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Sir Charles Dunstone throws down the gauntlet p34



Stobart's stark calculation of climate change truth p38

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This month's movers and shakers



CityFibre seals Vodafone pact

A MAJOR expansion of the partnership between CityFibre and Vodafone will significantly boost wholesale infrastructure competition in the UK and is worth billions to the trailblazing altnet.

SPECIAL REPORT

The deal establishes Vodafone as CityFibre's anchor customer nationwide, making long-term volume commitments across CityFibre's entire eight million home target roll out as part of its £4bn investment programme.

The deal makes Vodafone the UK's largest retail provider of full fibre to consumers. It also encourages wholesale infrastructure competition at scale in the market.

CityFibre is making a substantial investment into a new National Access network, connecting its footprint of local full fibre networks nationwide to make it easier for Vodafone and other wholesale partners to bring services to market.

"Four years ago we agreed a partnership with Vodafone to anchor a roll out of fibre to the home across 12 cities, and worth £500 million to us," commented CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch (pictured above).

"Vodafone won twice the market share working with us. It has now expanded across our eight million premises footprint and given us a minimum volume commitment that's worth billions in service revenue.

"Vodafone has made a powerful decision to help establish wholesale infrastructure competition for the UK."

CityFibre's roll out will deploy dense full fibre infrastructure in 285 cities, towns and villages by 2025.

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

THE chief driver in the accelerated adoption of digital technology today should not so much be Covid-19 but the 2025 switch off, which represents the biggest land grab opportunity for independent comms providers since deregulation back in the eighties. We should not turn a blind eye to this

because it's a fantasy to think the PSTN shut down may be bumped – and in the next two years there will be millions of customers requiring fibre and IP comms solutions. This was a point succinctly made by Steve Blackshaw, Head of All IP for BT Wholesale, during his Comms Vision session (Gleneagles Hotel, 10-12th November).

Openreach currently has 120 exchanges in stop-sell and by December 2023 stop-sell goes to every exchange. This date should be top of mind and any temptation to milk legacy technology is a flawed strategy. Unless action is taken soon to ring fence customer bases through a 2025 lens, those bases are wide open to rival providers with the client's best interests in mind, enabling them to ride the wave of IP migration. Those rivals will also take advantage of new upsell opportunities.

2025 demands change right now – a change of strategy, a change of thinking as a first step towards all IP, and a change of direction. The current road is a dead end. But is enough 2025 messaging in the air? I suspect not nearly enough, especially when you consider the publicity that preceded the analogue TV switch off at the end of 2012.

The UK requires a similar approach sooner rather than later. But a block to this is those seeking the optimal balance between milking legacy copper and pivoting to IP, which is a dangerous game to play.

Blackshaw warned: "If you continue to sell legacy this year, in 2022 and 2023, you're building a challenge for yourself in 2024 and 2025." See pages 25-41 for the full Comms Vision Convention Special Report.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Excell Group takes Wavenet to £100m

MACQUARIE Capital-backed Wavenet has joined the £100m revenue club following its acquisition of Excell Group.

The finances of the deal, which amounts to Solihull-based Wavenet's biggest transaction to date, remain undisclosed.

The deal bolsters Wavenet's share in the cloud and workspace market, strengthens its London presence, increases its scale and creates one of the UK's biggest MSPs.

The Excell acquisition is the third addition to the Wavenet Group since Macquarie's majority ownership was announced six months ago.

Excell Group has grown steadily since its inception through organic and acquisitive means, expanding its network, portfolio and creating a business centre service for landlords and serviced offices.

With the acquisitions of NTS Communications and Internal Systems, Wavenet now serves 10,000-plus businesses.

Bill Dawson, CEO of Wavenet, commented: "Excell is the largest and most exciting acquisition we have made to date, bringing new services and a talented team into the Wavenet Group.



Bill Dawson

"This acquisition represents a huge step forward in our growth plans, giving us a stronger presence in the south of the UK and adding experience in growing service areas including flexible workplaces and cloud." Excell Group Chairman Darren Strowger added: "Following almost 30 years of growing our business we felt the time was right to take the next step.

"Wavenet's vision and values align with those that we already hold at Excell, which will not only enable a smooth integration but will quickly

enhance the service provided to our customers."

Adam Joseph, Head of Private Equity for Macquarie Capital Principal Finance Europe, noted: "The Excell acquisition is the third in six months and significantly grows the business. We will continue to support the Wavenet management team to provide vital telecommunication and connectivity services to the UK's SME and public service customers."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

THE Techneds-backed three-way merger of ITSB, Quad Vision and Data Integration (a division of B2B technology provider DXC Technology) creates a single entity operating under the Vizst Technology brand and headed up by CEO Richard Betts. ITSB MD and founder Lee Dredge becomes COO. "Vizst Technology brings together different skill sets and multi-sector experience," stated Betts. "By combining this expertise we can provide an extended range of services to customers." See page 20

NETCOMMS (Network Communications Group) has acquired Greenwich-based Wavehill IT in a deal that bolsters its cyber security and IT services expertise. "Wavehill's experience in the managed IT space will add to Netcomms' networking, telephony and security expertise," commented Netcomms CEO Graham Powling. Wavehill IT's brand name will be retained. It's MD David Barker stated: "The acquisition will help us expand our operations and streamline customer processes." Netcomms was founded in 1987 and serves over 30,000 end users. The addition of Wavehill IT takes its number of UK-based brands to seven.

BDR buys Maple for IBM skills

STRATFORD-based BDR Group's acquisition strategy has taken another step forward with the purchase of IBM specialist Maple Computing, boosting BDR's enterprise offering, managed services portfolio and opportunities to cross-sell.

The transaction follows a trio of buys in May and an eight figure investment from Santander UK in October to fund several acquisitions over the next two years.

BDR Group MD Malek Rahimi stated: "The biggest draw to Maple was its culture and knowledge of IBM's storage, security, AI and cloud compute services.

"Given that Maple has partnerships with some of the largest logistics and finance businesses in the UK, the group envisions growth potential of 20% in the next 12 months."

Jamie Cozens, who is a Director at Maple Computing, commented: "BDR and Maple will be able to offer enterprise clients the entire tech stack they require for future proof, flexible infrastructure that drives business growth."

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Kerv swoops on Gyrocom

SURREY-based Gyrocom has been acquired by Kerv and will operate as Kerv's networking and security division.

Most notably the deal adds skills in SD-WAN and Secure Access Service Edge (SASE) and brings a strong presence in the retail sector.

Gyrocom was founded in 2006 by MD Graham Brown and Technical Director Ryan Coombes who worked together previously at Nortel Networks.

The firm's tech relationships include VMWare Velocloud, Dell, Cisco, Palo Alto, Fortinet, Versa and Z-Scaler.

Kerv is now a £50m revenue operation with 400-plus employees and 750 public and private sector customers.

Executive Chairman Alastair Mills said: "Gyrocom brings important new and strategic skills to Kerv across SD-WAN and SASE in particular.

"Its growth trajectory and ability to win major network transformation contracts are testament to its capabilities and product-market fit."

Brown added: "When Kerv approached us we weren't looking to sell, but in getting to know the team over the course of this year we saw the potential



Alastair Mills

for an excellent fit, strategically and culturally."

Kerv was created out of the July 2020 LDC-backed £30m merger of DoubleEdge Professional Services, Foehn and Metaphor IT.

NEWS ROUNDUP

CAE Technology's Microsoft practice has received a significant boost following the MSP's acquisition of Novus Group. Commenting on the deal, CAE CEO Justin Harling said: "Everyone across the two organisations will be retained and will have the opportunity to apply their expertise in new ways. For customers, it means more skills available to help drive transformation from integrating Microsoft cloud, workspace and security solutions into a wider portfolio of infrastructure services already delivered by CAE. Where opportunity exists to augment our capabilities we will look at acquisitions as a way of accelerating our growth."

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Nasstar's new Channel unit



Dave Hawkins

NASSTAR'S 600 partners will be served via a new standalone division following the launch of Nasstar Channel.

The move follows Nasstar's acquisition of the National ICT services business of KCOM, creating one of the largest UK independent tech providers with over 1,200 employees.

Dave Hawkins, Head of Sales for Nasstar Channel, said: "Now the acquisition is complete we've broken the channel away from the rest of the business to focus on partners.

"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."

Hawkins also noted that Nasstar is investing in its technology and boosting automation and innovation as it seeks to become a single source of partner solutions for the channel.

"We're also removing the complexity," he added. "Early initiatives include paper free automated processes with easy onboarding online. Training tools and technical support will move online including a new partner portal that will make it 50-60% quicker to buy services from Nasstar Channel."

NEWS ROUNDUP

A £15M investment boost from BGF enables IT Celerity to continue scaling its managed service proposition. As part of the deal Phil Male will join the board as a Non-Executive Chairman. Celerity CEO Chris Roche said: "In the last 19 years we have diversified from the provision of enterprise infrastructure to a cloud and managed services specialist across public and private sectors. We felt it was the perfect time to accelerate our growth and wanted to engage with a like-minded investor."

DSM Group has acquired Peterborough-based MSP EasyLifeIT as part of a five year acquisition programme. DSM CEO Mike Richardson said: "Both EasyLifeIT and DSM have operated in each other's sectors but the route to enhancing our respective offerings could only be achieved by a united front. Joining forces will enable the delivery of a refined and wider range of services nationally and internationally."

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Telappliant bolsters north presence with Connexions

TELAPPLIANT'S capability in the SME space and northern presence is strengthened following the acquisition of Carlisle-based MSP Connexions Group.

The transaction increases Telappliant's headcount to 100-plus and client base of over 6,000 businesses.

"This continues our strategy to scale up our managed services capability and provide customers with access to a wider set of technology services and professionals," said Telappliant MD Muhammad Nasim. "We have also established a presence in the north of England."



Tan Aksoy

Tan Aksoy, Director of M&A at Telappliant, stated: "We are continuing our transformation into becoming a fully fledged managed services provider. The

current climate has brought challenges, but we are confident that the change in business behaviour will bring increased demand for our services."



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NEWS ROUNDUP

KICK ICT has secured an £8.7m investment from BGF following its HSBC-backed acquisition of Turnkey Business Software earlier this year. HSBC will remain a key funding partner for the business which has seen revenue grow to £18m. Alongside BGF's investment Geoff Neville has been appointed as Chairman. CEO Tom O'Hara said: "In addition to growth through acquisitions we have experienced increased demand for services such as ERP, cyber security and network environment support as businesses embrace and plan for the future world of working."

AIM-listed MSP SysGroup has reported a 15.8% drop in sales for the half-year ended September 30th – generating £7.58m, down from £9.01m in the prior year. During the period the company also opened a new Manchester office to expand its northern sales and marketing presence. SysGroup also refurbished its office in Newport, South Wales. CEO Adam Binks commented: "The board is confident in meeting expectations for the full year. We have a strong customer base and we benefit from high levels of recurring revenue."

Gunga urges action on shift to full fibre

ACCORDING to Nick Gunga, MD for Fibre & Wholesale Services at TalkTalk Wholesale Services, there is no shortage of disruption and opportunity in the connectivity space, and the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated significantly how connectivity is consumed by organisations across the UK.

In his Comms Vision interview (November 10-12th, Gleneagles), Gunga said it's time to 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.

"It's an incredible time and opportunity to help partners pivot from copper to full fibre," stated Gunga.

"As TalkTalk Wholesale Services we are going to keep our challenger mentality and help partners on the journey. We absolutely challenge on our partners' behalf."

Gunga has worked in telecoms for 27 years, 17 of them with Sir Charles Dunstone, Executive Chairman at TalkTalk Group. "My career has gone full circle," stated Gunga. "I started in the cable industry, and the irony is that we are back in the



Nick Gunga

world of following the dig with Openreach, CityFibre and other alternative network providers."

Ever changing landscapes keep the industry moving and in terms of innovation, for Gunga it's about the core connectivity and the layers of the platform that sit above that, such as data and insight. "This is a must as we move forward," he added. "Data as a service is something we can provide."

"Driving wholesale services is about being easy to do business with and we have invested in our network and services.

That investment continues, and as we look ahead we will deliver the full suite of products that channel partners need to make the transition to full fibre.

"I'm astounded by the strength and power of the relationships we have and that's something we want to continue. And having a genuine alternative to Openreach is exciting."

See pages 25-41 for the full Comms Vision Convention Special Report.

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IT bosses poised to go green

SUSTAINABILITY will be a core priority for IT leads over the next two years with more than four in five (83%) saying that operating more sustainably is a key part of their plans, according to research from Brother UK.

The survey of 500 UK IT leads found that this ambition holds significant potential to cut energy use and the amount of waste that goes to landfill.

Just half of the respondents recycle waste (51%), only 43% use refurbished or recycled hardware and less than a third (32%) choose tech and IT solutions that are energy efficient.

Liam Fitzgerald, Head of Distribution and Reseller Sales at Brother UK, commented: "Enhancing sustainability will be high on the agenda for IT leads when it comes to purchasing decisions, from the products they buy and how they procure them to the green initiatives they can access.

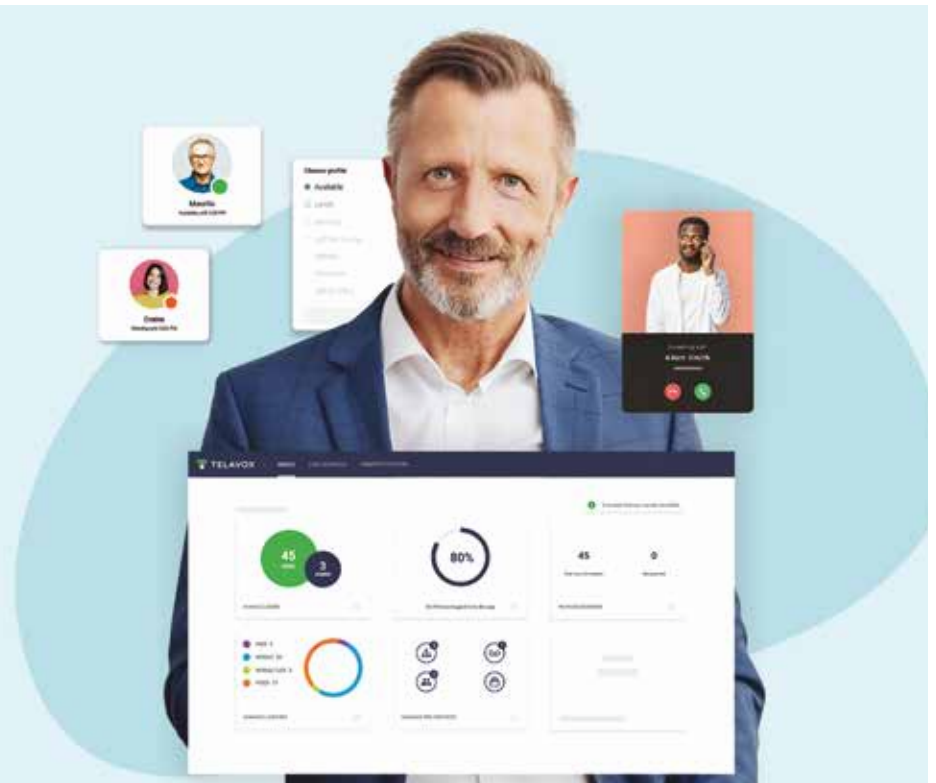
"This presents resellers with a significant opportunity to provide added value to customer relationships, by understanding where they can cut the amount of waste they produce and energy their equipment consumes to provide the right solutions."



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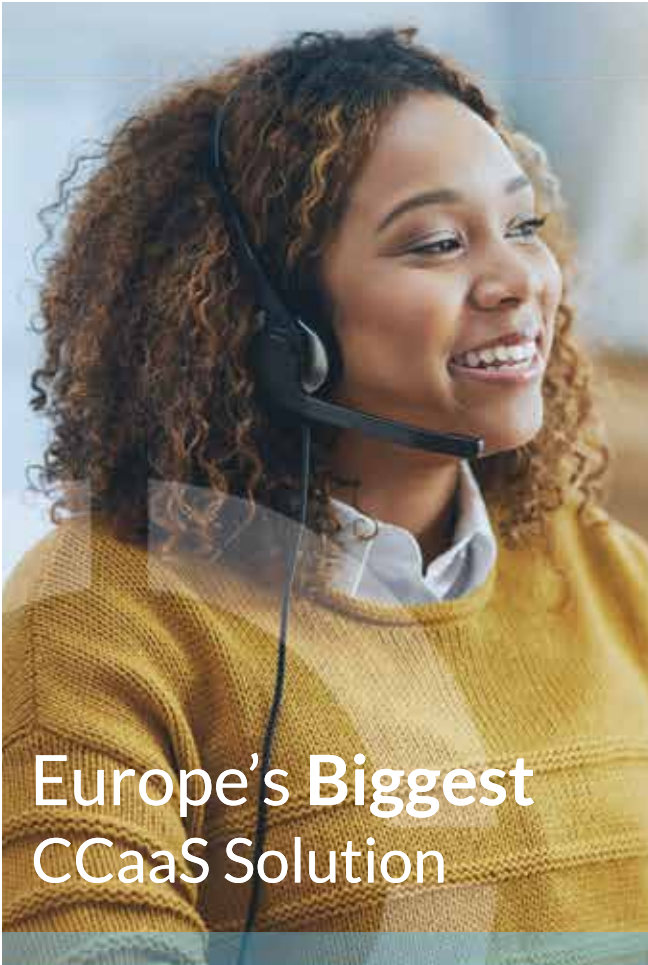


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Connect sales talk to user experience

WHEN selling connectivity resellers have been urged to move away from conversations around speeds and fees and focus on discussions about the customer experience.

This will allow resellers to have far more interesting conversations surrounding upsells and add-ons, according to Neil Wilson, Product Strategy Director at Virtual1.

Speaking at the company's Future Connect event staged at The Brewery in London, Wilson said: "Connectivity will be a relatively low spend going forward for customers, who will be spending big on a raft of applications and data. However, good connectivity is foundational to this. If companies are underspending on connectivity, then they are compromising return on investment for everything else they are spending money on as an organisation."

Wilson advises comms resellers to focus on getting to the bottom of how organisations operate, where their critical systems and data are held and how



Neil Wilson

they communicate with their customers. Wilson also pointed out that understanding the organisation's operations and gauging how much bandwidth is needed is key to then using the building blocks of public connectivity, fibre and globalised software such as SD-WAN to put a solution together that ticks all of their boxes.

Once the broadband is in place, the value in the service layer will grow significantly, observed Clayton Nash, Strategy Director at CityFibre, who underlined why full fibre is key to helping the UK thrive as a service-based economy.

"The UK is the number one investment destination in Europe with \$37bn venture cap-

ital investment since 2015," he commented. "This digital revolution is currently being run on a network that is 170 years old.

"It is time to replace the UK's first network with its second. Boosted broadband will bring a slew of currently non-existent applications that our customers will want to access. By discussing the value adds you'll have far more valuable conversations with your customers."

Future Connect also featured Applied Futurist Tom Cheesewright who discussed the importance of creating athletic organisations, and Graeme Hackland, CIO, Williams F1 team, who illuminated the key competitive advantage of data protection and availability.

Ericsson makes new enterprise play with Vonage acquisition

SWEDEN'S Ericsson has expanded its presence in the wireless enterprise space and broadened its global offerings with the \$6.2bn acquisition of New Jersey-based cloud comms provider Vonage.

Ericsson is pinning its growth prospects on the Vonage Communications Platform (VCP) which delivers circa 80% of Vonage's total revenues and serves more than one million registered developers globally.

Börje Ekholm, President and CEO of Ericsson, said: "This provides the foundation to build an enterprise business. Vonage

gives us a platform to help customers monetise investments in the network, benefitting developers and businesses.

"Imagine putting the power and capabilities of 5G, the biggest global innovation platform, at the fingertips of developers. Then back it with Vonage's capabilities in a world of eight billion connected devices.

"Vonage's strong developer ecosystem will get access to 4G and 5G network APIs, exposed in a simple and globally unified way. This will allow them to develop new global offerings. Communication service pro-

viders will be able to better monetise their investments in network infrastructure by creating new API driven revenues. Businesses will benefit from 5G impacting operational performance, and share in new value coming from applications on top of the network."

Vonage CEO Rory Read commented: "The convergence of the Internet, mobility, the cloud and powerful 5G networks are forming the digital transformation and intelligent communications wave, which is driving a change in the way businesses operate."

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Preventing Churn in Telecoms

Candio helps optimise digital transformation journeys by providing white-label digital services to over 50,000 technology and telecom resellers in the UK. Working with this number of businesses, the need to regularly monitor the churn rate is critical to our business.

Through experience, we know customer churn is often the result of poor customer engagement. It's the term given when customers abandon your company, whether it's the end of a contract or any point during their tenancy.

As an industry, telecom resellers and vendors work hard to ensure that a customer can't just change from one supplier to another without giving any notice - ensuring an agreement is in place to confirm their commitment.

There isn't anything you can do to save a customer who has already made up their mind and has essentially moved on without any notice, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't be given a chance to try and keep them as a customer. Eliminating those moments is key to ensuring you retain the time and money you've invested in your customers. Below we have highlighted the three lead causes of churn and how you can prevent them in the telecom industry.

Laying the right foundations: A customer will gauge what it's like to work with your business during onboarding. From their perspective, they have invested in a new telephony proposition to enhance the way their business communicates; the last thing they want is any issues arising with the onboarding process.

Solution: Iron out your onboarding process and make it mandatory by implementing a project management tool. By following a process, you can prioritise each communication and keep your customers in the know. Adding a self-service option can also be beneficial to enable customers step-by-step guides and video content.

Building a relationship: The key to building a solid relationship with your customers is to communicate with them frequently - making them feel listened to and comfortable enough to pick up the phone and give you a call. Ultimately, replacing an old-school business relationship with a new-school personal relationship.

Solution: Having regular contact with all key contacts and not just decision-makers to form a broad

company-wide relationship. Ensure you schedule quarterly business reviews to stay on top of things and identify areas that require attention. Follow up with customer support tickets surveys to further support their needs, be proactive with customer interaction, and contact them when it drops.

Customer Service: Issues are inevitable within telecoms, but the key is to make sure you're on hand and that there is a fix in sight.

Solution: Offering a self-service machine that can automate the answers of FAQs before even reaching the support team. The tickets then submitted should be monitored through KPIs to ensure a constant improvement process. By monitoring the statistics, you can identify common issues and prevent them from happening in the future.

Secret Weapon: Reach Out Proactively!

If the only time a customer hears from you is when you send them an invoice every month, you're doing it wrong!

Proactive outreach shows customers that you care about them. It tells them that you're invested in them getting the most out of your service. The best kind of outreach should also relate directly to the customer's use of that service. You may, for instance, contact customers who aren't using a specific service feature with a quick reminder about the features and benefits, helping customers get more satisfaction from your product.



Tom Chedham, Business Development Manager at Candio

At Candio, we understand the struggle of customer care calls. We know it can be a mundane process of asking if everything is ok. Talking to many telecoms partners every day, we understand the challenges of differentiating your propositions to offer new technology that creates an opportunity for both the reseller and the end-user business. The Web Listings and Website Optimiser white-label services provide digital transformation solutions that create great conversations with your customers.

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Wildix moves up to powerhouse status

UC PROVIDER Wildix has been positioned as a Niche Vendor in the 2021 Gartner Magic Quadrant for UCaaS, Worldwide, the only European vendor to be included on the latest Magic Quadrant, which UK Senior Channel Manager Ian Rowan believes is in part due to its British partners and their customers.

Speaking at the company's inaugural UK partner day staged at Stratford Upon Avon Racecourse, Rowan pointed to the UK annual results, highlighting that 1,222 new customers were activated on Wildix in 2020, relating to 100 PBXs every month.

That figure has risen to 1,400 customers and 150 PBXs a month in the first three quarters of 2021.

Rowan said there was a trend towards monthly licences during the pandemic, but the trend is now moving back to five year contracts which shows a growing confidence in the UCaaS market.

"Last year, a monthly licence was the biggest decision that people made because they were scared about what was happening with their businesses," he commented. "This year



Ian Rowan

it's switched back and the five year licence was our most popular, accounting for half of the licences we sold. This is great news for partners wanting to build recurring revenues."

Wildix hardware is still being sold strongly - 29,000 pieces in 2020/2021, but Rowan expects deskphone sales to tail off in the next few years.

"Gartner has predicted that by 2024, 85% of users will only have a headset, there'll be no handsets left," he said.

An exception will be DECT phones and one of Wildix's most successful hardware products is its W-AIR Med phone for use in sterile environments which, Rowan reported, became

very popular during the height of the pandemic.

"Due to Covid-19 partners sold these all over the place resulting in a 466% hike in sales - our biggest hardware increase," he said.

Another trend reflecting the move away from traditional telecoms hardware is the take up of Wildix's Hardware as a Service which provides partners with more recurring revenue and means customers are not committed to capex purchases.

"Some of our partners don't sell capex at all now," commented Rowan. "They sell Hardware as a Service exclusively which has witnessed a growth rate of over 650%."

Surprise deal sees RingCentral become Mitel's UCaaS partner

IN A SURPRISE move RingCentral has become the exclusive UCaaS partner for Mitel in a deal that saw Mitel's investor group Searchlight invest \$200m in equity in RingCentral.

RingCentral paid Mitel \$650m for intellectual property rights and patents covering network and call management, security and infrastructure.

The partnership gives Mitel an overnight pathway to meet

the immediate needs of an accelerating market for collaboration solutions in the cloud, driven in large part by Covid-19.

Integration of Mitel's CloudLink technology will give its 35 million-plus user base a migration path to RingCentral's Message Video Phone (MVP) cloud platform. CloudLink enables customers to integrate their on-premises infrastructure with cloud applications,

so Mitel customers are able to leverage their existing on-premises PBX capabilities via the RingCentral application.

Mitel said it will continue to support customers on its MiCloud Connect platform.

The product will continue to be branded RingCentral MVP. Additional product enhancements leveraging joint technologies are planned for the first half of 2022.

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A NEW FRONTIER IN BUSINESS CONNECTIVITY FOR VODAFONE PARTNERS

AS ADOPTION OF DIGITAL SERVICES CONTINUES TO ACCELERATE, VODAFONE FOR PARTNERS IS SERVING SMEs WITH CONNECTIVITY SOLUTIONS TO POWER THEIR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND BOOST THEIR TURNOVER

There's no slow-down in the adoption rate for digital services. During the COVID-19 pandemic consumers have shifted toward online channels and experiences, with companies and industries responding by accelerating their rate of digital transformation. In many cases innovation and progress that would have previously taken years, have been achieved within months.

And this isn't just happening with consumers. Business habits are changing too, with many more people working from home now than ever before. Businesses are turning to cloud-based connectivity and collaboration solutions for their staff, and this shift in work tools and habits means organisations now demand more dependability and speed from connectivity products.

Digital transformation supports business growth

For small and medium enterprises (SMEs) there's a direct correlation between digital adoption and business growth. A survey by the Welsh Economy Research Unit on digital maturity revealed that 66% of SMEs which integrate digital technologies into their work see increases in turnover. A quarter of these businesses see an increase in turnover of greater than 50%.*

The challenge for these businesses is moving on from traditional products and stop-gap solutions that served a purpose during the pandemic, to a new generation of fully integrated connectivity solutions.

For Vodafone for Business Partners, this presents a huge opportunity – and it's a journey we can take together. We're excited to work with our Partners to build a new frontier in connectivity. Our technology portfolio is at the forefront of what's possible and the migration to next generation solutions has begun...

Future-proof broadband with SOGEA and FTTP

Vodafone is continuing to expand its broadband portfolio. Single Order Generic Ethernet Access (SOGEA) is a new way to connect to fibre that's simple to order, install and maintain. It offers SMEs lower in-life running costs than Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC), and can be combined with voice IP services.

Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) is Vodafone's fastest broadband yet. Unlike copper wires, fibre is far less susceptible to interference and signal degradation. For your customers, that means less buffering, service loss and bandwidth limitations.

Tomorrow's voice services with SIP

The phone network as we've known it is fast approaching 'end-of-life'. In 2025 traditional phone and ISDN lines are going to be switched off. Vodafone Partners are positioned to offer customers the opportunity get ahead of this fundamental technology change by transforming calling with SIP.

SIP turns the physical phone lines of a business into virtual lines using an internet connection. Powered by Vodafone Evolved Voice over Public Internet, it's our innovative, business grade solution that unlocks value for SMEs and guarantees an easy transition to IP voice. Your customers will benefit from lower calling costs, without having to compromise on quality.

Confident connections with switched ethernet

For businesses looking to expand or standardise their capabilities at home or globally, Vodafone Ethernet Service is the key to receiving multiple voice, video and data services over the same access connection.

Our portfolio can fulfil the business need for bandwidth, service assurance and increased responsiveness, supporting your customers with greater automation and the power to run big data solutions with confidence.

Bespoke security with Dedicated Internet Access

Dedicated Internet Access (DIA) is ideal for businesses that depend on a reliable connection for business-critical services, whether that's simply website hosting, IP voice services, cloud-based applications, or large file transfers.

Thanks to Vodafone's uncontended service dedicated to business customers, your customers will never have to share a connection, or compete with consumer traffic. We also offer a range of standard and optional security options, perfect for businesses on remote connections.

Offer competitive pricing with wholesale DSL

Wholesale DSL offers SMEs Vodafone's world-class network, security capabilities and dedicated support, at a competitive price. Perfect for growing businesses looking to modernise their connectivity options, without cumbersome costs.

Vodafone wholesale DSL comes with business grade network connectivity as standard for your customers, and our assured bandwidth options are compliant with Ofcom's voluntary code of practice.

Stay flexible with Business Evolve for mobile

Business Evolve is our ground-breaking approach to mobile services for business customers offering flexible contract lengths and data plans, along with customised device bundles. It puts your customer in control of choosing what's best for their business right now, and makes it easy to scale as their business grows.

And you'll be providing your customers with the power of our best ever network. Vodafone's best ever 4G network, and growing 5G network, will ensure that customer mobile plans keeps pace with their business growth.

The next generation of connectivity solutions is here SMEs need their connectivity services to be working as hard as they do. As we enter a new world where remote productivity is non-negotiable, new connectivity solutions can help businesses cut costs and say goodbye to outages.

We're working with our Partners to make this the reality and we're investing in our team, our products and our services. By supporting Partners in winning customers, achieving growth and offering connectivity solutions for the new era, we can become better together.

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

<https://www.vodafone.co.uk/business/vodafone-partners/connectivity-solutions-campaign>



'Channel partners play an important role in the strength of British businesses. Their industry knowledge positions them to help companies digitise operations and adapt to new market conditions and opportunities. Businesses are looking to work with specialist partners to guide them on how to integrate technology into business strategy.'

Joe Llewellyn
Head of Indirect Partnerships at Vodafone UK



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Optimism as transactions hit new high



Adam Zoldan

OPPORTUNITIES for growing or selling an ICT business have never been better according to channel mergers and acquisition specialist Adam Zoldan.

Speaking at the inaugural Wildix Partner event staged at Stratford Upon Avon racecourse, the Knight Corporate Finance Director said transactions have risen to an all-time high and sector growth is set to return to 16% post-pandemic.

With PE investments continuing at pace, this is creating a high level of competition for acquisitions which in turn is pushing up valuations for the best targets.

"There's more buyers now than we've ever had in the channel," he said. "We've seen 200 deals in the last year and 30 in the last month alone."

Zoldan said the effects of Covid-19 meant there were winners and losers in the ICT space.

"CPE and PBX business fell off a cliff and mobile providers saw their roaming revenues plummet, but the real winners were those with high levels of recurring revenues," he added.

"We expect transaction activity to continue at pace because a whole range of financial institutions back us.

"When the hospitality, travel and leisure sectors became hard to invest in during the

height of the pandemic we saw a huge funnel of money targeted at comms and IT.

"That's resulted in a large number of private equity investments into larger resellers on a buy-and-build strategy.

"There's more funding coming in, and it should be beneficial to everyone."

Zoldan said any reseller thinking of exiting should have a clear focus on its direction plus forensic details on its customer base and financial performance to achieve the best valuation and multiple.

The core values used by buyers are customers, their size and vertical or geographical sector, the product proposition and go to market policy and the financial performance.

Questioned why one company may be valued higher than another when they look similar, Zoldan said: "Growth and size are key factors, but the perception buyers get of a business and the way the management presents themselves is the X factor.

"It's also about adapting to the future. For example, Tesla is now worth 16 times as much as Ford, a 100 year old business that is many times larger than Elon Musk's EV company. But consider Ford and where it's going – it's certainly not as clear as Tesla and its roadmap."

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Our digital events are built on media serving an engaged digital channel community including: The Comms Dealer website which provides over 21,000 unique monthly visitors, our e-newsletters going direct to over 15,000 ICT channel contacts and our influential social media networks.

Contact us to explore how you can grow your community with Comms Dealer online events.

Simon Turton
sturton@bpl-business.com
07759 731 134

One year old MHA seeks to broaden help for sufferers

It's been over a year since the launch of Mental Health Associates, the charity set up by industry veteran Peter Orr to help people working in ICT that may be suffering from anxiety, insecurity and lack of self-worth - issues that can lead to severe depression and, at worst, suicide thoughts. We caught up with Peter this month and questioned him on how the charity is progressing in its aim to help people who may be suffering in silence.



Peter Orr

What have been the main challenges?

It has been a year of learning for me. From the initial idea of wanting to help others in the industry with mental health concerns, to discovering all the paperwork involved in establishing a registered charity and the challenges of fundraising during a global pandemic. It has been a busy but rewarding year.

No man is an island, so who has helped along the way?

MHA has had tremendous support from a lot of people, but special thanks must go to Chair of the MHA Trustees Bob Swallow, Jose Sanchez who has tirelessly helped with fundraising and of course Comms Dealer, who created a professional website for us and publicised our aims and objectives.

What has this support led to?

Thanks to the help we have received we now have 18 trained Associates, we've

completed mental health awareness workshops for 11 companies, and we've supported 20 struggling individuals through our helpline.

How have you raised funds?

In September we held a fundraising and awareness raising golf day at Brocket Hall in Hertfordshire. Twenty teams competed for the Nick Duffield Cup, which will be awarded annually. The money raised has enabled MHA to train more Associates to help colleagues locally, and keep the helpline running. We are planning the next Golf Day for May 2022.

What are your objectives for 2022?

Our aim for the next year is to grow our Associate base by raising awareness of the need for local volunteers who we will train to be able to help their colleagues. We are always looking for

new Associates. We also want to continue to spread awareness of our work and the challenges that poor mental health brings to the workplace by offering free of charge workshops to companies. Most importantly, we want to continue with our helpline, being there when colleagues need some support - a voice on the end of the phone to talk through their concerns and be signposted to the help they need. Telling someone you are struggling is the first step to getting the help you need.

How can the industry help?

We will continue fundraising to keep the work of the charity going. The link to contribute is <https://tinyurl.com/MHAdonation>. For more information about the MHA Golf Day, or to book a workshop or volunteer as an Associate, please email peter.orr@mentalhealthassociates.co.uk.

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Forecast points to optim

Where is your post-Covid-19 lockdown thinking? What is on your techno-plan? To help answer these vital questions last month's virtual Comms Dealer Channel Forecast discussion put a finger in the market winds to show us where the industry is moving to, and the opportunities and challenges at hand. The upshot: Strong interest in cloud, fibre, security, integration and 5G is overriding a whole generation of comms technology, and these Covid-19 catalysed advances mean forward looking action is the only option.

The post-Covid era offers resellers an opportunity to exploit a number of technologies and solutions that serve the dual purpose of boosting business for customers and comms providers. The comms sector is in the grip of its biggest transformation ever, and the Channel Forecast experts all hold strongly to the belief that change and complexity is no enemy of growth. "Resellers should be focused on all the next generation data products," stated Matt Worboys, Business Development Director – Channel, Gamma. "Most importantly, it's about understanding what the customer's requirements are and mapping the right solution. It's then about understanding the usage of that service and the right type of connectivity to meet customer's needs."

The available options have been further transformed by developments in full fibre. "We're living in a state of revolution within the connectivity market and we've got to be careful about delivering yesterday's technology today, otherwise you're outdating your customer," stated Sachin Vaish, Managing Director



Matt Worboys

The channel has done a fantastic job when it comes to cloud comms. If you look at the UK compared to some of the European markets we're far ahead in that transformation

at Vaioni Group. "You've got to be mindful not to deliver copper-based services if there's a fibre product available. We're now focusing on gigabit and 10 gigabit services.

It's a huge opportunity within the reseller space."

Transformational times
According to John Lyons, Technology Director at Zen Internet, the industry is in

the midst of a once in a generation transformation and a step change in capability. "It's happening at lightning speed," he added. "It's very much FTTP and we think SOGEA is important.

You don't want to be deploying FTTC at this point and creating a migration problem for yourself. And there's the opportunity to offer digital voice alongside that connectivity. FTTP and SOGEA are big opportunities and over the next five years you're going to see FTTP-based services replace low end on demand Ethernet services."

Post-Covid lockdown, business leaders are seeking to reinterpret their operating environment and processes, which probably means going virtual. "Cloud comms is where the future lies," said Worboys. "SIP will plateau over the next three to five years and start to decline as the cloud comms market eats into that space. If I were starting a reseller business, I would absolutely be focusing on picking a cloud communications product, and I'd certainly be skipping that technology around SIP Trunking and an on-premise PBX. The channel has done a fantastic job when it comes to cloud comms. If you look at the UK compared to some of the European markets we're far ahead in that transformation."

An indication of advancing progress is the number of

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Optimistic outlook

resellers asking Gamma how to drive more margin into UCaaS sales. "The complementary services in that space is where it's at, like contact centre software, specifically in the SME space," stated Worboys. "Price points have started to come down so resellers can provide that type of capability into smaller businesses that perhaps didn't see themselves as contact centres, but would benefit from that type of technology."

Leapfrog

Lyons agrees that it 'makes sense' to skip a generation of pre-cloud technology. "Cloud comms is out there and it's a huge opportunity," he added. "We've all been using Teams or Zoom over the last

they're adopting they have network visibility, application visibility and performance, so they can continue to deliver the same experience while at home on domestic connections as they would in an office environment."

The key here is to use simplification as an aid to giving customers what they want. "We have started to simplify how we deliver cloud comms and unified communications solutions," added Vaish. "We can deploy a full UCaaS proposition within a matter of hours, if not minutes. So it's not as complicated as it once was. And with full integration into the likes of Microsoft Teams we're simplifying it even further. You've got

billing or CRM platform'. That's a form of digital transformation - taking the customer's ordering journey online. We're seeing big changes in that space.

"The partners that are succeeding are making it easy for users to consume IT, allowing them to manage some of that capability themselves and empowering them to make those changes. It's our job as technology vendors to ensure that the products and services that we take to market meet the requirements of the end user, enabling them to manage the aspects of call routing that they want to control. Otherwise, you simply won't succeed."

This epitomises a shift of power towards end users as the world moves on, and there is no denying that ICT providers that stand still run a risk of quickly becoming irrelevant. "The world is changing at a rapid pace," added Lyons. "Amazon Web Services launched in 2006 with three services. Today it has over 200. If you stood still during that time you'd be left behind within a matter of weeks. You've got to be on the edge of new capabilities and incorporate them into your products as they get released. You've got to understand where you can add value."

The message from Vaish is similar. He says the channel can turn up the volume on the services it provides, but it is a fact that more customers are listening only to resellers with the widest portfolios. "Businesses are looking for a one-stop-shop," he said. "They are looking for a full turnkey digital transformation

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The key is to use simplification as an aid to giving customers what they want

year and it integrates with mobiles, it's more flexible, it's pay per use and it's simple to use. Clearly, SIP trunking will make sense in some situations, but it's hard to ignore that transition to cloud comms. It's software based, flexible, constantly upgraded and feature rich. That's where we are seeing the biggest opportunity for resellers."

At each turn in the conversation the industry gurus asserted that a shift to cloud is the route forward in the 'new normal'. "As we deploy cloud technology solutions for the mid-market it's all about visibility," added Vaish. "The IT manager no longer has 100 employees in an office, they have 100 employees in 100 locations. It's about making sure that whatever cloud application

the best part of 200 million plus users on Microsoft Teams and you could argue that the majority, or a good proportion of SMEs, are using Teams in some shape or form. Our thinking on that is to focus on the Microsoft Team's proposition and provide the analytics, the call recording, and all the PBX features that we all love to use within a more common application such as Teams."

Integration

Widespread adoption of Teams has enveloped the comms industry in a wider requirement around integration. "We are being asked more about our API capability," stated Worboys. "Customers are saying, for example, 'I've taken your mobile service, I'd like to integrate that into our

The Night Before Christmas

'Twas the night before Christmas and all through the lands
Record volumes of telephony and UCaaS had changed hands
As channel sales people prepared for their beds
Turning over commissions endlessly in their heads

Whilst down in presales matters weren't so at ease
With technical experts feeling mighty displeased
"It's alright for sellers who've time to deck out their halls
Somebody has to do all those installs!"

Over in finance things were equally rash
With forever expanding delays in quote-to-cash
The speed it should take from sale to being paid
Was as slow and as slothful as a fat snail parade

Issues were growing, processes all out of song
Things that once went like clockwork had turned out Pete Tong
The business was a victim of its own success
Running out of bandwidth as Comms Dealer went to press

But then up in the sky in a bright blinding light
Came a vision of peace from the dark Christmas night
Was it a meteor or a magical horse?
No, 'twas a trusted support partner to which all can outsource!

They landed like linen on an icy hillside
A virtual sleigh with lots of goodies inside
Filled not with toys and trinkets for children to play
But a hit squad professional services team out for the day

Arranged on the snow in the shape of a grin
Stepped the assorted elves and fairies of Support to Win
Ready to shoulder the burden and enjoy
The opportunity to migrate, onboard and deploy

They set to their work with calmness and precision
Ready to act on their masters' decision
Porting, provisioning, a circuit or four
Training, explaining – hosted seats galore

Mere seconds had passed before all was like new
With the final hardening of project management glue
Paperwork finished and correctly amended
(At the Comms National Awards they'd been Highly Commended)

In no time at all, at a pace that terrified
Not a single end customer was left unsatisfied
Having put in their shift and spun up a treat
All was squared away, every action complete

"Thank you for that", said the grateful MD
Hiccupping slightly from his glass of sherry
He waved them away and prepared to retire
As Support to Win buckled back into their chariot of fire

And as he returned to eat the last of his roast
He thought "I must remember to put their cheque in the post"
For out in the car park with a whoosh and a call
Went Support to Win crying, "Merry Christmas to all!"

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Continued from page 17

solution. And it is complex. Customers don't understand the different connectivity technologies and what they mean, never mind cybersecurity. It's about being informed and working with partners who understand the various markets, the products and technologies - and providing that consultative approach. You've got to work with the right service providers and handpick the masters of those trades to complement what you do going forward."

In this context Worboys noted a crossover of IT-based businesses moving into the comms arena, while traditional comms partners are acquiring IT skill sets. "You're starting to see those two industries blending and converging to provide security services," he said. "Customers are investing in this technology. And when you're providing cybersecurity services you're touching everyone within that business, building your brand right through the organisation. This is certainly a growth area for channel partners."

According to Lyons, security represents an existential threat to businesses and is more challenging with the shift to hybrid working. "It moves the radius and perimeter of security into peoples' homes," he commented. "You've got to look at where the perimeter starts and ends and the technologies required for protection. End user protection is a huge challenge and a massive opportunity for resellers. If you haven't got separation between your primary environment and backups, then you can be left in a difficult situation. There's an opportunity for resellers to wrap security into everything they do. Whether that's voice, cloud comms, application hosting and connectivity, you've



Sachin Vaish

got to consider security. Customers expect to be at least as secure, if not more secure in this new world."

Vaish says a big challenge for the ICT sector resides in understanding cybersecurity.

if not more so. "5G will be essential," stated Worboys. "If you're waiting for a fibre service to be installed 5G can absolutely give you an advantage. And if you're going to be based in a building for a number

sole route to providing connectivity. So having it in your portfolio is important."

5G Potential

For high density urban areas or venues such as hospitals or sporting venues 5G can

technology, but it will always have the challenges of coverage and physics to compete with fibre services."

According to Lyons, there is a once in a generation opportunity for tens of millions of customers in the UK to change connectivity and voice. "You may already be working with a partner that can deliver FTTP, but my advice would be to double down on your efforts to be part of that transition," he added. You're not going to get such an opportunity again to land grab new customers. If you think about 50,000 Openreach customers being connected to fibre each week, and add the circa 100 altnets around the UK, that's 100,000 customers a week that have got a new opportunity to take on a service that is potentially 10 or 12 times the speed of their current one and five times as reliable."

While FTTP is an emerging technology we're going to see some of those low rent customers at the lower end of the SME market, that may have a relatively expensive 100 meg leased line, start to take a gigabit FTTP service, believes Vaish. "They'll pay a fraction of what they're paying now and potentially receive a similar product," he added. "They won't get the SLAs or the guarantees, but for that smaller end of the market it's attractive." ■

Amazon Web Services launched in 2006 with three services. Today it has over 200. If you stood still during that time you'd be left behind within a matter of weeks

"Endpoint security is a minefield," he stated. "Especially when you consider the home working environment. Internet security is one of the biggest growth markets, not just in the UK but globally. The question is: How do you go to the customer and talk about cybersecurity? We're doing penetration testing as a service for our partners. This tells customers what's working from a protection point of view, where the gaps are and how to solve them. There is a fantastic opportunity to get into the cybersecurity field which is a relatively untapped market."

Over the past few years many industry predictions, including those around 5G and connectivity generally, have been just as optimistic,

of years, sending a huge amount of data, you're probably going to be using 5G as a complementary technology to a fibre-based service. They will coexist. But there will be scenarios where 5G may well be the

be a great way of delivering services to a high number of people, observed Lyons. "If you want to offer a high level of SLA, then having 5G as a backup is a great way of doing that," he added. "It's clearly an important



John Lyons

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Going beyond traditional rewarding and incentivising sales teams

Christine Rodriguez, Head of Channel Incentives and SaaS propositions at Blackhawk Network Europe

When it comes to motivating external sales teams – whether it be resellers, distributors, independent retailers, dealers, or other partners – it can be challenging to create an effective strategy. There are the traditional SPIFs (sales performance incentive funds), MDFs (market development funds) or rewards (cash payments) for closing deals. But rewarding actual sales may only go so far. This is where the opportunity is opened to reward not just on sales but on behaviours and characteristics.

When external sales teams are your focus, there needs to be an understanding of the characteristics of successful sales partners. It is these traits that businesses need to reward and replicate across the broader sales universe to generate mutual success. In doing so, sales team leaders can drive and deliver long-term incremental performance.

It's time to move beyond the traditional rewards and incentives for external sales teams and tap into what will truly grow channel sales performance. Let's take a look at how.

Rooting rewards and incentives in behaviour

While focusing on post-sales rewards is important, in isolation they can be ineffective for two key reasons:

- The rewards are for run-rate business, instead of being focused on increments and consistency in performance.
- In many cases, these offered programmes are short-term tactical initiatives. As such, they are inefficient as they take time and money to implement but lack the desired sustained change. Quick results may be achieved, but they have a finite impact on the overall long-term performance.

Preferably, the sales incentive programme should have the flexibility to drive long-term, ongoing performance while providing abilities to adapt to business challenges as they arise. In an ideal world, such strategies would be developed so that they are simple to implement – for both team leads and

participants – and flexible enough to accommodate evolving market needs and priorities.

When involved with channel partners – be it a role in sales or marketing – it is known who is and is not successful. As part of this, there is a perception of what traits these partners have that makes them successful. For example, those that follow up on leads or obtain new clients. For more sales and results to be achieved, businesses need to look at how these qualities can be recognised and encouraged across the broader channel universe.

What behaviours to look for

To get started, it's important to identify the key behaviours practiced by the most successful channel partners, and their employees, to help drive performance. This should include a mixture of pre-sale activities such as sales training, performing lead generation activities or participation in vendor marketing programmes, as well as post-sale behaviours such as sales of new solution types, cross sell or upsell existing clients and subscription renewals.

Then add in the key behaviours the channel partners need to achieve the go-to-market objectives, including training or improving pipeline visibility through deal registration.

It should be straight forward to track behaviours, but data may be dispersed across several systems. It's important that each incentive behaviour is tracked so that rewards can be given effectively. Ideally, all these behaviours would be managed in a single

channel platform. If not, a system that validates each claim before a reward is issued may need to be used.

How to reward behaviours

With the right behaviours defined to measure and incentivise performance, the next step is to determine how exactly the incentive and reward is offered.

People like to be in charge of their own decisions. They value choice in all aspects of their lives, and incentives and rewards should be no different. The sales teams and sales partners are crucial contributors to the business and appreciate decision-making autonomy just like everyone else. As such, it's important to provide them with effective motivation and recognition through rewards and incentives that offer something for everyone, rather than apply a "one size fits all" mentality. Businesses need to provide recipients within the extended channel rewards that accommodate for different preferences and provide a more personalised reward experience.

For example, choice and flexibility of rewards can be offered through strategies such as online rewards portfolios with physical and digital cards as options. The recipient that's being rewarded can be directed to an online catalogue that provides them with a significant reward selection. It should be easy for them to browse and choose the type of reward and delivery method they prefer. Offering rewards such as digital and physical prepaid cards and e-gifts from hundreds of retailers will mean there is always something for everyone. Deliver things digitally and there

is a great opportunity to create a branded and completely customised reward experience, as well as speed of delivery that many will appreciate once eligible for a reward.

The simplicity in removing cash

As part of offering rewards and incentives rooted in choice and flexibility, businesses would be wise to remove cash from the equation. When rewarded with physical cash the temptation is there for recipients to put the money towards more practical expenses such as bills or grocery shopping, rather than spend the money on what it was intended for – a well-deserved treat. What's more, eradicating cash from the reward chain also makes for a much simpler payment process for businesses – a win-win for all involved.

Good behaviours, high reward, better business

For businesses to reward and incentivise their external sales teams in a way that will truly maximise the performance of the teams, it's time to move on from the traditional methods. SPIFs, MDFs or rewards for closing deals, while they serve a purpose also have their limitations. By rewarding teams for their behaviours, pre- and post-sale, as well as the results themselves, businesses can encourage and promote the actions of individuals that will land the best results. But offering rewards and incentives alone isn't enough. For these initiatives to have the highest impact, drive performance and deliver results, they need to be right for the individual's receiving them. It's exactly for this reason that cash-free rewards founded in flexibility and choice will be the ultimate compliment to any business' incentive and reward schemes. ■

Betts takes Vizst stake

The Techneds-backed three-way merger of ITSB, Quad Vision and Data Integration (a division of B2B technology provider DXC Technology) creates a single entity operating under the Vizst Technology brand headed up by CEO Richard Betts. Here, Betts opens up on the rationale and strategy underpinning the move.

Techneds execs Simon Mewett and Iain McKenzie join Vizst Technology as Non-Executive Director and Chairman respectively. Both are founders of the PE firm. "Myself and Iain identified the opportunity to create a new cloud technology provider that drew on the strengths of three existing businesses," commented Betts. "Each company brings its own value, multiple skillsets and multi-sector experience."

Techneds completed the merger of IT services business ITSB and audio-visual specialist Quad Vision in December 2020 so Betts knew both companies would contribute a strong offering. "I identified Data Integration as the perfect partner to complete our proposition," added Betts. "It has a strong portfolio of high end public sector and enterprise customers. There was no overlap in services by

bringing the three companies together. Each team brings expertise in different fields."

Vizst Technology has over 50 employees, offices in Poole, London and Newbury and generates £12 million turnover. Its client base numbers circa 500 with enterprises, higher education and Government sectors among its key target markets, but the company is not completely sector-specific. "We're aiming for 20 per cent organic growth per annum by working with existing clients and gaining new business," added Betts, who first started in the tech industry in 1982.

That was before the advent of the Internet, meaning that Betts has had plenty of time to flex his entrepreneurial muscle. "The biggest risk I took was buying Mettoni in a management buyout with Iain, which involved putting all my possessions into the investment,"



Richard Betts

explained Betts. "I knew it was a risk at the time, but I also saw the fantastic opportunity it could bring in creating a globally renowned technology provider. It was a venture I believed in, and it was rewarding to see the business flourish."

Betts spent ten years growing Mettoni before exiting the business to Enghouse Interactive in a \$30 million deal. The sale also helped

Each company brings its own value, multiple skillsets and multi-sector experience

many people to progress significantly within the tech industry. "That was my biggest achievement," said Betts. "As a result of our growth, many members of the management team have now moved into senior leadership positions. I'm proud to have helped them progress their careers to that level."

Betts is hoping to repeat this trick with Vizst Technology. He has personally invested in the business and is banking on the diversity of his portfolio along with a customer and cloud centric

approach. "Our focus is purely on cloud-based tech so we've been able to capitalise on the shift to hybrid working," he added. "Many more businesses need the infrastructure to host meetings between people in the office and those joining remotely.

"Our selling point is that we offer a broad range of services that provides multiple benefits to different

organisations. As well as targeting new business, we'll grow Vizst Technology by looking at white space in our current customer base and cross-selling our extended service offering."

According to Betts, cross-selling will significantly influence the evolution of Vizst Technology. "We have a substantial customer base already with strong relationships forged over time, so we have a good opportunity to show those clients what else we can do. Our appeal is that we can offer expertise under

one umbrella, particularly as we've also brought together our existing suppliers and partners from the three businesses, so clients don't need to outsource different suppliers. By building trust and strengthening our relationships we'll have more opportunities to successfully cross-sell our new services."

But one of the main challenges facing the comms channel right now is supply shortages, observed Betts.

"Everything has had a knock-on effect with slower lead times and equipment supply not meeting increased demand," he commented. "We're getting around the issue by planning early with customers. Forward planning is vital, and we're working closely with customers to ensure we're fully prepped and ready to effectively meet their needs."

Betts' definition of preparation is all-embracing in terms of getting under the skin of customers from top to bottom. Yet this approach is all too often overlooked by sales teams, he believes. "Our industry should be looking at other business departments besides IT to sell products more effectively," he commented. "Very often, the IT managers are the gatekeepers when it comes to tech investments. But new tech benefits the whole business, rather than just the IT department, so we should be targeting others to gauge a better understanding of the wider business needs.

"A holistic approach is key, so resellers should look beyond IT departments and target other areas like sales, marketing and business development contacts as part of their sales tactics." ■



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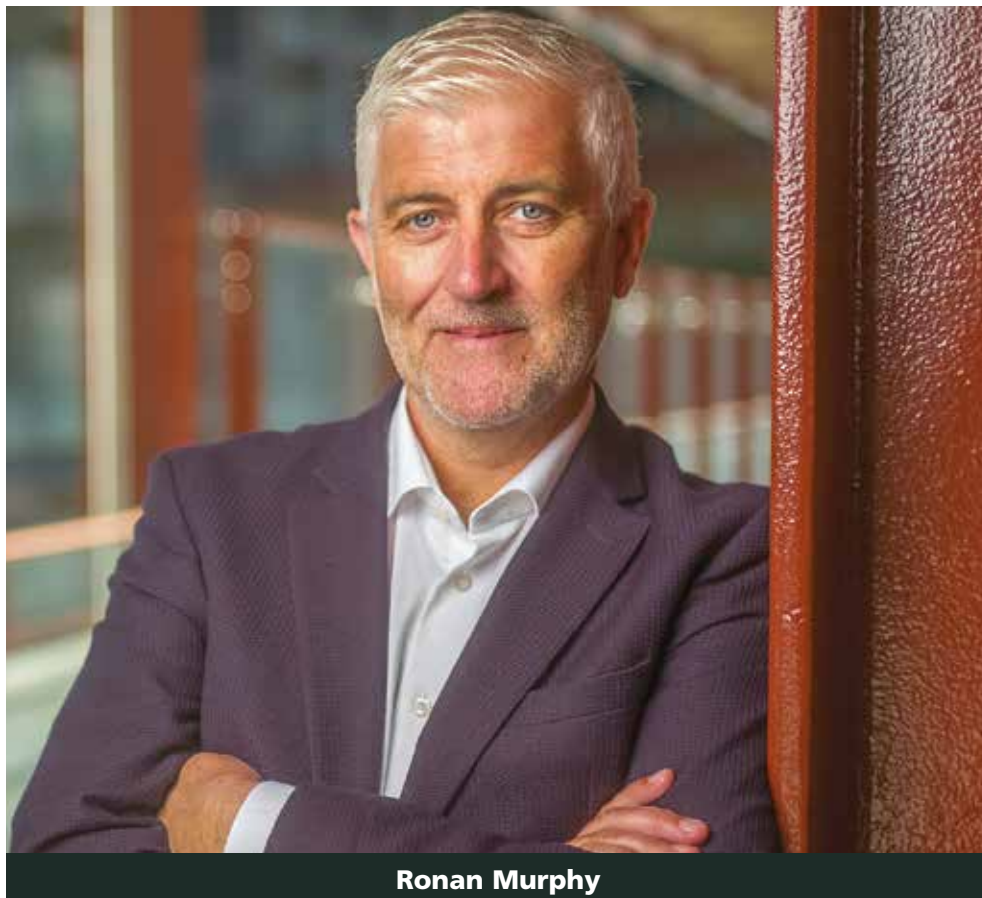


It began with the first iP

CWSI started life in a living room soon after the advent of iPads, when co-founder and CEO Ronan Murphy quickly spotted an opportunity to help firms manage these new devices in the enterprise space. Today, the company continues to blaze a trail in the mobile and cloud-first world, driving significant UK growth ahead of a big push across Europe.

CWSI was founded in 2010 in Dublin, Ireland, by Murphy with co-founders Philip Harrison and Conor Headon. The CW part of the name is derived from two previous businesses set up by Murphy (Connected World and Commercial Wireless), and as the firm is a systems integrator the tag SI was added. "The idea for CWSI was sparked by the launch of the first iPad and the realisation that few businesses had the IT knowledge or skills to get the best from these devices in an enterprise environment," said Murphy. "With this initial insight and working from a single desk in the corner of my living room, CWSI underwent huge growth through strong partnerships, patience and careful planning. We now provide a full suite of modern IT security and compliance solutions to some of Ireland's and the UK's leading organisations."

CWSI's decision to become an early adopter of what was, at the time, a new technology (Mobile Device Management) by becoming the first MobileIron partner in Europe was the foundation for its success, noted Murphy. "In 2018, we saw that Microsoft was intent on becoming a major player in IT security and endpoint management so



Ronan Murphy

There is so much opportunity in the market right now. We need to be disciplined about where to invest our time, resources and money

we established our Microsoft practice from scratch," he explained. "That was a major strategic shift but is now one of the fastest growing parts of our business."

"In terms of channel partnerships, our relationship with a major UK mobile

network operator, established in 2017, was transformational in terms of UK growth and our ability to service some of the largest enterprise and government clients. Completing our first acquisition in May this year of UK-based mobility and security reseller AVR

is another big milestone, proving that we can successfully integrate a business outside of our domestic market."

Growth

CWSI has achieved 35 per cent year-on-year organic growth during the last five

years and now has 60 people working across the UK and Ireland. In 2021, the UK will represent over half of overall revenue and profit for the first time, partly as a result of the AVR acquisition but also driven by healthy organic growth in UK channel partnerships. "Over half of our revenues will come from indirect channel partners in 2021," added Murphy. "We are targeting annual revenue in excess of 20 million euros within the next 12 to 18 months, with over 80 per cent of this being recurring revenue. We are well on track to achieve this objective."

CWSI has secured a number of EMEA-wide contracts and expects to have a presence in mainland Europe by the end of 2022. "Our longer-term vision is to become a pan-European leader in modern security through a combination of organic growth and M&A activity," said Murphy. "A challenge in any high growth business is to focus energy and resources in the right place. There is so much opportunity in the market right now. We need to be disciplined about where to invest our time, resources and money."

Three years ago CWSI pivoted from being mobility centric to security focused, realising that mobility was becoming standard

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Pad: CWSI CEO

and there was increasing convergence between the management and security tools for mobile devices, laptops, desktops and other endpoints. "This opens up a much bigger market opportunity and means that our sales conversations are increasingly with the IT security team and board rather than the IT operations team," commented Murphy.

Focus areas

This shift means CWSI is doubling down on Unified Endpoint Management, Endpoint Detection and Response, Zero Trust Network Access, Compliant Collaboration and Security Consulting solutions for mid-market and enterprise organisations. Its key technology partners are Microsoft, MobileIron, SentinelOne, Wandera, NetMotion, Corrata, Dubber and Movius.

"We're expanding further into Endpoint Detection and Response through our partnership with Microsoft and, via our recent acquisition of AVR, through a new partnership with SentinelOne," explained Murphy. "Our SentinelOne relationship also brings us into Managed Detection and Response for the first time, an area that we believe has good growth potential for the future."

"Furthermore, our recently formed partnership with Dubber is opening up a new area of Artificial Intelligence in communications. While this is currently positioned mainly as a compliance solution it does create future possibilities to gain insights, which are currently hidden, from voice, video and messaging communication."

Murphy also noted that Covid-19 resulted in the largest - albeit forced - proof of concept for remote technology and a remote way of working. "In rushing to roll out solutions many organisations inadvertently created new risks by relying on old fashioned security tools and approaches that aren't designed for the way we work today," added Murphy. "Our value proposition is built around helping organisations to get secure and stay secure in the context of this modern way of working."

Murphy sees four major drivers influencing the business over the next few years – the growth of hybrid and remote working, the continued and accelerated migration to cloud services, the drive for digital transformation and the growth of organised cybercrime. "The combination of these factors will mean strong demand from organisations of all sizes and in all sectors for advice, skills and services relating to modern IT security.

"VARs and SIs need to have a clear value proposition for their target customer base. This means doing something better, cheaper, quicker, more reliably or with less risk than a customer or competitor can provide. This is best achieved through high quality independent advice, expertise and services in a focused area, rather than being a generalist. While professional services will always be a key part of what we do, we see these as the door opener to recurring service revenue and ongoing relationships with clients that allow us to continuously improve their security posture." ■

Just a minute with Ronan Murphy...

Role model: John F Kennedy for his handling of the Cuban missile crisis. Without him we probably would not be here today!

Your main strengths and what could you work on? I don't tend to give up which is my greatest strength, my weakness is upsetting people by not giving up.

Your biggest career achievement? Setting up my first business with one of my co-founders at CWSI at the tender age of 23 and selling it before I reached 30.

In hindsight: Go big or go home: In hindsight, having seen the opportunity in mobile security as early as we did, I would have invested more in building out CWSI a lot earlier.

Industry bugbear: The way enterprises stage and onboard devices needs to radically change.

One example of something you have overcome? I was involved in a very bad motorbike accident when 16 and spent four months in hospital and six months in a wheelchair.

Name three ideal dinner guests: John Lennon, JFK and Sir Anthony O'Reilly.

If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing? Flying a plane or skipping a yacht.

The hardest decision you made last year? Pulling the launch of our UK direct business when the pandemic hit. It was a good decision and our acquisition strategy made much more sense.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know? I co-founded a Cancer Research Charity that has raised over 1 million euros so far.

How do you relax when not working? Sailing and cycling up mountains which at 93 kilos is not easy.



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A watershed moment

It is important for resellers to continually re-evaluate their strategy through a post-Covid and pre-2025 lens, and Focus Group co-founder and Director Chris Goodman has warned that those who sit on their hands amid these seismic shifts will quickly be left behind.

Following lockdowns, the way much of the UK works and lives has become embedded in a 'new normal'. And the extent to which organisations have reset their thinking is matched by the widespread challenges and opportunities now facing the channel. Here, Goodman offers his perspectives on the changing market, and shares insights into his leadership priorities and approaches...

What will be the primary challenges facing the comms sector in 2022?

The recruitment and retention of staff is proving to be a notable challenge. There is a real shortage of good candidates for roles in many sectors and it's unclear whether it's the impact of Covid-19, Brexit, or a combination of both. Furthermore, and this impacts the retention of staff as well, people have come to expect far more from their employer – more money, more benefits and more flexibility. Holding on to your best people has never been more important.

Other challenges are the prospect of further Covid restrictions, continued supply chain disruption, budgetary belt-tightening as a result of rising inflation, the increased cost of borrowing and managing estates of PSTN/ISDN lines through the switch-off. Not too much!

Having absorbed the brunt of the pandemic, do you think the comms channel has emerged stronger?

Without question, yes. The essential nature of the products and services that our industry delivers has never been more clear. It has broadened the size of client to whom a full ICT suite is applicable, highlighted the importance of adequate cyber security awareness, driven businesses into a hybrid working world and strengthened the needs for intermediaries – someone to cut through the confusion and deliver an appropriate and robust comms solution for their business needs.

The pandemic also forced businesses in the sector to practice what they preach.



Chris Goodman

We were forced to deliver a solution for our own businesses, without warning, and we will have learned a great deal about what works and what doesn't. We are now better placed to promote the benefits of the solutions we offer. It has also demonstrated the strength of the channel. People came together and supported one another, professionally, commercially

optimum set-up that creates the perfect balance of productivity, engagement, cultural integrity and customer satisfaction. The key to helping prepare our customers is to challenge their thinking and to open their eyes to the ways in which technology can enhance their business. By being a reseller we aren't forced to hedge our bets with one technology or provider.

Nobody yet knows the optimum set-up that creates the perfect balance of productivity, engagement, cultural integrity and customer satisfaction

and emotionally, through what was an incredibly uncertain time. Friendships have been strengthened, partnerships created and we are all the stronger for it.

How can the channel most effectively use the lessons of Covid-19 lockdowns?

The lessons are still being learned. We are still adapting our working practices to suit the needs of our business and our people. Nobody yet knows the

Flexibility is the key to remaining agile, enabling you to adapt to the ever changing landscape. Communicate with your customers. Be part of their journey. Share in their success.

With the infrastructure environment shifting and 2025 on the horizon, how urgent is it for resellers to reshape their outlooks?

It's critical. How can you define your strategy or give the right advice to your

customers unless you fully understand the implications and complications of the Openreach roadmap. There are so many unanswered questions and areas that have yet to be considered, and it is our job to challenge Openreach and Ofcom to ensure that our customers have a voice. Those who sit idly by will be left behind in what is a seismic shift.

How do you think the flash of investment in remote working will play out in terms of sustained interest in digital technology adoption?

The floodgates are open and there's no turning back. People have had a taste of the hybrid working world and they liked it! There is a better balance to be achieved through flexible working practices, arguably greater productivity and it solves all our disaster recovery needs. Perhaps businesses will start to look at the provision of connectivity at employees homes as FTTP becomes more widely available. Frankly, I want the same set-up at home as I have at the office.

As we approach 2022, what are your top priorities?

With our new CEO, Barney Taylor, at the helm it's a period of reflection for the business as we define our strategy for 2022 and beyond. At the heart of that strategy will be protecting the core principles and values that have delivered us growth year after year, and that create the foundation upon which we can build long-term dynamic growth. It's an exciting time to be in our industry and for those with their finger on the pulse and their foot hovering impatiently over the accelerator. It's going to be one hell of a ride! ■

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EVENT REPORT

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SuperSession unravels lo in mega-disruptive times

Comms Vision's (November 10-12th, Gleneagles) opening SuperSession drove towards the core of value creation in disruptive times and helped delegates to prepare their business for the growth opportunities that lie ahead.

The 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 world.

And comms industry players are wide open to these forces. So much so that the comms channel and its early stage cloud evolution could merely be the precursor to something far bigger – an all-out revolution in communications driven by Super Disruptive forces. But where is customer value moving to, and how should MSPs reposition to capture that value?

“You can categorise customer value three ways – digitalisation, simplification and solutions,” said Alex Tempest, Managing Director, BT Wholesale. “Customers want everything in a simple format that works. As simple as these elements sound, unless they are wrapped with knowledge and experience the customer gets zero value.”

Andy Wilson, Head of Wholesale, CityFibre, noted: “There is complexity in the mid-market and the value that can be delivered by the channel resides in the simplification of a complex IT environment that has built up over many years,” he stated. “But what the hyper scalers have done is over simplify the simple. You can't just lift and shift complex IT environments and put them into AWS. There is a huge amount of workload and applications and that's where the channel comes in, helping them understand what to move now, later and what will never move in terms of applications and services.”

Customers are far more exposed to substitute products and services from new suppliers – and resourcing models are being disrupted as tech giants continue to gain market share. The dominance of the major cloud providers continues to grow in public cloud where the top five control 80 per cent of the market. But uncovering opportunities where niche sectors can harness technology is one way for the channel to differentiate. Is now the time for MSPs to focus on specific services or user groups and offer niche specialities?

Complexity

“The hyperscalers and tech giants are delivering a simple proposition but there is a huge amount of complexity and interdependence associated with it, said Richard Thompson, Managing Director of Wholesale, TalkTalk Wholesale Services. “It's not just a comms piece, it's a far broader

Customers need the channel to demystify the complexity and provide the glue that knits it all together

sweep they offer but packaged quite simply. Customers need the channel to demystify the complexity and provide the glue that knits it all together. The channel plays a vital role.”

Andy Smethurst, Channel Sales Director, Gamma, added: “With these mega-disrupters, don't be fooled into thinking they are wash with avatars and AI, there are sales specialists for every product that needs bringing together - and the channel does this well. So don't be fooled, tech giants are doing it in exactly the same way.”

Diego Tedesco, Director of Wholesale Fixed at Virgin Media O2 Business, commented: “We can use cloud giants to augment the solutions we sell, or we could compete head on which is probably a dangerous game given their market power. But as a channel to end customers, it is important to make them aware of some of the limitations of huge public cloud providers. The solutions are not as customisable, they are off-the-shelf and security is a challenge. When an off-the-shelf solution does the job, let's use the partner ecosystem with the hyper scalers to augment our solutions. Where they don't fit the need we have a very important role to play.”

Steve Warburton, Managing Director, Zen Partner, observed: “There is a perception that it's all plug-and play, that couldn't be further from the truth – complex environments require a real skill to optimise and configure correctly. That's where the channel has a role to play in taking different technologies to create real value for the end user.”

Wilson noted that differentiating by embracing niches and verticals is something the

channel has been doing for some time - and this will become more important and effective. “There is an opportunity to take some of the niche parts of core products like data and voice and layer on the top more complicated products like cyber security, data analytics and OTT services from the public cloud,” he said. “I encourage people to keep an open mind about working with customers and the solutions specified for them. If you come across a solution that works for a particular customer it may create an opportunity to be replicated in verticals or other niche parts of the market.”

Long-term value creation



COMMS Vision is the leading annual leadership forum for CEO, MD and CTO delegates making up the major league of the UK reseller community. To find out more visit www.commsvision.com

According to Wilson, the big opportunity is the mid-market. "I was lucky enough in a previous role to sit in front of CIOs and talk to them about their cloud strategies, and every session came back to the same point - we don't understand our own applications and environment enough to lift and shift to AWS. So there is a massive consultancy opportunity to understand those applications and IT stacks and help them on those journeys. The mid-market is red hot right now."

Data opportunities

For Thompson, data is also a huge opportunity. "If you look at other industries, the most successful organisations are putting data at the heart of their business strategy," he commented. "I don't think we quite do that in the B2B space. Part of the challenge is how do we consume it all? We are working hard around how to surface a lot more of the data we generate and use it in a meaningful way that can lead to a genuine business outcome and improve the customer experience."

"We've surfaced a lot of data in the broadband space using a service capability and we are going to take that into Ethernet. We should all get behind data in a major way and be as open and transparent as possible - it can add genuine value. I'm passionate about the data piece. It should be at the heart of business strategy."

Tempest can't remember a time when data never was the new gold. "It's about how we make data incredibly powerful for people," she stated. "What frustrates me is that we are not moving quickly enough - that's relevant to all of us. I feel we're almost going to leap frog to catch up because collectively as an industry and a market we are too far behind on how we synthesis data for our customers, even in simple formats."

In the professional services world it is imperative that data is made meaningful to the customer, noted Thompson. "If we as a community don't do this data will have limited value," he added. "We are investing significant resources into data scientists that can support the data mining process. That's where it will add value."

Innovation is also key to driving value. "Innovation can be viewed two ways - how you do things and how you embrace innovative ideas and solutions," said Smethurst. "With the former there's a great moment in time for that to happen with the switch off, where you can innovate the way you do things and take advantage of an enormous opportunity - digital first, API provisioning and self-service portals. It's there to be grabbed. At the other end of the scale you've got smaller customers than

The most successful organisations are putting data at the heart of their business strategy

before demanding more complex solutions - this feeds into the growth of professional services - and the opportunity is there to design these solutions for customers and replicate and build."

According to Tedesco it's critical to success that we work as a community. "For me, it is about how we help each other to figure out those solutions - and being honest with each other too. For example, connectivity has been allowed to stagnate and we've seen prices erode 80 per cent in seven years because we haven't evolved that product. We need to be up front with each other and say this is limiting us and

customers. That will help all of us to raise the bar on the products and services we offer."

Customer expectations have also been raised on what the comms industry is doing to protect the planet, noted Warburton. "We are starting to see customers ask us specifically what we are doing," he commented. "Not a branded message but specific actions. We have also seen this when bringing people on board. They expect us to have a solid story around what we are doing. Fortunately, it's been 13 years since we set up our environmental steering group and we've made great progress. Our partners are starting to ask how we can help them to go on a similar journey, so we are sharing best practice. We are all in it together and have a responsibility to make a difference. It's about taking small steps to show that you are making a difference."

Tempest concurred: "Unless we all do this nothing is going to change. This is all about having a sustainability agenda that you are prepared to sign up to and

live by. Big things happen in small stages, and every tender I've seen has a sustainability point. When we as organisations pull together on issues like sustainability - our development and learning can be shared with everybody. As well as sustainability, diversity and inclusion is on the agenda - and as a market and a channel we have to embrace this."

Tedesco warned that at this time of transformation it is critical for channel firms to challenge themselves and challenge the status quo. "There's lots of examples of what happens in other industries when you don't do that," he said. "We can do it if we work together as a community." ■



Why the channel must w and plan a strategy now

BT's 2023 stop-sell is the harbinger of a big shift in technology from legacy to IP, but for the stars to align CPs would be wise to get rooted in IP sooner rather than later. Covid-19 has also shown us that this is not the time for hesitant steps, warned Gavin Jones, Channel Director at BT Wholesale.

BT's 2023 stop-sell is the harbinger of a big shift in technology from legacy to IP - but for the stars to align channel resellers would do themselves a big favour by getting rooted in IP sooner rather than later. Covid-19 has also shown that this is not the time for hesitant steps, warned Gavin Jones, Channel Director at BT Wholesale.

Lockdowns have catalysed technology adoption and as the UK moves towards an all-IP world identifying how to offer interconnected solutions that drive value will be key. The big question: How to manage the challenges and harness the opportunities? In his interview, Jones delved into the catalysts for an interconnected future including the critical role of innovation, digital transformation, the move to a zero-latency world with 5G and IoT, and an overall shift towards a layer 3 IT centric model.

"We've seen massive change over the last 18 months," stated Jones. "According to the ONS the number of people working from home increased from 30 to 47 per cent over that period. There is a seminal change in the market and the solutions we all provide. For us, all-IP is number one - super fast broadband connectivity into everyone's home. Second, 5G, and thirdly, making ourselves totally digital."

The biggest threat to a smooth transition to all-IP is not to the channel but to the UK's end users. And for channel resellers still to pass the all-IP test, they need to consider the full implications of BT's near imminent stop-sell, advised Jones. "Our vision is about smart working, the ability to get



There is a seminal change in the market and the solutions we all provide. For us, all-IP is number one

the best out of being in the office and working remotely," added Jones. "We know when we collaborate it can be creative - we also know that more work freedom makes us more productive. We are creating a seamless experience where you can work from anywhere with access to applications, information sharing and collaboration."

The stop-sell means that there is not even an option to remain in legacy shackles, therefore all temptation to milk old technology until its dying day should be resisted. "The move to all-IP is super important for the stop-sell in 2023 and the switch off in 2025," stated Jones. "There must come a point soon when resellers say we don't sell PSTN or ADSL, we only sell FTTP and IP communications. We all have a part to play in this transition."

Fibre momentum

In terms of FTTP, BT has passed six million homes and reduced the cost of passing each house by £50. "It's not just about BT, CityFibre has gone past one million homes and is building like fury alongside other altnets. "When you put gigabit fibre connectivity into someone's home, or put a gigabit onto a mobile device, we are going to transform the way we transfer information and the way we operate. The future for broadband is over the air or fibre optic wires. At Heathrow airport I downloaded two films in less than five minutes using 5G."

Jones also sees layer 3 as critical for the future. "We are working on solutions that operate on a layer three basis, that can be consumed, operated and run digitally," he explained. "For example, developing a security service that we put into our network and apply automatically. We are evolving to become a layer 3 operator."

But innovating in what Jones calls a 'small city' can be a challenge. BT is a company with 105,000 people, so it made sense to make structural changes around innovation and digital, separating out the traditional roles of the CTO and CIO to



walk the road to all-IP

bring a dedicated Digital Director. "BT Wholesale is totally focused in APIs and automation," commented Jones. "We've opened up access to a developer forum for APIs, for example, around hosted communications and Ethernet. We encourage working with people to develop APIs. There are many programmes in these areas."

This time of industry change is such that there will be no left overs from the days when the UK was ruled by copper and less than transformational mobile speeds. "The move to 5G is a massive opportunity for partners and customers – whatever the business," stated Jones, who has been with BT for 12 years, his time split between working in the channel and mobile.

5G impact

EE currently provides 5G in 160 cities, and according to Jones will cover 50 per cent of the UK in 2023 with ubiquitous coverage forecasted for 2028. "We have a way to go, but 5G will impinge and cross over areas we work on in ways we are yet to fully understand," he commented. "It's similar to the arrival of DSL and the subsequent rise of Amazon and Facebook etc. We will see the same kind of speed revolution hitting us over that period. The potential is phenomenal. Consider Google Glass which was invented futuristically approximately ten years ago, now its time is coming. Look at all the satellite dishes attached to homes for TV – you won't need those in five or six years time. It will be about 5G wherever you are."

Of particular interest to Jones are 5G private networks and applications built bespoke for organisations. He cited Bosch as a notable use case where transport in its factory is automated along with the automation of the management and monitoring of machines. "There are many uses cases especially in logistics where the efficient use of vehicles and transport is coming to the fore," he commented.

Jones also cited real-time diagnostics in healthcare and 5G potential within the broadcast sector as just two more examples of the transformation to come. "There are a number of niche operators but we are seeing more demand," he added.

Jones noted that 46 per cent of the workforce are digitally native and device centric. "They are going to drive a seminal change in the way we operate and how businesses are shaped," he added. "Everything will be plug-and-play and API – focused on cloud, communications, collaboration and security."

With approximately three million B2B ISDN and PSTN lines available to migrate by 2025, it has become a matter of some urgency for channel partners to seize the opportunity to move their customers towards a unified portfolio, drive value and offer more flexibility and agility. In his VisionTalk, **Steve Blackshaw, Head of All IP for BT Wholesale**, conducted a granular exploration of the all IP landscape and provided practical guidance on how to build and deploy an all IP migration strategy with confidence.

Blackshaw's task is to move BT's enterprise customers, including wholesale, to an all IP portfolio. The challenge follows similar projects during a 15 year period working for various telcos globally, helping them move to all-IP networks. "This is because I used to work for a vendor, Alcatel Lucent, and every time it sold a big network into a telco the incumbent would ask how to move the traffic, and migrate all customers from a legacy contract and legacy network to a new contract and all-IP portfolio."

Blackshaw's experience taught him that there is much commonality between IP transformation programmes. But he never thought such a thing could be replicated in the UK. "I didn't think the regulator was serious about closing legacy networks, and the first thing you need when closing legacy networks in any country is the regulator backing you," he said. "Incumbents are hard to move."

Are you geared up?

Nor is that all: Migrations are a huge challenge by their very nature. "If you've got 1,000 customers and they have ten circuits each, you've only got 660 working days until the WLR network turns off – and it will turn off in 2025," added Blackshaw. "That's 15 circuits a day. Is your company geared up in terms of the sales team and portfolio to sell these circuits to an existing installed base?"

Currently, Openreach has 120 exchanges in stop sell. By December 2023 stop sell goes to every exchange – 5,500 of them – and this is being driven primarily by competition in the UK market. "We now need to move to a full fibre network across our providers, including Openreach, and it has changed the unit economics," stated Blackshaw. "They have to compete now."

It's about more than the copper legacy network. It's other networks too, noted Blackshaw. "Openreach has announced a series of networks



to close down, including Wholesale Extension Services (WES) and Wholesale End-to-End Services (WEES), leased lines and megastream," he added. "3G is switching off before the end of 2022, and EFM is going on August 31st 2023. It's also happening because the equipment is ageing and there are no spares. Openreach is very serious about closing these networks."

To succeed in this environment, the trick is to build your portfolio, advised Blackshaw. "Make sure your portfolio teams are taking advantage now and mapping migrations, then arming sales people with the materials to have conversations with customers and move from one circuit type to another," he said.

"This is where you can start to upsell. For some CPs the commercial offering may not be as attractive in IP as it is in legacy, but start-ups are absolutely intent on capturing that base. Leaving this to the last year is a commercial choice, but be aware that other telcos and CPs might be going into your base and waking them up with this story."

Furthermore, CPs may not have a set of solutions to cover all end user use cases, and plugging the holes is already a top priority. "You can't leave customers high and dry, so map out the use cases, partner and build solutions into your portfolio," urged Blackshaw. "Understand your customers' business, physically, the logical data flows, the CPE at each end, and more importantly their use case of the network. That helps you on your sales journey. It also helps you to upsell a set of services over the top. In sales engagement, engage early and with everybody - you'll sell more and you'll get people brought in faster."

"Once you have made sense of your customers, undertake a replacement analysis and a migration journey. Build it onto your commercial plans and sales targets. If you don't, it is tempting for sales people to carry on selling legacy. So incentivise and reward appropriately. If you continue to sell legacy this year, in 2022 and 2023, you're building a challenge for yourself in 2024 and 2025. Don't put your head in the sand."



Leading digital transform

CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch

There is no argument that Britain needs a full fibre infrastructure and that the answer lies in unfettered competition – a scenario that was dismissed as folly by many industry pundits until Mesch set about upending the status quo.

Mesch acquired CityFibre in 2011 and from a standing start became largely responsible for driving the UK's Digital Britain agenda despite being told by detractors his business model was economically impossible to sustain. This makes his story as much about perseverance and tenacity as driving the roll out of digital infrastructure. And to provide another slap in the face of naysayers, in September CityFibre smashed the record for a fibre deployment capital raise with £1.125 billion financing. In more big news the company announced that it has significantly extended its relationship with Vodafone in another transformational deal.

"Four years ago we agreed a partnership with Vodafone to anchor a roll out of fibre to the home across 12 cities, and worth £500 million to us," stated Mesch. "Vodafone operated well across those cities and won twice the market share working with us. It has now expanded across our eight million premises footprint and given us a minimum volume commitment that's worth billions in committed service revenue.

"Vodafone decided to help us expand across 35 per cent of the UK, 285 cities, and gave us a commitment that allows us to anchor a national network connecting all of our facilities. This means we can bring Ethernet services and innovative business products across our entire backbone at better economics. That's the supercharge we're bringing to the UK. This is a huge milestone for the company."

CityFibre's journey has been based on anchored contracts with service providers. "We do not exist at a retail level, but what you will see next year is much more activity because we have more financial

horse power, giving more help to channel partners to help them succeed," added Mesch. "All of our contracts have been in support of the channel that desperately needs change. Last month we had 33 cities live and 16 consumer ISPs purchasing in the neighbourhood of 10,000 connections."

Targeting the UK

When you consider CityFibre's early days and its detractors, few can argue that the company is special. It began when Mesch was looking at the European landscape for the best spot to develop and deploy a large scale fibre roll out – and opted for the UK. "CityFibre was founded on a distressed acquisition – for a pound," explained Mesch.

I have purposefully put CityFibre into a mode of being a David against the Goliath – it's an easy metaphor for everyone to understand and it puts CityFibre in a challenger role

"From that pound, in September we announced a fund raising of £1.1 billion and a market cap of £2.3 billion – it's been a heck of a journey."

The regulatory framework of the late 1990s created an environment where everyone became dependent on BT, and developed a retrenched significant infrastructure provider in Openreach. "That super dependence on Openreach meant that if you built a wholesale dedicated fibre provider able to get scale then you could shift the revenue streams into a network with superior products and better economics," added Mesch. "That's what a challenger does."

Mesch is the youngest of five boys and when growing up was knocked down relentlessly. "The only thing I was ever taught was to stand back up and say I won," he added. "I have purposefully put CityFibre into a mode of being a David against the Goliath – it's an easy metaphor for everyone to understand and it puts CityFibre in a challenger role.

"The UK desperately needed to get full fibre. It was so obvious. I had been working in Ireland where we built a big fibre network that was purchased by BT Ireland. And after building a fibre network in Germany and The Netherlands it was clear that the UK was falling behind in deploying core fibre

infrastructure into cities. Outside of the M25 those cities were going down and down."

A challenger also lives close to the wind. "I put myself on the line financially and emotionally," stated Mesch. "To some

degree this was not the best career choice as I was doing well and could have easily done something else. But taking on this task became a passion and a labour of love. I'm more excited about the next ten years than the previous ten."

His career in a nutshell has been building companies and challenging incumbents, and in each of those cases Mesch developed successful organisations. "We feel passionately that the UK can have the finest digital infrastructure in the world, but it's going to be the spark of competition that delivers this. What we have done is shake up an incumbent mindset. The fundamental aspect



ation – An interview with



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of CityFibre is to think, act and move differently, and be innovative. The one weapon we will always have is our speed of decision making and speed of execution – nobody can take these from us. We are a small company at heart.”

Mesch feels for early stage companies and start ups because the raising of money is so difficult and puts an onerous burden on management and executive teams. “In the first five years we lived in the Land of No – investors saying no,” said Mesch. “We lived in that world for so long but stuck with it. For the latest £1.1 billion financing I only did two presentations. The dynamics have changed but we are the same company, young, scrappy, with executives that have been in place for ten years.

“Nobody thought you could build up a company to compete with BT. The belief system was embedded in the UK that it couldn’t be done. But it can be done because of that super dominance. We have 2,000 workers and over 4,000 that are mobilised though construction firms – so around 6,000 operatives building infrastructure across 60 cities.”

CityFibre showed perseverance against severe pressure – and it’s not over yet. “Some quarters don’t want a third national network to emerge because it will take market share,” added Mesch. “So they are doing everything in their power to stop that and we require partners to support us otherwise we won’t exist. It’s a simple symbiotic relationship and we need to help each service provider on our network and find

ways to make them succeed. We are looking at innovative products on the business side – half the economics for ten times the speed.”

Seamless connectivity

CityFibre is across 60 cities today with 85 in sight. Three years ago it delivered hardly any fibre to the home but it’s already past one million homes for channel partners to consume. “We are building simultaneously across 60 cities and will fully interconnect all of those cities with a different layer of access capabilities – we can build an access network across all of our footprint and provide FTTP to businesses and homes seamlessly,” said Mesch.

“The next three to five years will see the unfolding of a lot of hard work. We installed just over 10,000 customers in October, we’ll see that go to 15,000, to 20,000 to 30,000 circuits being delivered. That will create a real change. What we are talking about is gigabit speeds for £30 a month – that’s the future.”

Aside from attractive commercials pure fibre brings reliability, sustainability and consistent service levels. “Full fibre unleashes the full potential of the Internet and applications,” commented Mesch. “High speed Internet activity can really aid the productivity of the mind. The UK has a service-based economy so we do not need more roads, airports and railways. What we need to power the economy is a world class digital infrastructure. That will increase the GDP.”

According to Mesch, the many fibre companies that have emerged is a testament to what is possible when you think outside of the box. This approach is perhaps attributable to an engineering mindset. “I’m passionate about engineering,” commented Mesch. “I’m an engineer at heart, by background and education. But we’ve moved away from engineering being a proud discipline. We are naming our fibre exchanges after great engineers from the UK. The engineering depth is second to none yet we are producing less engineers now than many other countries.

“We try and push engineering disciplines because we want to leave a legacy – the finest digital network in the UK that will force revolutionary change. My passion is to get more engineers and more women engineers introduced to CityFibre. This industry is mainly white older men. That is not going to create the innovation, the change and diverse thinking and culture that we need to move forward.”

The green dividend is also key, and Mesch believes that full fibre across every city amounts to a boon for UK sustainability, citing carbon reduction from the removal of maintenance vans supporting old, corrosive, metal and power-based high maintenance networks with an electricity consumption up to 20 or 30 times more than fibre plans. “We completely eliminate all of that infrastructure,” said Mesch. “There is no electronics in the field whatsoever. Fibre has no touch. We need the whole country to adopt that.” ■



Harnessing change to build long-term value

Understanding your company's critical advantage and how that plays to burgeoning markets like UCaaS, CCaaS and voice-enabling Microsoft Teams is now key to success, says Gamma Managing Director – Channel, Daryl Pile.

Success is guaranteed for resellers that harness UCaaS, CCaaS and Teams integration opportunities and also meet the 2025 switch off with confidence and full preparedness, according to Pile, who in his VisionTalk brought these forward into the context of near rampant M&A within the sector. "New consolidators backed by private equity are coming into our industry," said Pile. "They think we are a great bet for tomorrow, and there is no shortage of money pouring into our industry."

For the channel, realising the potential of 'tomorrow' starts today, especially if customers are to be ringfenced against potential threats. "There is a risk that a big brand may come in with a digital-first play, certainly in the sub-10 market, and hit a price point you can't match," stated Pile. "It's not happened yet, but it could."

That said, the run up to 2025 and beyond sets us on a path to growth that is already signposted by multiples of EBITDA achieved on company acquisitions. "For a million pound turnover business, something between four and eight x EBITDA is not unreasonable," added Pile. "In the last ten years, valuations in our industry have risen, significantly in the last two years. The industry is looking good, it's valuable, we're part of the solution and there is opportunity everywhere."

For many reasons the time is propitious for the channel to shout solutions from the rooftops. "Think IT services," added Pile. "It's a big market - the holy grail of cross selling. When it comes to the end game you will have a different set of suitors. Suddenly you are in demand and your price will go up."

For Pile, the opportunities at hand include hosted comms, UCaaS and voice enabling Microsoft



The industry is looking good, it's valuable, we're part of the solution and there is opportunity everywhere

Teams. "There are approximately 624,000 users of voice enabled Microsoft Teams today, that will rise to circa 3.5 million by the end of 2025," he said. "We are working with Microsoft and the good news is that it is listening."

Contact centre value

Beyond this, what organisations need most of all is a contact centre solution, according to Pile. "Businesses place a greater value on the customer experience that their customers have – the customer's customer," he explained. "People are willing to pay more to deliver that."

He noted that there are circa 800,000 to 900,000 contact centre agents recognised by

Contact Babel in the UK (among 10-50 agent businesses). Pile then identified 0-50 employee firms as the 'forgotten segment'. They don't know they are contact centres, and many won't know the technology exists," he added. "People who receive inbound queries and act together as a team is the market that will explode. If you get in first you will win biggest."

The contact centre market is becoming machine led, with AI and self-serve soon to be de facto. Yet there remains a big gap in the market.

This is despite the large operators that dominate market share, pointed out Pile. "There is room for resellers to grow, not just double or triple, but quadruple their value and then some."

The big question: Are we as prepared as we need to be on the future of the industry? There are currently 135 exchanges on stop-sell, but by the end of 2022 there will be a huge uplift to 454. "Are we ready for the 454? Maybe, but we're not ready for the next 5,000 - that's 25 months away," stated Pile. "We know end of life is 2025 but many resellers are signing customers into technology solutions that are going to have to change. If nothing else, make sure there is something in your Ts&Cs to keep their service running."

Following the Covid-19 outbreak many organisations are crying out for clarity and solutions that deliver future proof agility. And with 2025 in the mix the market and channel should collectively embrace the inevitable transformation sooner rather than later. "Activity is back to pre-pandemic levels and change is happening," commented Pile. "We are now starting to think about the move away from SIP. It's not a questions of if, but when. Who would have thought ten years ago that we'd ever be saying that?" ■



How to turn disruption to your advantage

In today's ever-competitive market, raising the bar and deploying targeted strategies for growth will prevent business leaders from being led astray by conventional thinking, according to Gamma CEO Andrew Taylor.

The future look of the market is easier to define than ever. Challenges and opportunities are clear to see, and for once what lies ahead is for the most part predictable – and disruptive. In his Comms Vision interview, Taylor spotlighted the criticality of coherent value propositions that provide a competitive advantage for all businesses, including smaller firms, and explained the rationale underpinning his approach in the context of strategic acquisitions.

"We've made three acquisitions around technology, product and capability," he stated. "That's enabled us to deliver four of the five products we've launched recently. One acquisition was Mission Labs, a small company in Manchester building the PhoneLine+ product which we are integrating with SOGEA, giving partners the capability to deal with the voice switch off in 2025. Exactive gave us a feature rich Microsoft Teams Direct Routing capability as well as professional services expertise. And Telsis gave us a CCaaS proposition to develop."

These acquisitions show that Gamma can no longer be seen as a straightforward aggregator. "A big focus for us is software and applications that drive UC, collaboration, video, CCaaS etc," added Taylor. "We see big demand for Teams coming from large SME, enterprise and the public sector."

"But with opportunity comes risk. One of the structural changes is Microsoft – it's always there. The IT sector has years of experience partnering with Microsoft and we needed to think about this deeply. Now we co-exist with a company that has won the desktop. The market is converging with IT resellers moving into our space, and Microsoft is driving that. Everything you do at an applications level needs to be integrated."



The market is converging with IT resellers moving into our space, and Microsoft is driving that

Taylor notes that there is very little demand coming from the bottom up. Small businesses have different demands and rely on a channel partner, which is also a factor behind Gamma's product development. "Our strategy is to bring the cloud contact centre solution to the masses, a communication solution for small businesses that is fully integrated with Horizon, designed to solve problems they don't even know they have," explained Taylor.

Future transformations

He believes that more disruptive elements will be introduced in the future driven by digitalisation, collaboration and UC. "The pandemic has accelerated that," added Taylor. "And consider the whole connectivity piece, not just fixed access, but also 5G which is a disruptive element that enables new solutions. But these substitutional developments can cannibalise margins. That's a factor that everyone needs to consider."

The UK was first to deregulate and according to Taylor there is no other market in Europe like it. "The channel disrupted the market," he stated. "UK cloud penetration is about 25 per cent, much higher in the 100 employee and below space and even higher in the sub-50 segment. This is the domain of the channel."

"The market education and shift to cloud started much earlier in the UK. The channel has driven that disruption and stolen a march on the incumbent. Awareness is high, the intent is there and the pandemic has helped in terms of reinforcing and accelerating these trends."

"We compete and sometimes bump into each other as a channel, but the share of what we do is quite small so there is a massive market we can continue to disrupt. BT is getting out of the voice market in 2025. What an opportunity, there's millions of customers out there." ■



The Challenger's Champion

Sir Charles Dunstone

The take private of TalkTalk has done far more than supercharge its market challenger status: According to Executive Chairman Sir Charles Dunstone the move ensures the Group will become the dedicated Challenger's Champion.

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 unleashed company doubles down on wholesale and full fibre. "As we went into the first lockdown our share price went down 40 per cent," said Dunstone. "If you're an airline or a hotel, fair enough. But if you supply telephony and broadband, then surely this is a business that might thrive in a pandemic. We thought, 'if that's all you think it's worth, we'll have it'. It was one of the best things I've ever done."

The project was strategised in March 2020, agreed by Christmas and TalkTalk delisted from the market in March this year. "Being a public company was a miserable existence," added Dunstone. "Now, the senior team has much more time to spend on the business. Previously, around 20 per cent of our time went on managing external share holders, the analysts, the media and all else that exists in that environment. You find yourself making decisions based on a short-term quarterly number."

"We've now got supportive shareholders and we do the right things at the right time for the business. If we need to make a decision to invest more capex, we will. If we think the market is insane we may not compete as aggressively as we did, and if we see opportunities we go for them. There's a good dialogue and rhythm within the business, and a calmness, efficiency and determination in the organisation. Being a private company has helped us."

Dunstone remains baffled about the disconnect between what public markets seem to value telecoms companies at, and the high price of private transactions. "I can't

reconcile that," he added. "Big telcos are very cheap when you look at the reliability of those businesses and their cashflow."

"We could never get the financial markets to understand the presence and scale of our B2B division. They were totally obsessed with the number of consumer customers and the ARPU we were charging. Because the focus was on those numbers there was always a risk that the business would also focus on those metrics."

"But TalkTalk Wholesale Services is an absolute gem within the business, misunderstood and mis-valued by the market. We are going to

You've got to support the challengers coming into the marketplace. If you rely on someone else to do it, in the end they'll fail

invest significantly and double down on the business - we want to be at the heart of the market, enabling partners to sell connectivity from the widest variety of suppliers possible."

To rid Britain of legacy networks was another driver, noted Dunstone. "What really excited me about coming back into the business was the arrival of people prepared to invest money in UK infrastructure," he added. "And the fact that we might finally have a world with competitive suppliers. My background is selling mobile phones and there was always four of five networks vying for our business. That was vibrant. It is wearing to be in an environment

where you are taking what you are given by the incumbent – and your negotiator is Ofcom."

"We've now got an opportunity with around 100 altnets, some raising serious amounts of money and putting that into the ground. I salute and support them and the challenge they bring to the market. Collectively, we have to help them to succeed. Their success will provide a better and more competitive environment for us and our customers than we have enjoyed in the past."

The payback for investment in full fibre deployment by altnets should be their success, but that is not guaranteed, warned Dunstone. "Collaboration

among them is key – there is only one entity to fight," he commented. "We want to help all of these providers get access to customers and channel providers – and give partners a single point of

connection to a choice of altnets. Some places will get seriously overbuilt by operators, that will lead to plenty of choice and drive competition."

The case for full fibre is beyond argument, but the chief obstacle is the absence of a mechanism for partners to effectively sell it in a new competitive environment, according to Dunstone, who revealed plans to provide such a disruptive platform. "We are the challenger, and we want to be the champion of the challengers, enabling challenge to occur within the marketplace, while making sure all this money being deployed turns into something we can sell in a competitive environment," stated Dunstone. "Without support



ion – An interview with



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I worry that the altnets won't get where they need to be. We have to work together, altnets need to interface with us, have common SLAs, and they need to offer better value than we can buy from the incumbent. We can help them do that."

More proof is not needed to show that a radical overhaul of connectivity in the UK is essential, and that now is the perfect time. "The importance of connectivity has increased in peoples' minds," commented Dunstone. "The opportunity is to sell higher bandwidth into peoples' houses, but also into businesses and reconfigure how organisations work in this new world. The pace of change as we come out of lockdown, and the expectations that customers have for their connectivity, and how their business is changing, means they are more prepared to invest in connectivity and adapt the way they work. Suddenly the world went back to normal in September and IT departments are now thinking about what they need to do." Increasingly, the market is moving away from

copper networks and Dunstone called on the channel to fully support alternative network providers. "You've got to support the challengers coming into the marketplace," he urged. "If you rely on someone else to do it, in the end they'll fail and we'll be right back to where we were before. We have an opportunity to support the challengers that are deploying this money. If we start selling their services they will be successful and we will have a better more competitive market. That is the most important thing anyone can do."

Greater competition

Dunstone plans to be in a position during the first half of next year where TalkTalk Wholesale Services will be able to show, via one API, all choices anywhere based on the infrastructure providers available at the premises. In practice, a partner will get to a certain address, see which providers and products are available, installation times and price. "If three providers go past the building there will be some pricing tension and

competition for business," added Dunstone. "On a macro level, this will bring competitive tension to the market in general. People are going to have to fight and work for the business. It also makes the resellers' role more important by helping customers to decide the best value and infrastructure to run their services on. It's a free choice."

The story of all altnets is essentially one of tearing up the rule book and scrapping legacy baggage. The same applies to TalkTalk's take private. "As a private company we can talk more about innovation, take longer-term decisions and be more nimble and focused," stated Dunstone. "We're all over what's happening in the business in a way we never have been before. We are doing another massive investment in the network, tens of millions, simplifying it and putting in dark fibre. That has a five year payback, which is a hard story to sell if you are a public company. For us, it's back to the old days. Doing what's right and making sensible decisions in a calm and supportive environment." ■

Tedesco on the criticality at the heart of business models

The chief enemy of future business success is intransigence and extreme caution, according to Diego Tedesco, Director of Wholesale Fixed, Virgin Media O2 Business, who says proactivity and agility are now critical.

In his Comms Vision interview, Tedesco warned that inaction in the face of a transforming market is a high-speed route to failure, and he reiterated the importance of flexibility and adaptability alongside the criticality of leaders embracing change. "Sudden change was thrust upon all of us by Covid-19," he stated. "We evolved and adapted. But what about when change is not forced on us, when it requires us to take deliberate steps to make it happen? The top line question is 'why bother?'. Why risk destabilising the carefully laid foundations we put in place for our businesses?"

According to Forbes, cited Tedesco, three quarters of Fortune 1,000 companies have been replaced in ten years. Of the Fortune 500 companies existing today, Forbes says half will not exist within a decade. "Are we moving and changing fast enough?" asked Tedesco. "What do the past 18 months tell us about the future? Business success will be founded on agility and the ability to adapt, along with a willingness to challenge the status quo. Flexibility is not just critical to capture the growth opportunity we have, it's fundamental to our survival."

The last 18 months have seen the acceptance of a new working model, a new approach to doing business, but not a new technology. Now, flexibility is the guiding light, according to Tedesco. "There is a misconception that the pandemic drove a need for change, but it shined a light on how important it is for businesses to pivot quickly to rapid changes in their environment and market," he said. "There is an opportunity to take the learnings of the pandemic, maintain the momentum and move forward in a positive way. The question is how do we move from reactive change to proactive change that fully embraces the opportunity?"

Tedesco brought forward this challenge into the context of three change drivers. "Connectivity is the key enabler for digital technologies," he said. "Whether for small scale automation or software analytics, it all requires connectivity. And as use cases become more sophisticated, the demands on connectivity become greater."

Market confidence

A tidal wave of confidence is also required to wash away tendencies towards intransigence and inaction. "With any investment there is inherent risk," explained Tedesco. "But most IT managers in a survey we recently conducted (94 per cent) say investment will help their

because optionality in the digital space is becoming far broader and more complex. "We play a much more important role than ever in helping customers navigate that complexity," he commented. "Flexibility is critical in the current landscape. It's doable. When you set the target you find a way to do it."

But pivoting business models and value systems overnight is not easy, especially when the catalyst is a bolt from the blue. "When Covid emerged our partners told us they needed more flexibility, more autonomy over circuits, more transparency and less restrictive contracts," added Tedesco. "We were caught off guard. We were focused on product development and project delivery. Now we build propositions and commercial models that have customer and partner needs at their core. We could not have done that without remodelling our strategy

around business value. If you base your value model on what customers don't want your enterprise value will go down to zero."

As we have seen, for organisations to take advantage of disruption and innovation, agility is essential. And for the channel, opportunities to deliver flexible solutions have never been greater in a market defined as much by speed of change as widespread opportunity.

"We conducted research with the Centre for Economics and Business Research looking at the pace of digital transformation through the pandemic period," said Tedesco. "During

Business success will be founded on agility and the ability to adapt, along with a willingness to challenge the status quo

businesses grow, but the issue is that they don't believe they are agile enough. Their tools and infrastructure are too inflexible for them to make rapid decisions according to the changing environment around them. They are using legacy infrastructure and manual processes. How do we create the confidence for them to invest? Number one is flexibility. It helps businesses to test new technology and get rapidly to the right outcomes they need. If we create models that free up cash-flow for business it makes it a much easier decision to invest."

The final point is working collaboratively with customers and the industry, noted Tedesco,

y of embedding agility



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the first three months it advanced by about three years. In some sectors, like health, it was a five year jump. This tells us that there is a significant ability to adapt when we need to. People embrace the flexibility they now have - and they gain a better sense of well being."

In this fast moving world, creating new opportunities through high bandwidth connectivity will be critical in building the smart, agile communities of the future. But for this to happen connectivity must evolve, believes Tedesco. "The value of one gig Ethernet services has eroded 80 per cent in seven years," he said. "The industry should have thought of another value lever other than price. We haven't evolved it. Businesses should be able to tune down or switch off access connections to corporate sites; and at the same time dial up the high capacity low latency links that enable them to access applications around employee, collaboration and UC, to enable them to work in that new environment. The connectivity is not as flexible as the applications it supports."

In this context it is also easy to forget the customer outcome, warned Tedesco. "It is vital to maintain a focus on what you are trying to achieve for customers," he said. "With optionality comes complexity - customers can't see the

wood for the trees. That means the role we all play is about helping them to navigate the complexity. That's always been the case, but it becomes much more critical in a world where the options are so much greater. You can't predict what's going to happen in the future so you need flexible solutions that can adapt."

Agent of change

Tedesco describes himself as a 'change agent', and he passionately believes in giving customers the confidence they need to invest. "A thriving UK business landscape is critical to our success," he added. "We are at a crossroads where digital technology is deployed at every corner of society. One road is to embrace change - the other is BAU. You could call the status quo stable, safer, more predictable - but it's the exact opposite. The clear decision for me is to drive change, challenge the status quo, and not wait for someone outside of the industry to come in and flip it on its head because we haven't evolved. Let's embrace the opportunity and collectively raise the bar."

Unless dinosaur thinking is stamped out the channel could pay an enormous price for sitting on its hands. As Tedesco went on to show, Virgin Media O2 Business is embracing the need for change with a deep sense of

responsibility. For example, its sights are set on the potency of deploying compute capabilities close to customers and doing that rapidly - in months rather than having to scale up massive data centres which takes time and can be hundreds of miles away from the customer.

"Consider future use cases for technology, smart factories and smart robotics, deployments that need low latency and high capacity," he explained. "It's more than just fibre in the ground. You need compute power near customers because this allows the underlying technology to catch up with the applications, the robotics, the intelligent stuff that happens on top of it. Our parent companies Liberty Global and Telefonica have some fantastic joint ventures and we are looking at partnering with one of those to advance this. We are also exploring the opportunity for 5G with Telefonica and mobile-fixed converged services. Furthermore, we need to help businesses leverage their data. This is a huge untapped area."

Where Tedesco sees the biggest opportunities he also sees cross-industry collaboration as key to maximising market potential. "If we engage in dialogue and share knowledge and insight we have a much better chance of figuring out what we need to deliver to customers," he concluded. ■



Stobart's stark assessment and why we must act now

Current arguments about reducing carbon emissions miss the point – it's not about when and how, it's much more about moving ever faster and right now. On that there is no choice, according to Zen Internet CEO Paul Stobart.

In his VisionTalk, Stobart laid out many uncomfortable facts about climate change that should silence any arguments to the contrary. And he demonstrated through the clear evidence of science why we need to act superfast to build a sustainable future. "We are in deep deep trouble," he stated. "We are heading along a path to three degrees of global warming, and that's if everyone does what they say they are going to do at COP26 in Glasgow. Three degrees is the number you need to focus on, and it's not a good number."

With a moral conscience Stobart diligently conducted his own painstaking and lengthy research, all of which has been corroborated by technologists and climatologists. "Like many of us, during lockdown I started to think deeply about a lot of things, including climate change," added Stobart. "I thought about this in terms of 2100, which seems a long way off. Then it occurred to me that in the case of my children, their children will be around my age at that time. That's just two generations."

He demonstrated through the evidence of science why we need to act right now to build a sustainable future, and presented almost apocalyptic examples of climate related calamities. "South of the Channel Islands everywhere in the world will be extremely hot," he said. "In the Tropics it will be unbearable. There will be more people on the planet with less room to live."

"In this world, Gleneagles, the venue for Comms Vision, will be extremely cold because of the Gulf Stream which moves vast quantities of warm water to the North Atlantic, giving us our temperate climate. It sinks as it cools and goes back to the Tropics to cool the water there. But the Gulf Stream is slowing down – 20 per cent in the last

40 years. And as it slows down the risk of climate change becomes intense. Most predictions are that it's near a critical transition point. That means that by 2100 it would have slowed down by 40 to 50 per cent which is why it will be colder. But inland, the south of the UK will be baking hot."

Melt down mode

The reason the Gulf Stream is slowing down is twofold, noted Stobart: The general warming of the air, and the ice sheets that are melting. The Greenland ice sheet is melting very fast, and

have sea levels more than 50 meters higher than today, pointed out Stobart. "The last time that happened was 50 million years ago when it was four degrees warmer, no ice anywhere and palm trees in the Arctic Circle," he added. "That's the era we are heading back to at pace. And we have done all that in 150 years with fossil fuels."

Also in 2100, people will be hungry as grain yields decline by 10 per cent for every degree of warming. It gets more pronounced as each degree takes place. "Half of the world's population relies

on ice melt for their fresh water," said Stobart. "But the ice would have melted. I could keep going on about the oceans dying and the Amazon jungle forecast to disappear in 20 years. The Sahara would have doubled in size by 2100. It's not good. My grandchildren could be living in this environment."

If we work together as an industry, collaborate, share best practice, work through our supply chains up and down stream and work out ways to reduce emissions, we might just have a chance of making 1.5 degrees and avoiding that horrific future

the Arctic is also in melt down mode. "You can imagine getting to the North Pole by ship very easily," added Stobart. "Furthermore, sea levels are rising. By 2100 it's estimated that sea levels would have risen by two metres, enough to see London under water from Canary Wharf to Dartford, Chelsea and Hammersmith will go, Fulham will be under water at high tide and Battersea would have disappeared. And the area from Peterborough to the wash would be one brackish salty marsh."

With the ongoing melting of ice, it's perfectly possible that in hundreds of years we could

Stobart urged business leaders to reset their thinking and align with the existential threat of climate change. To support his argument further he cited the carbon budget. "Since the beginning of the industrial revolution, humankind has generated around 2,400 gigatonnes of carbon and shoved it into the atmosphere," he stated. "About 900 gigatonnes of that is still in the atmosphere. Scientists estimate that we have 300 gigatonnes of carbon left before we go past 1.5 degrees. We have a thousand gigatonnes before we get to two degrees. At two degrees we are in deep trouble."



nt of climate change truth



COMMS Vision is the leading annual leadership forum for CEO, MD and CTO delegates making up the major league of the UK reseller community. To find out more visit www.commsvision.com

“But at the moment we are generating 40 gigatonnes a year. The forests and the oceans can’t cope. Yes we’re planting two billion trees a year, which is great. The snag is that we are cutting down, burning, deforesting 10 million per year. So we face a major challenge in living within that critical 300 gigatonnes metric.”

Stobart cited evidence to show that every second humankind is generating 3,000 hot air balloons full of carbon dioxide and shoving it skywards. “In the time I talk at this event – 700,000 hot air balloons of carbon dioxide would have been shoved into the environment,” he said. “That’s enough to fill 1,500 Empire State Buildings – in 40 minutes.”

In seeking solutions Stobart argued that nuclear is as safe an energy source as you’ll find. “We must invest in nuclear - it’s green,” he said. “Hydrogen is really useful for heat intense industries like

steel, cement and glass, and for logistics and transportation where batteries just don’t work. Renewables today are still only seven per cent of global energy source. We have so much to do and only 300 megatons left. Scientists say that amounts to about seven years. The only sustainable way to do our bit is reduce carbon emissions dramatically and by 50 per cent.”

It’s too late

Zen has a net zero date of 2028, which Stobart says needs to be significantly brought forward. “By that time, six of the seven years would have gone,” he added. “It’s too late. The country as a whole is looking at 2050 – too late. India, 2070, who are they trying to kid? As business leaders we have a choice – we could all choose to reduce emissions by half from tomorrow. There will be costs and implications involved – but we could choose to do those things.

“If we don’t, our grandchildren will not forgive us. It’s important for all of us in our industry to reflect and see if we can choose to make a difference. To get it right, you’ve got to measure very accurately what you are emitting. And give your people a challenge to reduce their emissions – make them part of the issue. You’ll be amazed at how many ideas come out of nowhere.”

The winners of the next decade, says Stobart, will be those businesses that put climate change at the heart of their strategic ambitions and purpose. “There is no question that we have to change the way we do things and behave,” he urged. “If we work together as an industry, collaborate, share best practice, work through our supply chains up and down stream and work out ways to reduce emissions, we might just have a chance of making 1.5 degrees and avoiding that horrific future. It can be done if we act together, and act now.” ■

Comms Vision 2021 in pi

From climate change to the big switch off, from the fibre roll out to the march of digital, the return of Comms Vision at Gleneagles gave channel leaders and the UK's top reseller executives the opportunity to put Covid-19 behind them, understand the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead and do what they do best – meet and work together as a vibrant, flourishing community. To quote just one delegate, Jonathan Sharp from Britannic Technologies, 'The event was action packed with fantastic keynote presentations and I feel privileged to have benefited from them'. Roll on next year's event!



There was a traditional Scottish welcome for Comms Vision delegates.



Vaioni, Knight Corporate Finance and Inform Billing catch up at registration.



The Platinum sponsors are quizzed by Comms Dealer's Will Garside.



Gamma Channel Managing Director Daryl Pile delivered a compelling market overview.



Zen Internet CEO Paul Stobart delivered a sobering talk and discussion on climate change, urging every business to act now and make changes.



BT Wholesale Channel Director Gavin Jones warned about the closeness of the PSTN stop-sell.



A busy educational boardroom session.



Delegates enjoy the post first day fireworks sponsored by CityFibre.



Back together again at the first night networking dinner.



Nigel Barnett (Global4) pipped Adam Zoldan (Knight CF) to the loudest shirt at the event award!

ctures



The first night guest speaker was entertaining Radio 4 host and former Communards keyboardist the Rev Richard Coles.



Culture expert Kate Wood delivered a thought-provoking breakfast session on day two.



Business and sports psychology coach Jamil Qureshi opened up minds as well as the day two conference.



CityFibre founder and CEO Greg Mesch outlined his company's fast expanding fibre rollout plans.



TalkTalk Executive Chairman Sir Charles Dunstone underlined his company's status as the channel's challenger champion.



Gamma CEO Andrew Taylor stressed the importance of embracing UCaaS and CCaaS.



Virgin Media O2 Business Director of Wholesale Fixed Diego Tedesco gets his thoughts on camera.



Business supremo Justin King gave delegates some golden nuggets of advice on leadership and management.



Fidelity Energy, Inform Billing and Jola entertain delegates after an afternoon of meetings.



Pam Blanchard (ICA), Nicky Freeman (Gamma) and Ellie Allsey-brook (Inform Billing) get the last night celebrations underway with Gleneagles piper Andrew Low.



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White labelled to grow

NTA's commercial life began with a white labelling campaign that put branded products into the hands of resellers. Two decades later, the business continues to elevate partners in the hosted world, according to Managing Director and owner Paul White.



Paul White

the now common staple of hosted handset technology.

"In 2005 we began applying for our own number ranges, becoming one of the few companies that offered this and bringing us that bit closer to transitioning from a reseller to a service provider. This allowed us to provide customers with more freedom and flexibility to have and choose numbers based on aesthetics.

"We began building a platform from the ground up using a cloud-based solution that would include all the traditional features of ISDN lines without taking up the space. It was vital that the system was built to withstand the vast number of connections with both high uptime and reliability. The next step was to build the networks. Ten years ago, we proudly became an ISP. This gave us the opportunity to own our own IP ranges and peer with other networks."

The pandemic has accelerated change in the supply of telecoms services, but White is confident NTA can stay ahead of the game and help its partners maximise on the march to digital telecoms services. "We designed our systems and platforms to handle anything the industry throws at us, including the big switch off. We've spent nine years expanding the wholesale and technology market and we don't plan on stopping any time soon.

"We have a superb, loyal team and some of the stuff we're doing now we never would have dreamt of doing 20 years ago. When you feel like it can't get any better, it just does. For NTA it's onwards and upwards." ■

Twenty years ago, white labelling telephones was almost impossible, and some telecoms resellers resorted to a sticker covering the manufacturer's logo, which was both unsatisfactory and unprofessional. Most therefore took the decision to feed off the manufacturer's brand as a 'valued supplier' with strength and kudos in the market.

Back then, White launched his own reseller business, Nationwide Telephone Assistance, and recalls only too well the barriers suppliers built to protect their brands and, sadly, treat resellers as box shifters rather than solution providers. Thereby begun White's journey into what NTA is today, a fully fledged cloud-based communications service provider with many lessons learned from operating on the other side of the fence. "A large part of our journey has been creating and developing services to the channel, while setting an example and becoming

the provider we always wished we had," said White, who celebrates NTA's 20th anniversary this month.

His focus is to do things differently and support NTA's partner businesses with a 'behind the scenes', fully white labelled approach, so they can compete with web-based competitors and comparison sites while still maintaining a healthy margin. "Selling branded products can assure customers that they are purchasing something reliable, however partners are then directly competing with the rest of the world due to online shopping and other resellers selling the same handsets," he added. "With the help of the Internet they place themselves in a price comparison war and, let's face it, there will always be someone cheaper.

"To compete you must deplete your margins, but what if the product was your own? By branding your product you take yourself away from being another me-too product. Not only

are your products branded, but they have a layer of extra functionality that works directly with your hosted network. Potential customers are then able to take so much more from your business, rather than price. It's quite simple, really.

"White labelling products also allows partners to stand a much better chance of positioning themselves competitively in a vertical

We designed our systems and platforms to handle anything the industry throws at us, including the big switch off

market. By adding their own name to the product they have installed extra confidence in the sale. The first three rules of selling are: Sell yourself, the company and then the product. We have made this easier: Sell yourself, your company and you are the product."

Two decades ago White's long-term vision was to

create cloud-based products and services designed to be easy to manage and more importantly, easy to sell. He also firmly believed that good phone numbers remained important to resellers and their customers.

Early vision

"Back in the early 2000s, as hosted technology came into its own, so did we," recalled White. "We began developing a service with the

vision of creating a cloud-based telephony platform. We decided to call phone lines SIP Co-Lines. As you can probably guess, the name never took off, but SIP Trunking did. In those early days, creating VoIP products was an uphill battle as traditional phone companies simply didn't see the vision of cloud-based telephony. This struggle eventually led to



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As competition ramps up, do

As we navigate one of the most competitive periods in the history of our industry, business leaders must find ways to differentiate their offering and create brand loyalty.

This high level of competition is reflective of a healthy sector, with growth set to return to 16 per cent post-pandemic. However, increased competition has become the number one issue keeping MSPs up at night.

According to Datto's 2021 'Global State of the MSP' Report, 34 per cent of business leaders listed competition as their organisation's top challenge, with revenue growth in second place (27 per cent) and profitability in third (24 per cent). This is the first time that competition has topped the list.

The report stated, 'It makes sense that the MSP space is competitive and getting more so. Even in a global pandemic, many MSPs saw revenue growth, while lots of other industries did not fare nearly as well'.

We therefore asked this month's contributors, how can channel organisations most effectively differentiate and create loyalty in an increasingly competitive market?



TIM MERCER
VAPOUR

"The channel is an extremely 'busy' space right now. But customers are more discerning than ever. So, it's not just a case of vendors providing new tech that solves tomorrow's problems. It's about offering patient, consultative knowledge and support too – especially because tech adoption rates have rocketed, and many companies now find themselves overwhelmed with 'sticking plaster' solutions that aren't truly right for them. We're not interested in price wars. We're here to deliver really powerful technology that changes our customers' working lives – makes them more secure, more resilient, more productive, more growth-ready. That's the power of digital transformation, and customers now realise they don't have to embark on lengthy, scarily expensive projects to achieve results. It's the era of experience, after all, and I don't think the channel has always got this right. Every stage of delivery is being scrutinised now, and suppliers who get it right will thrive."



ANTHONY KARIBIAN
BONLINE

"Channel organisations will increasingly need to stay focused on their market segment or vertical and innovate relentlessly to be able to differentiate and compete successfully. There are too many top-quality competitors today in most segments and with the pace of innovation, it is very challenging to try to keep up with these "category killers" while trying to satisfy a broader audience. Even if you can innovate, what is very useful in one segment can be seen as a detractor or weakness in another segment. For example, the micro-business segment requires zero-touch automation at all levels to make the economics work while such automation would be of little use for the enterprise segment. The winners will be the focused innovators. They know the customers they want to focus on, and they innovate relentlessly around them while steering clear of "time bandits" - ie. non-core customers that distract and derail innovation."



DAVE REYNOLDS
XELION

"A basic rule of salesmanship is to identify customer needs and offer solutions that add value. Consequently, the critical factor for the channel is to sell value-added solutions which differentiate you from competitors, so you are not just in a price war. The key to winning long term loyal contracts over the next ten years will be comms providers' ability to deliver smart cloud services that integrate with third-party communications platforms and complex third-party software packages and CRMs, to deliver true, integrated UC solutions. We have seen that many channel vendors have very little control over their own platform they supply to the channel as they are also reselling the service themselves in their own brand. I would advise all channel partners to understand who the underlying developer behind a service is, how flexible are they when it comes to partner feedback and who makes the final decisions on both the roadmap and final product."



ANDREW DICKINSON
JOLA

"Mobile data is a high growth, high ARPU, high margin product that only around 1,000 resellers in the UK have properly productised. With so few channel competitors, these resellers are usually up against the networks direct. Consequently, they must sell products their customers need, that the MNOs can't offer. Channel-only mobile data aggregators have product development lifecycles of around six months vs the networks' 36 months. They offer products designed to be sold by resellers, that cannot be undermined by a retail MNO salesforce slashing prices at the last minute, just to retain the business. Furthermore, most MNOs do not have portals designed to be used by customers, let-alone resellers. Suppliers that have invested in fully automated parent-child portals give resellers a unique advantage over their competitors because they can selectively pass control (and administration cost) to their customers and package it as a value-added service."



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SOHINI RAITHATHA
REDSQUID

"Throughout recent years, customer expectations have changed massively, and basic support is no longer sufficient. Customers want wonderful support; it must be personalised and via multiple channels. We as businesses must provide this enhanced support, by utilising technology. At RedSquid we are migrating to a full omnichannel contact centre to meet these new customer expectations. This allows our customers to reach us via their favourite channel and creates a closer relationship. By utilising social media to create interactions with our customers, we are ultimately creating loyalty. We want our customers to love our company. Your brand is the best way to differentiate your organisation from others, and we use our brand to show that we are more than a technology partner. We differentiate with a strong CSR profile and a purpose to make a difference, as we take on the role of their advisers through the digital transformation."



VICKI MACKAY
9 GROUP

"Customer loyalty is your customer's commitment to your brand. As well as being able to offer the right products at the right price, a key driver for loyalty is plain and simple customer service. Understanding the power of providing positive and memorable experiences is key to building trust and gaining loyalty. High street brands, for example, focus on delivering exceptional levels of service. Staff are trained to understand that every customer interaction matters, and that the quality of service they provide can make or break loyalty. Successful businesses strive to give the customer the best possible experience at every touchpoint. This approach applies as much in the channel, as it does on the high street. A positive, enduring relationship can be achieved through honest conversations, trust and mutual respect. We employ a strategy around permission-based, relationship marketing and believe that regular and consistent communications play a role in building strong relationships with our partners."



MIKE KORKIDAKIS
WAVENET

"End customers have so much choice, with access to a plethora of product portfolios, immediate solution expertise and technical support. The market is hugely competitive, with every vendor offering some form of promotion or benefit for salespeople, aiming to keep their brand at the forefront of salespeople's minds. However, vendors must offer more, including valuable resources, education and collaborative campaigns, leading to an increased pipeline, broader opportunities, and a more loyal channel relationship. A real focus on true partnerships, taking joint risks, aligning strategies and analytics, and educating customers together can strengthen partnerships with value and credibility. End customers have more resources at their fingertips and more access to knowledge than ever before. Therefore, vendors and resellers must be at the forefront of delivering this knowledge and helpful insight. This approach will lead to the most successful results, creating loyalty and credibility every time."



CHRIS GOODMAN
FOCUS GROUP

"The essential nature of the services that the comms industry delivers has never been clearer. The pandemic highlighted the importance of adequate cyber security and hybrid working saw the demand for robust, agile ICT solutions grow at an unprecedented rate. Channel organisations need to step up and stand out – to deliver the right solutions for customers, to guide them through the ever-changing landscape of our sector and open their eyes to the ways in which technology can enhance their business. Focus Group endeavours to build long-lasting relationships with its customers through consistent communication; product-based training webinars and regular account reviews to ensure each business has the optimum technological set-up. Customer experience and satisfaction is the key to building loyal relationships. Communicate with your customers, pave the way to the best possible solution for their business and be an integral part of their journey. Connect and grow together."



STEPHEN WARBURTON
ZEN

"Businesses are increasingly facing pressure from their customers to deliver a better customer experience. Customers expect a better, faster and an increasingly digital experience. Channel partners can stand out by helping businesses understand how they can use technology to meet these changing needs. Over 250k businesses can now benefit from FTTP which is faster, more reliable and more scalable as business demands change. However, these faster speeds also rely on optimised WiFi and modern devices. Channel partners have a crucial role to play here in helping businesses make the most of these tools. Loyalty is derived from getting the basics right on service, keeping in regular contact with your customers in-life, as most focus all their energy on winning new customers. If you can demonstrate your solutions are driving demand, improving CX and improving efficiency you will build a loyal base."



GAVIN JONES
BT WHOLESALE

"The communications market is undergoing an exciting transformation. With the pandemic a catalyst, there are more offerings than ever. Businesses are thinking about how to use new technologies to optimise processes, however, this means channel organisations operate in an extremely competitive environment. Research by analyst Omdia found that 70% of enterprises are reconsidering their technology partners, with the top reasons to leave being poor service performance and support. Creating loyalty is crucial. Clear, consistent and jargon-free communication is a must-have. Channel organisations should speak candidly and listen to their partners' needs to create solutions that have market fit. That's why we created Partner Plus, to help our Channel Partners stand out through collaboration with our experts. Flexibility, too, will be a major part of defining the future workforce and partners' roles. Meeting constantly evolving needs will be achieved through innovating, expanding portfolios and even small amendments to contract terms. Flexibility and adaptation are becoming mainstays."

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Dearden retires



Antony Dearden

JOLA co-founder and Chairman Antony Dearden has returned to life as a retiree having been coaxed out of retirement in 2014 by CEO Andrew Dickinson to set up the Jola business alongside Adrian Sunderland, Lee Broxson and Cherie Howlett. Martin Harriman steps up as Chairman and Ronnie Smith, Jola's CFO, becomes Company Secretary.

"Antony has been an integral part of the team with his keen financial brain, and has been a great sounding board and consigliere for me," stated Dickinson. "Antony also held the role of Company Secretary and ran board meetings with military precision, checking every voice was heard and ensuring efficient and successful decision making. He has supported us at every stage of our growth and he will be dearly missed."

Dearden is a chartered accountant and trained with Price Waterhouse. He became a partner at Spicer & Pegler in 1975 and continued in this role with successor firms Touche Ross and Deloitte in Nottingham for 26 years. Since 2001 he acted as Non-Executive Director or Company Secretary for a number of private companies.

Also on the move...

VODAFONE'S Head of Commercial Joe Llewellyn is poised to lead the operator's channel strategy following the departure of Kathy Quashie who joins Capita as Chief Growth Officer in January 2022. Llewellyn joined Vodafone in 2006 and has held



Joe Llewellyn

several sales, marketing and commercial leadership roles across business, consumer and wholesale in the UK and globally. He started his career with the Mars Corporation and subsequently joined GlaxoSmithKline's consumer division. Llewellyn commented: "Our solutions spanning mobile, fixed, converged and IoT brings opportunities for our partners to support their customers with their digital transformation."

FORMER Virgin Media Director Ed Dannan has joined rural broadband provider Voneus as CFO. He brings more than a decade of experience within the telecoms industry and joins after three years as the Central Finance Director at Virgin Media where he played a key role in the integration



Ed Dannan

planning ahead of Virgin's £31 billion merger with O2. He previously held senior roles at T-Mobile and EE. "Having supported the delivery of previous generations of digital infrastructure to the UK, I believe Voneus is in a position to usher in a new era of rural connectivity," commented

Dannan. "Rural communities have been neglected for far too long by the traditional providers, and I'm in a position to drive Voneus' mission to change the status quo."

GLIDE Group has pulled in Bruce Girdlestone as Sales Director for the Higher Education Sector. He has over 25 years telecoms experience and spent the past two years setting up a sales team at Wireless Infrastructure Group. He previously ran a number of sales teams at Virgin Media Business. Girdlestone is now responsible for leading the student sector sales team focusing on PBSA and Higher Education requirements for student accommodation.

DAISY Communications has appointed Mike Newell as a Client Development Consultant. He brings 30 years sales experience within the ISP and telecommunication sectors. "My mission is to help businesses grow, retain and attract new customers with a portfolio of mobile connectivity, Unified Communications and contact centre solutions," he said. Richard Morse, Client Development Manager, commented: "Mike has the natural ability to design and sell solutions that help businesses increase their bottom line."

Vaioni brings in Ops executive

NICK Grimshaw has joined Manchester-based network operator Vaioni as Operations Director as the firm pushes on its growth journey to treble its size. He was previously Operations Director at Allvotec (formerly Daisy Partner Services) and in his 20-year-plus career in operational positions he was also Managed Services Director at Azzuri Communications.



Nick Grimshaw

Vaioni Managing Director Sachin Vaish

stated: "As an accomplished and forward thinking operations professional, Nick is a great addition to the Vaioni senior team as we continue our focus on driving a frictionless customer experience. His industry experience will be a great value add."

Grimshaw has led teams across product management, project management, service desk and service delivery functions, and has delivered multiple high value business transformation projects to organisations such as the Department of Health, British Nuclear, IBM, BBC, Fujitsu, Cap Gemini and Vodafone.

Six Degrees scales up with double hire

SIX Degrees has appointed Gareth Lailey as Chief Revenue Officer and Philip Wood joins the business as Chief Product & Technical Officer. The moves follow



Gareth Lailey



Philip Wood

the appointment of Chris Abbott as COO in October. Lailey joins from Rackspace where he was Sales Director and brings 15 years sector experience. Wood rocks up from easyJet where he was Director of Services and Transformation Lead.

"Today's organisations are recognising that cloud technology has the potential to help them achieve growth and differentiation," commented Six Degrees CEO Simon Crawley-Trice. "Gareth and Phil bring a proven track record in partnering with organisations and safely navigating them through this terrain. We've been open about the fact that Six Degrees is transforming to scale, these appointments support that."

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