles Dunstone and other leading industry lights (see pages 41-84 for the full Comms Vision line-up and supplement).

In more good news, we were thrilled to recognise the channel's luminaries once again at the Comms National Awards, staged at the Hilton on Park Lane in London's Mayfair on October 7th, and choreographed by dancer and television presenter Anton Du Beke. Congratulations were heaped on all winners during a glittering evening that saw Zen founder and Chairman Richard Tang collect the Entrepreneur of the Year award (see page 18 for Richard's inside story, and pages 34-37 for this year's Comms National Awards Hall of Fame). Have a great month!

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

# Focus closes Scottish deal



Ralph Gilbert

GALASHIELS-based GB Technologies has received an investment boost from Focus Group in a deal that extends the geographical reach, strengthens product portfolios and service expertise for both brands.

GB Technologies was established in 1987 by Chairman Gordon Brown who with his management team including Directors June Wilson and Mark Moncrieff continue to lead GB Technologies' 27 employees under its existing brand name.

Brown said: "GB Technologies is a growing, evolving and ambitious business. With Focus Group's complementary products, support services and

UK-wide engineering network we will fulfil our goals."

Co-founder and Director of Focus Group Ralph Gilbert said: "As a growing and dynamic business GB Technologies fits perfectly with the Focus Group culture. Geographically, it will also enable us grow our footprint in Scotland."

Focus Group acquired HighNet in April this year which has offices in Glasgow and Inverness. In October 2020 Focus acquired Resource Telecom Group which is based in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

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## NEWS ROUNDUP

LDC-backed Onecom's acquisition of Devon-based IP Office adds 700 customers, a new team and extends its geographical reach into the south west. The deal is Onecom's third this year and follows the acquisitions of Olive Communications closely followed by 9 Group. Martin Flick, Onecom Group CEO, said: "IP Office supports our mission to extend our geographic presence. It has demonstrable strength in the health sector which complements our specialisms." Yann Souillard, Head of LDC in London, added: "Acquisitions have been a core component of Onecom's growth strategy since we backed the business in 2019." Onecom was established in 2002 and employs over 600 people.

WAVENET'S IT capabilities and infrastructure have received a boost following the acquisition of Internal Systems (ISL). The deal comes soon after Wavenet's acquisition of NTS Communications (see p6). Wavenet CEO Bill Dawson said: "This acquisition combined with our partnership with HPE GreenLake gives us a stronger foundation to provide cloud solutions across enterprise and public sector."



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NEWS ROUNDUP

IN A TRADING update to FY2021 year end (30th September) CloudCoCo signposted revenue performance to marginally exceed the £8m recorded in the previous year. "While we saw a temporarily reduced number of orders in early FY21, as a result of customers deferring large scale IT projects and challenges in accessing sites in person, we were able to navigate the impacts of the pandemic," said CEO Mark Halpin. "The board continues to look for opportunities to build scale through organic and acquisitive means." In September 2021 CloudCoCo added 125 customers through the acquisition of Sheffield-based Systems Assurance and More Computers.

FOLLOWING its MBO early this year Bucks-based Epoq IT has ramped up its regional ambitions and added more weight to its board with the appointment Adrian Barnard as Executive Chair. "Epoq IT has great people, a great history and new fire in its belly," stated Barnard. "We are in the perfect space to win customers, organically and through local acquisition. I'm going to drive this business to be the best in Buckinghamshire, and then the south east."

## AIT seized as part of campaign

CONVERGENCE Group's UK expansion campaign has accelerated with the acquisition of Reading-based connectivity and security solutions operator AIT.

The deal boosts Convergence Group's revenue by 10% and adds 250 new customers operating in sectors such as higher education, public services and financial markets.

Convergence Group MD Danny Masters said: "AIT is a likeminded business and represents our commitment to driving forward our growth strategy in the UK."

The transaction follows Convergence Group's acquisition of LAN3 in July and LinchPin in September.

Birmingham-based Convergence Group provides connectivity services to public and private sector organisations across the UK, supporting 800 customers.



Danny Masters

# CEO change at Simwood

SIMWOOD founder Simon Woodhead has become Executive Chairman after 25 years operating as CEO.

Incoming Chief Executive Grahame Davies joined the wholesale and channel telephony provider in 2013 as an advisor before becoming Non-Exec Chairman in 2014, and then Chief Operating Officer.

Davies was also co-founder of Demon Internet and MD for Easynet overseeing around 450 employees and leading the company when it joined the stock market.

"Simwood has a strong board and senior management team, and this, combined with personal challenges, makes it an appropriate time for me to hand over the reins," explained Woodhead. "Grahame will bring a fresh approach that'll lead the business to bigger and better places."

Davies added: "I feel an enormous sense of duty and responsibility to Simwood and each of its staff and customers in taking up this role. I'm looking forward to working with all colleagues in the next phase of



Grahame Davies

the company's journey. I will be reaching out to our customer base to establish, renew and replenish relationships, and to refine existing services and collaborate on our roadmap."

NEWS ROUNDUP

FORMER Tharsus MD Chris Abbott has joined Six Degrees as Chief Operating Officer. Previous roles in his 20 years industry experience include Global COO for Vision-Box, Vice President and COO (EMEA) for HPE Enterprise Services and MD for HP Defence UK. Six Degrees CEO Simon Crawley-Trice commented: "Chris brings a demonstrable track record of organising and mobilising teams in global businesses to deliver at scale." Abbott added: "As our clients continue to pivot their digital transformations in this new, post-pandemic landscape, there has been no better time for Six Degrees' propositions of security, data and Microsoft Public Cloud solutions."

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# Circle rounded up by Arrow



Richard Burke

ARROW Business Communications has bolstered its cloud, networking and managed support capabilities with the acquisition of Circle Group (including Fabric IT which was acquired by Circle in March this year).

Circle's Microsoft Tier 1 CSP partner status alongside Fabric IT's accreditations in Microsoft Dynamics enables Arrow to offer the full Microsoft suite of solutions.

Circle's founder Roger Harry becomes a major shareholder within Arrow Group and will play a key role in its ongoing growth strategy.

Arrow CEO Richard Burke said: "The cultural alignment

of the businesses has stood out throughout the acquisition process and the high level of technical skill sets across the organisations will enhance Arrow's cloud, Microsoft and networking capability."

Circle was founded in 2002 and has built a national customer base with clients including UKTV, Harrison Clark Rickerbys and Cardiff University. More than 100 employees at its Cardiff Gate Business Park headquarters will now become part of Arrow.

The existing senior leadership team at Circle as well as all other employees remain in their current roles.

## NEWS ROUNDUP

SABIO'S CFO of over three years Troels Henriksen has stepped down, making way for incoming finance chief Nils Steinmeyer who has operated as a CFO since 2013. He also held a number of senior management positions since 1999 including a seven year stint in a PE environment at Terra Firm Capital Partners. CEO Jonathan Gale said: "Nils has huge experience of operating in C-suite and senior financial management and governance positions within acquisitive, growing businesses."

Full Fibre's build rate of 15,000 premises per month has earned it more funding from Basalt Infrastructure Partners. The altnet is building to over 320,000 premises across 10 English counties. A significant hot spot in south eastern Worcestershire is Evesham where work will begin this month on a network that will reach close to 22,000 premises. CEO Oliver Helm said: "Our focus on building fibre networks at pace means we are expanding at one of the quickest rates in the industry."

# Tedesco move signals next growth phase for operator

DIEGO Tedesco's move from Wholesale Fixed Commercial Marketing Director at Virgin Media O2 Business to Director of Wholesale Fixed signals a new phase in the company's growth strategy.

Tedesco succeeds Mike Hallam and has operated as a member of the Wholesale Fixed leadership team for almost nine years across various roles in the finance, strategy and commercial teams.

He reports to Jo Bertram, MD, Business and Wholesale.

"I have an opportunity to lead the Fixed Wholesale busi-



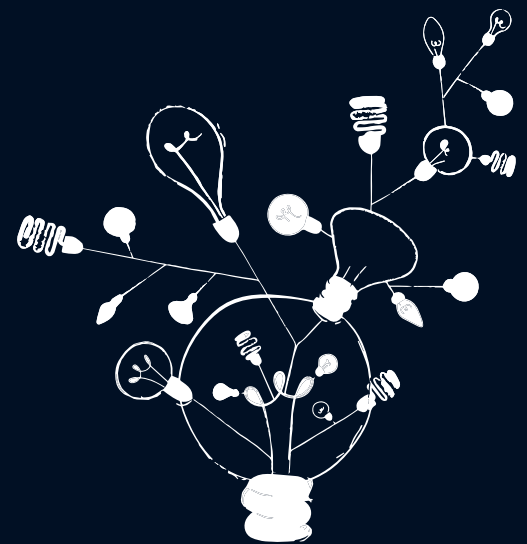
Diego Tedesco

ness into the next phase of its journey," commented Tedesco. "One that I believe brings a huge chance for our team to build on the successes we've seen over the last couple of years, continuing to drive dis-

ruption within the channel community and helping partners and end customers bounce back from the pandemic."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

YORKSHIRE-based Netcom Technologies has been acquired by Merseyside located Aabyss. The deal extends the IT consultancy's reach across the north and follows the acquisition of Bolton-based Tandem Systems in 2019. Aabyss CEO Andrew Allen stated: "We seldom find the right quality of firm to join the Aabyss family but Netcom is a perfect fit, representing enhanced benefits for our people and clients." Netcom MD Mark Kindred added: "The cultural fit and complementary service portfolio creates an opportunity to bring our collective expertise to a wider audience."

A TEN year managed network services contract valued at £20m-plus has been awarded to MLL Telecom by the South East Grid. The deal is part of a new 15 year Framework Agreement managed by East Sussex County Council. From December, MLL will manage the existing network infrastructure from the incumbent provider before commencing its transformation to full fibre. This will be carried out in tandem with MLL's fibre infrastructure partners, CityFibre and Openreach, with completion expected by early 2023.

# NTS bagged by Wavenet



Bill Dawson

WAVENET'S national presence has received a boost following its acquisition of Shropshire-based NTS Communications. NTS's tech partners include Mitel, Five9, Avaya, 8x8, Zoom and Gamma and the deal adds capabilities in contact centre, UC, cloud and IT services.

"The acquisition brings additional IT and cloud experience into the Wavenet Group which, combined with Wavenet's existing portfolio, gives our customers a wider range of solutions," commented Bill Dawson, CEO of Solihull-based Wavenet.

"With hybrid working now at the forefront of everyone's minds, NTS customers will

have access to Wavenet's cloud solutions including TeamsLink for Microsoft Teams."

Alan Pallett, Director of NTS Communications, added: "Being part of the Wavenet Group gives our customers access to further capabilities to adopt cloud-based contact centre, telecoms and IT solutions."

Wavenet began its commercial life in 2000. The company now has a 250 headcount and provides data, voice, security and IT services to over 8,000 SME, enterprise and public sector customers.

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# BDR eyes period of scaling up

BDR Group's two year acquisition strategy has received an eight figure funding boost from Santander. The deal follows BDR's three acquisitions earlier this year of managed IT services and provisions companies ACR, Boffins and Integratech.

In the last four years BDR has quadrupled revenues to £28m and is on target to hit £40m-plus in 2022.

CEO Bahman Rahimi said: "The team at Santander UK has always proactively backed our business and growth ambitions. The bank has become a valued long-term partner that we will continue to grow with."

Simon Clewlow, Growth Capital Director, Santander UK, added: "The IT services and telecoms sectors are rapidly changing, and over the past decade BDR Group has been at the forefront of industry consolidation. We are supporting BDR through the next phase of its buy-and-build strategy."

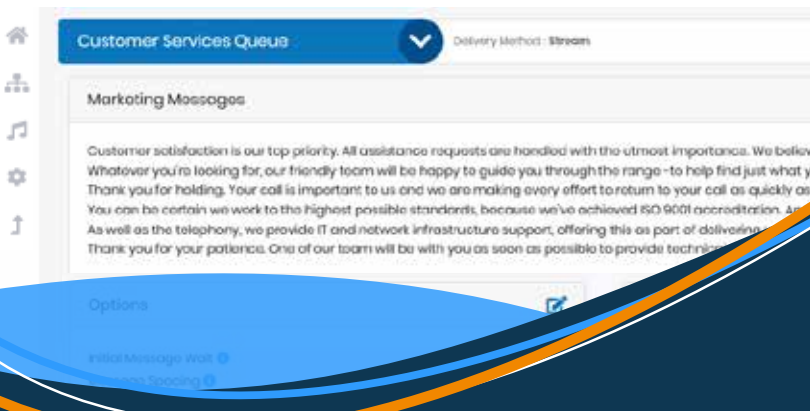


Bahman Rahimi

NEWS ROUNDUP

HORSHAM-based IT MSP William Jarrod Partnership has been acquired by Microsoft Gold Partner Marathon Managed Services. Marathon CEO Iain Maclean said: "Making targeted acquisitions is part of our strategy. The team at William Jarrod Partnership are a great fit." Paul Daniels, Managing Partner of William Jarrod Partnership, added "Marathon is a large enough business to offer enhanced services and opportunities, yet of a size to retain the personal approach that our customers enjoy today."


DUBLIN-based CWSI has ploughed over £1m into supporting UK growth. The investment will include 25 new roles in the UK and Ireland. CWSI entered the UK market in 2017 and acquired Berks-based security services provider AVR in May. CEO Ronan Murphy said: "The UK is central to our growth plans and expected to contribute 65% of annualised group revenues this year. We are particularly pleased to launch our apprenticeship programme in the UK. We have seen how the IT skills gap has negatively impacted the industry, and we plan to play our part in encouraging young people to build a career in IT and security."



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# Channel's winners celebrated at CNA

THE 2021 Comms National Awards (CNA) celebrated the industry's luminaries in style and reunited the channel at a fully live event staged at the Hilton on Park Lane in London's Mayfair on October 7th.

The awards extravaganza was hosted by dancer and television presenter Anton Du Beke who kept proceedings strictly professional with the help of voice of God, Gina Mellotte.

The first award went to Zen Internet CEO Richard Tang who was presented with the Entrepreneur of the Year gong. Double award winners included Jola, Redsquid, Gamma, CityFibre and Pangea.

Sohin Raithatha, CEO of Reseller of the Year Redsquid, said: "After a year of hard work and a big transformation within our organisation, we are filled with gratitude over these wonderful acknowledgments. We want to thank every single member of our team and all our amazing customers who have helped us achieve this."

Comms Dealer Editorial Director and awards co-ordinator Nigel Sergent commented: "This was very special night when the channel was able to meet face-to-face again and cel-



Anton Du Beke

brate everything that is great about our industry.

"It was fantastic to acknowledge the amazing solutions channel teams have deployed for customers during incredibly challenging times, recognise the support suppliers have given to make those solutions happen and reward innovation and business transformation in all its forms.

"It's been a tough time for everyone in business, but all the clever, determined people work-

ing in ICT have, quite literally, kept the UK communicating during the worst crisis since the second world war.

"I am extremely grateful to our judging panel who gave up their time to judge the awards and once again we had a record number of entries. A final word of thanks must go to our headline sponsor DWS and all our award and hospitality sponsors for their invaluable support."

See pages 34-37 for the full 2021 CNA Hall of Fame.

## Engaging times for rural users

RURAL broadband provider Voneus has ramped up efforts to connect hard-to-reach areas in Wales with a strengthened Community Engagement Team.

Carmarthen-based Voneus, which delivers superfast and ultrafast broadband across 22 UK counties, is accelerating its network build across Pembrokeshire, Carmarthen-shire, Ceredigion and Powys.

Zoe Day, Head of Community Engagement at Voneus, commented: "The role of the Community Engagement Team is critical. We know how important it is to embed ourselves in the communities we serve. We don't want to be a faceless business."

Community Engagement Team Leader Naomi Marshall added: "We have a desire to rid rural areas of poor broadband speeds. People in these areas often can't action simple tasks online like uploading files or watching streaming services due to slow speeds.

"We will change that, and we will be looking for more community engagement officers, as well as three more sales team members, more engineers and admin support to help us achieve this."

## NEWS ROUNDUP

THE expansion of Sophos' UK distribution footprint sees Giacom sign up as a new partner. All existing Sophos partners must nominate a new distribution partner before 31st December 2021. "As a prominent brand in the cyber security space, Sophos increases the strength of our security portfolio," commented Mike Wardell, CEO, Giacom. "To be chosen by Sophos as a key distributor is recognition of Giacom's market position."

A PARTNERSHIP between Union Street and ReforestACTION has enabled the billing provider to plant its own forest. ReforestACTION was founded in 2010 and its crowd planting programme has financed over 12 million trees across 35 countries. "Our aim is to plant a tree each year for every partner we work with," stated Union Street MD Vincent Disneur. "So far, we have planted more than 2,000 trees around the world's rainforests and this number will grow in line with our business. In time, our plan is to plant more trees here in the UK. Partnering with ReforestACTION is a positive step in giving back to our environment. Our objective is to create a more sustainable planet."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

TWO years after being hit by flooding and then Covid-19, Evolve IP UK has bounced back with the opening of its new HQ near Cardiff. The team worked remotely since February 2020 when flash floods in Nantgarw damaged the HQ; and the home working theme continued with the outbreak of Covid-19. "Collaboration is in Evolve IP's DNA," said MD Paul Harrison. "It was easy for us to transition to working remotely. This is what we do day in and day out. However, we need to collaborate in person at times. The UK team is spread across the country but considers a central hub essential to allowing them to connect, collaborate and create solutions."

BIRMINGHAM-based Intercity Technology has secured a multi-million-pound IT partnership with Nuneaton headquartered global automotive firm Horiba Mira. The deal extends an existing relationship. Charlie Blakemore, Group MD at Intercity Technology, stated: "We're taking our relationship with Horiba Mira to the next level. Our tech businesses are coming together to showcase what the automotive sector and the local area can achieve when the right solutions are in place."

# ETB to mark two decades



Nick Stapleton

ETB Technologies is on target to hit the £15m turnover milestone in its 20th year, which also saw its headcount boosted by 50% to 60 as part of plans to double staff numbers over the next five years.

Dalbeattie-based ETB Technologies recently opened new bases in Bellshill and Sheffield and plans to extend the existing Dalbeattie HQ. Growth has largely been driven by the expansion of the company's international customer base.

The firm is a reseller of refurbished servers, storage and network equipment and ships to more than 75 countries with

plans to extend its market share especially across Europe.

"While there is no doubt that the last 18 months have been tough, with both Brexit and Covid-19 placing hurdles in our paths, we have weathered the storm and are now experiencing steady market conditions allowing us to recruit 20 new members of staff," stated MD Nick Stapleton.

"The future potential of the refurbished enterprise IT sector is considerable. With bold ambitions, we are committed to extending our reach and bringing on board more employees and suppliers to achieve these."

# Jola's new recruiting strategies

JOLA'S refreshed recruitment strategy aims to appeal to more diverse applicants and a richer candidate pool.

Cherie Howlett, CMO, explained: "How do we ensure we recruit the best people to help us grow our business? And how do we make sure this process is fair and uniform across the company? Our developers were given the challenge to answer these key questions."

A training programme was introduced to review processes and improve templates such as job descriptions, key questions and assessments. "We reviewed our scoring process to ensure each department had the tools to assess skills and attributes," added Howlett. "We then customised a portal within ZoHo to standardise the process."

Each manager is able to add a new role, advertise it on websites and collect applications.

"We combined the way our marketing department advertises roles, the way managers run assessments and how our technical and billing teams onboard and train new starters," commented Howlett. "We designed this process to fit with the diverse and inclusive culture we have at Jola."


NEWS ROUNDUP

TECH firm Orbital10 has acquired Hereford-based IT company PC Logix and Bristol located Apple Mac specialist Tantra. The double deal adds scale and expertise to the group, which is also seeking to expand its consumer sales a support base. "We are introducing additional services so customers can have one point of contact," commented Orbital10 COO Scott Kean. "Different technologies require specialist knowledge and both acquisitions will play an important role in providing expertise." CEO Mark Salvin added: "The acquisitions provide cross-selling opportunities as well as new business sales."

BELFAST-based Barclay Communications has bagged UK Government contracts worth £750k. The Welsh Parliament and New Forest District Council contracts will see the firm process more than 1,000 connections. MD Britt Megahey commented: "We have consistently invested to ensure our customers are provided with bespoke communication solutions. This has allowed us to secure many tender wins for high profile clients."

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# BETTER BETTER BETTER

## BETTER TOGETHER: HOW VODAFONE AND ITS PARTNERS CAN BUILD BETTER BUSINESSES

**WITH OUR COMMITMENT TO COLLABORATIVE SUPPORT, EVERY VODAFONE PARTNER  
STANDS TO BENEFIT FROM ENHANCED SERVICE, VALUE, AND EXPERIENCE. DISCOVER HOW.**

Our Partners have always worked in tough, competitive environments. But as businesses look to recover from the uncertainty of lockdowns, the need to constantly innovate and explore new avenues of growth has become more important than ever. We've listened to our Partners and they've told us what they need to navigate the path ahead loud and clear: to achieve profitable growth, they're seeking a more collaborative relationship with Vodafone.

And that's why Vodafone for Partners continues to be our focus. It's our way to support Partners' growth and to benefit their end customers. For starters, it allows us to offer them greater capabilities and commercial flexibility. Using our market-leading technologies—supported by a tailored suite of training and marketing materials—we're working closely with our Partners to create new, differentiated propositions for their customers.

### **Our collaborative partnership plan**

With this mission in mind, we're continuing to step up investment in both our team and our products and services, whilst closely supporting every Partner to develop new solutions, win more customers, and grow their business.

### **Making it easier to work together**

We've recruited a bigger team of business partner managers, so we can better understand and serve every Partner.

Converged resellers are now supported by our dedicated reseller technical advisory, offering a single point of contact for our products and capabilities. What's more, our reseller service operations team has become the key interface for ISPs to connect with Vodafone's technology and billing functions.

We are constantly improving on our Partner Portal to ensure a streamlined experience for online ordering, supporting our Partners to close deals with their end customers faster.

### **Supporting Partner growth efforts**

Vodafone is proud to be an award-winning, truly converged global network.\* As an industry innovator, we can offer our Partners a wide range of resources to drive growth. This includes access to unique market insights, including customised training, sales, and marketing materials on our Partner Portal.

### **Delivering competitive products and pricing**

Every Partner is unique, so off-the-shelf solutions rarely meet their needs. It's why we've empowered our business partner managers with greater flexibility to create bespoke solutions that better reflect the reality of our Partners' businesses. With longer term agreements that offer greater commercial clarity and pricing predictability, we've made it easier than ever to work with Vodafone. We also regularly review our tariffs to ensure we offer market-leading rates to our Partners.

### **Using innovation to unlock new value**

As the global market leader for IoT connectivity, and integration platforms and solutions, we're constantly developing our network capabilities. We've launched 5G in 41 locations across the UK, with more 5G, IoT, and SD-WAN propositions lined up for the future.

Our entire network is backed by deep security expertise, giving our Partners complete peace of mind when adopting new products and services. Our innovation hubs across the UK provide the perfect place for them to demonstrate solutions to their end customers, supported by our expert team.

Underpinning everything we offer is the backing of our global brand for every one of our Partners. By supporting every partnership and working collaboratively, we can become better together.

We're building better growth for all our Partners and better solutions for their end customers. To take advantage of a new frontier in connectivity, get in touch today and speak to our Partner team, or visit <https://www.vodafone.co.uk/business/vodafone-partners>



**'Our proposition is all about looking forward and helping Partners to maximise opportunities from working with Vodafone. This is just the beginning of the journey with our Partners. Together we want to innovate to find new sources of value and growth.'**

**Kathy Quashie**  
Head of Indirect Business at Vodafone UK



Together we can  
**vodafone**  
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\*Awards won at 5G Week for "Best 5G Deployment 2020" and Global Telecoms Awards for "Best 5G Operator Innovation 2020"

NEWS ROUNDUP

EUROPEAN UC firm Enreach has brought the Swyx name under the group moniker. The move expands the Enreach brand into the DACH market. Swyx will be retained as the product name. Enreach was formed in 2018 with the support of investor Waterland Private Equity from the combination of Swyx and Voiceworks from the Netherlands and France-based Centile Telecom Applications (already rebranded to Enreach for Service Providers). "We've grown together as a group, which is why it's time to come together with a unified name under one brand umbrella," commented Dr Ralf Ebbinghaus, CEO of Enreach Germany.

DEESIDE-based Challenger Business Communications has acquired mobile supplier Synergy Business Consultants. The deal advances Challenger's strategy to double the size of the business within the next five years. Challenger MD Jeff Eamens stated: "After meeting the directors and understanding the way they worked, we realised our two companies had a similar outlook on how to do business and keep customers satisfied. Synergy has a well managed and stable customer base."

# Green world on the plans



Shaun Lynn

SUSTAINABILITY is a key consideration for business leaders in the IT channel with 45% already driving sustainability and circular economy initiatives, and 40% more are committed to introducing them in the future.

Agilitas IT Solutions' 'Connect for a Sustainable Future' report also found that the smaller, more agile firms are advancing sustainability strategies the most, with 71% activating plans within a year, compared to 59% of larger businesses.

"The implications of humans and technology is having a profound impact on the environment and planet, and now is the time for action," stated Agilitas CEO Shaun Lynn.

"Our findings show that the IT channel is responding to this necessary shift to build a greener future for the sector and across the world.

"From eco-friendly supply chain processes to building a culture of sustainability through workforce initiatives, IT channel organisations must find ways to reduce waste and build a circular economy that maximises resources with efficiency and longevity.

"The optimism shown by channel firms leaders in their ability to make change rapidly is a huge vote of confidence for our industry."

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# ITP names Vaizey as its Patron

FORMER Minister of State at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport Lord Vaizey has been appointed Patron of the Institute of Telecom Professionals (ITP).

He commented: "The UK will need to work ever harder to keep at the forefront of the global economy, and apprenticeships have become increasingly important for the next generation of young people entering the workplace.

"The ITP's vision of how to deliver apprenticeships will not only give young people the education and training they need in today's competitive employment market, it will also help close the skills gaps we see in the UK's digital industries."

ITP CEO Crissi Williams added: "With his insights and expertise in IT and tech, and passion around young peoples' education, Lord Vaizey can help take the ITP to the next stage of its development."



Lord Vaizey

NEWS ROUNDUP

A LINK up between Britannic Technologies and Five9 will put the Surrey-based contact centre specialist onto a higher level, according to Sales and Marketing Director Jonathan Sharp. "Cloud is the future of contact centres and 61% of consumers said they were planning to move their contact centres to the cloud," he said. "This number is likely to increase further as a result of Covid. Customers want to contact companies using multiple channels. Designing a digital omnichannel experience and moving into automation using AI and chat bots is essential."

BROADWAY Partners' ambition to connect 250,000 homes and firms by 2025 received a boost following a £145m investment from Downing. Marcus Allchurch, Managing Partner at Acuity Advisors which secured the investment, said: "The Broadway team has a clear focus on delivering next generation full fibre connectivity to rural communities in Wales and Scotland." Broadway Partners CEO Michael Armitage stated: "This will enable us to accelerate our rural broadband programme, offering connectivity to businesses and households in parts of the country that other providers can't reach."

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# Green Duck netted

XPERIENCE has acquired Bury St Edmunds-based Green Duck, a provider of cloud, cyber security and managed IT Services.

The deal builds on Xperience's network of offices in Lisburn, Peterborough, and Glasgow and strengthens its presence in the east of England. Green Duck will trade under the Xperience brand.

The transaction puts Xperience's headcount at 123 with an annual turnover of approximately £16m. The enlarged entity



Iain O'Kane

will serve more than 1,100 clients typically ranging between 10-100 users across the UK and Ireland.

Xperience CEO Iain O'Kane stated: "Growth across the UK

is a priority for us, and Green Duck is a natural fit.

"As part of Xperience, Green Duck will gain access to investment, a broader range of technical services, our dedicated cloud service plus a business that serves both the UK and Ireland. With the advent of hybrid working and the ever-changing cyber threat landscape, the acquisition of Green Duck provides Xperience with the opportunity to expand significantly in this area."

# Mercer adapts Costa Rica charity challenge

VAPOUR CEO Tim Mercer did not let Covid-19 obstruct his fundraising campaign in aid of Borne, a charity committed to preventing premature birth.

His plan was to visit Costa Rica and travel 286km in a week from the Caribbean to Pacific coast by trekking, kayaking and white water rafting.

But Covid-19 travel restrictions meant a change of strategy that saw Mercer recreate a version of the challenge at the Reform Gym, which shares premises with Vapour.

Mercer completed a 13km run, he rowed 20km and cycled 211km as well as completing the 42km Yorkshire Three Peaks Challenge.

"I wanted to be as true to the original Costa Rica route as possible," he stated. "I planned for substitute exercises, like kayaking for rowing and trekking for running, and managed to create a similar itinerary.

"Of course, there are certain things I could not recreate. Instead of trekking alongside toucans in the Costa Rican wilderness, I was negotiating a herd of bulls in the Yorkshire dales. But it was so important to still find a way of raising money for Borne."



Tim Mercer

Mercer's ambition is to raise £23k for the charity within 12 months (starting June 2021).

In other fund raising efforts, Vapour recently hosted a Ryder Cup Charity Golf Day, and Mercer is currently donating payments for his consultancy time to Borne.

"Our families are what we seek to protect the most, and with premature birth an ongoing problem that nobody under-

stands, there seems no better cause," he added.

"It is the leading reason for childhood mortality in the world, affecting some 15 million babies worldwide every year. We want to do our bit to help stop babies being born too soon, and hope to drum up support from our varied efforts."

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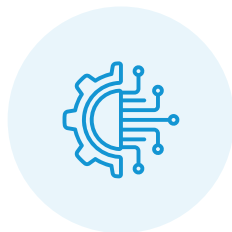


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# CityFibre accelerates

**Trailblazing and tireless, CityFibre is a paragon of market disrupters, according to Head of Wholesale Andrew Wilson.**



**Andrew Wilson**

It is well documented that CityFibre is investing £4 billion into creating a full fibre infrastructure across 285 cities, towns and villages by 2025. This will reach eight million homes, support 800,000 businesses as well as 400,000 public sector sites and 250,000 5G access points. "The priority we're focused on is to take advantage of our build programme and to ensure that we enable our partners to address the needs of all the different types of customers that sit within the CityFibre footprint, at scale and through a full range of connectivity products," commented Wilson. "We're equally focused on continuing to develop our IT systems and partner platform."

CityFibre is building at scale and rapidly, but it could be said that for channel partners the build isn't progressing fast enough. "We've created such a positive momentum that we now need to continue to ensure our build programmes keep pace with the demand that the channel is creating for us," added Wilson.

"Since we're on a journey, it's about balancing the vision with the reality. We're addressing that by setting the right expectations around

product and availability to give our partners a good understanding of where we are, where we're going and by when, so that they can plan their own strategy and business development activity ahead of our delivery. It's a good challenge to have.

"While we continue to face the impact and interruptions of the pandemic, we are adapting to the challenge to ensure we work to our best capability. This means maximising the opportunity and potential for our people to play their part in everything we're doing."

CityFibre was quick to adopt an agile strategy for working and ensured employees have the wherewithal to continue to work effectively on their own and collaboratively across teams as part of a hybrid approach to working from home and in offices.

## Empowerment

"In our experience it's been important to lay down guidelines that take away the uncertainties that flexibility can create in peoples' minds," commented Wilson. "In enabling people to be aware of what we're doing and what's expected from them, we encourage and empower them to add value and to push their own boundaries."

In times of market disruption one of the leadership pitfalls could be to forget where you came from and why you exist, noted Wilson. "For any business that's going through rapid growth, both in terms of the pace at which people are joining the organisation and the rate at which it is extending its reach into the

## Full fibre is a new landscape, particularly as customers make the transition from copper to FTTP

market, losing the culture that's been the foundation of its initial success is arguably one of the key pitfalls that many leaders face," he said.

"As the business's growth strategy is advanced, the introduction of new people, structural changes, new systems and processes can overwhelm the essence of what makes its culture special if it's not kept in check.

"Even though the business is growing at pace, it's important to ensure that the values of the people it is recruiting are symbiotic with the culture that already exists in the organisation.

"As an example, in the time since the early impacts of the pandemic were felt, CityFibre has more than doubled employee numbers and established stronger systems and processes. But central to this has been a continued focus on helping our people understand what we're doing together as a company and

the journey we're on, while encouraging and enabling them to give their best, support one another and think smart and act fast."

Although CityFibre enthuses about building its full fibre network at pace to eight million premises by 2025, the primary opportunity it is seizing is setting a new standard, claims Wilson. "We believe the network we're providing is advanced because of the way it's designed, because of the technologies we're deploying and because of how we're focused on delivering the user experience to customers, to

and through our partners," commented Wilson.

"I'm particularly interested in the dynamic of the full fibre landscape and how the wholesale market is going to evolve, in terms of how ISPs are going to develop to consume a full fabric of fibre. Full fibre is essentially a new landscape, particularly as customers make the transition from copper to FTTP, so how it will dovetail into what is today a mature wholesale landscape is going to be very interesting to see."

In other developments, CityFibre is seeking to deliver ever greater bandwidth services across its full fibre infrastructure by adopting technologies such as XGS-PON. "Central to this is continually striving to provide the fastest speeds and best service quality to channel partners in the most cost-effective way, so that we maximise their opportunity to get more from the fibre that we're installing and to extend the capability of their customers," explained Wilson.

It is initiative's such as the that Wilson says will earn CityFibre cross-industry acknowledgement as the organisation that took the boldest steps to spark the UK's adoption of full fibre and build an infrastructure that created an opportunity for the channel, and which changed the landscape of the UK. "We're already on this journey and many partners are taking advantage of it," commented Wilson. "The question for channel business leaders to ask themselves is, 'are we on the journey too, and where will we be in three years time?'" ■

# PromptVoice monetises a new market for all channel players

Channel players offering bespoke prompts, in-queue and on-hold audio are realising a huge opportunity to secure additional margin. PromptVoice's game changing re-think of the way these solutions are delivered transform it into a high margin revenue driver for all.

Over the last two years, call volumes have increased to many SMEs, and contact centre queues have grown in length. Growth in AI, chatbots, and online self-service options have frequently triggered predictions of the demise of the inbound phone call - but call volumes are staying strong. Customers still want to speak to a real person, and it's in this interaction that resellers offering bespoke prompts, in-queue and on-hold audio are realising a huge opportunity to boost their margins.

Providing the tools that enable end users to get professional in-queue and on-hold audio recordings right is as important as supplying the right telephony and UC infrastructure. Few telecom resellers currently offer this vital final piece of the jigsaw, but the chance to plug this gap with a revenue driving solution has never been more available.

## Why haven't telecoms resellers traditionally offered in-queue and on-hold audio recordings?

Historically, providing these services was a lot of hassle, and rarely produced more than minimal return. Therefore, viably supporting end users with professional, instant recordings at a low price point, and which are simple to implement has not previously been achievable. Until now, lack of development has meant it's fallen to resellers' technical teams, who have no knowledge of script writing or voice recording, to provide this. Therefore, some

resellers have understandably recommended their customers source recordings from a third party, forcing them to leave margin on the table for another supplier to grab.

## How does PromptVoice open the opportunity for resellers?

With the move to cloud-based telephony, PromptVoice saw the need to completely re-invent the way prompts, in-queue and on-hold audio are delivered as a channel first proposition. PromptVoice Portal is specifically designed to enable resellers to scoop up the margin they've previously had to leave behind. This highly disruptive solution offers outstanding functionality, with straight-forward processes and simple pricing, all delivered through a secure, white-label portal that's fully owned by the reseller but operated by the end user.

## What PromptVoice offers resellers today is radically new

Resellers have full ownership of their portal, with branding opportunities throughout, and end-user pricing is approximately 70% lower than current market rates for similar audio services. PromptVoice transforms bespoke in-queue and on-hold audio into a key communication tool and revenue driver – whether users want to harness its full potential as an audio marketing channel or use it to provide outstanding customer service with bespoke IVRs and intelligent comfort messaging played to queuing callers.



Anthony Buxton

Of course, two critical aspects of any channel solution are its ability to generate monthly recurring revenue, and the support services that underpin it. PromptVoice is 100% channel focused, meaning the solution is sold on a monthly recurring revenue model, and is offered with uncapped margins and an extensive white label sales and marketing toolkit. In the past eighteen months, PromptVoice has invested significantly in ensuring its support services are as efficient as possible for both resellers and their end users. Last month's Comms National Awards saw PromptVoice shortlisted for Best Business Support Service.

## A major new release, transforming channel opportunities

Innovation and development are truly at the heart of PromptVoice's operation and the latest version release introduces a wealth of new

tools and benefits. In this release, the channel can expect to see:

### A Freemium model with intuitive customer-initiated upgrades:

The all-new Freemium model offers everything you'd expect to see from a classic Freemium proposition – the ability to give all customers access to basic functionality, free of charge, and then upgrade them through the paid subscription packages that generate healthy margin increases.

But PromptVoice has taken it one step further with new, inbuilt smart upgrade paths that let customers initiate their own upgrades whilst resellers sit back and watch their revenue streams grow. This intuitive new functionality encourages users to upgrade through the subscription levels to gain access to more advanced functionality. Resellers see their margin growing automatically,

and save the time and headache normally associated with upselling different subscription levels.

### Simplified pricing, new packages:

Naturally, the freemium proposition is bundled with new, simplified pricing, as well as two entirely new packages. Simplifications give resellers and end users access to more functionality as standard and enhance service quality guarantees. Caps on the number of seats and simultaneous calls have been removed from all packages, maximising flexibility, and scalability. The two newly added plans, Premium+ for streaming customers, and Pro for download customers, mean there's a PromptVoice subscription plan available to suit any type of customer – from micro-SME to the largest enterprise.

### New Text-to-Speech and professional voices:

In addition to new and improved commercials, this release is packed with hundreds more on-hold message recordings and templates, all available within the subscription plans. Plus, over a hundred new voices have been added, including professional voice artists and the latest text to speech characters from Google, Amazon, and Microsoft.

This revolutionary new version release certainly makes PromptVoice a very attractive partner for any channel business looking to expand their telephony portfolio and capitalise on even more opportunities. ■



You can get in touch with the team via email at [partners@promptvoice.com](mailto:partners@promptvoice.com), or visit [www.promptvoice.com](http://www.promptvoice.com).

# Tang's achievements lau

Looking back on his career, it is his quest for a higher purpose and the creation of a people-first culture that Zen Internet founder and Chairman Richard Tang recalls most fondly. And it should come as no surprise that his mission to do good, and more besides, secured him this year's Comms National Awards Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

**T**ang had ambitions to set up his own business from an early age, setting up Zen Microsystems in 1994, offering software development services. A year later he was in a pub enjoying a pint with his brother Dan discussing whether the Internet would take off. The two brothers then set up Zen Internet in 1995 and sold their first dial-up Internet service for £10 per month. In 2008, during a paragliding trip to Bhutan, Tang was inspired by the Gross National Happiness philosophy of the King of Bhutan. This led him to create Zen's most fundamental long-term objectives of Happy staff, Happy customers and Happy suppliers, which remain the foundation of everything Zen does to this day.

Today, Zen has grown into a business approaching £100 million turnover and employing over 500 people. In 2020 it became a member of the B-Corp movement, a global movement of people using business as a force for good. Tang has committed to never selling his shareholding in Zen to ensure that the people-first culture is always maintained.

Tang's educational career is also impressive, born and brought up in Rochdale, he



Plaudits aplenty: Richard Tang acclaimed at last month's Comms National Awards

## When I was at primary school in the 1970s I had a dream to set up a big multi-national corporation and use the profits to save the third world from starvation

secured O-levels, A-levels, a Degree in Computing and a Post-graduate diploma in Computing, specialising in 3D graphics and neural networks. "When I was at primary school in the 1970s I had a dream to set up a big multi-national corporation and use the profits to save the third world from starvation," commented Tang. "I'm inspired by people working

to make the world a better and more sustainable place."

### Key influences

Before establishing Zen, Tang travelled through Pakistan, China, India, Nepal and Hong Kong for nine months. Prior to that, he worked for a small business in Kingston upon Thames designing computer hardware. "I thought of the name Zen while still at school," he explained.

"Zen Microsystems was a play on Sun Microsystems. The 'Zen' came from the eastern influence of my dad who came from Hong Kong. I needed a 'pretend' company while at school so that electronic component manufacturers would send me their data sheets. When I set up in business for real as a software developer in 1994, I used the same name, Zen Microsystems. When we

set up the Internet business a year later, Zen Internet was the obvious choice."

The launch was self-funded with Tang's life savings of £5,000. First year turnover was £59k (1996 year-end). In 2021, turnover is expected to be £92 million and Tang owns 100 per cent of the ordinary shares. "The biggest highlight has been the journey itself," added Tang.

# ded at CNA

"Some of the best moments are when long-standing employees tell me how much they enjoy working at Zen. When this happens, it's a great confirmation that what I'm doing is worthwhile."

Zen has grown organically for all of its 26-year life. The growth is fuelled by reinvestment of profits from previous years. Zen's most fundamental long-term objectives, in priority order and as indicated above, are Happy staff, Happy customers, and Happy suppliers. "Everything we do ultimately contributes to one or more of these objectives," stated Tang. "It creates a culture where people come first and money second."

## Optimising opportunity

"I'd like to see Zen maximise its potential in the market. We have the opportunity to become a true challenger brand to the biggest names in our industry, and become a household name as a broadband supplier. Looking at the bigger picture, I would like to see Zen be part of a shift towards a more ethical way of doing business, a way that puts increased focus on the wellbeing of society and the sustainability of the environment, and less focus on money-centric goals that benefit the select few."

"We put people first, money second and continually strive towards our happiness objectives along with continual improvement, by every single member of staff. We accept that we are all on learning journeys, throughout our lives and careers. We all make mistakes, and I want everyone at Zen to feel comfortable sharing their mistakes openly and positively to reinforce their

own learning and to share that learning with others. We make decisions that are morally right, for the long-term and always respectful of others. We stretch people in a positive way to drive not only their productivity, but their own development and feeling that what they are doing is worthwhile. And we empower people to use their initiative, be creative and make the decisions that they believe are right.

"I don't want armies of process robots. Processes are just tools that people should choose to use when the process fits the situation. But when the process doesn't fit, people should feel empowered to do what they believe is right – deviate from the process, or ignore it altogether, and then take ownership to update it if necessary."

According to Tang, the 2020s is the decade of full fibre. "That's where the money is going to be made over the coming years," he stated. "Currently, broadband continues to do very well. Cloud and SD-WAN also continue to grow strongly. We dipped our toes in the business of selling mobile handsets a while back, but that didn't do particularly well so we pulled the plug on it."

Tang's role continues to change and develop alongside the ever-changing and developing world of technology. "There are so many new things to interest me, and new opportunities to challenge me, that I don't feel the need to do anything particularly proactive to keep my enthusiasm for it all," he added. "I feel incredibly lucky." ■

## Just a minute with Richard Tang...

**Who helped you most in your career?** My mentor at university – Frank Barker. Without his guidance, my life would have taken a different path.

**Your strengths and what could you work on?** I'm reasonably good at leading and inspiring people, solving complex business problems and adapting to the changing requirements of my role. I have a tendency to get involved in too much detail, which I continue to work on.

**Biggest career achievement?** Creating a culture at Zen that will hopefully act as a template for a sustainable version of our capitalist system.

**The biggest risk you have taken?** Building our first HQ building started in 1997 and completed in 2001. It stretched the company's finances to the limit and we nearly ran out of cash.

**Industry bugbear:** Broadband suppliers signing up new customers and then unilaterally hiking the price mid-contract. It's unethical.

**Best decision you made:** Building out our on-net broadband network, now at 450 exchanges and on a journey to 700.

**And the worst decision?** In the early days I spent a lot of time and money trying to launch a radio broadband service. It was a flop but a learning opportunity.

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** Probably working in software or AI research.

**One example of something you have overcome?** I used to get nervous presenting, but gradually got better.

**Top tip:** Putting people first and money second is a great recipe for long-term financial success, and is what the world desperately needs.

## Help with project margins

More comms partners are flexibly bringing in technical and operational expertise on new projects when it suits them.

Whether that's a one-off tactical need to relieve pressure off internal teams or a more strategic sourcing move for implementation and onboarding success – the arguments are highly compelling.

And we're making them more compelling still with a 30% discount offer running throughout the last 3 months of the year.

### 3 is the magic number

Good things come in 3s. Like Support to Win once again being Highly Commended in the Best Business Support Services category at the Comms National Awards!

We think that's triple the reason to celebrate the success of our brilliant team, and triple the way to share our good fortune with new and existing customers.

It all revolves (neatly) around 3 core service offerings:

1. Order management and fulfilment
2. Customer onboarding
3. Project management of implementations and migrations

Each of which are designed to accelerate quote-to-cash, increase customer satisfaction and safeguard revenue.

### Smartsourcing rather than outsourcing

As more comms partners embrace external project expertise, one of the strange things we've found is how people in the channel react to the word "outsourcing".

Is bringing in skilled trainers, project managers and onboarding engineers the same as "outsourcing" key project functions? You'd be surprised just how few channel folk use that terminology. Fewer still refer to "insourcing", which should mean the opposite but ends up meaning the same.

Instead people like 'smartsourcing' because it more accurately sums up what goes on. Smartsourcing is putting skills where they are needed; augmenting existing resources



Tamsin Deutrom-Yue

and combining to create a seamless customer experience.

### Plan ahead for bluebirds

The other great thing about smartsourcing is how it can be spun-up and turned-down on demand. Your approach might mean it's appropriate for project A, but not project B. Or there might be certain elements that apply in some circumstances but not others.

It's still wise to plan ahead, knowing what your smartsourcing options are before you need to call on them. For example, the next time you get an unexpected bluebird land on your lap – you want the freedom to decide whether to deliver the project in-house or engage smartsourcing. The alternative is having limited options or no options at all.

### Run a smartsource proof of concept

The only way to see how smartsourcing works for you is to take the plunge on an initial project. Use it as a proof of concept and see what you can learn. Target some key objectives like speed of delivery and get feedback from the customer on quality and overall satisfaction.

Ultimately, smartsourcing works best with some special sauce from your chosen partner. Support to Win would love to show you what's possible. Get started on one before the end of the year and you'll save more margin with a 30% discount.

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# Union Street one year on:

**In September 2020 Union Street struck a deal to merge with Aurora and then acquired Ebillz, creating a billing powerhouse led by Managing Director Vincent Disneur. Here, Disneur provides an update on developments during the past 12 months, his strategic approaches and post-merger progress.**

**T**he rationale behind the merger of Union Street and Aurora was to create a platform that digitally enhances how the channel not only bills end users, but also how it provisions services. One year on, Disneur discusses where Union Street is on its digital journey, and where it wants to be. He also shares insights into the challenges and opportunities arising from the merger of two key market players...

**What was the biggest challenge the Union Street team faced following the merger of Aurora and acquisition of ebillz?**

There were lots of logistical challenges with merging the companies' infrastructure, business and operational support systems, aligning roadmaps, getting to know each other's products, and more. We also jumped from 80 to 160 personnel. Our people are our biggest asset, so integrating our teams into one cohesive whole was something that we took particular care over.

Combining the talents and expertise from all three companies under one roof was no small task. However, it has been one of the most rewarding parts of the process. As long-standing competitors, our teams have always had a grudging



Vincent Disneur

**We're now turbo charged with a wider product set and greater investment**

respect and admiration for one another, so to be united with a common goal is really exciting.

Unifying our expertise is already paying dividends, with lots of new ideas emerging for how to drive our products forward to the benefit of our partners. We've also achieved brilliant NPS (net promoter score) scores from internal audits and the Institute of Customer Service. So I'm

confident that we're moving in the right direction.

**What was the plan put in place after all the integration was complete?**

Our objective following the merger has been to help our partners to become bigger, better and more profitable. To achieve this, we are providing solutions that are designed to help our partners scale their businesses, to operate more efficiently and gain a competitive edge in

the end user marketplace. Following the merger, we also took time to re-evaluate our values, simplifying them so that they now focus on the three core tenets of our business. First is achieving operational excellence, providing a consistently high quality experience for our partners. Second is to deliver product quality, ensuring our solutions are developed and tested to exacting standards prior to release. Third is to boost

customer intimacy, taking the time to truly understand our partners' requirements, then develop our products and services accordingly.

**How else have you consolidated resources to strengthen your proposition?**

Immediately following the merger, customer facing departments such as Service, Training, Accounts, Support and Bureau from all three companies were combined under the Union Street brand. A new division was formed with responsibility for all research and development of products which comprised of personnel from all three companies and other development resources within the group.

The objective was to improve Union Street's partner focus and enable rapid onward development of our solutions, and to a large extent this strategy has been successful. However, as a software provider, Union Street's business model and requirements are subtly different to other businesses in the group. This is why we recently brought the development teams that work on our products back in-house. We now have a ring-fenced development resource that is directly accountable to our board and solely focused on developing

# The story so far

solutions. This means we can work more efficiently and respond with agility to changes in the channel.

## What other priorities has Union Street been working on?

A key focus area for Union Street is to streamline the sale to bill process which is a pain point for resellers. Many of our partners struggle with the process of quoting and placing orders. To prepare a proposal, resellers will often have to visit multiple vendors' ordering portals, entering the same customer information each time to find which supplier will provide the best balance of cost and quality.

When the order needs to be provisioned, the reseller may have to enter that information yet again, then manually duplicate that customer's data into their billing software along with any associated charges so that it can be billed. The whole process is inefficient, error prone and disjointed. Union Street is working to develop solutions so that they can assist resellers to quickly identify the best solution, then facilitate a smooth flow from sale to bill.

## How is this strategy progressing?

We've made some great strides with this over the past 12 months. By using APIs we can federate suppliers' ordering systems into our billing software so that prices for various products can quickly be retrieved and compared alongside one another. Resellers only need to enter a customer's details once to compare offerings from their various suppliers, saving a great deal of time. Once the customer has accepted the quote,

our software can then be used to provision the order. The system automatically adds one off and recurring charges to the customer's account so that they're ready to be billed and nothing is missed. Much of this was discussed with our partners at the recent Billing People Summit and Awards. The feedback of our roadmap was positive and enthusiastic.

## You have kept the Union Street brand, but do you still have independence for decision making within the Group?

Collectively the group serves circa 6,000 partners and being part of the group gives us significant market insight, financial backing and resource. We're now turbo charged with a wider product set and greater investment for faster development. The group recognises that we have the expertise in this area to chart our own course. Naturally we collaborate, share ideas and work closely with other companies in the group as our interests coincide.

## What has DWS' acquisition of Giacom meant to Union Street's delivery of converged billing solutions?

Giacom is a brilliant addition to the group. I believe that it's currently Microsoft's largest growing partner in Europe. Our partners want one billing solution for all services as this is the only way to optimise efficiency and to maximise visibility of revenue and profits. As the IT and communications channels increasingly converge, it's essential for our solutions to process costs and generate bills for all services in a way that is efficient and intuitive. Having Giacom

on the team has given us valuable insight, both for how billing IT services should ideally function, and of opportunities to solve challenges in this area. We have adjusted our development roadmap in light of this and continue to work with Giacom to leverage its expertise.

## Why did you launch aBILLity Lite?

Many companies sell communication services as a sideline rather than as the core of their business. They'll typically be billing low volumes and don't require the comprehensive features that aBILLity has to offer. In some cases, this wide range of features can even be a bit overwhelming for resellers in this category. We wanted to help resellers start off on the right foot so that they can scale up effectively and without dislocation. aBILLity Lite is affordable and has a scaled down UI with just the essentials. This product is also provided with our bureau service as standard.

## How will the launch of the Billing People event and awards programme help Union Street's development?

The recent Billing People Summit and Awards was a success and attracted over 100 billing professionals from across the channel. It was rewarding to see it all come together. The programme of content provided interesting points for discussion, and the awards offered valuable recognition to the winners and finalists. Our ultimate goal is that with the community's support, the organisation will become self-sustaining and that eventually the Billing People will mature into its own distinct entity. ■

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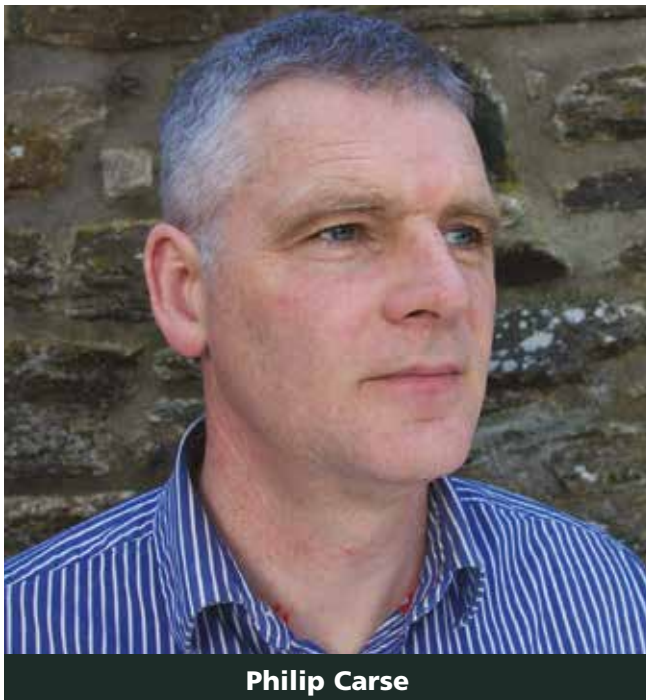
# Resilient trading maintains

The comms sector's resilient performance continues unabated and is an auspicious omen for the channel's future prospects at a time of extensive industry change, writes Philip Carse, Analyst at Megabuyte.com.

**A**t the risk of sounding like a broken record, the key themes for the UK telecoms sector continue to be – resilient trading, bumper corporate activity and strong FTTP momentum. However, there is a nuance within each: The trading outlook for many companies remains tough given a dearth of projects and broader headwinds such as equipment and skills shortages and energy prices. That said, more than ever M&A is being used by resellers and MSPs to bring in IT skills, and while banks are now prepared to support FTTP rollouts with debt far earlier in the process than hitherto, not all can qualify, with smaller players starting to be acquired by better funded peers.

## Resilience but tough trading

A picture of resilient trading through the early stages of the pandemic came both from trading updates from public listed companies such as BT, Vodafone, Virgin Media, Gamma, Redcentric etc, as well as from anecdotal feedback from private company CEOs, reflecting the mission critical, recurring revenue nature of telecoms. We had previously estimated that the major UK network operators suffered only mid-single digit declines in revenues, EBITDA, capex and FCF in calendar 2020, while some companies continued to grow, for



Philip Carse

## For telecoms resellers, the move into IT adds a significant growth opportunity, more acquisition opportunities and a wider pool of buyers

example Gamma with 9% organic revenue growth. A more typical impact for B2B telecoms was a double digit revenue decline, but with more limited profit impacts due to cost saving measures.

We are now starting to see private company accounts covering pandemic trading – to December 2020 or March 2021 which confirm these broader trends. For example, Daisy's EBITDA fell 4.5% to £73.0m (boosted by £5.9m of government support

payments) on revenues down 9% (estimated -14% organic) at £417m. Some have suffered more, typically because of sector exposure, for example hospitality focused cloud communications provider Fourteen IP's EBITDA fell 83% to £0.2m on revenues down 8.9% to £10.1m. However, it still remained profitable. There have therefore been very few bankruptcies among resellers, and those that have experienced problems (eg Origin Broadband,

acquired by TalkTalk) were typically challenged even before Covid.

What about now? While there are clear growth hotspots (eg m2m, SD-WAN, Teams voice), many broader based suppliers expect stable revenues or modest growth at best from the Covid floor, with mid-market focused players such as Redcentric highlighting a dearth of large customer projects. This is being compounded by hardware and skills shortage, while higher energy prices are starting to impact profit outlooks. However, most companies are still upbeat on the future.

## IT focused M&A

The already strong pace of reseller M&A has picked up in recent weeks, with at least 15 buyers in the last three to four months, several with multiple acquisitions, including Arrow, Babble, Convergence, Chess, Croft, Daisy, Focus, Modern Networks, Onecom, Redcentric, Southern, Telaplant, TelcoSwitch, Wavenet and Windsor. The many and varied strategic rationale include scale, customers, vertical focus, capability and geographic presence, but an increasing number of deals have an IT focus. Recent notable transactions of this nature include Arrow/Circle IT (for Microsoft capabilities), Redcentric/Piksel (for digital transformation and cloud skills), Chess/Armadillo

(cybersecurity), while Focus has signalled its intent by appointing a CEO from an IT services company (Barney Taylor from Ensono).

Adding IT to telecoms services is partly market driven given the convergence of IT and telecoms at the technology level, with the WAN and the LAN becoming one and the same and voice becoming just another software application. It also, according to Vodafone estimates, broadly doubles the addressable UK B2B opportunity in terms of market size, but actually more than this in practice given that the UK telecoms market is still dominated by the major network operators whereas the UK IT market is far more fragmented. For telecoms resellers, the move into IT adds a significant growth opportunity, more acquisition opportunities, and also a wider pool of buyers. Telecoms resellers are better placed to make this move using M&A than IT resellers in the opposite direction, given the debt facilities that can be supported by telecoms recurring revenues.

## FTTP funding and convergence

The most notable FTTP news recently was CityFibre's new £1.1bn investment, comprised of £825m equity from two new investors - Mubadala (Abu Dhabi's sovereign wealth fund) and owner of IKEA (Interogo Holdings) – and £300m



in debt. Meanwhile, new FTTP players continue to come out of the woodwork, the most notable recent one being Liverpool-based rural broadband Internet service provider Broadway Partners which secured a £145m investment from Downing LLP.

So what's changed? One emerging trend is FTTP players tapping bank debt far earlier in the process than hitherto, with for example Zzoomm and Airband both raising £100m debt facilities. This reflects debt providers' increasing comfort with the FTTP model, supported by valuations (and hence chance of being repaid in a sale situation) being a multiple of invested capital (typically 2-5 times). To put the raises into context, Zzoomm will have secured it with almost certainly fewer than 5k paying customers currently.

Conversely, the continued flow of debt and equity into FTTP/next gen networks isn't available to all, and we are now starting to see smaller players sell out to larger, better funded peers. Recent examples include Community Fibre/Box, Quickline/Boundless and Voneus/Solway/ResQNet. This is unsurprising given the major challenges in first building next generation networks and then monetising them, and its probably only a matter of time before we start to see consolidation involving some of the larger players with target rollouts above 100k premises. After all, at the latest count there are 50 players with plans to build fibre past 70m+ UK premises (and potentially 7m more from VMO2), versus 32m existing UK premises. ■ [philip.carse@megabuyte.com](mailto:philip.carse@megabuyte.com)

## COMPANY NEWS ROUND UP

### Redcentric trading in line, but faces higher energy bill

AIM-listed business comms and IT provider Redcentric has issued an in-line trading update for the first half to September 2021, expecting EBITDA of £12.0m (-2.4%) on stable revenues of £46.3m, while net debt of £0.4m reflected a £1.4m negative swing after dividends of £3.7m, the EDF non-core disposal proceeds of £5.8m, and the £9.5m recently paid for Piksel (which is said to be doing well). Notwithstanding a continued lack of large scale IT projects and supply chain issues, trading remains in line with expectations for the full year, but increased energy prices will knock a £0.5m hole this year and £1m next year, leading to minor broker forecast adjustments (now expecting £24.0m and £26.0m EBITDA in fiscal 2022 and 2023 respectively).

### Convergence does third acquisition of 2021 with AIT

Managed connectivity services provider Convergence Group has made its third acquisition in four months, in the form of Reading-based connectivity and security managed service provider AIT, on undisclosed terms. The acquisition boosts revenues by 10%, suggesting around £4m, and adds 250 customers including within higher education, public services and financial sectors, adding scale and capability to Convergence and potential customers for its Tiviti Connectivity as a Service. This year's three acquisitions have collectively boosted Convergence revenues by an estimated circa £10m/one-third.

### TalkTalk rescues Origin Broadband following £17.9m pre pack

Troubled consumer ISP Origin Broadband has been acquired

by TalkTalk after a pre-pack process by original backer Michael Spencer-owned Faro Capital valued at £17.9m. Perennially loss making Origin grew rapidly in the year to March 2021 with revenues doubling to £16.5m from 80k customers but EBITDA losses expanded by a half to £9.3m. It owed £38.3m – £27.4m to Faro and £10.5m to unsecured creditors, of which Vodafone is the largest at £9.2m. For context, now privately-owned TalkTalk in the 11 months to February 2021 generated revenues and EBITDA of £1,353m and £249m, and at February 2021 had 4.049m broadband customers, with Origin representing a 1-2% uplift.

### Q1 trading as expected for AdePT with further M&A on the horizon

AIM-listed business telecoms and IT services provider AdePT Technology has released an in-line trading update for the first quarter to March 2022, noting organic growth improvements in recurring revenues for cloud-centric services (ahead both sequentially and year on year), an increase in revenue for one-off services (ahead of last quarter), a decline in traditional telephony revenue (now 12% of group total revenue) and strong operating cash generation (£2.5m - 96% conversion). However, other cash outflows (including for the acquisition of Datrix) resulted in net debt increasing by £6.4m to circa £32m. Management remains positive moving forward with a focus on organic growth, harnessing a shift to cloud-centric solutions, although continues to seek M&A opportunities after the Datrix acquisition earlier this year. Current (and unchanged) broker forecasts for the year to March 2022 are for EBITDA of £12.5m on revenues of £70m, up 28% and 21% year-on-year respectively. ■

## A Recurring Success Story

Recurring revenue streams have cemented themselves within a company's annual growth plan during the last 18-months. Providing an additional layer of assured revenue that a company can expect month in and month out – helping predict sales, drive more opportunity and increase the overall valuation of their business.

Solidifying recurring revenue sources for channel resellers is a strong focus for Pragma and Ericsson-LG Enterprise. With significant R&D investments, the team has delivered a series of new products and service enhancements through iPECS Cloud and a new collaboration solution, iPECS ONE. Each service is delivered through a monthly subscription model that lifts a reseller partner's revenue each month by forming a reliable source of recurring income and growth opportunity during a tough economic period.



Pragma channel resellers see Cloud oriented solutions as key growth enablers – recording an increased average reseller uptake of 33% from this time in 2020. Focusing directly on iPECS Cloud and iPECS ONE to improve how each business collaborates with its customers and colleagues through a range of industries and delivering options for tailored solutions for industries such as Healthcare.

Following the success story with Web Listings, Pragma launched Candio to further drive its white-label digital solutions into the UK reseller channel. Delivering through two core services: Web Listings and Website Optimiser, resellers can expect to add up to £5 margin per customer location per month. Thanks to its ease of onboarding and overall simplicity, partners can roll this service out to thousands of customers with



iPECS ONE for Desktop

little to no effort from their teams.



Candio delivers its services to over 50,000 customer locations throughout the UK while delivering additional recurring revenue streams to over 50 partners. This business model enables Candio to deliver 100% of its revenue through a recurring revenue source.

Services include Web Listings, an online directory tool that helps organisations manage their identity across multiple platforms, including Google, Bing, Apple Maps and voice platforms such as Siri and Google Assistant. And Web Optimiser, a tool to ensure organisations websites are delivering value and performing at their best.



Web Listings white-label service

Candio helps resellers deliver cost-effective digital transformation tools that customers can easily engage with while delivering organic growth and recurring revenue. It provides the perfect proposition as resellers seek to transition customers away from ISDN and maintain their growth.

Driving recurring revenue has ultimately become the most important form of income for any business, providing a secured source of revenue every month that also increases business valuation. Pragma and Candio are proud to have so many recurring success stories with reseller partners within their channel, ranging from all sizes of partners throughout the UK.

Get in touch today to grow your recurring revenue stream and become part of this success story at:

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# Telavox ramps up in UK

So far, so good for the trio of students who turned a great idea, first seeded in an attic in Lund, into one of Europe's fastest growing UCaaS providers with ever lofty ambitions. And with acquisitions in Spain, Portugal and Belgium under its belt, Sweden-based Telavox has turned its attention to UK channel expansion. We caught up with Head of Product Vision Henrik Thorvinger to get the inside story.



Henrik Thorvinger

**T**elavox was co-founded by CEO Viktor Karlsson, who at the age of 19 had an idea to create a user friendly cloud PBX. He established the business in 2003 with two friends in an attic room, all shared an objective to sell easily accessible IP telephony. "This idea quickly developed into an ambition to lead the cloud PBX market," stated Thorvinger.

"We created a 100 per cent cloud-based PBX which was revolutionary back then. That's the first big milestone. The second milestone was when we kicked off our indirect sales channel and partnered with dealers and resellers. In 2009 our mobile offer came into place, and since then we have added both integrations and collaboration. Today, Telavox

has over 300,000 users in nine countries. And 189 months is Telavox's average subscriber lifetime."

Thorvinger has been with the business for 13 years. He followed the founders' footsteps and was also a student at Lunds University, doing his master thesis at Telavox on how to prevent churn with the help of business intelligence. He spent many hours in the Telavox office, printing papers and discussing AI. After graduation he became one of its software developers.

According to Thorvinger, Telavox is targeting long-term scalability and greater partner self-sufficiency, along with a seamless user experience in what is a complex world. But scalability has become the top challenge. "We always need to stay 10

steps ahead on scalability since we are growing fast," he stated. "Therefore we need to continually think 10 times bigger than what we have today. To stay ahead of the game we need

data and statistics from different sources. Add AI and the insights are endless."

Thorvinger noted that Telavox has also been working hard to improve the online

"A digital process is smoother and provides more options for customers. Before, they might have evaluated two or three services. They could not count on getting a demo at first glance, and the process involved many hours in meetings. Today, customers can evaluate maybe ten different services online, perhaps resulting in three digital sales meetings before they pick a supplier.

"Since the exposure to competition has completely changed and customers are evaluating several suppliers simultaneously, they can hit the target better in a simpler and faster way. If we create processes that are scalable we can tackle new markets easily. Telco is very local compared to IT. It's harder to scale but has huge growth potential. We are an IT player in the telco world." ■

## We always need to stay 10 steps ahead on scalability since we are growing fast

better code, better ease of use, better everything."

Telavox has built a UCaaS service including telephony, PBX, messaging, meetings and contact centre in one platform that integrates with other business software. "Omnichannel is our next product launch," added Thorvinger. "We want Telavox to be a 360 degree tool for the customer. Magic happens when you mix big

buying journey for MSPs and resellers. "A transformed buying behaviour has long been noticeable in B2C, and in recent years, we've seen a clear shift in B2B as well," he commented. "What does this mean for us? How should major suppliers that previously sold physical solutions think when customers only want to shop online, and when trying before buying becomes the norm?"



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**Isn't that tempting?**



# A model for consultancy

The Covid-19 crisis has forced all businesses leaders to rethink all aspects of their organisations, especially where and how they work, and according to Avant Senior Consultant Mark Thompson the doorway to future growth is wide open for resellers with sharply honed consultancy skills.

**E**ver-changing market conditions keep Thompson moving, but consultancy with clients has always been his north star, even from the outset of his career. "Having been in direct sales most of my life, the deregulation of telecommunications and the opportunities that it presented to me were too good to overlook," said Thompson. "Selling discounted minutes led to selling phone systems then mobile products and services from alternative providers. I later realised that I was advising companies on how communications would be of benefit to them. This led me toward consultancy rather than the sale of a product."

Avant has several consultants working on projects in and around Europe. Although they have been together for several years the business was formalised two years ago. "Turning points have been assisting a global organisation to consolidate its mobile communications throughout

Europe," added Thompson. "This was a two year project encompassing bills and contracts in 12 languages and several countries which don't have digital billing. The organisation saved, in excess, of £6 million per annum. Other turning points are similar organisations concerned about mobile tariffs changing post-Brexit. But our key driver over the last 18 months has been home working. Many companies have had to re-engineer their comms, not only within the office or mobile environment but within the four walls of most employees."

As an independent consultancy Avant does not have partners within the industry. "When completing benchmarking we choose different vendors and allow the client to choose from the information gathered," said Thompson. "Our client base is varied. However, small to medium companies with up to 500 employees are our sweet spot. These



Mark Thompson

clients usually want Avant to look at improving their communications, all at once! Where larger organisations are generally more specific with their needs. Growth areas will continue to be home working, distance working and mobile comms which are always top of a client's help list."

#### Demand drivers

Avant is growing organically with demand in large part driven by shifts in client requirements over the last year or two, creating a need for specific knowledge on remote comms and connectivity from multiple sites. "Home working has created enquiries into multi-network SIMs in routers instead of physical broadband and fibre," commented Thompson. "My thoughts on this are simple: Home workers using their traditional connectivity has highlighted inadequacies in traditional broadband at home. All you can eat data on a SIM can be a lot cheaper and the speed is constant and much

better than your average physical connection."

Thompson's longer-term objective is to continue creating solutions throughout Europe, with its consultants working in many more organisations, while training new consultants in an academy style (video-based) environment. "The greatest opportunities always seem to come by surprise," he added. "There is a saying: Success seems to come when hard work meets good luck."

Thompson rates his biggest career achievement as starting a company from zero, creating a successful business and working with great individuals. But in hindsight he may have done things differently. "I wouldn't have sold my original business," he commented. "Large sums of money can be too much of a temptation, but once your company is gone all you have is a number on a bank statement. I realised the business meant so much more." ■

#### Just a minute with Mark Thompson...

**Role model:** My old boss and co-author of our book, Barry Purcell. I worked for Barry in the health clubs where I was a gym instructor. He introduced me to personal development and the art of selling; and helped me to realise that the only difference between successful people and the not so successful is the full use of the ability you have.

**What talent do you wish you had?** To sing! I have a voice that could break bullet proof glass.

**What do you fear most?** Spiders.

**Your strengths and what could you work on?** Tenacity is my strength and weakness: I will work on something until I can make it work, but don't know when to stop when the general consensus is that it won't work.

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** My dad, he always made people laugh. Steven Fry, I'm in awe of his vocabulary. And Jordan Peterson, I love his books and talks.

**What possession could you not live without?** Netflix.

**Industry bugbear:** Futurists! We will soon have implants in our fingers to make a call! The comms industry needs to focus on the magic we have now, and sell it to death.

**Best advice you've been given:** Everyone has an agenda.

**If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing?** Something in politics.

**How do you relax?** Gym, jogging or reading.

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I was a nightclub bouncer for over a decade.

**Top tip for resellers:** Keep recommending really good consultants.

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# Maximising data assets

**Extracting data from workplace analytics has massive potential for all businesses to benefit, writes Tony Martino, CEO of software developer Tollring.**

**W**e're used to change in our industry, but no one could have predicted the enormity of the shift in working practices that we've all been through. Working closely with our service providers and partners, as we have throughout the pandemic, we are seeing a real explosion in demand from all industries for technology that helps businesses to make sense of the changes.

The past 18 months has forced many mid-market and smaller businesses to move from on-premise to cloud-based call handling solutions. In step with this, their policies, procedures, processes and people have also had to adapt and evolve. With such fundamental changes, these organisations are keen to step back and review how they are doing and to understand if they are being effective, driving a renewed need for accessible, intuitive and commercially compelling workplace analytics.

Now that we're far beyond that initial period of disruption, businesses can start to see the benefits of their new working practices. For example, moving to cloud-based

comms has allowed many smaller businesses to punch above their weight, accessing sophisticated features and capabilities at affordable prices that were previously only available to bigger enterprises.

That presents resellers with an opportunity to penetrate this surge of new customers, who both expect and need data to underpin their decision making – but partners must understand the significance of offering the right data, at the right time, to the right people. By adding cloud call analytics to monitor both incoming and outgoing calls, resellers can give these businesses access to valuable information about how they communicate with their customers at a cost-effective price point as well as drive considerable improvements in their customer service.

Data and insights that encompass the whole business, not just from within a contact centre, deliver an essential view of a company's internal and external communications. It shows if people are adapting to new ways of working, with in-depth visibility that highlights workflow improvements and identifies business performance issues.



**Tony Martino**

The latest call analytics and reporting capabilities for the small to medium business market include live wallboards, dashboards and reporting. Businesses can understand if calls are answered on time, or not answered, how long callers are willing to wait, assess if staff spend the right amount of time on each call and if they respond to customers appropriately – across the whole business. Managers

loyalty and retention. A 30,000ft analytical view will underpin decision making and reduce uncertainty so that businesses can focus more energy on what makes them competitive.

#### **Teams adoption**

The migration to the cloud and hybrid working has also seen an explosion in the use of tools like Microsoft Teams. As of the end of July 2021, Microsoft reported over 250

## **As an analytics vendor, we are now working with many of the major CSPs in the UK and Europe**

from every department (including the contact centre) can measure and compare the effectiveness of call groups and queues, then structure teams to ensure the right people are available when needed to deliver a resolution on first contact.

In our new hybrid working world, the cleanliness of the customer journey is critical. The shorter and more efficient the journey, the better the customer experience – and good experiences lead to greater

million daily users of Teams. Business leaders now want to evaluate if the technology is delivering the results needed for their company and their people. We've been providing business analytics to the unified communications market for many years, and with the increasing reliance on Teams for both internal and external communications, it made sense to provide the benefits of deep insight into this environment.

Whether the challenge is wellbeing, performance,

or customer experience, accessing top level analytics from the Teams environment helps leaders across all business functions to manage remote teams, support and motivate individuals, and drive customer engagement.

Staff wellbeing is a major priority. The analytics from Teams enable businesses to understand how changes have impacted mental health, team performance and employee satisfaction. For example, extended hours and extreme collaboration trends can be compared to help identify warning signs and to drive positive habits, good time management and effective working.

As an analytics vendor, we are now working with many of the major CSPs in the UK and Europe. We are seeing them add analytics to help businesses to improve business performance and ensure customer facing teams can operate more effectively. Incorporating third party developed products into core services not only speeds up and boosts go-to-market offerings, it can also deliver a competitive advantage in a saturated market.

It's great to see that analytics is offering much needed clarity and transparency at a time of upheaval and uncertainty. Resellers have an opportunity to use the analytics to take a consultative role, empowering their customers to adapt to change now and in the future. Demand is high, and with workplace analytics that are easier to sell, deploy and use, it presents an excellent upsell opportunity for resellers with additional recurring revenue and stickiness. ■

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# Employee ownership pays

**Microtech Group has diligently increased its presence in the health sector over many years, and having secured the company's long-term future in Ayrshire by becoming an employee owned entity, Managing Director Chris McMail has ramped up his growth ambitions.**

**K**ilmarnock-based Microtech has two divisions – Microtech Support and Microtech Health, and for 35 years it has specialised in the delivery of end-to-end IT services to the public, private and third sector. The eHealth business focuses on technology to manage patients with long-term conditions; while the support arm operates in telecoms and digital marketing including web design, brand development and social media management.

McMail established Microtech Support in 1986 to provide IT software and services to SMEs. "In the early 1990s we extended our client portfolio, introducing Ayrshire's GP practices," he explained. "NHS Ayrshire and Arran consolidated the IT contracts for all practices in Ayrshire at this time, and we were fortunate to win this tender. The contract helped us build a relationship with some of the IT teams within NHS Scotland and also introduced us to the applications used within GP practices. At the same time, we became the Scottish Distributor for a Document Management (DM) Application, used exclusively within primary care."

In 2004, NHS Scotland issued a National Framework Agreement for Docman, and Microtech was awarded the contract which started an 18



**Chris McMail**

## When the transition to an EOT was suggested, I knew this was the best way to secure the company's position in Ayrshire

year relationship with NHS Scotland. "This was a massive achievement, exposing us to every GP practice in Scotland," added McMail. "This application is now a core component within GP practices and the software

forms an integral part of NHS Scotland's strategic IT healthcare policy. Our team is responsible for supporting every GP practice in Scotland and Northern Ireland, with in excess of 20,000 users and management of over

200 calls per day at the Kilmarnock service desk."

### One option only

In September Microtech Group became a majority employee owned company with 74 per cent of the

business shares being transferred into an Employee Ownership Trust (EOT). McMail favoured employee ownership to any purchase offers. "After making the initial decision to explore options for the future, I received various offers," he said. "However, none of these guaranteed the continued operation of Microtech in Scotland, which took so much hard work to build. It soon became apparent that any sale of the business 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."

Microtech currently employs 70 staff and generates circa £5 million turnover. With the release of its Health Portal, which supports remote consultations and Digital Patient, Microtech forecasts annual growth of 10-15 per cent. "Greater pressure from high waiting lists caused by the pandemic, as well as the requirement to meet NHS targets has meant an increase in demand for our Telehealth solutions," said McMail.

"We will continue to grow organically with a heavy focus on our current product set and we have a well defined



# s off for McMail

development roadmap built around customer priorities. We will also continue to look for more acquisition opportunities. In parallel, we are keen to investigate the Healthcare opportunities within Europe and the USA and expand the role of resellers in expanding our market reach."

Microtech's key technology partners include Microsoft, Cyber Essentials and Clinical System Providers. And aside from health, other target markets include SMEs, large corporate companies, private, public and third sector. "Microtech is well positioned to support businesses' transition to the new norm post-Covid," added McMail. "With changes in blended working arrangements there is a need for a dynamic, scalable and flexible IT infrastructure that supports our new way of doing business. We will continue to see the on-boarding of new clients to our IT solutions.

"Over the past three years we have transitioned from a traditional distributor of software products to developing and supporting our own applications within the healthcare space. We have built a strong innovative resource for healthcare providers. In 2020, Nick Fernando was appointed Commercial Director. He has extensive experience in Healthcare IT and drives the planning, development and implementation of commercial strategies."

These include a new capability, Microtech Health's BEAM, which provides an improved document delivery experience for the patient. All documents are converted to PDF as source and the patient

is notified by their preferred method (BEAM mobile app, online portal, SMS message or email). Once registered, patients can view and access personal documents or provide access to a family member or carer. "Moving forward, we are looking at more advanced capabilities for BEAM, an intelligent way of corresponding digitally with patients," said McMail. "Our development roadmap will bring additional features to allow patients to engage with both Primary and Acute care. Our service is designed to complement and integrate with existing Clinical Management Systems and document management systems."

#### Priorities

McMail's top priority is Microtech's latest capability – MiHealth Portal from Microtech Health – a secure web-based platform specially designed to communicate important health information between health providers and patients, with the goal of improving patients' health outcomes. "Our interactive portal connects seamlessly with other Microtech Health solutions such as our HealthPod remote patient monitoring devices, Digital Patient Correspondence and Patient Flow capabilities," explained McMail.

"The pandemic has further highlighted how technology can be better deployed in a number of areas within Healthcare to support Digital Patient and remote consultations. IT departments are now adopting a 'make it happen' attitude which was less obvious in the pre-pandemic world. Our MiHealth Portal puts us in an ideal position to capitalise on these opportunities." ■

#### Just a minute with Chris McMail...

**Role model:** Any entrepreneur who builds a successful business from a standing start with limited resources.

#### Your main strengths and what could you work on?

My strengths are tenacity and identifying commercial opportunities, but I could work on my patience!

#### Your biggest career achievement?

Building one of the largest Scottish SMEs in IT Healthcare. Trading for this long in such a challenging market, combined with facing a global pandemic, shows the company's resilience and strength.

**In hindsight:** Every decision was taken based on the information and experience I had at the time. I have too few regrets to mention.

**Best advice you've been given:** Think positive!

**One example of something you have overcome?** When I started the business at 21, I was extremely shy. I had to learn quickly how to deliver courses and demonstrations.

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Tony Robbins, his books had a material effect on my personal life and career; Cristiano Ronaldo, I admire his ambition, fitness and dedication to his sport; and Bill Gates, he built one of the largest companies in the world despite having no formal degree.

**If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing?** A dolphin trainer or chef.

**The hardest decision you made last year?** To transition as an EOT. I was determined that the business stayed in Scotland and jobs remained secure.

**The biggest risk you have taken?** Starting a business at 21 with no money.

**How do you relax when not working?** Padel tennis and golf.

## THE RECRUITMENT COLUMN

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## Partnership. An extension to your business?



Darrol Stevens and Ollie Benn

**R**ecently, a couple of our clients have told us that we have become "an extension to their business". One even wrote it in a testimonial for us.

It was great to hear as it is exactly what we set out to achieve when we launched neoci. We wanted a true partnership model.

As a recruiter in the telco sector, partnerships are hugely important. It's probably no coincidence that our most successful placements are with the clients we are closest to.

But what makes a great partnership?

- Service?
- Honesty & Trust?
- Alignment of core values & culture?

#### All of the above of course!

Service is so often an overlay in an industry where businesses do not have a proprietary offering. The nature of our reseller community is to take ownership of a white label product and badge it as their own. Then add in another product and another and so on. Where they add value is in the service and now more now than ever "Service" is king.

When a company gets it right, whether it is their product or something that is a small part of a chain of providers it is usually because the way that they deliver it or the service wrap that they provide.

Supplying a great service isn't

a 'one size fits all' approach. Those businesses that take the time to properly understand and truly get under the skin of their clients really do make the difference.

People buy from people, but they also buy from brands that are renowned for being good at what they do.

Those brands stand the test of time, but they evolve, they change to suit their customer and the market they operate in. We all had to evolve recently, but how many of you have truly adopted a change or are old habits kicking in?

When we started our recruitment business in the middle of a pandemic, we decided that apart from the fact that we lived and breathed the telco industry, our main USPs would be the way that we interact with our clients, the time that we spend to understand them and their culture, whilst retaining our own core values and beliefs.

We have been fortunate to work with companies that have embraced our way of working, companies that are delivering true value outside of just cost benefits and expect their suppliers to understand and help deliver their ethos through the way we work with them. We have created partnerships which work both ways, it's a win win situation.

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# It's time to turn rising cyber

The cyber-threat landscape never stays the same. With technology evolving at record rates and hybrid working creating more gateways for would-be attackers, the channel and its customers are under constant threat.

Working from home has increased the likelihood of cyber-attacks. A recent study by TextAnywhere, investigating the screen habits of 1,000 employees in the UK, revealed that 67.4 per cent are using their mobiles for work, imposing a serious threat to business security.

Resellers must make customers aware of the emerging technologies which have created a host of new

risks to businesses. For example, there is great uncertainty about how IoT will affect the industry, with more dispersed endpoints creating a higher volume of vulnerable points. The GDPR PrivSec Report found that 47 per cent of the most vulnerable devices are security cameras installed on home networks, followed by smart hubs like Google Home and Amazon Alexa and network-attached storage devices.

For this month's Kaleidoscope, we therefore asked industry experts a simple question: How can resellers safeguard customers against increasingly sophisticated threats and retain their position as a trusted and dependable business partner?



TIM SCOTT  
ADEPT

"Organisations operate in an environment no longer constrained by traditional physical boundaries, but one of highly distributed people, applications and data. This increases risk, which contributes to the growth in cyber threats and the industry's adoption of the zero-trust concept of never trust, always verify. MSPs play a key role in educating customers on the modern threat landscape and the need for visibility and control across all aspects of their environment. A constructive approach is the Secure Access Service Edge (SASE) architecture. This provides a holistic access and security model and enables a good conversation about the broad range of risks, from different locations, and how they can be addressed. By approaching the discussion in this way, with a complete approach rather than point products and services, the MSP can act as a trusted advisor and consult on how solutions that address modern threats encapsulate how organisations work in a changing landscape."



MICHALA HART  
BT WHOLESALE

"Having good foundational cyber hygiene is by far the best way resellers can safeguard customers against the rapidly evolving threat landscape. Most breaches are a result of poor basic cyber hygiene either within the systems of the organisation, which are compromised, or within their supply chain network and digital ecosystem. If resellers focus on the basics and ensure that their own network and systems are patched and proactively monitored, they reduce the attack surface for themselves and their customers. Extending this advice and best practice to customers will earn trust and confidence. A good way to do this would be collectively adopting industry best practices such as the NCSC ten steps to cyber security which provides clear guidance to UK businesses. To further quote the NCSC, "cyber security is a team sport" we are safer together and proactively engaging will build long term trusted partnerships."



LORRIN WHITE  
BAMBOO

"Credibility and capability are top of the list when retaining customer trust. The best way of illustrating this in the rapidly expanding digital landscape is by showing you have your own house in order when it comes to mitigating and managing the heightened risk. Resellers should be able to confidently talk about the safety and security of their own ICT infrastructure and how they continually assess the attack surface of their business as it grows. If done right and resellers are demonstrably embedding digital assurance into every digital touchpoint then customers can take comfort that third party expansion simply knits into embedded processes and behaviours. If you really get it right, you ensure that your customers are additionally safeguarded by educating them throughout any technology change process too. To that end, it is equally important to understand and work through the infosec requirements of specific verticals and customers."



JOHN DENNY  
WAVENET

"Our industry has always been one with an ever-changing landscape, and with this comes not only a great opportunity but also a great threat. New technology creates new avenues for customers to be compromised by those that would seek to cripple businesses for their financial gain. We have a duty as comms providers to stay on the pulse of these evolving threats, something that must be taken seriously. Delivering timely solutions that are proven to work, by partnering with the right solution providers, is the only way to ensure customers remain consistently protected. There is a responsibility therefore to vet these providers properly, not only from a technological perspective but from a cultural one too. Only those with the customer at heart will deliver, and continue to deliver, products and services that will protect customers for years to come, regardless of location: supporting hybrid, remote and office-based workers."



RUSSELL HENDERSON  
TRUSTACK

"In truth, it is not possible to completely safeguard a client against increasingly sophisticated cyber-attacks. The best you can do is to stay abreast of security best practices, evaluate, adopt and provide layers of protection using best-of-breed products to protect your clients. The onus also sits with the client to heed advice and invest in quality layers of protection. It isn't a case of 'it won't happen to us', it's a case of when it does, how quickly can you contain the threat and limit the damage of either data encryption, data exfiltration, full-service outage, and reputational damage. Quality perimeter protection, solid endpoint protection, data loss prevention policies, data encryption, very robust backups, and cloud-integrated threat protection services are all necessary layers in today's world to help reduce the possibility of an attack and limit the impact if one occurs."



## TeamsLink

Microsoft Teams direct routing, done right

# Turn threats into opportunities



GARRY VEALE  
VECTRA AI

"As trusted advisors, it is up to partners to educate customers about increasingly sophisticated threats. The attack surface has widened, the traditional security perimeter has disappeared, and visibility is clouded. So, partners must advise customers to shift their mindset away from prevention-first strategies, which leave organisations blind to sophisticated attackers who are slipping through the net. This means adding technologies like AI and proactive threat detection solutions that can identify suspicious behaviours, so it is easier to stop attackers in their tracks. For example, technologies like Network Detection and Response and cloud-based security for services like Office 365 can increase visibility and enable organisations to stop attacks before they do any real damage. By convincing customers to take proactive security measures, they will have a better chance of avoiding breaches and being kept out the headlines."



GAIL LESLIE  
KUBENET

"The Internet of things (IoT) is a great asset to our daily lives; and offers increasing potential to both how we build our businesses, and how we can interact with our customers. However, as the use of IoT rises, so too does the threat of a cyber-attack. As a trusted telecommunications provider, offering cyber security services, it is imperative to emphasise how measures such as firewalls and guest Wi-Fis (that can be set for just IoT use) enable protection to businesses, but it is also important to offer guidance into how to use IoT devices to their full potential. By introducing education and guidance, a trusting relationship is formed - helping position your business as an expert in this sector of technology and communications."



ADRIAN SUNDERLAND  
JOLA

"There have been some high-profile cybersecurity attacks on IoT and M2M devices and deployments. Bristol Airport's flight information system was held for ransom and the digital signage in Union Street station was hacked so that information screens displayed hardcore pornography. There are also hidden attacks where IoT devices are used as botnets to power DDOS attacks, with device owners unaware until their monthly bill arrives. Jola is acutely aware of the need to protect our resellers and their customers from cybersecurity attacks. Our Mobile Manager portal, with its real-time alerting and control, provides visibility into the SIM usage before the monthly bill arrives. However, our approach goes beyond just managing the costs. If your application doesn't need internet access, then why would you expose it to the Internet? Jola offers SIMs that provide secure private access back to a corporate network without having any access to the Internet, eliminating the 'attack surface' completely."



ADAM CATHCART  
9 GROUP

"The pandemic resulted in a global shift towards hybrid working, creating opportunities for hackers to exploit new weaknesses. Attacks are becoming more sophisticated, as criminals constantly find new ways to outsmart existing technology. Responsibility for security doesn't just sit with business owners, it's firmly with the individuals within an organisation. However, Partners can add value by providing regular support and advice to customers, supporting them to reduce their vulnerability. Make security a focal point of your messaging and demonstrate that you are keeping pace with emerging threats. Holiday periods are particularly vulnerable times for telecoms fraud. Partners can take a proactive approach by contacting their customers to remind them of the risks and to provide guidance around the steps they can take to protect their business. We've worked closely with industry bodies to publish a fraud prevention checklist, for partners to share, enabling them to provide value to their own customers."



ROAN PRATT  
ENREACH

"Enreach has designed a cutting-edge cybersecurity strategy and defence system to ensure customers are protected against threats. As a telecommunication provider, we understand the importance of cybersecurity. The rate of change to all our systems can change in hours. As an organisation, we are constantly working to ensure that we are secured against growing threats to our customers. The benefit for our customers is having one platform and various product offerings that allow us to pivot quickly. Everyone at Enreach, from our customer service representatives to expert IT technicians, and everyone in between, understands the importance of security. We recognise that every SME has unique security needs, therefore we tailor our solutions to ensure that they are secured from any threats. We are dedicated to offering the finest results for every SME business. We address any cybersecurity difficulties for our customers and assist them to enhance performance."



STEVE HENNESSY  
BABBLE CLOUD

"The main strategy of resellers should be providing education on potential cybersecurity risks, whilst also ensuring protection is provided for their networks. As most attacks are due to end user error, it is vital to advise on additional security steps, such as multi-factor authentication, to minimise risks. To remain as a trusted and dependable business partner and provide organisational resilience to customers, reseller strategies should also incorporate: audit and education, focused on giving the customer control and knowledge of its network; recommendations, reviewing the network vulnerability with the customer and providing helpful questions such as, who has control over the security of your network? How quickly could you recover from an IT failure? Are all your IT systems and services documented?; finally, regular reviews should keep the customer informed on user training, network infrastructure and hardware etc."

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# AWARDS RETURN CELEBRATE

## COMMS NATIONAL AWARDS

7TH OCTOBER  
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The 2021 Comms National Awards celebrated the industry's luminaries in style and reunited the channel at a fully live event staged at the Hilton on Park Lane in London's Mayfair on October 7th.

The glittering awards extravaganza was hosted by dancer and television presenter Anton Du Beke who kept proceedings Strictly professional with the help of voice of God, Gina Mellotte.

The first award of the night was presented to Zen Internet CEO Richard Tang who was presented with the Entrepreneur of the Year award. Double award winners included Jola, Redsquid, Gamma, CityFibre and Pangea.

Sohin Raithatha, CEO of Reseller of the Year Redsquid, said: "After a year of hard work and a big transformation within our organisation, we are filled with gratitude over these wonderful acknowledgments. We want to thank every single member of our team and all our amazing customers who have helped us achieve this!"

Comms Dealer Editorial Director and awards co-ordinator Nigel Sergent commented: "This was very special night when the channel was able to meet face-to-face again and celebrate everything that is great about our industry. It was fantastic to acknowledge the amazing solutions channel teams have deployed for customers during incredibly challenging times, recognise the support suppliers have given to make those solutions happen a reward innovation and business transformation in all its forms.

"It's been a tough time for everyone in business, but all the clever, determined people working in ICT have, quite literally, kept the UK communicating during the worst crisis since the second world war.

"I am extremely grateful to our judging panel who gave up their time to judge the awards and once again we had a record number of entries. A final word of thanks must go to our headline sponsor DWS and all our award and hospitality sponsors for their invaluable support."



Double winners Pangea celebrate with friends



Gamma's Mark Lomas just loves a microphone!



Entrepreneur of The Year Richard Tang, Chairman of Zen Internet

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Entrepreneur of the Year



Entrepreneur of the Year – Richard Tang, Chairman, ZEN INTERNET

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Best Billing Solution – UNION STREET

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UC & Collaboration Category



Best UC End Point or Device – JABRA



Best UC Hosted Platform (Up to £10m) – VANILLA IP



Best UC Hosted Platform (Above £10m) – GAMMA



Best UC Collaboration Platform – 8X8

Intelligent Network & Connectivity Category



Best Network – VIRTUAL1

Service Provider Category



Best Wholesale Service Provider (up to £10m) – PANGEA

UC Solution Category



Best SME UC Customer Solution – START COMMUNICATIONS



Best Altnet – CITYFIBRE



Best Wholesale Service Provider (above £10m) – GAMMA



Best Enterprise UC Customer Solution – BRITANNIC TELECOM

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Contact Centre Category



Best Contact Centre Customer Solution – GLOBAL4

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Business Transformation Award (Reseller) – WINDSOR TELECOM

Channel Support Category



Best Channel Support Programme – PANGEA



Best Channel Business Service – IP NETIX



Best Channel Portal – JOLA

Business Innovation Category



Best Reseller Innovation Award – COBALT



Best Supplier Innovation Award – JOLA

Positive Impact Category



Diversity Award – CITYFIBRE



Sustainability Award – ZEN INTERNET

Reseller of the Year



Comms Dealer Reseller of the Year – REDSQUID

# Allseybrook rises



Ellie Allseybrook

INFORM Billing's sales and marketing head honcho Ellie Allseybrook has been appointed Business Development Director. She will work alongside owner-Directors Shaun Bodsworth and Darren Salisbury in the newly created role. Allseybrook joined Inform Billing in 2013 as a part-time Marketing Manager. The company then had seven employees and circa 50 customers. Today the team has grown to 30-plus staff, 300 customers and

generated a seven-fold increase in revenues in the same period. "We have a number of exciting plans in the pipeline and the intention and ambition is to take the business to the next level," said Allseybrook. Managing Director Shaun Bodsworth added: "Ellie has a proven track record, has been central to our growth and her influence continues to evolve."

## Also on the move...

STEVE Norman has joined the board of Leeds-based Pure Technology Group as Commercial Director, a new role designed to bolster commercial performance during the company's next growth phase following its acquisition by Fulcrum BV. The move is said to align with PTG's £100m revenue aspirations, focusing on key aspects including the Group's culture, expansion and internal infrastructure. Norman has managed corporate, public sector and enterprise clients, working primarily in the UK with organisations across the Americas, Asia and EMEA. He previously held senior positions within iomart, Stone Group, CDW and Canon. "PTG's emphasis on its people and culture has been refreshing," he said. "I'm working alongside the team to make a significant contribution to its commercial objectives."



Steve Norman

**ABZORB'S Bradley Holmes has been promoted as Service Delivery Manager responsible for onboarding and supporting new channel partners. He joined as an apprentice and moved into an account management role for the direct side of the business before leading the Customer Care Team and training. Head of Indirect Mark Riddell said: "Bradley's appointment is an important step in our enhanced channel partner programme and towards working closer with partners."**

**JEANNETTE Goodred has joined billing services provider Symbiant Technologies as Head of Marketing and Sales. She brings 15 years industry experience and previously worked in sales and training roles for Aurora. Keith Pearshouse, who is the Managing Director of Symbiant Technologies, commented: "Jeannette brings additional skills to our management team. We believe many resellers will welcome the opportunity to consider using independent billing system providers."**



Mitchell Feldman

FORMER HPE Chief Digital Officer Mitchell Feldman has joined Glasgow-based Microsoft partner Akari Solutions as Chief Marketing Officer. "Mitchell brings years of experience in the channel and a marketing strategy that will help Akari achieve more success," said

MD Margaret Totten. Feldman added: "Having built and sold a number of technology businesses, I have a good sense of what great looks like. When I was approached by Margaret to be involved with Akari, it was one of the easiest decisions I have made. Akari's vision of the future is clear – it has ambitious growth plans, a strong and energetic team, and a focus on delivering solutions that positively impact customers and their people through inclusion and sustainability."

# Tollring's Oliver in CMXO role

TOLLRING has strengthened the link between marketing and customer experience with the appointment of Hilary Oliver as Chief Marketing and Experience Officer (CMXO). She was previously Marketing Director for the company.

"Over the past 18 months we have seen our addressable market widen in light of new demands for analytics products driven by hybrid working and data led decision making," she stated.

"This has come at a time where our investment in processes and people has been high. As a result, we have seen the introduction of new releases for Cisco BroadWorks, Webex Calling, Mitel Flex and Microsoft Teams, all of which have served to satiate demand for greater customer experience insights."

Oliver's promotion follows Andy Bannister's appointment to Global Head of Sales in March this year.



Hilary Oliver

# Ollivant reunited with Vapour CEO

GLENN Ollivant has joined Vapour as Senior Account Director 15 years after he was first hired and trained by CEO Tim Mercer, who in 2006 was Regional Sales Manager at Virgin Media Business (formerly TeleWest). Ollivant subsequently moved to Kcom and TalkTalk Business where



Glenn Ollivant

he was a technology and UCaaS specialist well known for netting one of the company's largest deals.

"This is absolutely the right next step for me," enthused Ollivant. "I've set myself bold targets, never mind the goals that have been outlined as part of my role!"

Mercer added: "The time is right for us to join forces once again, not least because the market is opening up again and we have the same attitude when it comes to supporting customers. He knows what you can achieve in organisations if you're agile, inquisitive and collaborative."

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# COMMS VISION CONVENTION 2021

THE NETWORK SUMMIT FOR ICT CHANNEL LEADERS

**EVENT SUPPLEMENT**



# Comms Vision 2021: Defining the future in disruptive times

In what has been an unprecedented year, Comms Vision 2021 (10th-12th November, Gleneagles Hotel) will chart the next big comms market shifts as we emerge from Covid-19, map the Managed Services Provider competitive landscape and explore your potential to create customer value, loyalty and sustainability in times of unparalleled market disruption and change.

**T**he sum of major industry transformations such as the move to all-IP, the national fibre roll out, trends in public cloud infrastructure procurement, the rise of data-defined business models and the primacy of technologies such as AI – and the march of mega-disruptive alternative providers – is pushing the MSP world into a period of irreversible change. Not to mention the impact of Covid-19 and the drive for a more sustainable planet. In this year's Comms Vision opening SuperSession, experts will unravel the implications of these trends and identify where the value of tech companies will reside in the future. But do you know your company's critical advantage and how that plays to current trends? Building long-term success through true differentiation is key, says Daryl Pile, Gamma Managing Director – Channel. In his VisionTalk he will explore how to win with a capabilities defined strategy, and spotlight ways to ensure success by building on existing strengths and creating strategies that truly differentiate.

the evidence of current science why we need to act right now to build a sustainable future.

Stobart will then discuss reshaping culture to embrace sustainability. In his following Fireside interview he will explain why company culture needs to adapt to embrace sustainability, and why business leaders must reset their thinking and align with the existential threat of climate change. He will share his personal fears on why net zero commitments may be too little too late, and emphasise why embracing sustainability will matter more and more to all customers. The winners of the next decade, he says, will be those businesses that put climate change at the heart of their strategic ambitions and purpose.

#### Bringing leadership to life

This will of course mean bringing leadership to life in the digital workplace. Author of *The Mind Coach*, Jamil Qureshi is an internationally recognised innovator in the psychology of performance and leadership, attitudes, improving people, cultural change and team performance. In his session he will discuss how to reassess your thinking amid industry disruption and demonstrate leadership in business change management. His expertise will also help delegates define their organisation's future purpose, create long-term value, build sustainability and resilience to change, and discover the keys to successful business model innovation.

A Fireside interview with Cityfibre CEO Greg Mesch will also explore how to lead effectively at this time of digital transformation. Mesch acquired CityFibre in 2011 and from a standing start he became largely responsible for driving the UK's Digital Britain agenda despite being told his business model was economically impossible to sustain. The visionary leader has set his sights on continuing the

**Do you know your company's critical advantage and how that plays to current trends?**

A big question for Gavin Jones, Channel Director at BT Wholesale, is 'where are we now, and where do we need to be?'. In his Fireside interview he will discuss the catalysts for an interconnected future including the critical role of innovation, digital transformation, managed services, the move to a zero-latency world with 5G and IoT – and an overall shift towards a layer 3 IT centric model.

In his VisionTalk, Zen Internet CEO Paul Stobart will address two more of the most relevant issues today – climate change and sustainability. He will look at the bigger picture and demonstrate why taking a line of action that meets the green expectations of organisations and customers through sustainable approaches is vital. He will also demonstrate through

# Driving value creation



company's disruptive mission and in September smashed the record for a fibre deployment capital raise with £1.125 billion financing. In his Fireside interview, Mesch will share insights into his strategy, personal journey, why full fibre more than anything else has the power to transform the UK's economic fortunes – and inspire delegates to also supercharge Britain's race to all-digital.

### Journey to All IP

The journey towards All IP is further crystallised when we consider that there are approximately three million B2B ISDN and PSTN lines available to migrate by 2025. How can channel partners seize this opportunity to move their customers towards a unified portfolio, drive value and offer more flexibility and agility to customers? In his VisionTalk, Steve Blackshaw, Head of All IP for BT Wholesale, will conduct a granular exploration of the All IP landscape and provide practical guidance on how to build and deploy a transformation model for customers with confidence.

Harnessing catalysts for change with a challenger and wholesale mindset is also key, says Sir Charles Dunstone, Executive Chairman, TalkTalk Group. In his keynote he will share insights into why TalkTalk Business' rebrand to TalkTalk Wholesale Services and move to private ownership comes at a critical juncture not just in the comms sector's theatre of transformation, but also as the company 'doubles down on wholesale'. With new opportunities presenting as never before, thanks to the rise of full fibre and digital services, Dunstone says the capacity to take effective action hinges on business transformation, agility and an ever-strengthening commitment to a challenger mindset supported by a wholesale fuelled growth engine.

It goes without saying that the pandemic has changed much about how connectivity is consumed by

organisations and in their Fireside interview Dunstone and Nick Gunga, Managing Director for Fibre & Wholesale Services at TalkTalk Wholesale Services, share their perspectives on a transforming marketplace, and pick up on action points that will enable resellers to draw on full fibre momentum, the launch of 10Gb, focus on growth and deliver a more connected customer experience. They will also discuss the key themes driving full fibre roll outs, their partnership strategy with alternative network providers – and why platforms that deliver these services will become a priority for all businesses.

Understanding the essentials of a competitive advantage-driven strategy is a top priority for Gamma CEO Andrew Taylor. It is a fact that in today's ever-competitive marketplace, raising the bar and deploying targeted strategies for growth will prevent business leaders from being led astray by conventional thinking. More than ever, achieving long-term success requires a new look and a sharp focus on coherent value propositions that provide a competitive advantage. In his Fireside interview, Taylor will share insights into Gamma's evolving strategy to differentiate its, and partners' capabilities in important markets – including UCaaS, CCaaS, mobile and 5G.

But the race to bring much needed flexibility to workplaces is barely out of the blocks despite the unprecedented business transformation opportunities that lie ahead. Why? Because the burgeoning market for agile solutions remains a challenge for many channel partners needing the right insight to take them forward. In his VisionTalk, Diego Tedesco, Director of Wholesale Fixed, Virgin Media O2 Business, explores how partners can optimise growth and business value from helping organisations understand the variables that make them become more agile. And for the channel, opportunities to deliver flexible solutions have never been greater. In his following Fireside interview, Tedesco will discuss why the channel is at a tipping point and why the successful partners will be those that secure their future through thinking big and acting small.

Business transformation in times of disruption demands more than the best possible strategies, it requires an intimate understanding of the company's culture, values and the customer experience. In his Comms Vision Keynote, former Sainsbury's CEO Justin King CBE shares insights into how he led the supermarket giant through huge shifts in the retail and supermarket landscape. He will shine a light on his leadership approaches, strategic focus, and the vital task of achieving culture change to drive sustainable customer loyalty. King was named Most Admired Business Leader by Management Today and identified as Britain's Most Impressive Businessman in the IPSOS-MORI Captains of Industry Report.

**In the following pages Comms Vision Convention 2021 sponsors share their market views and strategies.**

**COMMS Vision is the leading annual leadership forum for CEO, MD and CTO delegates making up the major league of the UK reseller community. [www.commsvision.com](http://www.commsvision.com)**

**Business transformation in times of disruption demands more than the best possible strategies, it requires an intimate understanding of the company's culture**

# 2022: Good, bad or ugly?

It will not be business as usual in 2022, but this could be a good thing for UK channel partners, writes Camille Mendler, Chief Analyst, Enterprise and Wholesale, Omdia.

**U**K enterprises didn't just tighten their belts during the pandemic, they learned what really matters to their businesses. Investment budgets won't be back to pre-pandemic levels, but money will be spent. The challenge for any digital service provider, and their suppliers, is mapping propositions to emerging priorities.

All of this will be discussed at Comms Vision, a strategic event where I will be supporting BT Wholesale in its boardroom session. As BT Wholesale continues to transform and improve its digital experience, we have been sharing our industry perspectives to help shape this. This includes Omdia's latest research among 4,500 enterprise decision-makers, providing direction on what's next for business and the channel.

## Experience will drive buying decisions

Diving into this research, poor service performance and support were the top reasons UK enterprises churned suppliers during the pandemic, with cost ranking a more distant third. Specifically, digital experience is becoming a top reason for enterprises to buy, stay loyal or change service providers. They demand immediate response, on-demand service activation, converged service management, and the ability to design a digital environment that suits them.

Can you, and your partners, support live serviceability



Camille Mendler

checks, on-demand quotes for new orders, and proactive fault notifications? Larger enterprises also want ways to flow live service information into their own systems, potentially through APIs and integrations with common off-the-shelf service management platforms. Indeed, without APIs, you can waste time, effort and money with unnecessary issues such as manual and double-key entries. As an example, with BT Wholesale's APIs, you can fulfil orders from your systems and pass orders to BT's. Ultimately, for channel partners and suppliers alike, investing in a better digital experience is crucial.

## Employees won't return to the office

Two thirds of UK employees are expected to be remote or hybrid. But they still need the tools, services, and security that bricks-and-mortar business environments usually offer. It will still be good to talk, but it won't be in the staff canteen. This will have a significant impact

on the connectivity market. There will likely be less high bandwidth into large offices and more broadband into homes or smaller offices for example. In addition, this poses challenges in equipment selection and remote management, let alone providing the best collaboration tools. Connectivity must also be good enough for complex call handling, video calls, team whiteboarding and other tasks, with effective and seamless service backup in case of an outage. Not least, enterprises are reallocating their budgets to address the security challenges of hybrid working: the top two areas for 2022 investments are security operations and cloud applications.

Is your SD-WAN service calibrated for a growing number of remote workers? Can you cross sell UCaaS with managed security? How is your wholesale supplier mitigating network security and fraud threats? We can explore all of

this as discussion points at Comms Vision in our boardroom session.

## Worker discrimination will end

The pandemic put a spotlight on frontline workers, who were often an investment afterthought. Frontline workers, such as care workers, delivery drivers, skilled trades and field engineers, are the hidden majority in the UK workforce. Enterprise IT departments often ignored these employees in favour of white-collar office workers, and so did technology suppliers. But there is a rich seam of opportunity in providing better tools (and better connectivity with options like 5G) to these mobile field workers. Not least, many are self-employed or running independent micro businesses. Increasingly, these SoHos and SMEs won't settle for consumer-class services and support. Can you improve the digital skills of frontline workers – a top concern for UK enterprises? What's your proposition for helping a frontline small business run and secure their business more effectively?

## "Real-time" and "zero latency" won't be hype anymore

Enterprises crave real-time situational awareness about their business. That's why a staggering 86 per cent of large UK firms buy into the near zero-latency promise of edge computing. A top use case is implementing edge to unify physical and digital security involving premises, people and connected assets.

To do this, however, a third of enterprises say an overhaul of their wide area network is required, and two thirds say their campus network needs transformation. These enterprises will need help to navigate choices that span fixed and mobile connectivity, public and private networks as well as compute. They will also need help with edge management. Whether or not you play in edge, you will feel its beneficial effects: greater focus on the quality of digital interactions and the need for better network infrastructure to enable these.

## New goal posts are appearing

2022 presents many opportunities for ambitious channel partners. Enterprises are setting up new goal posts: value is moving from delivering connectivity anywhere to delivering experience. To do so, channel players need to learn/re-learn what is important to their customers. It's not just about throwing technology at them for technology's sake but offering genuinely sound advice, a slick digital service and customer intimacy.

Those experiences are likely to be consumed outside of a traditional office and must be accessible to all in real-time. We have barely scratched the surface of the zero-latency world, but it's coming faster than you think – channel partners and suppliers must work together to champion this.

I look forward to meeting you at Comms Vision along with the BT Wholesale team. ■

# Ready, steady, **grow.**

Join us at Comms Vision to find out about our new partner programme, Partner Plus.



Partner Plus will help you  
to grow your business.

From sales and marketing support to online tools and training, our partner programme has been developed to put you on the fast track to success. Get ahead of the competition with Partner Plus. [btwholesale.com/join](https://btwholesale.com/join)

**BT** WHOLESALE

# Building a better network

Since 2011, CityFibre has argued that Full Fibre should be the standard for everyone in the UK, writes **Greg Mesch, Chief Executive, CityFibre**. Now in 2021, the 'gigabit imperative' is set and, fortunately, we're no longer alone in this mission. Deploying at scale and pace just to deliver faster broadband speeds is not what we're about though. We're building a world-class digital infrastructure where everything is better because of the way it's designed, and where a radically elevated customer experience is the overriding measure of success.

Recent years have seen a momentous shift in support for Full Fibre by government and industry, and the mission to upgrade the UK's copper network has been taken up by infrastructure builders large and small. This shift means that Full Fibre will soon become the new de facto medium of data transport for UK homes and business. No longer is our industry debating the merits, viability or necessity for a gigabit-powered future. Instead, it's asking: 'how rapidly can we deploy it?' and 'how long will it take for the UK to catch up with the countries we lag behind?'

But, as Full Fibre becomes more widely available, it's network quality, reliability and superior service experience that will define the best networks and deliver the real benefits.

## We must lay the best foundations for tomorrow

If any company sets out merely to replace copper with fibre just to get the job done as fast and cheaply



Greg Mesch

as possible, they risk doing our nation a disservice. Instead, we must ensure the investment we're all making delivers something significantly better than what went before. It matters because the success of our nation's service-based economy is wholly dependent on us to deliver infrastructure that doesn't just 'catch us up' but leapfrogs us far beyond, securing our place as the best digitally connected nation in the world.

## A unique opportunity

CityFibre has had a unique opportunity to build a brand-new digital infrastructure from the ground up, with no concessions needed for legacy technology or systems. With us there is no migration from old to new

and no copper or coaxial network to maintain while a new one takes shape.

Our network is high quality and ultra-reliable, and the state-of-the-art Fibre Exchanges that power it are driving a micro edge computing reality. As we build, we're feeding accurate geospatial and network performance data into intelligent platform management systems – marking the start of a data flow that's all about delivering exceptional end-customer experience.

Thanks to these systems, we can already monitor emerging issues in real-time, meaning repairs can be underway even before they are reported. Smart

automation is also providing zero-touch order provisioning and enabling most of our Full Fibre Network services to be delivered within a few days. Managing the everyday in this way frees up our people to better-manage exceptions, pre-empt problems, find solutions and strive to make every interaction the best it can be.

## Better networks will benefit all

At the heart of our mission to build the UK's finest Full Fibre network is the belief that services should be delivered for our partners right first time, every time. In the simplest terms, we believe our service should never let theirs down and that up to the minute information should be

easily available to them, on demand. Achieving this not only strips service-related cost out of their businesses – it empowers them to elevate their own customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

This whole journey is exciting for us, but what's even better is seeing that same excitement in the eyes of our partners as they learn about the path we're on and see the opportunity first-hand. Extraordinary progress is already being made to co-create something exceptional and that's why we're seeing more and more ISPs backing us as their network of choice.

## Proving that not all networks are equal

CityFibre sparked the UK's Full Fibre revolution and now we're throwing down the gauntlet once again – and not just on service. Instead of talking about and trialling next-generation network technology, we're out there deploying it. We're making future- and power-efficient equipment choices and properly managing the environment in which it all lives. By committing to a net zero strategy, we're also proving that these efforts can benefit our planet too. Together all of this is setting new standards for our industry and new levels of expectation for our partners and their customers.

Our whole team is focused on ensuring everything we do is better by design, and in the months ahead we'll be lifting the lid on some fantastic technology projects and service initiatives. Our journey to deliver a world-class digital infrastructure for Britain is well underway, but the very best of it is yet to come. ■



# We believe Full Fibre should come as standard.

That's why we're building a brand new, gigabit-speed network that not only empowers our partners and their customers, but sets new standards of excellence for our industry. So together we can unleash new possibilities for entire communities across the UK for generations to come – ensuring every person benefits from the digital age.

Learn more about the future we're building  
[cityfibre.com/betterbydesign](https://cityfibre.com/betterbydesign)



# Time to be different

**A** lot has changed in the past 18 months: Lockdown after lockdown, we've all had to adapt to a new reality, **writes Gamma Managing Director – Channel, Daryl Pile**. As we continue to navigate this time of uncertainty, two fundamental shifts will stay with us well beyond the pandemic – the way we work and the way we communicate will never go back to the pre-pandemic era. But as we often say, with change come both challenge and opportunities for the Channel – and now more than ever that statement holds true.

## Working differently

In one way or another, hybrid working is here to stay. Employees want to work from anywhere, at any time that suits them best – the pandemic has made it happen, and now it's time to fully embrace it with the help of the right communications and collaboration solutions.

For resellers, the opportunities in the world of hybrid working are vast and varied. From enabling telephony for popular collaboration platforms such as Teams through Direct Routing, to providing better connectivity through mobile offerings.

Unsurprisingly, mobile data consumption has increased by 27 per cent between 2019 and 2020, and we can expect it to grow even further as employees start commuting again. For home workers, mobile connectivity proved to be a lifeline when fixed lines failed – with 36 per cent of Brits working remotely regularly switching to their mobile network to stay online, and 61 per



Daryl Pile

cent saying it's made their working experience better.

With the PSTN Switch Off in 2025 quickly approaching and 5G proving to be a mission-critical game-changer in the business market, it is safe to assume that a lot more businesses will consider moving to a mobile business service in the coming months and years.

Therefore now is the time for resellers to seize the opportunity at hand – especially when paired with Gamma's unique tariff service – Tariff Optimiser – to truly deliver high margin and value to our partners and their customers.

## Communicating differently

Just as the way we work and connect has changed drastically, so has the way we communicate – both with each other and with our customers. The pandemic has completely reshaped consumer behaviour and expectations – more people expect to make a portion of their purchases online post-Covid than ever before. And with a more digital buying experience comes a more digital support experience.

While voice is never going to go away, webchat and social media have risen in popularity as the chosen channel for customers to contact a brand, especially amongst

younger generations. In this light, a truly omnichannel experience has never been more important for businesses hoping to win the customer experience battle. However, in the SME market, there are still perception issues around contact centre technology – with this solution too often considered the sole domain of bigger organisations. This is why earlier in 2020 we launched Horizon Contact – an omnichannel contact centre solution for the SME market that will help partners bring true value to their customers.

## Selling differently

As customers and consumer behaviour change, so should

the way resellers approach their customers. The key is always to start from the customer. It's time to truly embrace a benefits-driven messaging that can resonate with customers' challenges and how that can show them to solve them. A good product is not enough anymore if the way it's presented doesn't match what the customer wants to see and what they need. Business leaders will be looking at resellers for advice and guidance. This means that to build a sustainable strategy, resellers will have to present their offering in a much more consultative fashion than ever before.

Unfortunately, the educational piece in our market is often lacking, especially one that is benefits-driven, rather than product-focused. Providers should tailor the selling experience to their customers, getting rid of jargon and helping them understand the value in the simplest way possible. Businesses, especially small ones, don't necessarily know how a UC solution, or an omnichannel contact centre, or even a mobile solution will benefit their business – it's important to break it down for them in a way that makes sense to them and their business goals.

Finally, all of this can only be possible with the support of a trusted partner such as Gamma, who not only can provide future-proof hosted comms solutions across the board, but that can also assist them in building their strategy and provide a suite of additional training, resources, tools and information to help them succeed in an ever-so competitive market. ■

# Customer experience is now even better

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# Delivering a fibre future

**O**ur 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, **writes Richard Thompson, Managing Director, TalkTalk Wholesale Services.**

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



**Richard Thompson**

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 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 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.

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 market.

We are at a pivot point and how we support future growth and connectivity services is more important than ever. Everything starts and finishes with the customer. ■

# TalkTalk

Wholesale  
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## BUILDING A FIBRE FIRST FUTURE

### TOGETHER

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# Empowering partners

In June 2021, Virgin Media and O2 joined forces with a mission to supercharge businesses across the UK. Our wholesale division is dedicated to supporting our channel partners and the organisations they serve – working together to build connections that power millions of homes and businesses across the UK, writes **Diego Tedesco, Commercial and Marketing Director, Virgin Media O2 Business**.

The connectivity channel played a vital role in ensuring organisations across the UK could adapt to the ongoing impact of the pandemic. Now the channel has an exciting, proactive part to play in shaping the UK's future. Businesses are now in a position where – with the right support – they can switch from recovery to growth.

## Capitalising on a £236bn opportunity

Our study with the Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr) revealed that Covid driven investment in digital ways of working, the delivery of new services and the use of big data could add £236bn to the economy by 2040. This would benefit every business, community and individual across the country. It's a big opportunity for the channel to support digital transformation by providing the best connectivity technologies.

In 2020, in the wake of the pandemic, we made a commitment to speed up how we work with our partners. Our Lead the Revolution model puts partner feedback at the heart of our business. It means



Diego Tedesco

that we can work together to define our roadmap and build better solutions. And we've been listening. Our partners' views have informed everything from the launch of our full 10G National Ethernet service to a range of Rebound commercial offers.

## Responding to change through UltimateFlex

This year, we've gone above and beyond to demonstrate the benefits of this approach. So, when our customers told us they needed flexibility after an uncertain year, we knew we had to rip up the rulebook. That's why we introduced UltimateFlex: a new contracting model for wholesale services. It offers anytime cancellation combined with benchmarked pricing to ensure the ongoing rentals for installed services regularly adjust to match our acquisition pricing.

That means our partners can be confident that they are paying the current market

rate throughout the entire life of that service without ever having to renegotiate. It also allows them to contract with their onward customers without worrying about front-book, back-book discrepancies in future.

What's more, there are no mid-term termination charges after the first 90 days of service, so our partners can upgrade, move or cancel without penalty. And we've also axed installation fees and excess construction charges. UltimateFlex is designed to give our partners the confidence they need to take decisive action. Whether reseller, aggregator, carrier, SI or other, we want to give our partners the tools and safeguards to develop their own propositions and help UK businesses quickly respond to changes in the market.

We've been delighted with the response to UltimateFlex. By taking on the commercial

risk associated with contracts, we're working with our partners to tear down the barriers holding back digital transformation to ensure that UK businesses continue to thrive.

## Growing our network

Another vital part of our mission has been to upgrade the UK by continually investing in our infrastructure and future technology. Last year we launched Project Spark: a multi-million-pound investment in our core network capabilities and digital service, tailored to real-world business demands.

We're bringing the 10Gbps revolution to even more of the UK across our national network. In fact, by the end of 2022, we will have increased our 10Gbps capability to include the majority of our PoPs. And we've introduced automation and operational improvements, resulting in a service that's even more

responsive. In addition, we've also revealed plans to completely upgrade our existing Hybrid Fibre Coax (HFX) consumer broadband network – currently connecting around 14.3 million premises – with full Fibre-to-the-Premises (FTTP) by 2028. In fact, much of our network expansion under Project Lightning has already switched to FTTP.

This investment will bolster our long-term network strategy, fuel future connectivity innovation for consumers and businesses, and create options for us to potentially pursue the FTTP wholesale market in the UK. We will, of course, keep our Wholesale partners up to date with any developments as they happen.

From ethernet and optical high-capacity services to dark fibre, we can provide high bandwidths at low latency, greater scalability and added security. And, with access to a truly national network, we have the underlying network capability to help our partners better serve their end customers – now and in the future.

## A brighter future

The next few years promise to bring a great tide of digital change. Covid-19 has accelerated the technology deployment in the UK by three years, with organisations boosting their IT spend by an average of 18 per cent – accelerating the UK's digital progress by three years.

Change is never easy. But through bold new ideas like UltimateFlex, we want to empower our partners and make it easier for everyone to do business. ■



**BUSINESS**



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can too**

Our wholesale connectivity services  
now come with an off switch.

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With monthly rentals that adjust in line  
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**#LEADTHEREVOLUTION**

Find out more:  
[virginmediabusiness.co.uk/UltimateFlex](https://virginmediabusiness.co.uk/UltimateFlex)

General: Virgin Media network areas only. Subject to survey and serviceability. Offer only available on new orders for Ethernet Extension, National Ethernet, High Capacity and Internet Access services with bandwidths of up to 10Gb, delivered entirely through Virgin Media's network and placed after 12.01am on 7 June 2021. Code "UltimateFlex" or relevant tick box must be used at checkout. Minimum term and cancellation: 12 month minimum term. If a customer cancels within the first 90 days they will pay a cancellation charge equal to 90 days of service, less any pre-paid amounts. After day 90 a customer can cancel with 30 days' notice. Up-front costs: Virgin Media Wholesale Limited reserve the right to cancel any qualifying order where excess construction costs have been identified and deemed uneconomical to incur. In this instance a customer shall not pay a cancellation charge. Adjustable rates: Virgin Media Wholesale Limited will conduct a rental review at least once in each 12 month period. This will compare the rate of a customer's qualifying order against the rate for a new qualifying order. If there is a difference, the customer's rate will be adjusted accordingly. This could result in an increase or decrease of the customer's rate. Any changes will apply prospectively. Rentals will align with acquisition pricing and change every time acquisition prices are adjusted. For full terms and conditions, see: [virginmediabusiness.co.uk/UltimateFlex](https://virginmediabusiness.co.uk/UltimateFlex)

# Musings on the post pandemic customer

Ahead of Comms Vision, Zen CEO Paul Stobart sets the stage on why sustainability and customer experience have become two of the most relevant issues today. Considering the triple bottom line he explains why the winners of the next decade will be those businesses that put climate change at the heart of their strategic ambitions.

**A**s we emerge from the pandemic, it's clear that customers are thinking very differently about how they do business. It started with working practices, of course, where hybrid, flexible, and permanent 'work from home' alternatives are commonplace, as well as variants on the above. But the preparedness to think differently extends from working practices to every part of the operating model.

There is a mood of impatience, urgency, and frustration. Every supply chain is feeling the pressure; customers are more demanding, and suppliers are struggling to deliver. In this environment, it's sensible to return to the basics of what a great customer, or supplier, experience should be, and that means keeping things simple, delivering on promises, being honest and transparent in short doing the basics well.

## Creating moments of magic

Delivering the basics really well is the key to a good experience. If you can then add something else to the mix, you can create a moment of magic. At Zen we are proud of our NPS score of 75+ and our Trustpilot rating of 4.2, but none of



Paul Stobart

us believes that that is good enough. That's why we are on a mission to recreate and rethink the entire customer experience – through more intelligent use of technology, process automation and digital assets, thereby freeing up more time for our technical teams to add true value where it's needed.

Technology and propositions only take us so far. The rest is down to people. If our people are fired up and enthused about the journey ahead, feel they have real authority to resolve customer issues, and are inspirationally led, then surprise, surprise, the customer will feel a better quality of experience. I think it's also up to us as leaders to set the example

with Customer Experience. In my own case I make it my personal commitment to close the loop on every Trustpilot 1\* review we get (regrettably, we do get some).

## The green agenda

The long period of lockdown over Covid has given us all a great deal of time to reflect on what really matters. And one of the major topics that people have re-assessed is the dire state of the planet and the increasingly existential threat represented by climate change. We all care about these issues deeply, which makes our collective frustration with politicians and their lack of progress in reaching agreement on Net Zero, even more acute. For too long the business

community has turned a blind eye to these issues – yes, we have had our Carbon Neutral Plus badges and our Net Zero commitments, but we have not really taken responsibility to institute far-reaching change in our own businesses and to demand change from others.

The only sustainable way to ensure we don't overheat the planet is to reduce emissions by half over the next five to ten years. Net Zero targets of anything beyond 2030 are too late. Our own Government's target, one of the leaders globally in reducing emissions, is 2050. Too late. Zen's own Net Zero target is 2028, and increasingly I believe that that is just too late.

When we were faced with the existential threat of Covid, mankind acted and spent hundreds of trillions of dollars on lockdowns, and furlough, and emergency loans, and state subsidies, and benefits enhancements, and vaccine roll outs, and we survived. We are staring down the barrel of extinction through climate change, yet seem unable to take it seriously. It's bizarre and unacceptable.

Of course, we won't suffer from a climate three or four degrees above pre-industrial levels (which is where we are headed), but our grandchildren will. The quality of life they will inherit will be hideous and it will have happened on our watch.

It's time for business to take the lead and get carbon reduction taken seriously, once again by setting an example. For too long we have been worrying about what Governments and other organisations are doing about climate change.

Now is the time for us to take action, and the only thing we can do, and control, is the reduction of our own emissions; this is where our unrelenting focus should be placed. And in that way we will set an example for others to follow. ■





# We're in business to be a force for good

At Zen we believe that business can be a force for good. That is why our ultimate purpose is not to provide a return to shareholders, but to deliver happiness to our people, our customers and our suppliers. We strive for long-term goals that are aligned to our collective desire to have a positive impact on people and the planet.

Visit [zen.co.uk/partners](https://zen.co.uk/partners) to find out more.



# The path to net-zero

The current energy crisis in the UK is all over the news and has impacted everyone, from domestic energy users to businesses, writes Fidelity Energy MD John Haw and Sales Director Sean Dixon. Energy management is, at the best of times, a confusing sector and Fidelity Energy has been helping its partners get a better understanding of the market since 2014, alongside procuring energy for their customer bases.

**W**ith energy prices extremely volatile and increasing to new highs daily and suppliers going bust, Fidelity Energy has offered support to all businesses to help guide them through their options during these unprecedented times. By partnering with Fidelity, resellers can also offer these services to their customers, and secure commissions.

Since 2014, Fidelity Energy has championed sustainability and has helped show businesses how they can make a big difference by adopting small changes. Many businesses know about 'green' energy, but not all are aware of how simple it can be to make your business more environmentally sustainable, as well as monitor carbon outputs and take positive steps to reduce carbon footprints.

## The tools to reach net-zero

For businesses to have a successful net-zero path, they need to have the tools in place to measure their carbon footprint. The number of businesses that have asked us how they can play their part to help tackle global warming has increased dramatically over the last year. The green option is something we always aim to champion first when quoting our customers and we are keen to assist businesses to take



Sean Dixon and John Haw

## The number of businesses that have asked us how they can play their part to help tackle global warming has increased dramatically over the last year

the next step in enhancing their corporate image and reputation on environmental and sustainability issues. As more businesses demonstrate they are open to change, more will follow suit and green really is the future.

As reported by the Crown Commercial Service, first and foremost, companies need to understand what their current carbon footprint is to create a benchmark

and measure success. Our new tool, IPSUM is a unique, automated carbon footprint reporting solution that can provide detailed insight into a business's emissions output across their entire organisation, with departmental, office, room and device-level tracking.

Soon, all UK organisations will be legislated to report their emissions, commit to and evidence a reduction of

their carbon each year. IPSUM enables businesses to adhere to GHG Protocol Scopes and automate ESOS/SECR carbon reporting efficiently, which most importantly allows businesses to work towards a net-zero carbon footprint. Fidelity Energy has adopted many of these small changes, from replacing all lighting with LED versions to making the company's car fleet electric.

With the ban on new petrol and diesel cars or vans from 2030, we decided it was best to adopt the change earlier and the company now has four Electric Vehicles (EV's), helping make members of staff who are field-based more environmentally sustainable.

Currently, the charging infrastructure for EV's does not meet the demand as the EV uptake has increased rapidly. We saw this as a new opportunity in the market and Fidelity Energy now can provide and install bespoke EV charging points for businesses, helping them to support the EV rollout as well as entice new customers and employees.

At Fidelity's Newbury office, we have installed our own branded charging points to support our growing EV fleet and currently have the capability to charge six EV's at no extra cost

to our employees.

Reaching net-zero is no longer an idea in the distant future, it is in our lifetime, and we need to take the steps now to leave a better planet behind for the next generation. Many businesses are now looking at their own path to net-zero and through a partnership with Fidelity Energy resellers can now offer their customer base a whole range of green solutions. One of the newest products in the bid to help reach the UK's net-zero carbon by 2050 goal, is Fidelity Energy's new carbon management tool, IPSUM. But these also include EV charging points, green consultancy and a 100% renewable business energy rate.

## Meet Fidelity Energy at Gleneagles

Fidelity Energy is a Gold Sponsor at Comms Vision to be staged at The Gleneagles Hotel in Scotland on 10th, 11th and 12th November. So, if you haven't already, find out why Fidelity Energy currently has over 600 partners, 80% of which are ITC resellers. Schedule a meeting with John Haw and Sean Dixon in The Craigellachie Suite or join us for one of our boardroom sessions to find out how a partnership with Fidelity Energy can be beneficial to both your business and your customer base. ■

# WHAT IS YOUR BUSINESSES PATH TO NET-ZERO?

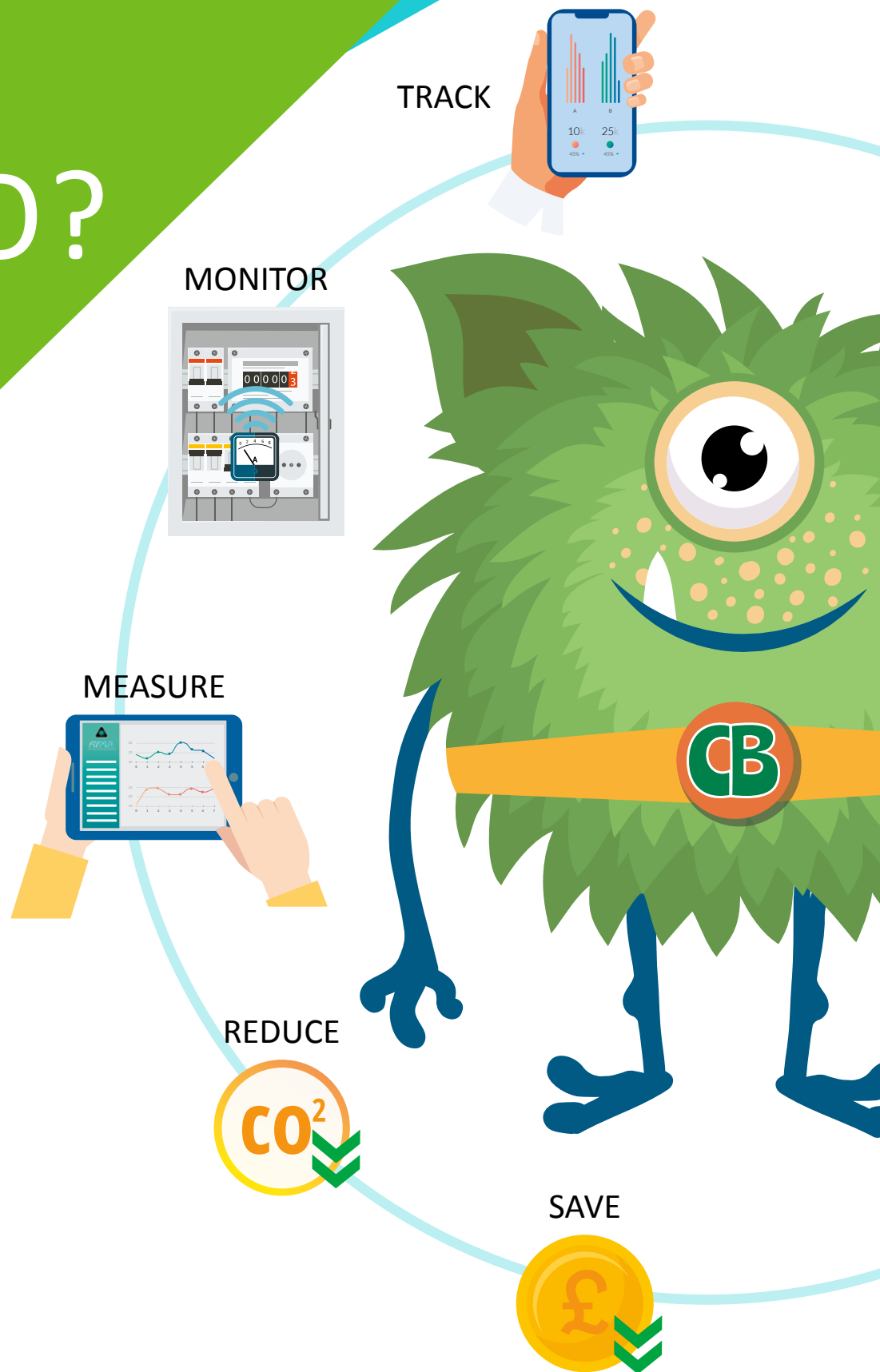
Businesses must innovate for the future as the question of reaching net-zero is no longer "when" but instead "how".

Soon, organisations will only do business with companies that have taken measurable steps towards cutting carbon emissions.

With Fidelity Energy, we can support and guide you to reduce your, and your customers' carbon footprint, and effectively manage energy used.

Businesses can only take the path to net-zero if carbon footprints are measured. IPSUM, our carbon management platform, removes all the hard work by tracking and automatically reporting carbon outputs in real-time. This allows you to automate ESOS and SECR compliance reports, and most importantly allows you to work towards a net-zero carbon footprint for you and your customers.

Contact us today for more information about how we can help you and your customers' find a path to net-zero.



**Fidelity Energy**

Energising Our Partners

# Mobile data: Take control

**M**2M and IoT is not as difficult to get into as you may think.

Your customers are working on mobile data projects right now and demand is predicted to increase dramatically over the next few years, writes **Andrew Dickinson, CEO at Jola**. If you get it right with M2M and IoT, you will quickly generate high margin recurring revenue and, due to higher EBITDA multiples, increase the value of your company.

According to McKinsey, revenues from mobile data are set to increase dramatically over the next five years. Factors driving growth are the availability, speed and reliability of 4G, 5G and IoT. Statista say the number of IoT devices worldwide is forecast to almost triple from 8.74 billion in 2020 to more than 25.4 billion IoT devices in 2030. Fortune Business Insights predict this market will be worth £1085 billion by 2027.

People think IoT is very low revenue and you've got to win hundreds of thousands. You don't. You can often get a decent ARPU of £10 to £15 on thousands of devices and sometimes margins in excess of 40%, so it's a really attractive line-of-business to pivot into.

Your mobile data partner will need to give you the tools to win deals, usually competing with the direct sales arms of the mobile networks. Your supplier will need to be an aggregator with access to all the networks and ideally, they will also be an independent MVNO. Most importantly everything must be automated, with real-time APIs offering zero-



Andrew Dickinson

touch provisioning and management through a single self-service portal.

They will need to be innovative, with a constant stream of relevant mobile data and IoT products that the networks would take years to develop and launch. When you partner with the right channel supplier, mobile data is easy to sell, support and bill.

The opportunity for the channel is significant. We may not find ourselves supplying car manufacturers with eSIMs for self-driving cars, but ICT resellers already have strong relationships with business customers for IT infrastructure, asset tracking, digital signage, mobile WiFi, monitoring and utilities.

Mobile data is an easy product to sell and provision and needs very little support. Jola took on just under 300 new partners in 2020 and now have over 1000. COVID-related projects fuelled early demand but these temporary revenue streams were quickly dwarfed as our partners' customers started to look at projects they had on the back burner like cost-saving IoT solutions. We recently put 30,000 multinetwork SIMs into iPads for one public sector project, unrelated to COVID.

#### Scale

Jola activated 10,000 SIMs in ten minutes in January. Our partner didn't have to add any more people in billing or accounts to support it. SIMs provision immediately

using our Mobile Manager platform, so you don't have to wait three months to start generating recurring margin. As soon as customers put that SIM into their device, you're billing for it.

#### Getting started

Speak to your existing customers, understand their requirements and then partner with an aggregator that can provide innovative solutions, unavailable elsewhere. Find out about their current projects and challenges. Once you have established your customers' requirements, start building your solution.

#### Selecting the right suppliers

Who will you partner with for the devices, and where

are you going to get the connectivity from? What challenges do you need to overcome? Who has the most cost-effective mobile data solution to meet the requirements? Who is agile enough to develop solutions to meet the time frames? Can you manage the data usage across the estate? Can you control usage and costs, maximise your margin and protect your customer from bill shock?

#### Jola

Jola is a mobile data aggregator and MVNO, which means that we offer services from all the major UK networks and hundreds of networks globally. We have been selling mobile data to the channel since 2014 and we understand the pain points of our partners and the needs of their end-users in each vertical market. Over time we have developed a unique portal that gives you the control and visibility you need to manage global SIM estates. Control you can even extend to your customers. We have also developed unique hardware solutions that save our partners time, helping them create a great customer experience, maximise their margin and minimise costs for their customers.

There is high demand for mobile data from your existing customers. It is an easy product to sell, provision, support and bill. We have partners who have doubled the value of their business, increased their ARPU and reduced churn by focusing on mobile data.

Jola is a Gold Sponsor at Comms Vision this year. To find out more about how to get into M2M or IoT, come and see us there. ■



# Channel-only mobile data aggregator



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Build innovative propositions

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or visit [www.jola.co.uk](http://www.jola.co.uk)



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# Giving partners control

**2**021 is going to go down in the history books as the year that organisations truly went hybrid, writes **Myles Leach, MD of NFON UK**. The aftermath of lockdowns has resulted in a fundamental shift in the world of work. Last year Microsoft's CEO explained the pace of change by stating: "(I have seen) two years' worth of digital transformation in two months... (we are working) in a world of remote everything."

Organisations of all sizes, across the length and breadth of the UK, are seeing new and unexpected benefits from new hybrid models. Earlier this year we commissioned a survey of 500 UK small business leaders to explore the nature of these benefits, from staff wellbeing to reduced company expenses. The results were fascinating; even businesses who had been culturally averse to hybrid working were reaping the rewards.

Over a third of respondents had been pleasantly surprised by their team's performance whilst working remotely, a quarter (26 per cent) thought it had enhanced team spirit and 25 per cent felt the team worked harder remotely than they did in an office setting. The respondents cited the top benefits of hybrid working as reduced company expenses (48 per cent), followed by fewer staff sick days (40 per cent), a positive impact on the environment (38 per cent), and increased wellbeing in staff (30 per cent). You can read more in our 'Looking to the Future Report.'

We value these types of insights; the more we



**Myles Leach**

understand what end users care about and need, the better we can equip our partners with the tools and support to win business. Our partners are at the heart of everything we do. It's not good enough for us to sit back and take advantage of market conditions, which are making the adoption of cloud telephony and collaboration technologies a no brainer. NFON is committed to always going the extra mile so that our partners can maximize both their profits and customer experiences.

#### **Giving back control**

Resellers need to feel confident that they are working with the best vendors who have the right product, processes and people. At NFON we pride ourselves on having an industry-leading partner programme, which is focused on encouraging and rewarding success.

NFON stands apart from its competitors because we offer the true embodiment of cloud technology. We are not like other providers who are governed by the vendor for their offering and bug

fixing. Our change control is much faster. Also, because we are independent and own our technology, we can react to market changes much more quickly. This enables our partners and customers to have a real voice in our product development as they can request features that get added to our roadmap.

The partner always stays in control of their customer, making it a true relationship. NFON supports, but the partner always drives. Resellers can expect a partnership that is tailor-made for them. Dedicated inbound and outbound marketing pre-sales and sales support, access to MDF, face-to-face and online training (with professional certification), co-defined remuneration schemes and special pricing and come as standard.

#### **Next generation product development**

We understand that our partners are ultimately looking to enhance the stickiness and lifetime value of their customer base with value added services that actually address their customer needs and enable

them to work smarter. NFON has an enviable portfolio that is helping its partners drive their revenue, every day.

Nvoice for Microsoft Teams is our premium unified communications solution bringing together our enterprise-grade cloud telephone system, Cloudya, and Microsoft Teams, the world's most popular collaboration tool. With Nvoice for Microsoft Teams, customers can harness the power of Microsoft Teams with the reassurance of a reliable cloud telephony solution with high availability to keep their comms up and running.

Compliance is easily addressed through Recording Insights for Nvoice for Microsoft Teams, our powerful call recording and analytics tool which offers recording voice, chat, video and on-screen activities all within the native Teams app. It is ideal for customers looking to protect their business from liabilities and boost service quality whilst complying with strict regulations. It also increases monthly

revenue and customer lifetime value even further!

We have also just launched some new exciting product developments, including Cloudya Meet & Share, which means customers can now easily start video calls or conveniently schedule upcoming meetings, conduct video meetings and schedule appointments more efficiently. Meeting links can be shared, and telephone dial-in can also be provided. Video conferencing can be interactive, for example, by using functions for raising hands to answer questions or muting individual participants, as well as screen sharing.

We have also just unveiled Cloudya CRM Connect. CRM Connect enables organisations looking to simplify data management and support more seamless collaboration to easily integrate their Cloudya cloud telephony desktop app with more than 60 different CRM platforms. With the ability to integrate Cloudya with different CRM systems, CRM Connect allows contact search from Cloudya or click-to-dial directly from the CRM system used.

But don't just our word for it. The success of the NFON is evidenced by the results of a study by Frost & Sullivan. In the Frost Radar (TM): Benchmarking Future Growth Potential, Frost & Sullivan places NFON in the group of the ten most innovative companies in Europe in the hosted IP telephony and UCaaS market.

We will be sharing details of our new product features – and our industry leading partner programme, at Comms Vision. ■



cloudya

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020 3740 6720 / paul.sparks@nfon.com

**Simplify Communication**

**nfon.com**

# Every business is a contact centre

With consumers looking to communicate with brands in the ways that suit them, omnichannel CX solutions are set to deliver the next generation of UCaaS, writes Sam Giggle, Head of Sales at TelcoSwitch.

In the last few years, we've witnessed a sustained change in the way consumers interact with the businesses they buy from, specifically leveraging the growing number of inbound communications channels available to them. While we all acknowledge voice will always play a crucial role in how consumers communicate with businesses, it's no longer the most appropriate method for all types of interaction. Consumers expect queries to be answered quicker than before, with better accuracy and an overall more fluid experience.

Operationally, this benefits businesses as much as the consumer. Being able to quickly type a reply to a customer over WhatsApp Business, Facebook Messenger or Web Chat can often drive a quicker resolution to a customer query or problem than speaking on the phone; a win-win for both parties in the conversation. In terms of experience, opening up choice to the consumer in how they interact with you can broker more conversations and drive consumer loyalty through delivering a better journey.

Just last year, a study undertaken by Gartner found 89 per cent of businesses expected to compete primarily on



Sam Giggle

## Consumers expect queries to be answered quicker than before, with better accuracy and an overall more fluid experience. You can't do that just with voice

customer experience rather than price, or some other traditional set of arbitrary metrics. But how many have the tools to deliver that?

While it's important to offer consumers a wide range of communications channels, that's only half the story - or half the solution. Meeting your customers where they are is key to driving a great customer experience, but the quality of that experience comes from being able to help the customer quickly and effectively once the conversation starts. You might need to retrieve order information, an accounting service to check payments or refunds, a CRM record, or even an

existing support ticket to provide the customer with a prompt progress update.

### Brand loyalty

Integrating these crucial services, from systems that already reside within the business, is core to delivering an end-to-end experience. A recent report from Zendesk highlighted that around 60 per cent of consumers consider the quality of the service they receive as an essential component of their loyalty to a particular brand. So, where the consumer has an almost limitless brand choice, opening up new routes of communication and assisting consumers quickly and accurately with critical information at your fingertips

is paramount to getting that customer experience right.

In a world where we have powerful SaaS solutions that can enable businesses to open up all these online communications channels and integrate existing systems to deliver excellent customer experiences, one big challenge remains. Many businesses don't identify as traditional "contact centres" despite sharing many of the attributes we associate with a modern contact centre. This is especially true of small and medium-sized businesses. If you were to ask them if they operated a contact centre, many would answer 'no'. But dig a little deeper and you'll quickly uncover they have a CRM, probably support ticketing or logging software, accounting packages, email marketing software, social media profiles, and more. So, while they may not identify as contact centres, they are, because today every modern business is a contact centre.

We believe channel partners are the ones best placed to deliver customer experience solutions to businesses. No one is closer to the customer than a channel partner, which is often selling and supporting multiple products across communications, connectivity, managed IT and more. Partners have an excellent understanding of what the customer already uses in its business and its

IT roadmap and can align a CX solution to that.

The benefits for CX spread far and wide. For businesses buying the solution, it represents a demonstrable uplift in service levels to their end-customers, and an advantage over their competitors, operational time-saving for their employees, and financial savings by consolidating a number of the existing systems they use.

For channel partners, CX represents the opportunity to deliver the next generation of unified communications at greater levels of profitability, and with the number of third-party integrations available, a far stickier product with the buyer that is guaranteed to enhance client retention.

Gartner is forecasting that over 50 per cent of all contact centre deployments will contain omnichannel and CX components by the end of next year – we believe that's under calling the market. But even if Gartner's assertion of 50 per cent is right, with businesses evaluating how they can better support and retain their customers across office and home-based workers, there has never been a better time to assess the opportunity within your base for an omnichannel customer experience solution. ■

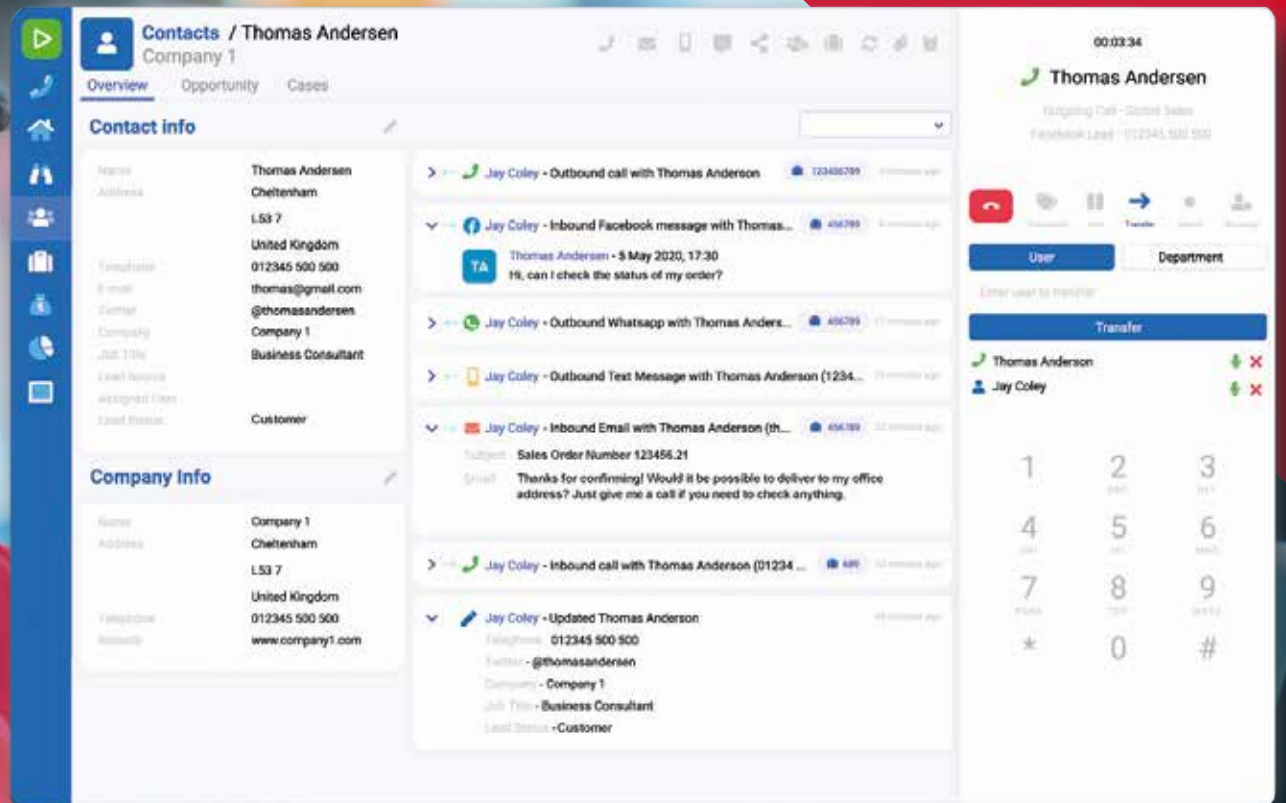




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# VOICE WAS JUST THE BEGINNING...

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# The power of XCaaS

**A**t 8x8, we've seen a lot of industry changes over the last decade. One by one, cloud technologies have replaced legacy, on-premise communication platforms, giving businesses everywhere access to innovative and cost-effective collaboration, **writes Keith Jackson, Regional VP International Channels at 8x8.** We are proud of the role we've played as a nine-time leader in the Gartner Magic Quadrant for UCaaS and Challenger in the Gartner Magic Quadrant for CCaaS during the last seven years, whilst delivering wholesale services to channel partners.

Until now, most cloud communications solutions have focused on either employee experience (business phone and collaboration) or customer experience (contact centre and embedded communications), not both. Yet



**Keith Jackson**

employees and customers are increasingly communicating across the boundaries of geography, device, time, and channel.

## Introducing XCaaS

eXperience Communications as a Service (XCaaS) is a simple answer to the growing complexity of business communications. It's a single platform that brings together the phone, video and messaging tools that business users need, with the platform contact centre agents use for inbound, digital and outbound

customer communications. It is a platform for building success.

8x8's eXperience Communications Platform is the first and only XCaaS platform on the market to give you:

- Company-wide collaboration. A modern experience that eliminates organisational silos, boosts employee productivity and engages customers.
- Simple, unified administration. A single source for licence management, user management, provisioning and configuration, and ongoing monitoring.
- A single integration framework. Connect to all your organisation's productivity tools, like Microsoft Teams and CRM apps, and use low code tools to create great customer and employee experiences quickly and easily.
- Cross-platform AI and analytics. Bring data together across the business to reveal better insights and enable smarter, faster

decisions, including real-time reporting, speech analytics, and customer journey analytics.

- Single point of accountability. Only 8x8 guarantees a 99.999% SLA for all your communications, including high availability and superior quality globally, something not credibly possible in any two-vendor scenario.

Public record management company Cott Systems made a sudden transition to remote working when the pandemic hit, combining PBX call forwarding with a new cloud contact centre solution. But now with remote working here to stay, its IT team decided to find a better solution. "We narrowed it down to 8x8 (XCaaS) from five different vendors. A huge selling point for us was 8x8 having its own platform with both unified communications and contact centre on a single platform," said Eric Payne, Internal Systems & Support Manager, Cott Systems. ■

**8x8**

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dealer

## CX vs EX? Time to dissolve all boundaries.

For a seamless fusion of contact centre, voice, video, chat, and APIs. Discover XCaaS ("eXperience Communications as a Service").

Visit us at **8x8.com**

# Winning big in SMB space

**A**t Digital Wholesale Solutions, we have the products, portals, platforms, and people to enable Channel partners to win big in the SMB ICT market, writes **CEO Terry O'Brien**. The combined product portfolio across Digital Wholesale Solutions, Giacom and Union Street, gives our partners a once in a generation opportunity to win big from the mega-market trends present in the Channel: the PSTN switch off, FTTP roll-out, growth of 5G and the hybrid working trend.



**Terry O'Brien**

one is better positioned to help resellers do truly amazing things for the UK's small businesses.

We're constantly striving to be the leading technology platform in the Channel, making it simple for partners to train, enable, sell, deliver, and support small business customers. We know we cannot stand still; we continually review our business and the broader market to innovate and push the boundaries with new products, price points and

processes. We always aim to be first to market and deliver a first-class buying experience for our partners.

Earlier this year, we conducted market research and discovered that, despite embracing new technology, less than one per cent of all SMBs have any full-time IT resource in their business; therefore, they expect more from IT and comms providers. This presents an incredible opportunity for traditional comms resellers, like our partners, to expand their portfolios and become converged providers.

Launched in July 2020, our Direct Routing solution, SIP2teams, enables partners to capitalise on the UC&C market and bring voice capability into Teams. We also became one of the first providers to market with a new Single Order broadband solution, SOGEA. At the start of 2021, we overhauled our FTTP portfolio to make full fibre more accessible

to customers, with new low and medium bandwidth options. We're excited to launch our new V-IP single order voice product this month, set to revolutionise how micro and small businesses communicate.

Digital Wholesale Solutions is not just about the products and platform; it's our people who make the business great and make a real difference to our partners. We're a business with a values-driven culture at its core. In our recent Employee Satisfaction Survey and Partner Advocacy Survey, we received scores of +57 and +50 respectively, both rated as excellent. However, as always, we strive to improve and continue to drive enhancements across the business. At Digital Wholesale Solutions, our goal is to provide the **best** products, at the **best** price, through the **best** platform with the **best** people. **100 per cent Indirect, 100 per cent Independent.** ■



## Win big in the SMB ICT market

#1 telecom, IT and cloud product portfolio in the Channel

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# What the fibre!

**A**t Full Fibre we are passionate about providing end-users with a choice of providers; enabling a competitive marketplace that will drive innovation, improve customer service and ultimately, deliver better value for money for all, **writes Chief Sales Officer, Dan Jones.**



**Dan Jones**

As a wholesale-only provider, Full Fibre presents an opportunity for small and medium-sized ISPs to access, and supply to the market, a better unique infrastructure giving them the competitive edge against their peers and even the national industry heavyweights. This in turn helps to drive overall FTTP adoption without being hamstrung to other infrastructure's slow roll-out plans. Since our foundation in 2017, Full Fibre has grown considerably:

- Actively building infrastructure that will reach 320,000 premises stretching across 10 counties.

- Scoping further build that will connect well over half a million premises by 2025
- Delivering a cadence of network build each month which is the envy of our peers
- Employing 130+ highly skilled staff with over 1,000 collective years of industry experience

We know that consumers are apathetic to the term 'fibre'. We

also understand how the general lack of awareness of the benefits of full fibre and the substantial advantages it can give to businesses and residents can make it a difficult proposition to sell to anyone except the earliest of adopters. This is why Full Fibre Ltd is investing heavily in the communities we serve to overturn the perception of FTTP and sell the concept in a vendor-agnostic way. This activity is preparing the ground for our ISPs to do what they do best, sell their fantastic products and services to a receptive market.

At Full Fibre, we stand out from the crowd and generate intrigue within our communities. We've created a customer-facing brand to help achieve lead generation, encouraging sign-ups through our website which we then hand over to our ISP partners to complete the final step to convert them.

Our Fibre Heroes B2C brand and marketing activities include TV advertising, radio advertising, door knocking and direct mail campaigns, innovative community partnerships and paid digital media. We've stopped leading with speed and packages as our core message and started to talk in a language that consumers understand, reflecting their pain points and creating a dialogue that resonates with them.

#### Life's fast. We're faster!

Our Fibre Heroes defeat your internet woes, so you get a lightning fast, reliable connection that handles whatever life throws your way. Back-to-back work calls? No problem! Three kids online. Don't sweat it. Your mother-in-law video calling for her fourth chat of the day? Well, we'll let you handle that one. Broadband at the Speed of Life

**Our plan? To make sure everyone gives a fibre, about fibre.**

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**FIBRE HEROES**

FullFibre are coming to the rescue of poorly connected towns throughout the UK.

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# Win big in SMB market

Over 80 per cent of businesses use video for most or all meetings - for nearly 90 per cent, video calling is a critical or important service\*. Microsoft Teams is the video calling solution of choice for the business world, reaching 250m monthly active users worldwide by July 21\*\*.



Mike Wardell

In 2021 hybrid working is the new normal, driving the SMB market to identify ways their employees can work from anywhere with secure communication and collaboration, writes Giacom CEO Mike Wardell. This is a huge opportunity for IT and communications companies. Savvy ICT service providers are recognising their customer's need not just Teams, but also increased connectivity services to support video calling, Teams-integrated phone systems and calling plans. They need to be confident that, whether remote, office-based

or somewhere in between, their data is secure. What's more, SMBs will want one supplier to support and service these new workloads.

Fortunately for UK ICT providers, there's an easy way to make sure you're the partner chosen. Digital Wholesale Solutions acquired Giacom and Union Street in 2020, bringing together three channel leading solutions – telecoms, Microsoft cloud and cloud billing. Together, they're uniquely positioned to make it simple for the channel to train, enable, sell,

deliver, and support small business customers, seizing the incredible opportunity in cloud and comms.

Giacom's Cloud Market platform, the UK's largest independent cloud portal, is all about making life easier for businesses who serve the IT needs of UK SMBs. Cloud Market delivers leading SaaS solutions, like Microsoft 365 and Teams, Azure, security, and backup, to over 3,500 channel partners who support 75,000+ end-user SMBs. With simple onboarding, you can be supplying cloud services like Microsoft, Sophos and Acronis with ease. You'll be supported every step of the way by a friendly and knowledgeable team committed to world-class service.

This is an incredible opportunity to win big in the SMB market. Your customers already trust you and expanding your portfolio is a great way to build an even better relationship

with them, whilst giving your margins a healthy boost. Adding Microsoft 365 and Teams is just the start of the opportunity – Giacom has bundled 365 with back-up and cybersecurity in one business-boosting bundle. It's an easy way to boost revenue, margins and customer relationships. You'll get all the team training you need to sell and support it, plus free marketing materials, in your own brand.

Helping your customers communicate and collaborate securely and efficiently also has the happy benefit of increasing your revenue. Adding cloud solutions to your offering is quicker and easier than you think. It is time for you to arm yourself and your team with the tools to keep your customers, happy, productive and secure.

\*Metrigy's 2012-22 global study on workplace collaboration. \*\*Microsoft Teams Revenue and Usage Statistics (2021) by Business of Apps

## WIN BIG IN THE SMB ICT MARKET

**YOUR GROWTH INTO CLOUD SOLUTIONS**   **YOUR BUSINESS FUTURE PROOFED**   **YOUR HAPPY CUSTOMERS**

Discover the easy way to expand your portfolio and start providing your customers with market leading cloud solutions.

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# The key role of altnets

Connectivity is no longer a convenient accessory; it has evolved into an indispensable lifeline.

However, not everywhere in the world has the technology to access this lifeline, writes **Daniel Alvarez, Head of Channel at Glide.**

Even in some of the most advanced countries, sufficient connectivity can be a real problem. For example, 'not-spots', where there is inadequate or negligible access to high-speed connectivity, have become an issue for many trying to work from home. With increased dependency on data-intensive services such as video streaming, the pandemic has highlighted the need for more widely available and reliable broadband connectivity.

At the end of 2020, the UK government announced the next steps in its £5bn strategy to deliver



**Daniel Alvarez**

next-generation, gigabit-capable broadband to the entire country. The aim is to maximise coverage in the hardest to reach areas and to reach at least 85 per cent of UK premises by 2025. Alternative Network Providers (altnets) have the

means and flexibility to cater to such demands in the UK's 'not-spots'. Under its recent plans to cover the harder to reach areas of the UK, the government is encouraging altnets to bid for contracts in the Building Digital UK (BDUK) programme alongside larger industry players.

Over the past few years, altnets and challenger ISPs have developed a marked increase in overall market share, and according to a study from PointTopic, this is set to continue. In 2015, AltNets and challenger ISPs only held 8.7 per cent of the overall market share. That number has since grown to 12.5 per cent and is expected to reach 14.5 per cent by 2025 - gaining another one million customers during that time.

The value that challenger ISPs bring is clearly being recognised, and by supporting altnets throughout the bidding process, the UK can

begin to generate a level playing field for competition. This growth in competition will also drive down long-term costs for the supply chain and increase reliability in fibre.

It has always been the prerogative of altnets to challenge the status quo by deploying fibre infrastructure in areas that aren't seen as 'commercially attractive' through FTTP and fibre-to-the-cabinet solutions. Now, the world is catching up and will rely on these providers to reach UK targets by 2025 and generate the global connectivity coverage that we not only want, but need.

At Glide we have invested millions into our network to ensure we deliver the best possible service. Our network consists of 100,000 premises reached, 570 fibre enabled cabinets in the UK, 300km of fibre in the ground, and a footprint spread across seven countries. ■

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[glidegroup.co.uk/business-broadband](http://glidegroup.co.uk/business-broadband)



# Investing in innovation

**W**e are thrilled to be back at Comms Vision in 2021, bringing along two years' worth of enhancements and improvements to benefit delegates, **writes Business Development Director, Ellie Allseybrook.** With all the uncertainty of the past 18 months, one thing that has remained constant is Inform Billing's investment into its products and services. An ongoing development roadmap is critical to the fast-paced industry that we serve. To date we have invested over £2.5m into our Eclipse NG billing platform and continue to plough 45% of revenues back into continually developing the software, most recently focussing on billing for mobile services, API driven integrations and end-customer self-service options.

As a truly independent provider, we are progressing a wide range of



**Ellie Allseybrook**

partnerships and integrations with other complementary applications and third-party carriers to offer joined-up solutions. Our ongoing roadmap will see us continue to ease and simplify the billing process, by introducing enhancements that enable automation.

With all this focus on product development, it's important to remember it is Inform Billing's specialist knowledge and

expertise, amassed within the team over decades, that drives the development roadmap and provides enviable value to resellers. What makes Inform Billing stand out is our ability to demonstrate significant market knowledge and our proven track record in dealing with the complexities of billing, including bundling and complex CDR processing. This is paramount when it comes to understanding, solving and often pre-empting problems that the reseller may not yet even know to exist.

The telecoms landscape continues to change at a rapid pace, and as an experienced billing specialist with significant flexibility within our software applications, we can support new technological areas where billing systems are vital. These include cloud and subscription services and more inclusive package style propositions, where multiple

products and services are essentially bundled into a total solution and billed in that way. Eclipse NG has a great deal of flexibility to enable accurate billing for the dynamic nature of many of these services. Whilst the bill to the customer is kept simple, we provide the critical detail for revenue assurance and supplier invoice validation.

As the last remaining truly independent billing provider of size, Inform Billing believes part of any good service is staying close to your individual customer's needs and being agile enough to respond and adapt to changes in their requirements. Not only do we have a modern API driven software product, with a roadmap that we have full control of, but we also continue to invest in the training and support that has always set us apart. We are in a very privileged position and resellers can be assured of our commitment to their future. ■



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# Enter Nasstar Channel

**N**asstar Channel has arrived, and we are thrilled to launch our brand at Comms Vision 2021, writes **David Hawkins, Head of Channel Sales at Nasstar**. A standalone division of the Nasstar Group, Nasstar Channel is dedicated to one thing – partner success. In case you missed it, in August, Nasstar completed the acquisition of the National ICT services business of KCOM. It has made us one of the largest independent providers of transformative technology solutions and services in the UK, with over 1,200 employees.

We were excited to inherit KCOM's existing channel of over 600 diverse partners, its highly experienced team and its heritage in providing outstanding technology solutions. We've broken the channel away from the rest of our business to keep our focus on what our partners need. Ultimately, we



**David Hawkins**

have kept the DNA and added innovation, investment, automation and new ways of working.

So, what does this mean? It means we are making it simple for our partners by stripping back the noise and making it easy to do business with us. It means we are investing heavily in technology, boosting automation and enhancing our tools. And it means where possible, we are going paper-free via easy onboarding online and enhancements to our

portals. This alone will make it 50-60 per cent quicker to buy services and deliver them to customers.

But this is still a people business. Whilst we'll automate the mundane, we're looking to boost support for partners in areas such as 1-2-1 training and delivering first-class technical guidance. Our goal is to help you and your customers succeed and we'll do this by removing the complexity and keeping it simple.

#### What can you expect to see?

Configurable and marketable products; product development dedicated to channel; further automation and innovation; competitive pricing; total visibility and control; access to the best expertise and resources; comprehensive marketing collateral and support; a highly trained UK-based service and support team; and extensive experience.

In a constantly evolving marketplace, customers are making the journey from legacy to new technology and are at various stages in their transformation. It's complex and they need strategic advice and solutions to help get them there.

We have the technologies and services your customers need. We have access to all the major vendors and can offer best-in-class features, functionality, and expertise born out of decades of experience.

At Nasstar Channel, we keep it black and white so you can add the colour. We'll provide the building blocks: the knowledge base, an experienced team, access to resources and innovative solutions. You bring your own expertise, industry knowledge or service wrap to suit your customers and together we will extend your reach, increase your potential and succeed. ■



NASSTAR  
CHANNEL

**We keep things black and white  
so you can add the colour.**

[nasstarchannel.com](http://nasstarchannel.com)



# Know your options

**W**hen we formed Knight Corporate Finance almost 13 years ago, the only realistic transaction open to business owners was a traditional trade sale, **write Directors Adam Zoldan and Paul Billingham**. In the aftermath of the financial crisis, funding was hard to come by, and the number of buyers and investors was limited. Slowly the funding returned, but it was not until late 2013 that we completed a transaction that was something different, and this started a paradigm shift in terms of corporate finance in the channel, opening the doors to numerous transaction options for business owners.

From an owners' perspective, understanding these options and implications for both their business and their ultimate shareholder value is key preparation for a potential transaction. Too often business owners are seduced by off-market offers for their business that are flattering to receive, but do not necessarily provide exactly what they are looking for.

Our starting point at Knight when talking to potential clients is seeking to understand the rationale behind any potential process. Everyone has their own reason for considering a transaction, but we often sense that maybe selling outright on day one



Adam Zoldan and Paul Billingham

is not always right for a business owner, however, they often believe it's the only option they have.

Some of the most common reasons for a transaction are that the business owners want to release some equity, either to rebalance their wealth (as it is often largely tied up in their business) or to take advantage of favourable tax rates for business sales relative to taxes on income. This does not necessarily mean the business owner wants to finish working or growing their business, and it is in this scenario where alternatives are available.

Private equity is one way of releasing equity for a business owner, but often a business is too small, or it is not something a business owner wants to consider. Private equity is not for everyone though, despite a series of successes across the ICT sector. There are alternative transaction options open to business owners who want to remain with their business, but want to de-risk, or even take more of a back seat.

These include transactions that have a long earn-out, or a partial exit to a larger trade buyer. Earlier this year Knight advised the shareholders

of HighNet on a transaction that exited one of the two business owners who wanted to retire, whilst allowing the other owner and his Senior Management Team to retain a material level of ownership whilst the business continues to grow as part of a larger Group.

Like most shareholders, we have built value by investing in our people, our services and our brand, but without the luxury of recurring revenue an exit was always likely to be a more complicated affair. We had considered several options, but when Knight was approached by an acquirer earlier this year, we resisted for a number of reasons. The timing was not right as we felt we had at least five years left, particularly as we had invested in establishing the Knight Transaction Services team.

However continuing discussions with the acquirer K3 capital were fruitful and we were able to agree a deal that suited us as it contained many aspects of a private equity transaction, despite technically being a trade sale. The consideration was a mix of cash and equity in the buyer, with a five year earn-out. Our autonomy is retained, and we look forward to continuing our work with the channel with the same message: if you know where you want to get to, we can show you the art of the possible. ■



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# Choosing the right partner

**C**an choosing the right channel partner really be the difference that makes the difference? Having worked in the channel since 1999 I have seen many examples of both good and bad choices when it comes to selecting channel partners, **writes Mark Shraga Chief Sales and Marketing Officer for Southern Communications Group.** In 2012 I had a chance meeting with what could then have been called a 'boutique' software vendor that had built a highly intuitive and ridiculously easy to set up hosted platform.

I asked some tough questions and was met with an extended period of silence, which was purely to emphasise the complete lack of inbound fault calls from other resellers. Back in 2012, this was quite a boast and one that lit a fire in my mind to learn more. Flash forward two years and my business had been transformed into a growth



**Mark Shraga**

machine with Cloud telephony at its core. The transformation was so in-depth that we even changed our logo to reflect that we had made a 100% commitment to being a cloud technology enabler.

Pace another year ahead and we found ourselves amongst great company as the 49th fastest growing tech company in the UK, ranked by Deloitte. All this growth didn't just come from choosing MyPhones as our main platform to serve our customers needs, but it really helped as it meant that we didn't have to run around perpetually fixing what we'd sold. It worked out of the box and our customers intuitively began using it, whether they liked new technology or not. Its simplicity, feature richness and reliability gave them what they needed time after time.

Today the MyPhones platform is just as intuitive to use, even easier to set up, and more customers than ever before are adopting it as their Hosted platform of choice. The reason why? MyPhones isn't just a Cloud Telephony platform anymore. It's now a full wholesale offering with everything you need

to grow your business, especially if you have a hunger for growth and the ambition to succeed in a highly competitive market.

That's not everything. As the Chief Sales & Marketing Officer of Southern Communications Group, the company that owns MyPhones, and the company that bought my own business, NSN, I can personally endorse the product. I am also delighted to be able to offer to a select number of existing and new MyPhones partners an exit guarantee unlike anything seen in the Channel for over 10 years.

If you choose to go for serious growth and wish to crystalize that value, we will work with you to realise the success you are aiming for. If you would like to share in this and many other success stories enabled by MyPhones then we look forward to hearing from you soon. ■

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# Trailblazing in mobile data

**T**elecoms is changing. Today, user experience is king. How fast can you get your customers online? What protects them from outages? How flexible is their connectivity? Intelligent mobile data is the answer, writes Pangea Managing Director **Dan Cunliffe**. It's overtaken fixed-line in reliability, flexibility and deployment speed. Multiple analysts valued the mobile market at £36bn in 2020 and Ofcom says fixed wireless access is the saving grace for nearly 400,000 premises that cannot access traditional broadband. Here's what that means for you.

**If you are a reseller...**

Your primary concern is keeping customers connected and happy. Those customers aren't rooted in place anymore, no business relies on just one site, nor wants to be tied down by Ethernet cables. Plus, after the UK lost £5bn to outages in



**Dan Cunliffe**

2020, patience for outages has been worn down to dust. Why should you put up with fixed-line's limitations when your customers won't? When valuing your business, the multiples on IoT and mobile data are worth

3-5x more than fixed-line and over 2020 mobile usage rose by 28%. The best part? You're guaranteed to find mobile deals in your customer base.

**If you are an MSP...**

You've probably noticed IoT and mobile data are requirements for many tenders and frameworks. It's because businesses don't want to risk falling behind; especially with the 2G / 3G sunset and PSTN switch-off coming. It's time to decide, are you leading this shift towards mobile data, or getting left behind?

Playing catch-up in a competitive market like ours is expensive. It's painful. And no matter how hard you work, there's no guarantee you'll ever catch your competitors. But being a market leader? That's profitable. That's how you win projects that shape the future. Your customers are eager to be part of that future with mobile data.

**If you're an ISP...**

Competition from mobile puts you in a tight spot. Fibre installations force you to wait for planning permissions and dig up roads. Plus, after the PSTN switch-off, wholesale line rental won't be an option. Meanwhile, 5G is a growing threat. The solution's simple: turn mobile from risk to revenue using mobile L2TP. Use it to give your customers all the benefits of mobile, get more value from your LNS systems, and offer 5G products on top of your fixed-line services; all from your own network.

**No matter your business model, the bottom line is...**

The appetite for intelligent mobile data has never been higher here in the UK, Ireland, Europe, and beyond. Soon, it'll be your most important revenue stream. Bring mobile into your strategy, and you'll have a business model as resilient as the connectivity you provide.

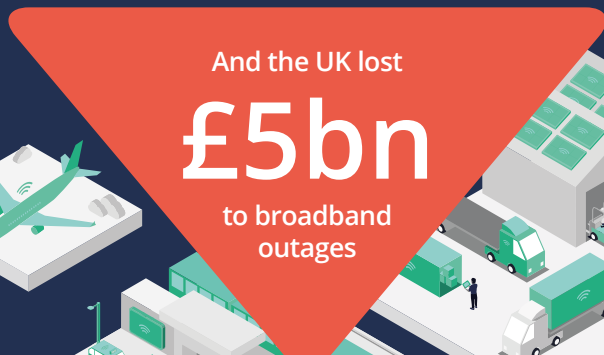
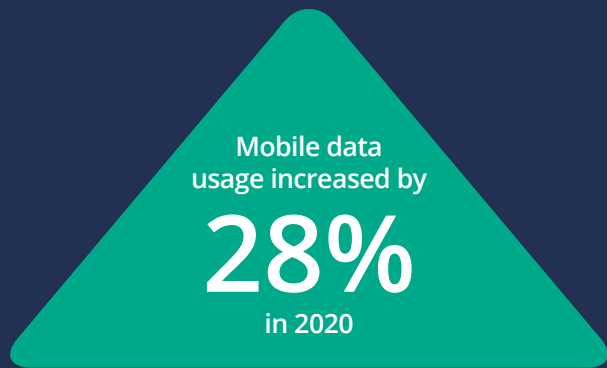


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# Delivering opportunity

**P**ragma has seen another record year of channel success, with partners growing faster than ever before, **writes Sales and Marketing Director Will Morey**. With the Ericsson-LG iPECS Cloud proposition, Pragma reseller partners have benefited from another year of innovation with the launch of iPECS ONE, a WebRTC collaboration tool alongside integrations into MS Teams, new hardware updates and a host of new features.

Alongside Pragma, its sister company Candio has delivered some storming results for resellers, securing over 50 new partners in the last 12 months with its white-label digital services proposition. Candio has helped resellers across the channel add to their recurring revenues and deliver services that help drive digital transformation. Candio has launched white-label digital services to over 50,000



**Will Morey**

subscribers through the channel.

One such service was Web Listings, an online directory tool that helps organisations manage their identity across multiple platforms, including Google, Bing, Apple Maps and voice platforms such as Siri and Google Assistant. Another valuable service has been Website Optimiser, a tool to ensure organisations' websites are delivering value and performing at their best.

Candio helps resellers deliver cost-effective digital transformation tools

that customers can easily engage with while delivering organic growth and recurring revenue. It provides the perfect proposition as resellers seek to transition customers away from ISDN and maintain their growth.

Pragma ensures that support is available not only from its team of people but also through its support Hub that provides simple online access to all the tools and resources that sales, marketing, technical or provisioning people need. These tools include QuickQuote, a completely configurable quoting tool that helps sales teams deliver bespoke, reseller branded UCaaS quotes in seconds. The QuickQuote online tool ensures that salespeople can start selling iPECS Cloud simply and easily generating compelling propositions that win new business.

Pragma lead the way as a channel-only service provider, totally focused

on supporting its resellers with the technology proposition and support to win in the market. During the last 12 months, Pragma has delivered over 35 per cent year on year organic growth through its resellers and seen a small number of new partners join its channel. By maintaining a small but focused channel, Pragma has continued offering strong value to its partners, enabling high growth resellers to deliver breakthrough performance.

The combined proposition from Pragma and Candio creates a compelling proposition for resellers seeking to grow their recurring revenues, secure high margins and partner with an innovative and channel-centric organisation. Pragma and Candio are proud sponsors of Comms Vision and look forward to meeting resellers who are seeking a new and innovative channel partner. ■

# Adding value every step

**H**aving the right support structure around you is key to progress and development, **writes ProVu Managing Director Darren Garland.**

That's why we at ProVu strive to provide the very best support services to our partners. Just like a candle to a flame or a dog to a bone, we are here to complement your company's objectives. Since our inception in 1999 we have developed our service to add value to every step of the customer journey, easing the delivery of equipment for resellers through the UK ICT channel.

There's no doubt that the past 18 months have been incredibly challenging for businesses as operational plans have been altered and knocked off course. But, as the way you work has changed, so have we. Be safe in the knowledge that you are in good hands with ProVu. Our award-winning Technical



**Darren Garland**

Support and Sales team are on hand to assist you in the design and delivery of your solutions.

Experiencing issues sourcing hardware? Our team can expertly guide you to select the best alternative; helping to ensure your

business continuity. Take our new shipping flexibility as an example. We know orders often need to be shipped to multiple addresses, therefore we have adapted our shipping options to enable you to drop ship items wherever you need them to be. Plus, with our branded shipping options you can maintain your messaging throughout every step of your customer journey and spread your brand as far and wide as your deliveries.

### Bespoke Services

Whether you're looking to secure flexible payment terms, ship orders in your own branded packaging or develop a unique API to seamlessly integrate with your ordering systems. No project is too big or small.

ProVu's approach to partnership is a nurturing one. We know there is no one size fits all when it comes to business. We like to

work alongside our partners to get to know their business objectives and this helps us to identify the areas in which we can add the most value. Our small, dedicated team work hard to maintain effective lines of communication and ensure you have the relevant contacts to access the information you need, when you need it.

We work closely and hold strong relationships with the world's leading manufacturers, giving us a strong product selection and positioning us to be able to actively respond to the needs and requests of our partners. We stock over 1,000 VoIP products including IP desk and DECT phones, access control units, routers, switches, headsets and gateways, many of which are available for next day delivery.

Whatever your requirements, we have got your back. ■



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# Access a £2bn market

**D**espite the pandemic, new asset finance business grew by 9 per cent in the 12 months to August 2021 (compared to the same period the previous year), showing a continued demand from UK businesses for finance options when investing in assets, **writes Tim Levine, National Account Manager at Shire Leasing.** That demand exists in the comms channel too, with over £2bn invested in IT equipment finance during that same period.

Throughout national lockdowns and government guidance to work-from-home, demand for the ICT and comms channel saw significant growth from SMEs trying to respond to change. For those offering their solutions on a CapEx model, the short-term needs of the customer were met and they will return again when they believe there is another need.



**Tim Levine**

On the other hand, resellers offering finance options were able to consult with customers and form a solution tailored to an agreed timeframe. By working with a finance provider like Shire, they would have received full payment of their invoice within 24 hours of completing relevant documentation, the same as a CapEx sale. The difference: a finance sale builds into a longer-term sales

pipeline. The reseller can return towards the end of the lease with a soft-sell to offer an upgraded solution that meets evolved needs (usually for a marginal difference to what the customer is currently paying), whereas CapEx customers may otherwise try to exhaust lifetime usage of products paid for outright.

At Shire Leasing, we support manufacturers, distributors and equipment resellers in enabling their customers to access the latest technologies, without damaging the cash flow of either party. Almost anything business-related that would include an upfront cost can be financed, from a single mobile handset and soft costs, to millions of pounds worth of kit. At Shire, we offer conventional finance methods, such as Finance Lease agreements, as well as two off-the-shelf managed service agreements tailored to the ICT and comms channel; Technology

Lease and Managed Rental Agreement. These refined products allow resellers to deliver a solution for a monthly cost when the order value mainly consists of soft costs.

A key differentiator for Shire Leasing is our award-winning FinTech solutions and API capabilities. We equip approved resellers and VARs with a portfolio of leading-edge tools that streamline finance sales and can be integrated into existing processes. For example, the Shire Online proposal management tool allows sales teams to quote, propose, complete the sale with e-signatory in minutes and manage deals on the go.

When bolstered with the developed ability to provide a finance decision for customers in as little as six seconds, offering finance suddenly becomes an evolved proposition to maximise sales opportunities in the channel. ■

## Good things come in small packages...



Combine your hardware, software and service solutions into a single, manageable payment for your customers.

Shire Leasing are business finance specialists in the ICT & Telecoms sector, having supported the channel for over 30 years.

Discover our award-winning services:

☎ **01827 302 066**



**www.shireleasing.co.uk/commsdealer**

Finance for business use customers only, subject to credit status, application, terms and conditions. Shire Leasing PLC is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority for certain types of consumer credit lending and credit related activities that are regulated under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 and by the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000.

# Mobile first for the UK

**S**oluno and Telepo were recently acquired by Destiny and we are excited to share what that means for the UK market in the form of partner opportunities, writes, Mattias Ohde, CEO at Soluno by Destiny. We have recently launched a new partner programme. It is the most flexible in the market regardless of whether you are an operator, a sales agent, or something in between. Our offers range from building your data center, through managed servers as a true wholesale partner with our white label concept, to moving the services with one of our distributors.



**Mattias Ohde**

We are convinced that mobile is the driving device in UCaaS. The mobile phone is becoming increasingly important in our everyday lives, both in our free time and workday. As a result, companies are now ready to embrace solutions that cater to the needs of the new hybrid world,

with true flexibility that does not sacrifice functionality or quality. Therefore, we are looking forward to launching our FMC proposition.

**Paris**

We provide partners and their end-users with the vital tool to make

the mobile-first movement come true and have redefined the partner experience with our Service Provider Platform. By digitalising the whole journey, from quoting to billing, our partners receive multi-tier and scalable automation for maximum efficiency and simplicity every step of the way. We can't wait to introduce your new digital colleague, Paris.

Paris is a smart portfolio manager which proactively meets our partner's and their customers' needs, now and in the future. With AI and Partner-ready portals, Paris provides a multi-tier service, helping partners, their potential resellers and end customers, every step of the way.

This is the grand entrance for our Wholesale Partners, and also the umbrella that covers our different modules, that together help you manage our cloud communication platform.

The cloud ecosystem is getting more crowded every day, and the importance of applications talking to each other is becoming necessary to stay effective. As a result, the integrations you already have as a service provider, and how easy it is to integrate with new ones, is becoming a differentiator.

We do not know what the future has to offer. It is as simple as that. That was one of the first things this pandemic taught us. Significant changes can happen overnight, and we can't know what's next. So companies need to be adoptive to be future-proofed. With our own IP, the world-leading technology from Telepo, that is already empowering more than two million cloud users to communicate, collaborate and provide excellent customer service, we are ready to do just that and keep growing together with our partners. ■

## Join us in our mobile first movement

Let's partner up! We are looking for partners who want to take the next step in future proofing their offer. With us, you do not only get world leading technology from Telepo, but also, we have redefined the partner experience. By digitalising the whole journey, from wholesale partner to end customer, you will receive automation, efficiency, and simplicity, in every step of the way.

Read more at [www.soluno.com](http://www.soluno.com)



TRUE WHOLESAL  
CONCEPT



FAST TIME  
TO MARKET



READY-MADE  
PACKAGES



E-LEARNING  
PORTAL



MULTI-TIER  
PORTALS



# Simplicity at the core

It all started with three students in an attic in Lund in 2003. Today, the Swedish UCaaS company that they created is rapidly expanding in Europe, writes **Andy Brunt, Partner Sales Manager at Telavox**. The idea that got Telavox going was simple enough – to sell easily accessible IP telephony. This quickly developed into wanting to create the world's best cloud PBX solution for companies.

Our journey started almost 20 years ago, with a hunch that there was a better, more natural way for businesses to communicate because when everyday communication is easy, that's when people share ideas and knowledge. Simplicity continues to be our guiding star to this day.

Today, with over 300,000 users in nine countries, we have certainly made our mark. At Telavox we have built the platform from scratch and with more than 90 in-house



**Andy Brunt**

developers, we stay evergreen and agile, adding new features constantly to stay ahead of the curve.

#### The best experience for your customers

The Telavox UCaaS solution is flexible and puts you in control: it is a solution that is built with scalability in mind, whether it's up or down. Customers can easily

manage employees independently and assign licenses. That is so much easier than obnoxious subscriptions! This allows for a solution that the customer can grow with, enabling your company as they expand.

#### The whole PBX package for partners

The Telavox licenses include all UCaaS features such as voice calls, messaging, SMS, audio and video conferencing, and live chat. We want to be different by offering our partners a simple and transparent licensing model with easy-to-understand pricing.

This takes away a lot of the complex decision making regarding features, making the process easier for our partners' customers when selecting a vendor. Partners and their customers just want a simple and easy-to-use solution that is affordable, reliable, feature-rich and scales easily.

Telavox also comes in a superb package; consumer-centric UX meets advanced technology. The Telavox solution is easy to use, and the interface is miles above the clunky and rigid user experiences of other PBX suppliers.

#### Your brand, powered by our technology

It is key for partners to apply their identity to their service. So, we work on the principle that customers see your brand, powered by our technology. Telavox offers a range of partnerships, and you can brand the solution differently depending on what partnership package you have.

Regardless of whether you are looking to white-label our product or if you are interested in building company value with the help of Telavox's brand, optimising your return every year, we are interested in getting to know you. ■



## From this...

Tired of expensive, rigid and feature locked PBX systems that take forever to sell and install? **So are your customers.** We figured it was time for a change.



## ...to this

With Telavox, you get a PBX system with everything your customers need to communicate seamlessly in one single app. **So easy to use, there's not even need for a manual.**

Read more about the benefits of being a Telavox partner:  
[www.telavox.com/partner-with-us/](http://www.telavox.com/partner-with-us/)





# Your trusted CRM partner

**A**s the leading CRM provider for telecoms & IT companies in the UK, Layer Systems supports ICT companies with their digital transformation journeys with a blend of industry-specific software and professional services, delivering a unique proposition to the channel.

Founded in 2011, Layer Systems have built up an extensive customer base, working with many innovative channel businesses, including Tela Technology, Welcomm, and Excalibur Communications. Demand has soared since the end of lockdown, and with a recent seven-figure investment, they're set for rapid growth in 2022.

Over the past ten years, we have refined our proven model for delivery, guaranteeing project success. Adopting a consultative and collaborative approach paves



Michelle Mat

the way for long-term customer partnerships that continue beyond implementation. The Layer provides core functionality out-of-the-box: saving time, effort, and high cost of implementing new CRM software. Combining the Layer with a finance package and billing platform enables customers to run their entire businesses.

We also offer integrations with

third-party systems via our developer platform, enabling customers to extend The Layer where required. "We are passionate about supporting leaders in supercharging their businesses and executing their growth strategies with technology," writes Michelle Livingstone, Layer Systems CEO. "There are many opportunities to increase revenue and reduce onboarding & servicing costs. Our team is continually finding innovative ways to solve real-world challenges and open opportunities for the channel. The collective savings and efficiencies to be gained are worth millions of pounds annually."

With the pandemic accelerating the adoption of new technologies and ways of working, finding a trusted technology partner who can help navigate these changes and support the modern workforce with hybrid, remote, and flexible

working patterns can simplify the process. Investing in skills required to address these challenges can be time-consuming and expensive, and partnering with Layer Systems offers a cost-effective alternative by providing skilled project managers, business analysts, and developers.

Layer Systems' founding mission was to create and maintain a community-driven, market-relevant product. Since its incorporation in 2011, its growth has demonstrated that working collaboratively with customers & the broader market results in the most efficient way for ICT organisations to embark on their digital transformation journey and beyond. The company has a dedicated innovation team researching how to leverage the latest technologies to uncover real-time, accurate data and insights to enable faster, more informed decision-making. ■



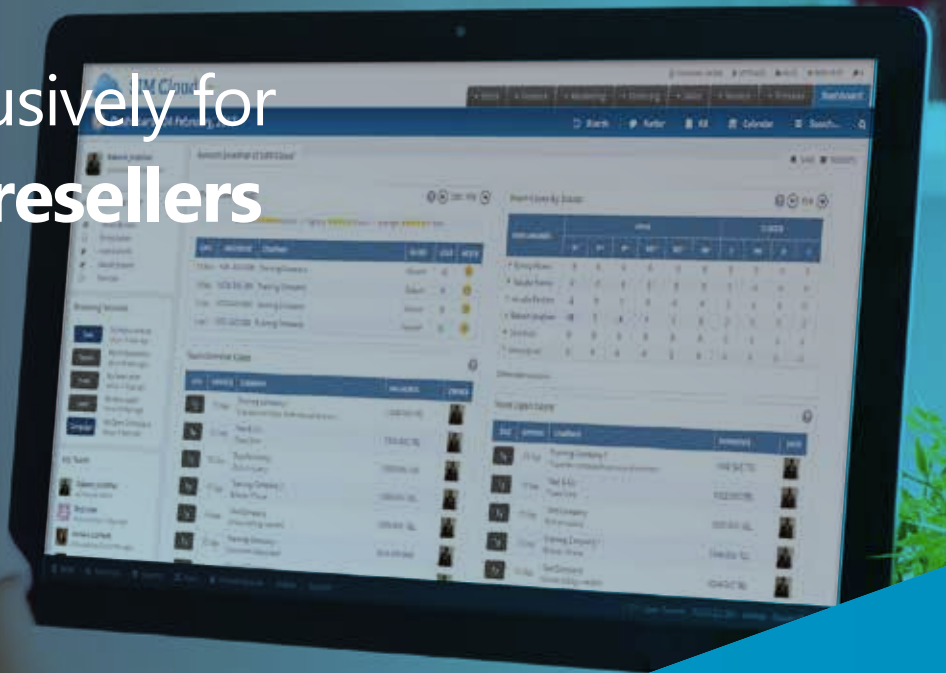
thelayer.com  
03333 222 000

## CRM designed exclusively for Telecoms and IT resellers

Transform your business performance through our 6 powerful modules:

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- SALES
- ORDERING
- PRESALES
- SERVICE
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Automation, Integration & Transformation

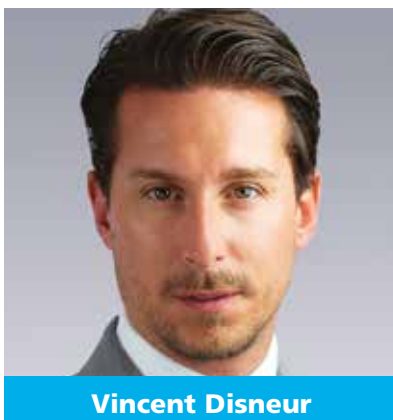


Visit us at  
CommsVision 2021

# Adding value via billing

It feels like much has changed since our last visit to Comms Vision, for Union Street, for the channel, and even the world itself, writes **Vincent Disneur, MD for Union Street Technologies**. This time last year the channel's billing software landscape changed dramatically following our merger with fellow billing software vendor, Aurora, and our acquisition of eBillz, another longstanding provider of billing solutions. Combined under the Union Street banner, we now serve circa 900 partners who collectively use our solutions to process over £2bn of retail billing per annum.

The channel has continued to evolve thanks to familiar trends such as convergence and mobility, but it is also having to adapt rapidly to disruptive new technologies including fibre and 5G. Compounding these factors is the transformative effect of the pandemic, which



**Vincent Disneur**

has caused a paradigm shift in the way that people across the globe work and do business.

Whilst these changes present significant challenges, it's undeniably the case that they also present enormous opportunities for the channel. Resellers that can offer the right proposition are sure to make hay in the coming years. The key to successfully capitalising on

these opportunities is for resellers to ensure the business and operational support systems that underpin their solutions can boost growth and efficiency whilst providing valuable business intelligence.

This is where we come in. The expertise and resources we've gained by uniting our teams, combined with the insight that serving such a large community of resellers provides, has given us an unprecedented understanding of the channel's challenges and opportunities. We see enormous potential for our solutions to enhance how the channel not only bills end-users, but also how it provisions services, and we intend to revolutionise the sales-to-bill process for the benefit of the channel.

We've reimagined our development roadmap accordingly and leveraged new private equity investment to ensure our plans are realised. We've

also introduced ProfitaBILLity, a consultancy service which assists our partners with identifying areas of revenue leakage and potential areas to boost profits.

Recognising that service is a key differentiator in our market, we've invested heavily into our service and support operations. We've introduced a dedicated Customer Experience Team and worked with the Institute of Customer Service to optimise Union Street's partner experience. The work we've done here has been extremely rewarding and resulted in Union Street being awarded with The Institute's coveted ServiceMark accreditation.

We work exclusively with the channel and enjoy a symbiotic relationship with partners. When they succeed, we succeed, which is why our mission is to help them to become bigger, better, and more profitable. ■



## Don't get in a pickle over your billing

Union Street's well seasoned billing and provisioning software can spice up your business. We're driven to keep tinkering with our (award winning) recipe.

We invest millions each year to continually enhance our products and improve our customer service for one reason; to put your business streets ahead.

Isn't that tempting?

020 8614 9090  
unionstreet.co.uk



# Forging vital connections

**V**aioni Wholesale is a multi-award-winning network operator. We are connectivity specialists, delivering resilient, super-fast and commercially competitive internet, security and voice solutions to UK organisations through the channel, **writes MD Sachin Vaish**. By leveraging our industry relationships, buying power and investing in technology and innovation, we provide our partners with disruptive, market differentiating technology solutions with connectivity at the core.

We own and operate VEN, a carrier-grade, cloud-ready National Ethernet Network, connecting all major cities and towns to our super-resilient core network. Operating our own network means we are agile, can offer the best value and ensures our support, from the engineers who designed and built it, is world-class. We are so confident in our network



**Sachin Vaish**

that we offer an industry-leading SLA, 100 per cent uptime or one day's credit per hour downtime.

We aggregate the major UK network operators creating the biggest and most powerful Ethernet Platform in the UK with one of the largest footprints and multiple different connectivity technologies. We have 96 per cent UK Ethernet coverage and can deliver to

over 150 countries globally.

Whether managing a geographically dispersed workforce or looking to move to a cloud-based work environment, many businesses are starting to consider a move to all-IP telephony to give more control over cost and people efficiencies. The 2025 ISDN/ PSTN switch off is also driving the need to change.

Clear Voice is our carrier-grade unified communications platform offering 'work from anywhere' functionality. Rich in features as standard, with true Microsoft Teams integration and with market-disruptive pricing, Clear Voice offers the channel a compelling BroadSoft alternative and a solution to stand out from the crowd.

As market-leading providers of business connectivity, we understand the importance of offering customers peace of mind that their data and

infrastructure is safe from cyberattacks. Combining our connectivity expertise with Fortinet's Next-Generation Firewall and Security Fabric Analytics & Automation, we have developed a security portfolio to meet the demands of today's workplace including remote, hybrid and BYOD working customers. Our affordable 360 cybersecurity toolkit delivers a world class level of protection and service to your customers.

We want to deliver an extraordinary and frictionless experience for our customers and have created the myVaioni portal, one of the most advanced self-serve portals around, to make it easy for you to do business. Real-time quotes and ordering in just a couple of clicks helps you make better decisions for your business and provide a better service to your customers. We pride ourselves on being the go-to channel partner for connectivity, security and voice technology. ■

Resilient, super-fast,  
commercially competitive,  
cloud-ready, ETHERNET

## Why Vaioni Wholesale?



Faster time to market



True Resilience



We're connectivity specialists



“ They provide a cost-effective and very reliable, bespoke connectivity solution which I highly recommend to any business in the UK. They're second to none, with an excellent pro-active support team that is always available and some of the best engineers in the industry...Overall an ISP that cannot be faulted. ”

Get a quote and grow your ethernet base faster at [my.vaioni.com/login](https://my.vaioni.com/login)

Call us on 0161 672 9900 or email [sales@vaioniwholesale.com](mailto:sales@vaioniwholesale.com)

# Reasons for true cloud UC

**V**anillaIP has always embraced the full and true principles of cloud service delivery and management, creating a reseller proposition that enables partners to control the entire customer experience, **writes Iain Sinnott, Sales and Marketing Director.** Partners benefit from an expansive product portfolio which includes an automated Webex/Broadworks platform, but with the added ability to blend in enhanced reporting, call recording, MS Teams integration and direct routing, two Call & Contact Centre application suites, fraud security, CRM integration, GSM extension endpoints, customer self-service and integrated invoicing, all behind a single pane of glass.

However, the customer experience is not simply about the sales and deployment elements; resellers need to own the day-to-day service delivery, issue resolution,



Iain Sinnott

solution evolution and technical/ diagnostic processes. Whilst VanillaIP's support teams back up the partners, Uboss delivers a range of technical tools to support the triage of customer concerns and an SLA driven ticket system, engaging the UK based support team.

Our industry is evolving faster than most, so product development,

integration and flexibility are paramount. With over 140 people in the development team, VanillaIP positively encourages feature requests from resellers and their customers, meaning we are constantly evolving the product to meet the needs of businesses across the spectrum.

We even run a quarterly reward for the best feature request submitted. There is no doubt that cloud solutions will own the market for SMB, mid-market and enterprise, but with so many productivity tools available and fighting for market share, resellers need to be able to integrate, as well as innovate, in order to meet the demands of their base.

Businesses had to move fast in 2020 to adopt cloud services that enabled home working. Now, the task is to make the transition permanent and arm customers with the right technology tools to make them

productive in a changed world. We are into the early majority, but customers still need an incentive, or the commercial support, to move.

VanillaIP resellers are mixing commercial incentives with beneficial business outcomes to make the transition irresistible to customers. We are also investing heavily in the training of our sales and onboarding teams to ensure the service is absolutely right for each customer and delivered perfectly.

VanillaIP have been recognised as Best UC Hosted Platform for the last two years in a row at the Comms National Awards; not a coincidence, as the world suddenly needed true cloud UC rather than PBX replacement! Being cloud-based, we are fast, feature-rich, secure and accessible anywhere. No two VanillaIP resellers are the same, so come and join an exclusive club of unique cloud professionals. ■





COMMS NATIONAL AWARDS  
2021 WINNER  
BEST UC HOSTED PLATFORM (UP TO £10M)

## LEAD your market in 2022

with a single portal for cloud communications solutions that truly puts you, the partner, in control!



Multi vendor, multi service, SINGLE portal



One step from fulfilment to billing



Offer flexible contracts on individual services



Want to become a partner?  
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call 0800 970 0971

## Own YOUR brand with Uboss, true white label

# Optimising opportunities

**T**he last 18 months have changed the world, giving businesses in all sectors an unprecedented amount of time to reflect, take stock and emerge refocused on their core business and what really makes them successful, **writes Tom O'Hagan, CEO at Virtual1.** It's fair to say that these months have driven more digital transformation than the industry has ever seen in such a short space of time.

With working patterns undoubtedly changed forever, there is a huge opportunity for our industry to support UK businesses to not just survive, but thrive, in what is now the new working world. Together we can showcase the technological foundations that will truly drive them forward.

Foundations that are right for today, but also futureproof, and ready to scale for tomorrow. Comms Vision



**Tom O'Hagan**

is the perfect venue for us to get together and discuss these trends, and I am delighted it is back!

Since we last got together, we have

continued to enhance Virtual1's connectivity portfolio by delivering expanded On Net coverage, bringing in CityFibre as a new key connectivity partner and following the UK rollout of FTTP. We have also seen significant uptake in our 1Cloud IaaS and Cloud Exchange products as both the channel and businesses alike accelerate the migration of their critical data and applications to these environments. We can help stitch these components together in a cohesive and high performing way to benefit today's organisations.

Finally, we have significantly invested in our in-house security capabilities and can now offer secure and optimised solutions across our Connectivity and Cloud portfolios. From firewalls and fully Managed SD-WAN solutions, all powered by Fortinet, to our enhanced cyber protection and backup products in partnership with Acronis, we

can help you to deliver end-to-end peace of mind to your customers. As ever, we bring all of this together in a way that puts our partners in control of the services they deliver and allows them to set their own SLAs - with our software-defined carrier network.

This now comes with real-time bandwidth flex on both Virtual1 and CityFibre Services and our multi-tenant SD-WAN and Cloud solutions giving our partners direct access to customer solutions.

Our focus at this year's Comms Vision is on how we can help you make the most of these key trends and technologies. We will be walking you through the latest product developments and our raft of sales enablement materials, ready-made to open up valuable upsell conversations and drive new opportunity pipelines to our partners. ■



**Can't wait to catch up  
with our partners at  
Comms Vision 2021!**

We're looking forward to supporting you drive new opportunities into 2022.

[virtual1.com](http://virtual1.com)



# Driving next gen comms

Comms Vision is widely acknowledged as the highlight of the channel's calendar offering an excellent opportunity to share and gain invaluable insight into industry and channel developments, writes **Paul Taylor, Sales and Marketing Director at Voiceflex**. This year will also be that little more special as it'll be the first face to face Comms Vision since the start of the Covid pandemic. As a dedicated sponsor, it provides us with an excellent opportunity to meet with new customers and enhance relationships with existing customers in a relaxed and informal setting.

This year's theme is redefining value creation in disrupting markets, fitting given the enormity of the changes and challenges the channel has faced. It has been a strange two years in which the communications landscape has changed forever. Traditionally



Paul Taylor

businesses have had a landline for making calls and an internet connection for email and browsing. However, businesses must adopt the next generation of voice, over-the-top voice services (OTT) which allow staff to make and receive calls using any device, handset, or softphone over an existing internet connection with voice services prioritised to ensure superior call quality.

Businesses continue to review their workplace strategies as we shift from homeworking to a future of hybrid work. But whether working from home or the office, the need to connect with colleagues and customers will drive businesses to OTT services to ensure they can facilitate efficient and robust workplace communication among teams regardless of their location.

Plus, with the phased withdrawal and ISDN switch off, all telephone systems will be VoIP-based – next-generation voice, SIP, and hosted applications continue to be hot topics.

Voiceflex is first and foremost a telecoms carrier and has been providing services within the cloud for over 15 years. Since inception, we have continued to evaluate and adapt our roadmap to develop offerings that meet the changing communications landscape. We've

continued to enhance our range of SIP products and services and taken bold decisions to develop and launch products during the pandemic – MS Teams Direct Routing, International SIP breakout and IP voice, a direct replacement for PSTN. We have significantly increased our game on SoGEA and FTTP connectivity products.

We support our partners through our agility, flexibility, and ability to create applications to meet the needs of the market through our in-house development team. In addition, our wealth of experience means that we are highly adept at addressing any issues faced by companies looking to install new technologies and gain a competitive advantage.

Not all IP voice carriers are the same. We have a wide range and bespoke products that are specially designed to meet the changing marketplace. ■

Find out more  
+44 (0) 3301 6000 | sales@voiceflex.com | voiceflex.com

# Pioneering UC for SME

**W**ildix is a multinational company that has grown to become a leading provider of UCaaS since its arrival in the UK in late 2017, and is the only European UCaaS vendor on the Gartner Magic Quadrant for 2021, **write Senior Channel Managers Ian Rowan and Rob Loakes.**



**Ian Rowan   Rob Loakes**

Wildix developed the first sales-oriented UC solution that is aimed at small and medium businesses, between five and 50,000 users, that need to provide their employees and collaborators with efficient yet simple to use communication tools.

The UC&C Solution is innovative, simplistic in its delivery and just as simple to use. It harnesses the power of WebRTC to allow not only users but also their customers to talk, video call, chat and even screen share without the need to install any software, not even an add-on.

What's more, the whole solution requires no VPN, SBC or additional firewall configuration. The full solution is delivered directly within a web browser and not a proprietary application, this simplistic approach, and the fact that people are familiar with using web applications means that the user adoption of the solution is exceedingly high. Wildix is recognised as leading the way within the WebRTC community, having worked directly with Google and Citrix to help enhance the protocol.

The Wildix system was designed to be easy to install and to manage with low maintenance costs. Wildix is a complete and scalable solution for companies that need to upgrade their communication tools by introducing features such as video conference, chat, users' presence and at the same time, reduce operating costs.

The use of WebRTC to offer a simplistic and fully-featured collaboration solution is innovation at its finest, this shows how Wildix and their solution is leading not only collaboration but also UC&C. Unlike most hosted solutions on the market, the platform is not a shared resource, each customer gets their own instance hosted by Wildix within AWS, this means that the platform does not suffer the pitfalls of downtime. Furthermore, Wildix offers a complete range of Hardware products and UC along with full collaboration features.

The web-based application utilising WebRTC allows users to collaborate without a requirement to install any software. This simplistic approach allows Wildix partners to service their customers with a reduced engineering overhead. The functionality of the solution allows approved partners to increase their recurrent revenue streams and increase margins.

Wildix brings value to companies around the world, with offices in Europe and the United States. The Research and Development Center in Odessa, Ukraine has been in operation since 2007, deploying and supporting products.

Only Wildix helps companies grow with 100 per cent secure products that put the latest technology at their service. With a strong partner base of established partners and new recruits, Wildix continues to see great growth in the UK.

Looking for a technology that can demonstrate high revenue potential and increase sales and profits for your business?



Discover Wildix,  
The First Sales-Oriented Unified Communications Solution

Request a Demo now: [www.wildix.com/try](http://www.wildix.com/try)

# FREE TO PERFORM

9 offers outstanding support for Partners, alongside a complete communications portfolio. Our Virtual Office capability, Billing experts and award-winning Marketing team work tirelessly to support our Partners, so they can achieve their goals.

Get in touch with our Sales Director [anna.roper@9group.co.uk](mailto:anna.roper@9group.co.uk) to find out how 9 can help you be Free to Perform.

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