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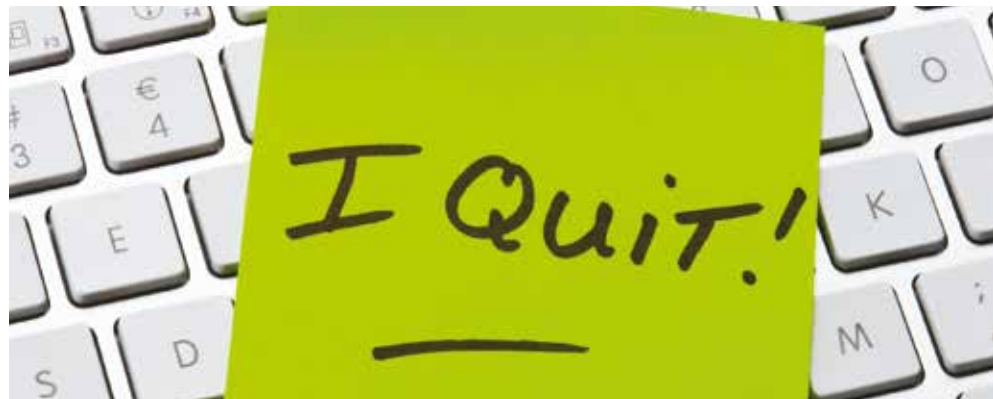
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This month's movers and shakers



# Staff loss fears spur cloud shift

**FEARS** of losing staff wedded to remote working will be a key driver for cloud adoption in 2022, which is just the job for resellers seeking to capitalise on a predicted boom in demand for cloud and collaboration solutions this year.

## SPECIAL REPORT

A quarter of British workers are set to jump ship if forced back into the office full-time according to research by RingCentral.

"This is why the Great Resignation is such a concern," stated Steve Rafferty, Country Manager UK&I, RingCentral.

"It's all very well to say that workers should return to the office but for many a hybrid working model has been a life-line. The data is clear: To retain

their staff businesses need to offer an environment that caters to modern requirements."

Organisations will have to stretch beyond their comfort zones to avoid the impact of the Great Resignation, observed Mitel CHRO Billie Hartless.

"In 2022, hybrid work will become the rule rather than exception," she commented.

"Many people, especially Gen Zs, will demand previously unheard of levels of work flexibility. Collaboration technolo-

gies will be used in new ways that support company culture and help a remote workforce stay engaged."

Mitel CIO Jamshid Rezaei noted that more business leaders are now considering new investments in hybrid cloud options.

"In 2022 we will see accelerating adoption of hybrid cloud as it delivers agility to grow and support remote employees, enabling companies to pivot as business demands evolve and change in an uncertain world."

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

IT'S time to move on from legacy networks and what better time to plan for 2025 than now. Pessimists will cite that statistics indicate that the challenge may already be an insurmountable mountain, given the number of PSTN lines to be upgraded between then and now. True, the channel

must act urgently to avert the potential carnage of a painful transition. But of all the conclusions that can be drawn from this, the most glaring is that the sector has not before faced such a big growth opportunity.

Milking legacy revenue streams until the last lap in the run up to 2025 is a false strategy. Unless, like Max Verstappen you have faith in a miracle of luck. But for us, there are no safety cars to intervene and help you close the gaps in the race to all-IP.

Openreach is well on the way to dismantling the PSTN network and there is no falling back to a slimmed down version of it come 2025. It is also a fact that end users will have no role for partners that do not grasp the all-IP opportunity. That is why the essence of 2022 New Year resolutions should be to look ahead with optimism, not sustain the pretence of an extended life for the legacy network when it is already a near dead duck.

The channel would be wise to concentrate all efforts on one objective – the move to all-IP and a future proofed business model.

Rather than risk playing catch up, it is time to harness the potency of digital, enhance growth prospects and the customer experience and secure the loyalty of your base. This is a racing certainty.

Why risk your base falling under the descending glare of rivals already living in the all-IP world when this once in a generation opportunity is in your hands right now? You know the way to a happy outcome, and Comms Dealer wishes all our readers a happy and prosperous New Year.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

# Rudak: Changes to ECC still fall short

AMENDMENTS to the Electronic Communications Code (ECC) designed to remove barriers that prevent network operators from upgrading and sharing infrastructure have been welcomed by Georgina Rudak, Head of Wayleave and a solicitor at telecoms law specialist Trenches Law, but the changes fall short of what is required, she claims.

The amendments include a requirement for telecoms operators to consider the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) as an option in their notices to landowners; automatic rights for operators to upgrade and share underground infrastructure; measures that enable operators to apply for time-limited access to certain types of land more quickly where a landowner does not respond to repeated requests for permission; and provisions to speed up negotiations for renewal agreements.

“There is a genuine intention to legislate in this area,” stated Rudak. “Without support from the UK Government the industry is likely to fall short of the 85% gigabit broadband coverage by 2025 target. However, we don’t believe the changes go



Georgina Rudak

far enough. While they provide an easier route for agreements to be imposed on unresponsive occupiers, we expect this will mirror the Telecommunications Infrastructure (Leasehold Property) Act 2021 in that where an occupier has previously been in contact but has since stopped responding, this new process will not be available.”

Rudak says the requirement to consider the use of ADR is a welcome move. “But we question if this is enough,” she added. “Whether this will assist where truly unreasonable terms

or costs are requested remains to be seen.

“We believe that professional costs associated with the acquisition of wayleave agreements is an area that requires a particular focus as they are becoming astronomical.

“ISPs are unable to justify fees in excess of £3,000 to facilitate a £35-£40 per month broadband connection.

“Overall, the changes are a step in the right direction, but legislation may need to go even further to support the roll out of full fibre broadband in the UK.”

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NEWS ROUNDUP

RADIUS has acquired Dublin-based Telcom, its tenth transaction in the telco space and first in Ireland. Radius CEO Bill Holmes said: "Radius has been in Ireland for over 25 years with its DCI fuel card brand and this partnership provides a platform to extend our range of services to customers." Liam Tully, CTO of Telcom, added: "This partnership allows us to achieve our ambitions for growth within the Irish and UK market and provides more opportunities for the business."

IN A BID to expand its business in the UK and Europe comms infrastructure provider BAI Communications has acquired Vilicom, which delivers 4G and 5G coverage solutions and last year was awarded a 20 year contract from TFL to deliver high speed mobile on the London Underground. It also penned a 20 year partnership with Sunderland City Council to create an advanced smart city. BAI Communications UK CEO Billy D'Arcy said: "We are working to connect the unconnected, and this acquisition will play a huge role in assisting us to achieve that goal. With its focus on indoor venues, Vilicom is helping to enhance connectivity for all."

## Prime sets up fourth acquisition

LONDON-based Prime Networks has acquired local MSP Our Tech Team, its fourth transaction and second in 2021.

The deal augments Prime Networks' customer base and brings more engineering resources to bolster project delivery and IT support services.

Prime Networks emerged from the reverse takeover of Modern Communications' IT division in 2013 and has been on a buy-and-build journey since 2018 following a debt funding package secured with Clydesdale Bank.

Prime Networks MD Mark Simons commented: "We have been watching Our Tech Team's progress closely for a number of years."

Our Tech Team founder Joel Lassman joins the Prime Networks board and will head up the account management function across the group.

Prime Networks now employs over 50 staff and provides IT services to over 400 SMEs and mid-market customers.

More acquisitions are in the pipeline as the company seeks to bolt-on right-fit MSPs.

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# Russell deal for Onecom



Martin Flick

LDC-backed Onecom has bagged Gateshead located Russell Telecom, its fourth transaction this year.

Russell Telecom started life over 35 years ago and the deal adds 1,500-plus customers to the Onecom Group.

Onecom CEO Martin Flick said: "Our businesses are a match and this transaction supports our strategy of acquiring strong businesses that share our culture, values and ethos. Russell Telecom has strength in the education sector which complements our specialisms."

Onecom acquired Olive Communications at the start of 2021 creating one of the UK's largest B2B connectivity and cloud providers.

The Olive deal was followed by the acquisition of 9 Group which added thousands of customers and hundreds of channel partners. The 9 Group acquisition

preceded the purchase of Devon-based IP Office.

Onecom was founded in 2002 and employs over 600 people in offices across the UK. Its key tech partners include Vodafone, Mitel, Samsung, Apple, Gamma and Five9.

NEWS ROUNDUP

8X8 HAS acquired fellow cloud business Fuze in a deal that gives 8x8 access to a significant customer base as it seeks to advance upgrade opportunities. 8x8 CEO Dave Sipes confirmed that customer-partner relationships will be protected. He also said the acquisition creates significant new revenue opportunities with an expanded solution portfolio and complementary partner-led value added services." For those Fuze customers that want the full benefit of XCaaS, we intend to offer a seamless upgrade to 8x8 XCaaS," stated Sipes. "With roughly 300 enterprise customers and over 400,000 total paid business users, Fuze increases our global scale."

## comms dealer

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# Invicta snared by AVC One



Russell Parker

CLOUD MSP AVC One has expanded its comms portfolio with the acquisition of Tunbridge Wells-based Invicta Telephone Sales (ITS), adding specialisms in digital communications, connectivity, technical services and consultancy.

ITS operates across a range of sectors including transportation, architecture and education, predominantly in the south and south east of England. All staff will continue to work out of their current offices.

AVC One MD Russell Parker said: "We have made this acquisition on the back of three years

strong organic growth, where we have tripled in size. Organic growth continues to be important, but we will also consider strategic acquisitions on a case by case basis where there is a good fit for our business.

"ITS's portfolio complements our business, adding value to current customers while creating new opportunities."

Simon Beaumont, MD of ITS, commented: "It will be business as usual for ITS but with the added benefit of having access to AVC One's rich resources, additional services and expertise."

## NEWS ROUNDUP

XELION'S partners now have access to Voiceflex's SIP trunks following a link up between the providers. Voiceflex operates its own core IP network using three data centres, meaning no single point of failure. Voiceflex has also added dual audio codes using AWS with the development of its Microsoft Teams Direct Routing application. Voiceflex Sales & Marketing Director Paul Taylor stated: "The transformation to IP creates an opportunity for improved customer experience and business efficiency. Delivering a dependable service is critical."

BT's NEW HQ in Aldgate (One Braham), London, houses 3,500 people, smart building technology, flexible workspaces and collaboration areas with ground floor space for community engagement and community projects. Philip Jansen, Chief Executive, said: "This represents a changing BT, one that is more agile, forward thinking and able to adapt to the challenges and opportunities presented by the acceleration of digital technologies."

# Atos builds muscle in north Europe via Cloudreach buy

ATOS' multi-cloud and security capabilities have been boosted by the acquisition of Cloudreach. The deal adds circa €100m revenue and more than 600 employees.

Cloudreach started life in 2009 and is headquartered in London with offices in the USA, Canada, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Switzerland and India. It holds over 1,000 certifications across AWS, Microsoft Azure and Google Cloud Platform.

"Cloudreach has strong synergetic potential, notably in Europe, and enhances the



Adrian Gregory

value of our past acquisitions," said Adrian Gregory, Acting co-CEO of Atos.

"Atos Northern Europe now has a potent combination to deepen the development and delivery speed of digital

services. Atos will also allow Cloudreach to extend into North America and other regions of the group."

Brooks Bocherding, Cloudreach CEO, said: "Our partnerships with Amazon, Microsoft and Google will be accelerated by our combination with Atos. It offers a global platform of technology assets and expertise enabling clients to drive digital capabilities at scale."

The transaction is expected to complete in Q1 2022.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

MANUFACTURERS and resellers of consumer connectable products may be fined up to £20,000 a day following new rules under the Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure (PSTI) Bill. It requires manufacturers, importers and distributors of digital tech which connects to the Internet or other products to meet new cybersecurity standards. NCSC Technical Director Dr Ian Levy said: "The requirements this bill introduces, which were developed jointly by DCMS and the NCSC with industry consultation, mark the start of the journey to ensure that connected devices on the market meet a security standard that's recognised as good practice."

AVAYA has reversed over a decade of annual revenue declines with Q4 revenues of \$760m and FY21 revenues of \$2.973bn, an increase of 3.5% on the previous year. For fiscal 2021, software and services accounted for 88% of revenue, flat year-over-year. Cloud, Alliance Partner and Subscription made up 44% of revenue, up from 33% a year ago. Jim Chirico, President and CEO, said: "This year marked a substantive milestone as we have navigated a journey of transformation."

# MS3 fired up by PE boost



Guy Miller

FIBRE network operator MS3 Networks is ramping up its build plans following a partnership with European infrastructure fund Asterion and the arrival of three execs each with strong industry experience.

The Hull-based wholesale-only provider plans to expand its network and build a 10 gigabit-capable network to over 500,000 homes and businesses.

MS3 will build on its existing fibre ring through Hull and to more than 30 additional locations in the region.

The incoming trio at the centre of MS3's ambitions are former TalkTalk exec Guy Miller who joins as CEO; ex-ZTE finance chief Zarif Imam comes in as CFO; and tech entrepreneur

Chris Byrd, a co-founder of M247, joins as CTO. MS3 founders Tony Hales and Ben Tarbotton will continue to play an active role in the business.

Miller stated: "MS3 is well placed to become a major regional player in the full fibre market in the years to come."

Councillor Daren Hale, who is the Leader of Hull City Council, commented on the development: "This is another significant investment coming into a Hull-based business, especially one which supports the aims of our economic strategy to position Hull as a leading city in digital technologies."

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# Tech giant poised for expansion

FOLLOWING a 200-head hiring spree conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic Infinity Works, which is part of Accenture, is set to strengthen its presence and influence in Birmingham and Glasgow.

Infinity Works created a data engineering programme in partnership with Generation UK to help young people in Birmingham get into a career in technology, and is now looking to create opportunities for cloud, data and full stack engineers in the city.

Infinity Works MD Richard Allen commented: "Birmingham offers us the chance to grow our presence in a city with a flourishing tech community.

"Greater Birmingham is home to the largest and fastest growing developer population of all UK regional cities."

Infinity Works first revealed its ambitious Scottish expansion plans early last year.

The strategy involves extending its reach from its base in Edinburgh to Glasgow.

Allen commented: "Glasgow's digital technology economy is ranked as one of the fastest growing in the UK, as well as being home to a growing digital start-up community."

NEWS ROUNDUP

ELITE GROUP IOM, a division of Elite Group that operates in the Isle of Man and includes Wi-Manx, has joined forces with IT Works to form Elite Group IT. The deal unites Elite's strengths in telecoms and broadband with IT Works' experience in IT support and cloud services. "It made perfect sense for us to become one tight-knit family," said Matt Newing, Elitegroup.im Chairman. "With IT Works we don't have to reinvent the wheel in the island's IT space." The IT Works and Elite teams will move into one building and led by CEO Ryan Cleator. Wi-Manx remains dedicated to providing residential broadband and home phone services.

THREE UK has boosted the omnichannel experience for customers across telesales, digital sales, indirect partners and retail sales following a multi-million pound investment in business infrastructure including more than 100 new jobs. "To support our channel and customer experience we have completed phase one of our digital transformation," commented Mike Tomlinson, MD of Business, Three UK. "We now have a digital platform upon which our future propositions will be launched."

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# Bamboo beefs up managed services

BAMBOO Technology Group's acquisition of TechTeam strengthens its IT managed services offering, adding expertise while expanding the customer base and providing a boost to its regional MSP footprint.

Worcestershire-based TechTeam was established in 2006 and has a particular focus on the small to mid-market.

Bamboo kicked off its transition from telecoms services to becoming an MSP with the acquisition of Tech Op Solutions in 2019.

CEO Lorrin White is also focused on the south west cyber and technology communities; and the group's software development capabilities have seen Bamboo awarded inclusion in the Crown Commercial Service's Technology Services 3 Framework.

Furthermore, White is heavily involved in advancing education and employment in the sector, working in conjunction with the West of England Institute of Technology and The Cyber Resilience Centre for the Southwest.

"Our overarching purpose at Bamboo is in helping others develop and grow," she stated. "This is as much about the



Lorrin White

efficiency and productivity of the here and now as it is about protecting future operations.

"With TechTeam, we are now positioned to educate and inform a broad audience of business people so that they can confidently connect and grow.

Whether it's business as usual or digital transformation programmes, it is imperative that we have the right people, with the necessary expertise, delivering all the right elements."

TechTeam was founded in 2006 by its CEO James Green.

# ETB Technologies strengthens networking kit refurb capacity

DUMFRIESSHIRE-based ETB Technologies is able to refurbish networking equipment in under an hour following investment in a new workshop.

The business has witnessed a significant rise in demand for networking equipment and streamlining processes along with more space to work has doubled its capabilities.

MD Nick Stapleton said: "The demand for networking

equipment has risen considerably over the past year with businesses looking for new and faster ways to connect and securely share data. Our goal is to quickly supply our customers with products, so we knew growing our networking workshop was a priority.

"Rather than solely relying on increased staff numbers to achieve this, we also reviewed our internal processes.

"We expanded the workshop's footprint and changed our storage and testing spaces to improve the workflow and increase efficiency.

"As a result, our staff can refurbish networking equipment in under an hour. This means we have doubled the total number of networking equipment each person can refurbish in a week, with no loss of quality."

See page 26

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## Driving Opportunity with Ideas Lab 3.0

Thursday, 25th of November, saw the Pragma team successfully deliver their third Ideas Lab event to an audience of channel partners. The event presented a perfect opportunity to explore the hottest insights into seizing new opportunities from Ericsson-LG's technology offerings. The event was hosted by Pragma's Sales and Marketing teams and produced alongside digital marketing partners GetCrisp.

The digital event began with a presentation explaining how the Cloud communications market is changing due to a more tech-savvy customer base and why sales and marketing teams will need to adapt their approach. Presenter Will Morey emphasised the need to combine sales and marketing techniques to create a loyal customer base.

Commenting on his opening presentation: "The traditional sales and marketing roles we previously knew are changing to accommodate the fast-paced digital selling environment. Sales and Marketing are increasingly becoming more integrated into one another - salespeople need to take on marketing roles and vice-versa. People still aren't working in the office five days a week, so it's important to integrate your process with remote selling and new techniques."

Pragma then introduced their new Hub Portal, exclusively available to Pragma reseller partners. The bespoke portal is designed to enhance a partner's sales and marketing toolkit by delivering a range of helpful video guides, high-quality brochures, white-labelled marketing campaign material and an intuitive quote builder.



Ed Savory, Business Development Director at Pragma

The live stream then led to Pragma's Business Development Director Ed Savory providing an overview of

iPECS's new WebRTC collaboration service, iPECS ONE and the benefits the technology can provide to improve user experience, customer service and cost-effectiveness.

Ed then took attendees through the history of WebRTC and how the technology has advanced in its ten-year journey, with one of its originators being Ericsson. He concluded with why the technology is at the forefront of collaboration and can enhance a channel partners collaboration capability as it has for industry leaders like Google and Facebook.



Helen Ranaghan, Business Development Director at Pragma

Providing insights on how prioritising customer retention can help businesses to thrive was Helen Ranaghan, Business Development Director at Pragma. By demonstrating the new iPECS Analytics solution, she presented the functions and benefits and how its in-depth reporting functionality and monitoring tools can directly enhance staff performance and ensure more successful marketing campaigns. iPECS Analytics will be launched to Pragma reseller partners in Q1 of 2022.

The final speaker of the event was Richard Knight, Director of GetCrisp highlighting how using social media can generate sales leads through referrals. He explained how the leverage of previous good reviews allows sales staff to make inroads quicker and connect with decision-makers more effectively. He added: "Don't be afraid to get your personality across; if you're happy to say it in a meeting, you should be happy to say it on social media."

If you didn't get the chance to watch the Ideas Lab event live, each presentation is available to watch on Pragma's YouTube channel. Visit [www.wearepragma.co.uk](http://www.wearepragma.co.uk) to find out more about partnering with Pragma and Ericsson-LG Enterprise.

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# Top Microsoft MSP snared by Advania

NORDIC IT services provider Advania has secured a UK foothold with the acquisition of top Microsoft partner Content+Cloud.

The deal builds on Advania's bases in Sweden, Iceland, Norway, Finland and Denmark.

The combined group's turnover is now more than £800m with staff numbers standing at circa 3,500.

Content+Cloud CEO Peter Sweetbaum will continue to lead the business alongside the existing senior leadership team.

Advania CEO Mikael Noaksson commented: "Joining forces with Peter and his team is an opportunity for Advania to enhance its customer proposition and scale our offering outside the Nordics."

"The acquisition is a major step towards becoming a leading northern European IT services provider."

Content+Cloud operates across all three Microsoft clouds, including Modern Workplace, Azure and Dynamics.

Sweetbaum said: "Becoming part of the Advania Group presents an exciting opportunity for the group to build a leading European technology and transformation provider."



Peter Sweetbaum

According to ECI Partners its sale of Content+Cloud generated a return of 4.1x and an IRR of 32.1%. ECI invested in Content+Cloud, then called IT Lab, in 2016.

"Over the last five years we have grown organically and acquired key businesses within the Microsoft ecosystem,

creating a scalable platform from which we can continue to build," stated Sweetbaum.

Goldman Sachs Asset Management remains the majority shareholder of the Advania Group.

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## BDUK to gain greater powers in April as Executive Agency

THE Government's broadband delivery body, Building Digital UK (BDUK), is to become an Executive Agency next April as part of efforts to ramp up the rollout of gigabit broadband.

Executive Agencies are focused bodies within government departments set up to deliver a service fundamental to the policy of their sponsor department. They have more operational autonomy.

BDUK currently sits within DCMS and is delivering the Government's £5bn Project Gigabit to bring faster and more reliable Internet speeds to hard-to-reach areas.

The Government has made a commitment for at least 85% of the UK to have access to a gigabit-capable broadband connection by 2025.

Digital Infrastructure Minister Julia Lopez said: "National

gigabit speed broadband coverage has jumped from 6% to 60% in just two years.

"We are giving BDUK greater freedom and flexibility to ramp up rollout and expand its operations to create new jobs, boost economic growth and level up communities."

The agency will have a new corporate governance structure, including a new board and new HQ in central Manchester.

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# Professional Services: how a helping hand can boost your business

By **Faz Rasool**, Senior Manager – Professional Services at BT Wholesale

When it comes to growing your business, channel partners have a lot to juggle. They are not only a seller of technology critical to business operations, but also a source of ongoing counsel, solution maintenance and future strategy guidance. Get it right and partners will strengthen relationships, add value and drive business. But providing everything to a high standard is a big ask reliant on numerous moving parts and processes.

Professional Services can make life easier. Enabling experts to lend a hand on those vital functions – whether that be access to engineers or time-consuming admin work, for example – they fit around your plans and existing resources. You, channel partners, can then focus on what you do best, serving customers and growing your business.

Professional Services isn't there to replace your existing workforce, it's there to compliment it. So when you have peaks in your business you can in effect 'turn on the tap' to dedicated resource to enable you to deliver your required outcomes.

## What's driving the all-IP technology revolution?

There is a huge opportunity for channel partners who can support customers' digital transformation journeys and boost all-IP transitions. The move away from legacy-based solutions is a technological evolution being driven by a few factors.

By December 2025, the PSTN and ISDN will be switched off meaning all legacy services must be migrated to all-IP alternatives to ensure futureproof connectivity and voice capabilities.

This is happening at a time when business internet usage is increasing. They are turning to digital tools to operate and improve performance.

The need for flexible voice and collaboration have become critical with the rise of remote working, and that was prior to the work from home guidance being reintroduced in early December 2021. Supporting such capabilities requires connectivity resources beyond legacy infrastructure.

Finally, BT is investing significantly into next generation networks.

Networks offering greater resilience, bandwidth and capacity increase the opportunities available to channel partners, who can provide solutions and services that can supercharge customer performance.

## Are you prepared?

The all-IP transition is already in motion, so it's time for channel partners to understand your own strategy so you can provide and flourish in this new era.

The first step is to evaluate your own portfolio. How much of your revenue is tied to legacy solutions? Have you thought about edge use cases, as the effects of the switch-off stretch far beyond phone lines? Do you have a roadmap for introducing alternatives and ceasing services? How will you manage and educate customers, so their digital transformation is seamless?

There are many questions you need to ask yourself to ensure you're prepared. And at BT Wholesale, we can help. Our Audit service can work with you so we can understand your business. Then we'll guide you to ensure your portfolio is futureproofed and allows you to diversify services so you can increase customer wallet share through deeper integration.

## Getting to know your customers

To maximise the value you add to customers, it's imperative that you understand their needs. There's no one-size-fits-all with all-IP and you should identify the business use cases as this will have driven the decision around which legacy circuits they purchased.

With this information you can then present the most suitable all-IP substitution. Whether it's point-to-point, point-to-

multipoint or 4G/5G mobile connectivity, for instance, you can provide accurate counsel which leads to happy customers, lasting relationships, and a growing business.

Getting into the nitty gritty of customers takes time, however. That's where Audit and Substitutional Analysis Professional Services can lend a hand. Working with BT's experts gives you access to a wide range of specialists that can get under the bonnet of customers – or prospective customers – while you focus on delivering a first-class service.

Not only does this provide you with a faster route to a positive outcome, but it also allows you to take on projects that may otherwise be difficult to manage solo due to size, location or expertise. Professional Services reduces the risk of taking bigger opportunities.

## A seamless customer experience

BT Wholesale's Professional Services have been developed to help channel partners grow businesses. Providing access to support across a whole range of services, we can work with you so that your service never drops.

From helping you to audit and migrate customers, to managing orders, projects and logistics, you can pick and choose the services that will empower you to boost operations without increasing risk.



Let's work together to facilitate the all-IP era. For more information on BT Wholesale's range of Professional Services, visit [here](#).



NEWS ROUNDUP

IOT service provider North has appointed Danuta Gray as Chair of the Board. She brings over 25 years experience in the telecoms sector holding roles at BT and was CEO of Telefonica O2 Ireland between 2001-2010 as well as Executive Director of Telefonica Europe. She said: "I am joining North as we look to accelerate growth across areas such as private 5G and IoT." CEO Glen Williams added: "Danuta's experience in scaling businesses and her knowledge of the sector makes her the perfect Chair to lead the North board as we expand into new areas."

HYPEROPTIC has pulled in Lisa Neale as MD of Infrastructure reporting into CEO and founder Dana Tobak. Neale joined BT as an engineer aged 18 and spent 20 years rising through the ranks and held a number of leadership roles at Openreach including Director of Fibre Build in UK East and Director of Fibre and Network Delivery in UK West. She said: "I am looking forward to collaborating with the senior team on new innovative tools and techniques that will help fast track our rollout schedules. I will be able to add a lot of value from consolidating everything I have learnt through my career."

# Focus shares out its gains



Chris Goodman

FOCUS Group has handed shares in the company to nearly 200 of its employees.

The business confirmed that 185 of its staff have taken the opportunity to join the Save As You Earn (SAYE) share scheme for 2021. More than 50% of eligible workers now hold equity in Focus Group.

Co-founder and Director Chris Goodman said: "Our people have been at the heart of our success since we founded the business back in 2003. The My Focus Fund gives staff an opportunity to participate in the future growth of the company and share in success financially via share option arrangements."

Focus Group, which received private equity backing in 2020, launched the scheme after

announcing that its revenue is set to grow from £79m in 2020 to an expected £116m in 2021.

Despite the impact of Covid lockdowns during the first quarter of 2021 and significant investment in people with the recruitment of over 70 new employees, the business will see EBITDA grow from £13.5m in 2020 to £18.5m in 2021.

Goodman added: "It's about creating a connected culture – a connection to our mission, our vision and values, our community and each other. I've always dreamt of being in a position to launch this scheme and to enable our people to share in our ongoing success."

Focus Group is headquartered in Sussex and has eight regional offices across the UK.

# DI lifts roll out target on £100m

DIGITAL Infrastructure (DI) is set to connect one million premises over the next six years after a £100m funding boost from Basalt Infrastructure Partners.

Digital Infrastructure has hubs in Cheshire, Essex and the midlands. A fourth hub is set to launch near the Scottish border this year in a bid to reach circa 80 towns and cities by 2027.

This investment also boosts sister ISP Be Fibre's ability to deliver residential and business connectivity over the network.

Up to 500 jobs will be created by the end of 2022 to support the growth of both organisations. And Charlie Ruddy joins as CEO bringing 20 years comms industry experience.

He said: "There are only a handful of times in your career when you're able to truly make a difference and this is one of them. We can positively influence how communities live, work and play, not to mention how people view the provision of what is the fourth utility."



Charlie Ruddy

NEWS ROUNDUP

ULTRAFAST rural broadband provider Gigaclear has secured the next phase of funding to support its roll out project in some of the most underserved rural parts of the country. Commenting on the £190m facility CFO Ian Wade said: "Gigaclear operates mostly in rural areas, upgrading the infrastructure in communities that have historically been left behind in terms of Internet access. This round of debt funding secures our ability to deliver our target of connecting 500,000 homes and businesses to our ultrafast full fibre network by 2023."

COUNTY Broadband has created a Bespoke Connections Team to find and deliver methods of connecting the remotest premises on the outskirts of villages back to a core main network. The team of rural experts is working on around 200 projects ranging from a single premise to a group of 30 that all want to connect to a village's FTTP network post-build. Gavin Ashkettle, Manager, Bespoke Connections Team, commented: "We will ensure no one is left behind, including the hardest to reach premises that fall outside each village's spine network, which is typically about 10-15%."

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# Neos Networks delivers cutting edge technology following investment

Over the last 18 months, Neos Networks have been investing heavily in the expansion of their connectivity network. So much so that, in November, they announced the completion of a project that enabled them to double their UK presence, unbundling some 550 exchanges and extending their fibre footprint from 20,000km to an impressive 34,000km.

Following its completion, we caught up with Business Development Director for Wholesale at Neos Networks, Simon Willmott, to discuss how the project came about, what's next for the business and why he believes high capacity connectivity is the future for the telco space.

**What made Neos Networks decide to invest in unbundling exchanges?**

We recognised early on the importance of layer two connectivity services, like Ethernet and Optical, and how they, and the bandwidths that comes with them, can help better serve fast-paced, growing businesses. In fact, way back when, we were the first national Ethernet provider in the UK.

Back in 2016 we initially launched an Ethernet expansion programme, named Project Edge. This initiative saw us identify 54 exchanges to add to our network, allowing us to serve 200,000 business postcodes and enabling us to provide our customers with market-leading Ethernet connectivity at more competitive rates. Over the years, Project Edge has grown legs. Today we have 550 exchanges on-net and serve near-on 750,000 business postcodes across the nation, an achievement that will help underpin the UK Government's target for full fibre, gigabit connectivity to 85% of UK premises by 2025.

**Following the news that you'd doubled your network reach, what's next for the business?**

“By offering connectivity out of 550 exchanges... we enable our partners to take advantage of our well established, highly reliable fibre infrastructure.”

*Simon Willmott  
Business Development Director, Neos Networks*



We've recently announced an exciting new initiative for Neos Networks, bringing high capacity fibre access direct to four key business districts across the UK; London, Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester.

This metro access project see's us offer new 'last-mile' services direct to nearly 34,000 regional business and office locations, allowing us to deliver full end-to-end connectivity, bypassing third-parties like Openreach. This enables our partners to access a service delivered wholly by a single supplier - Neos Networks - and allows for more competitive pricing as well as better visibility on a connection.

Deployment is already underway with Liverpool set to come onstream at the start of next year. Birmingham and Manchester are due to go live from the middle of 2022 and the City of London is set to follow in February 2023.

**How have you seen the industry change over the last few years and what are you doing to support this?**

It's evident to us that the market is seeking out higher capacity services more than ever before, particularly following another tricky year with the pandemic that led to many businesses re-evaluating their IT strategy once again. As part of our Edge investment, we therefore made sure to increase the capacity of our exchange network.

Today, most of our on-net exchanges offer Ethernet services up to 10Gbps as standard with NNIs up to 100Gbps, and Optical connectivity ranging from 10Gbps - 100Gbps. This allows our partners to backhaul connectivity and gain access to exchanges rather than having to invest themselves.

For an industry where just a few years back, 1Gbps Ethernet services were enough to support business requirements, the move to 10Gbps connectivity feels like the natural next step for many. We were keen to pre-empt this move by introducing the higher capacity service sooner rather than later. And it's a step that is already paying dividends as we see a huge proportion of our 400+ resellers

already quoting and ordering at these increased bandwidths.

**How does your network investment benefit the channel market?**

Quite simply, as our network grows, so too does our reach and, in turn, the reach of our partners. By offering connectivity out of 550 exchanges, 676 points of presence and 90 data centres we enable our partners - and their end customers - to take advantage of our well established, highly reliable fibre infrastructure.

If you add to that the fact that we have over 20 years' worth of expertise, are known in the industry for leading net promoter scores and that we serve mission-critical services to some major players in the UK economy, there really has never been a better time to talk to us about partnering.

What's more, we always keep our finger on the pulse in terms of what's happening in the market and how our pricing fares against that of our competitors.

**How can partners access the extended reach?**

The easiest way to access our services is via our online pricing and ordering tool, LIVEQUOTE.

Another key investment for us, our LIVEQUOTE portal was enhanced in September 2020 and now offers better supplier choice and pricing options than ever before, giving service providers more transparency and choice. ■



A woman in a business suit stands with her back to the camera, reaching out towards a futuristic digital cityscape. The city is composed of glowing blue and white lines and nodes, overlaid with various network-related icons such as a Wi-Fi symbol, a cloud, a smartphone, a heart rate monitor, a car, and a house. The background shows a real city at night with illuminated buildings and streets.

# Our B2B connectivity network is now available in **550** UK exchanges

Over the last 18 months, we've invested heavily in our UK-wide network.

Today, we can offer high capacity Ethernet, Optical, Dedicated Internet Access and Dark Fibre connectivity across our **34,000km** fibre network from **550** exchanges. Quote and order these services from our free-to-use price comparison portal, LIVEQUOTE.

Speak to us about partnering today →

# An Active role model for

Aside from co-running one of the UK's leading mobile solution providers Jo Wimble-Groves is an award winning author and blogger and a leading light in the fight for equality in the business world. Here she explains how channel leaders can drive change in our industry and inspire young women to pursue a career in ICT.

**W**imble-Groves' opening comment when asked how young women can make a start in tech was, 'Put your hand up and don't be afraid'. Her track record to back up that statement would inspire any youngster, regardless of gender, but she's clearly a role model for young women seeking to overcome stereotypical barriers and build a successful career in the STEM sectors.

Having steered the rapid growth of London-based Active Digital alongside her brother Richard Groves for a quarter of a century, the mother of three has created a much-loved blog and website (Guilty Mother) to inspire women juggling careers and parenthood, and has written a book (Rise of the Girl – Seven Empowering Conversations to have with your Daughter) to help parents motivate young daughters. She is also an ambassador for STEM, regularly sharing her story with students at schools and universities all over the UK. Her blog is now followed by 55,000 people worldwide.

In March 2019, Wimble-Groves was one of 100 women invited to No.10 Downing Street to meet the Prime Minister on International Women's



Jo Wimble-Groves

**Young female students are not seeing role models that can inspire them to opt for STEM careers. I hope I can be someone they can look up to**

Day and in 2020 won the Entrepreneur Award at the FDM Everywoman in Technology Awards. Like so many ICT entrepreneurs, her career had humble beginnings and as a young woman in the male dominated mobile sector she had to learn to be fearless,

selling her first phone at the tender age of 16.

#### Putting your hand up

"I left school after finishing my GCSEs and went to a nearby sixth form college to study media, art and sociology," she said. "My older brother Richard had

started selling mobile phones as a sideline project and somewhere along the line I put my hand up to work with him. Fast forward over 20 years and we are still working together to this day. When I first came into the industry, I was one of only a handful of women in my mobile partner

community sector and I was probably the youngest. There were no female role models around me, or none that were visible to me at the time, and that remains an issue.

"I used to find myself trying to blend into the background

# young women

until I realised that I could use my point of difference as a source of strength and an opportunity to leverage the Active brand. I started to recognise that being different is a good thing and put myself forward as an ambassador for STEM. I wanted to be part of a movement responsible for finding our next generation of girls in tech. It was time for me to be seen, to use my voice and to ask our girls to use their voices too for the power of good."

## Stereotyping

According to the WISE Campaign, which encourages women and girls to value and pursue science, technology, engineering and maths-related courses, only 24 per cent of STEM workers are women and despite rising numbers of unfilled jobs the industry continues to struggle to attract a more diverse workforce. Wimble-Groves believes the root cause of this is the stereotyping of men and women in STEM careers.

"In several studies, when children are asked to draw a mathematician or a scientist, girls were twice as likely to draw men as they were to draw women," she added. "I considered what could be done to change this and what was happening for girls. Was something this simple a reason why girls are not choosing a career in STEM? Stereotypes and biases can shape the opinion on what women in STEM should look like and we need to work now to drive change.

"Young female students are not seeing role models that can inspire them to opt for STEM careers. I hope I can be someone they can look up to. This is one of the reasons

why I now spend time going into schools, colleges and universities to share my story. We all have a story to tell, but how often do we tell it? Just joining a school assembly, taking 30 minutes of your time could really help spark a future in STEM for a child sitting in front of you."

Wimble-Groves hopes successful women in technology will stand up and lead the fight for change. "As data shows, our girls are not inferior to boys when it comes to STEM," she commented. "We just need to ensure we are giving girls the support and a positive environment to enable them to focus on growing their natural STEM skills. It's important for leaders to show girls what female engineers and scientists look like, to tell them about women who are STEM history makers and encourage successful women in STEM to talk to students. This is how we can bring more gender diversity to STEM positions.

"Diversity is important to us at Active Digital because it brings together individual differences, life experiences, knowledge, inventiveness, innovation, self-expression and capabilities. We recognise that the talent our employees invest in their work represents a significant part of not only our company culture, but our reputation and company's achievement as well. Overall, we embrace what makes our employees unique and we're proud of that. I can honestly say that working in the technology sector is incredible and I'm so grateful for it. We are so fortunate to work in an industry that continues to evolve and innovate, even through hard times."

## Just a minute with Jo Wimble-Groves...

**Role models:** My drama teacher Miss Walters. She taught me how to command the stage.

**What talent do you wish you had?** To be a faster runner.

**Your main strength:** Public speaking. I am happiest in front of an audience and always working on helping girls and young women find their confidence and their passions. I always want to do more.

**Your biggest career achievement:** Winning our first global customer service award in 2015 in Las Vegas.

**Ideal dinner guests:** Reese Witherspoon, Michelle Obama and my best friends Michelle Griffith-Robinson (Triple Jump Olympian) and Sophie Parker.

**If you weren't in the ICT industry what would you be doing?** Writing more books or a full-time keynote speaker.

**Best advice you have been given?** Put your hand up and give things a try.

**The hardest decision you made last year?** Choosing a secondary school for my daughter!

**One example of something you have overcome:** Doubting my own abilities and learning how to focus on my strengths was a game changer.

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I published my first book on 7th October 2021. It is an incredible feeling to walk into a bookshop and see it!

**Proudest moment:** Being invited to 10 Downing Street for tea with the Prime Minister as one of 100 women for International Women's Day in 2019. And publishing my first book!

**Top tip:** Never lose sight of your core values and why you started. And it is time to listen to your customers more than ever before.

## Which are you: upscaler or streamliner?

There are two tribes in the ICT channel eyeing big opportunities in UCaaS and collaboration in two different ways.

Everyone is either an upscaler or a streamliner – and which camp you occupy defines how you use smartsourcing to achieve your goals.

### Upscalers: going for lean growth

If you're all about scaling up and selling more than you're an upscaler. Yours could be a buy-and-build strategy or targeting opportunities to deliver purely organic growth – it doesn't matter.

What's important to understand about upscalers is that they're speeding up and expanding and don't want to create drag. They don't want to be slowed down by the need to create new internal infrastructures and processes.

### Streamliners: focused on efficiency and profitability

Streamliners also want growth, but they're at least as focused on retaining existing customers as acquiring new ones.

If you're a streamliner then customer experience is key, but so is avoiding unnecessary risk and expense in acquiring skills. That's difficult in new and evolving technology areas.

Many partners with an eye on a possible exit act as streamliners to make their businesses as financially attractive as possible.

### Picking the best smartsourcing strategy

The uncomfortable truth about upscalers looking at fast, aggressive growth is that they're always in real danger of customer churn. Technical departments have limited capacity, and if the sales team is winning lots of business, orders start backing up and customers get angry. It's the classic case of being a victim of your own success.

So smartsourcing here is really about backfilling a technical operations capability that isn't yet big enough to cope with the scale being achieved by sales. Smartsourcing professional services around deployment, onboarding and enduser training enables upscalers to act big before they get big.



Tamsin Deutrom-Yue

The main difference with streamliners is the longer-term, more strategic outlook on streamlining internal operations and skill sets.

One of our smartsourcing services is in-life support, where we act as the full-time, white-label support desk for technical enquiries once the partners' customers are onboarded. Some streamliners make the strategic decision that they never want to fulfil that role, particularly if it's a non-core technology area for them.

Whichever tribe you belong to, smartsourcing can be a long-term arrangement or a short-term stopgap while you upscale internal technical operations capability.

### Smartsourcing projects, insource BAU – or vice versa?

Some ICT channel players put a dividing line between business-as-usual, and special projects like big implementations and migration. On one side is the in-house team, geared up to deliver. On the other is the smartsourcing capability, working with a pro services partner like Support to Win.

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# Parker doubles down

**With a hefty bag of acquisitions secured during 2021 under his belt it's clear to see that it takes more than a pandemic to deter the ever strengthening ambitions of Babble CEO Matt Parker.**

**P**arker has outlined solid plans to ramp up the primary growth drivers that have delivered so well for the business in 2021. "As we make more progress we become more ambitious," he stated. "As we've acquired more businesses and added to the scale of the organisation we've been able to build on our four product pillars – UCaaS, contact centre, cyber and mobile – and having experts in these fields helped us advance our organic growth strategy, with bookings 90 per cent ahead of 2020. A priority for 2022 will be to continue the success of our buy-and-build and organic growth."

Parker has also strengthened his commitment to a new strategic approach taken in 2021. "Many mid-market businesses prefer to work with people locally, so our new strategy is focused on being a national player with regional hubs serving customers through local people," he explained. "Hitting the ground running by continuing our buy-and-build success while delivering on our new strategic approach will ensure we remain on track to hit our revenue targets."

"My ambitions and those of our leadership team become bigger by the day. We made five acquisitions in 2019 and if everything goes to plan we should have done 10 deals by the start of 2022. I expect us to do more this year than we did in 2021. Is there a likelihood that we would do something outside of the UK? I don't know, but it is something that we've started to talk about."

It's no secret that following the Covid-19 lockdowns flexible and hybrid working is the new norm, so companies need to invest in digital technology to attract and retain the right talent. "Tools and solutions that allow for collaboration, innovation and flexibility will be the most sought after," added Parker. "We're going through a defining era for the industry. Those businesses that fail to adapt to suit their rapidly evolving customers' needs will struggle to survive. In this game you can never afford to remain static. That's true now more than ever before."

The rising number of cyber attacks is a growing concern for the industry and makes Parker's warning against sitting on one's hands all the more stark. "News stories of



**Matt Parker**

major hacks are becoming increasingly common, and security concerns will continue to be high on the agenda in 2022," he added. "Maintaining a competitive edge is another area that businesses have had to contend with as

anywhere in the world, thanks to the benefits of cloud technology. While the pandemic has certainly sped this process along, the end model of having greater flexibility in the workplace for many sectors was inevitable and the comms

the very best technology that's tailored to meet their needs, while also keeping ahead of the increase in cybersecurity risks."

As we look at the market and its trajectory, customer experience, generally, will become ever more important for businesses and organisations, believes Parker. "The move towards UCaaS, collaboration-based tools and cloud contact centre solutions support this trend," he added. "Customer experience in terms of how organisations engage internally and externally will become a more important theme."

"Therefore, resellers should constantly assess and evolve their outlooks, strategies and portfolios. This is essential for ensuring they are prepared to adapt quickly and assert the competitive edge that the pandemic has blunted. Furthermore, 2025 isn't that far away and businesses must act now to ensure long-term sustainability. The comms industry is in a period of rapid growth. It's an exciting place to be." ■

## My ambitions and those of our leadership team become bigger by the day

a result Covid-19. As we move into the new year these issues will continue to be a major focal point."

Opportunity also knocks for resellers who embrace hybrid as the future, believes Parker, who made his point with another warning for stuck-in-the-mud resellers. "Through our hybrid model we have seen a happier, more efficient workforce, and businesses that are stuck in the past will simply not survive," he stated.

"It is a fact that the majority of office-based jobs can be done anytime, from

industry will be in a stronger position post-pandemic."

### Agility matters

The pandemic forced businesses to scramble and get their staff set up to work from home overnight. It's hard to imagine a better scenario to show customers the importance of being agile. "Those fast to act and empower their employees to drive results from anywhere were the winners in the race, while those slower to do so missed opportunities," commented Parker. "It's now vital for the comms channel to ensure customers are adopting

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# AVC One chief on playing

The unrelenting onslaught of a rampant and worsening global pandemic has forced many organisations to shift their focus and priorities, but for AVC One it's full steam ahead with Managing Director Russell Parker's strategy already on point and paying big dividends.

**L**etchworth Garden City-based cloud MSP AVC One is part of the AVC Group which has a rich pedigree in technology, infrastructure and services. Launched in 2013 following the acquisition of the Broadsoft platform, AVC One was moving along nicely but the executive team had bigger ambitions and wasted no time in bringing Parker on board to build more value into the business. "I was appointed in late 2018 and my mission has been to focus on people," he said. "A business can't succeed without great staff, fine tuning our proposition and of course growth."

Parker, who holds a UEFA licence as a football coach, first ran onto the comms sector pitch when a football manager suggested that he should study fibre optics. "So I did," he stated. "I graduated with a Business Computer Science Engineering Honours Degree and a Postgraduate in Marketing degree. Having gained experience in a number of technology companies by the age of 32 I was appointed Managing Director of LANart Corp which was acquired by CSI on the NASDAQ. We were backed by Charles River Ventures and Bessemer from Boston."

Parker was Managing Director for five years before



Russell Parker

**I am a big believer in doing more of what you do well. So our focus is on our strengths in voice, cloud and application centric infrastructure**

the exit and carried the title Vice President EMEA too. He has also worked at a senior executive level with Cayman Systems, Sylanro, AlwaysOn, Exponential-e and Claranet before joining AVC One. In 2019 AVC

One grew turnover to £2.5 million and the following year doubled revenues to £5 million with a forecast to add £2 million this year. "I am a big believer in doing more of what you do well," commented Parker. "So our

focus is on our strengths in voice, cloud and application centric infrastructure – allowing businesses to operate seamlessly across their infrastructure – whether on premise, in the public cloud, wherever they are."

AVC One's customers include Kwik Fit, Coca Cola and Aston Martin; and its tech space partners include Cisco, Broadsoft and Microsoft. Voice is at the heart of AVC One's offer having acquired the Broadsoft platform,

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# to his strengths

so the copper switch off is a primary driver for growth. "Other key areas for us are creating great customer experiences – in Internet retail and call centres for example – and support for the increasing use of smartphones to access files, data and social media," added Parker.

"As people are unlikely to return to their pre-pandemic working habits anytime soon, cloud will continue on its exponential growth curve. Security will always be an integral part of this mix as the threat landscape evolves and becomes ever

of England. "We will look at strategic acquisitions, and as every business does, we'll hope there's a little sprinkling of luck along the way," said Parker.

"It's about adding the value around voice, digital transformation and experience. We will do this by continuing to develop our core strengths, our people and technical skills, as well as our processes in these areas. It's vital that we continue to look after and nurture our customer relationships. We are in it for the long haul. We don't look for quick wins and churn. That's not our style."

## As people are unlikely to return to their pre-pandemic working habits anytime soon, cloud will continue on its exponential growth curve

more complex. And last but not least, application centric infrastructure will continue to be an important pillar of our business."

### Key acquisition

The main strand of AVC One's growth has been organic through voice and digital including infrastructure. This has made up 100 per cent of the firm's growth over the last few years, but the acquisition of Tunbridge Wells-based SME comms and IT solutions provider Invicta Telephone Sales (ITS) early last month could signal more transactions that add value to the business, noted Parker. ITS operates across a range of sectors including transportation, architecture and education, predominantly in the south and south east

Realising long-term goals of course means being in charge of your own destiny, but Parker believes self-determination to be an ever growing challenge for the channel. "There is a tendency for vendors to favour a referral model which takes away the power from the channel," he said.

"The annuity and PAYG models, coupled with the complexity of solutions and increased support staff costs etc, doesn't give any financial safety net and squeezes margins hard. My advice for resellers therefore is to constantly look towards adding value in the longer run, not the quick wins. And make sure you always work with people that are creative and innovative." ■

### Just a minute with Russell Parker...

**Role models:** I have long admired Mohammed Ali. I read his biography as a young lad growing up in Manchester. He was resilient, principled, had great integrity and stood up for what he believed in. And a past boss, Dr Yoseph Linde. He was then Chairman and CEO of Chipcom which was acquired by 3Com and then HP. Now he is General Partner at Jerusalem Global Ventures.

**Your biggest fear?** As I am motivated by making a positive difference, whether that's for an end user, a colleague or my loved ones, my biggest fear would be to fall short of this ambition.

**How would you like to be remembered?** For integrity and working tirelessly to make a change for good.

**Best advice you have been given?** Find what you are good at and do more of it.

**Industry bugbear:** Computerised call centres. As humans, we want to feel like someone cares and that can only be achieved with a more personalised interface.

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I hold a UEFA licence as a football coach and worked part-time for 15 years in professional Championship and League 1 football clubs.

**Name one thing you couldn't do without in your job:** Milk for my coffee! And of course my incredible team.

**What 'possessions' could you not live without:** My family, dog and sport.

**How do you relax?** Walking the dog. And having spent so much time in football, watching the game. I love it at any level. I can't help but see patterns of play (once a coach always a coach). I guess this passion was inevitable being the youngest of four boys. Two of them were professional players.

## THE RECRUITMENT COLUMN

neoci

# The Great Salary Hike



Darrol Stevens and Ollie Benn

**2021** has been an interesting year for the UK job market. We've seen great demand for talent as the industry booms, thanks to the shift to remote working.

There is a demand for talent unlike we've seen before, but there is one key issue...there appears to be a lack of people interested in moving.

Companies that have managed to keep hold of their best people during the pandemic, sure as hell don't want to let them go now!

We have seen numerous counter offers throughout 2021. Companies will very often offer eye watering salary rises just to keep staff!

This has meant that salary expectations are now higher than ever. Candidates are quickly learning that the market is paying them higher wages, and this has made it a highly competitive, candidate driven market.

Considering that salaries have stagnated terribly over the past decade, it's probably about time there was a hike. But this does leave some businesses in a difficult position. If they want the best people, then they need to be prepared to pay for them. If they don't, then their competitors will, and they'll lose out. This is something that many companies are learning the hard way!

I know of one telco who offer the same salary for provisioning staff as they did in 2006! Then they wonder why

they are struggling to attract the right talent.

We all know that age old saying "you get what you pay for". You can't expect high quality for rock bottom prices. Well, the same goes for talent.

Many people are describing the shift in salary expectations as "silly season on salaries". Perhaps they are right, it won't last forever and can't keep rising at the current pace, however the cost of living does.

There are also genuine concerns from some hiring managers that offering a higher salary than their existing employees will cause them a headache if their team finds out. The obvious solution is to review your current employee salaries.

In reality, it's not as easy as that. Business leaders/owners are often portrayed as greedy and ruthless, but running a business is tough. Making money is never easy but losing it is.

I think it's safe to say that there needs to be a balance. Business can only pay people what they can afford. However, salary expectations certainly won't be dropping back down any time soon. People don't generally leave their role for less money. Perhaps it really is time to review your business model.

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# Full fibre at full speed

**A new access product from CityFibre accelerates the speed to market for ISPs across the altnet's fast expanding national footprint. What does this mean? Head of Consumer Sales Emma Goodwin explains.**

**T**he launch of a new National Access product by CityFibre eases the process for wholesale partners selling consumer FTTH broadband to residential customers across CityFibre's nationwide footprint. And according to Goodwin the product supports CityFibre's mission to upgrade and level up the UK's digital infrastructure by opening up the opportunity to connect to its full fibre network to the wider ISP channel and underpin the company's target to reach eight million premises by 2025.

The National Access product follows a major investment by CityFibre that brings together all of its local access networks onto a multi-terabit nationwide backbone. The investment is estimated to exceed £65 million over the next seven years and is designed to deliver an expanded service proposition and improved customer experience for partners. The move is also expected to accelerate partners' speed to market in locations as they come online. According to Goodwin it will make entering new markets easier and more cost-effective

for partners not wishing to set up local network infrastructure of their own or invest in third party backhaul.

"Under the local access model, CityFibre manages the network and traffic from the consumer premise to the local fibre exchange (FEX) from where it's handed off to the partner ISP," explained Goodwin. "The National Access product takes this model a step further and handles everything from the FEX all the way to the partner's selected interconnect location. This effectively means that ISPs only need to invest in the interconnect once to gain access to the national footprint, rather than in each city or location they wish to sell CityFibre services."

#### Open access

With interconnection points at strategic locations across the country, partners will ultimately be able to market, sell and provide consumer FTTH services to all premises on CityFibre's networks, noted Goodwin. The product was initially launched with five interconnect locations – Edinburgh, Leeds, London, Manchester and Slough – with more to follow this year.



Emma Goodwin

"The new product will utilise CityFibre's local access and national backbone networks with diverse entry routes and ring-based core network infrastructure," added Goodwin. "It will also support multiple services across residential, SME, larger corporate customer segments and 5G small cells, using CityFibre's Passive Optical Network (PON) architecture within the same single shared network build."

Goodwin believes that the product will catch the eye of all ISPs no matter their size. "We expect some larger partners will use the National Access model to test the market in new locations before investing in a local access approach," she commented. "For smaller ISP partners, the National Access model removes the financial barrier to entry of investment in each local area, making access to the nationwide footprint possible. Each new customer ordering a service from a partner will be offered an installation date within five working days of placing their order, providing

them with rapid access to the speed and reliability benefits of full fibre."

#### Targeted growth

Goodwin also noted that when ISP partners join CityFibre they can choose how they interconnect. Either locally in business Fibre Exchanges, enabling targeted growth in a specific town and city, or nationally to address its UK-wide available footprint. "Our national interconnect ultimately means ISPs can connect once and capitalise on the UK's consumer premises as their next revenue stream," she added.

CityFibre currently has over 30 consumer ISPs selling its symmetrical full fibre broadband services. And in November last year it signed a major extension to its partnership with Vodafone which made long-term volume commitments over CityFibre's nationwide footprint, leveraging the National Access product. "Using the new National Access network other wholesale partners, alongside

Vodafone, will ultimately be able to provide full fibre services on CityFibre's networks," stated Goodwin.

The launch of the National Access product came swiftly after CityFibre announced that over one million homes were ready for service across its network. Goodwin also pointed out that CityFibre's infrastructure is delivering more than just high-speed full fibre connectivity. "We're working with partners to co-create an enhanced customer experience for businesses and residential consumers, pushing the boundaries and setting new standards for the industry," she claimed.

"Furthermore, in the closing months of 2021, CityFibre was named Best Infrastructure Provider at the ISPA Awards and Best Altnet of the Year at the Comms National Awards. These wins demonstrate that CityFibre has been successful in disrupting the market and challenging the incumbent, providing choice to the market." ■

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# Narrowing the new-refu

**With demand for refurbished networking equipment hotting up like never before Dumfriesshire-based ETB Technologies has directed creative energy into streamlining and doubling its networking refurbishment capabilities. And as the company enters its third decade Managing Director Nick Stapleton plans to scale up 100 per cent within five years.**

**S**tapleton left school when he was 16 and joined the Army (Royal Corp of Signals) as a Communications Engineer where he trained on analogue pre-computer equipment. After a ten year stint he left the Army, just as the switch to digital and dial up modems was gathering pace. "In 1993 I took my first job in the tech industry, with R. Frazier – one of the early pioneers of the IT circular economy in the UK," he recalled. "I first provided tech support to the sales staff who were selling used IBM and Cisco equipment, then moved into sales and eventually sales management. I left in 2001 to start ETB Technologies."

Stapleton started ETB Technologies with his brother-in-law Russ Tandy. "Like many people who start a business, I wanted to be my own boss rather than work for someone else," said Stapleton. "Thanks to my time at R. Frazier I had the technical skills and market knowledge to do so. We started off buying equipment from my own contacts and selling them on eBay and our own small website."

"The company grew slowly and organically until 2014 when I bought out my business partner and we began to expand. Since then



Nick Stapleton

## More and more companies are seeing that the quality of refurbished can almost match new equipment and be backed by the same service levels

we've increased sales from £3.5 million to £15 million and grown staff numbers from 14 to over 60."

### Configured to order

The company supplies refurbished enterprise-level IT equipment that is configured to order. This includes anything from servers to storage arrays and networking equipment. "We sell directly from our own

stock with a next-day delivery service which saves money and reduces wait time for equipment – something that is particularly important given the current supply chain challenges," added Stapleton.

"Currently, we are focused on the Dell infrastructure range but we're in the process of expanding our range with Cisco and Juniper products."

Stapleton is confident that within the next three to five years the company will have doubled in size. "Over the past five years sales, profit and staff numbers have trebled," he added. "This wouldn't have been possible without focusing on our staff. They are key to everything. We concentrated our recruitment on more experienced staff to help meet our expansion plans,

and it's so far worked well. We also expanded our product range by including more manufacturers in the mix to ensure we can better meet the needs of a wider variety of organisations."

ETB Technologies' customers are spread across all sectors and range from SMEs to global corporations – about 55 per cent of its business is domestic. "Our customers

# Refurbished divide

are all busy and don't want to be spending their limited time on sourcing hardware, so we want to make it easy for them," said Stapleton. "We do this by having a wide range of products and a multi-channel approach so they can buy from us in the way that best suits their needs. Cloud computing and home working are other, more obvious factors that continue to drive demand for our networking and security products."

According to Stapleton, the refurbished market has been around much longer than a lot of people realise. "Since establishing the company 20 years ago I've seen the market mature tremendously in terms of product quality and levels of service," he explained. "It was driven by customer demand, but service was also one of my founding principles for the company. Now, the market is as competitive as I've seen it and suppliers need to be constantly reviewing their differentiators and how they set themselves apart from the competition. Whether this is through how they engage with their customers, how easy they make it for their customers to purchase, or the range of products and services they offer – it's great news for the customer."

## Turning point

A major turning point for ETB Technologies occurred in 2014 when it changed from an organic growth strategy to a more deliberate one, led by Stapleton's purchase of his business partner's shares. Around the same time the company also invested in enterprise level resource planning and focused on growing its website. "Our priorities include optimising

the entire buying experience, from pre-sales advice through to speed of delivery and warranty support," said Stapleton. "This is heavily reliant on our staff. As we increased employee numbers we really had to maintain a focus on this to ensure all new staff members work towards that same aim. As a result, we've improved our internal training systems, which overall leads back to a better customer experience."

## Core principles

Another priority, noted Stapleton, is protecting core principles by ensuring good stock availability and providing a quality product and service to customers and vendors. "Our market is fast paced so we must be reactive, which can make it difficult to maintain our core principles when going through periods of significant growth or looking at product diversification and new markets," added Stapleton.

He observed that the refurbished market has grown each year, and recent supply chain issues and low product availability mean businesses are now more willing to consider refurbished equipment. "As a result, more and more companies are seeing that the quality of refurbished can almost match new equipment and be backed by the same service levels," he stated.

"Hopefully this will lend itself to the market continuing to grow, even as supply chain issues subside. We will continue to focus on showing people that there are no downsides to refurbished equipment. The price and availability can, in many cases, be far better than buying new." ■

## Just a minute with Nick Stapleton...

**What talent do you wish you had?** An aptitude for foreign languages.

**Your main strengths and what could you work on?** My biggest strength is my attention to detail. I expect high quality work at all times, which is a strength or a weakness depending on who you ask.

**Your biggest career achievement?** We've just celebrated our 20th year in business and seen growth every year. I'm proud of that.

**In hindsight:** My only regret is not having had the ambition and confidence to focus my efforts on growing the business earlier.

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Brian Clough, because he's Brian Clough! Gyles Brandreth, he would make sure the conversation never stops; and Michael Dell for his business contacts.

**Your biggest fear?** Failure.

**How would you like to be remembered?** For being fair.

**Best advice you have been given?** Find a work/life balance.

**The hardest decision you made last year?** To leave a vendor we had been working with for many years. It was the right decision, but that didn't make it any easier.

**The biggest risk you have taken?** When I left a paid job to start ETB Technologies I had a wife, two children and a mortgage to pay. It was a huge risk, but the time felt right and it paid off.

**Who do you admire most in the channel?** I applaud anyone who starts their own business. I know what a huge step it can be.

**How do you relax?** Getting on a bicycle and pedalling is very relaxing.

**Top tip:** Look after your customers and suppliers.



## CHANNEL CHAMPIONS

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# Unlock cellular power

**Cloudcell Technologies Managing Director Kevin Boyle is strategising at a pivotal time not only in the pandemic but at a critical juncture in the development of new connectivity technology including 5G and satellite.**

**B**oyle has worked in the telecoms industry for over two decades, enjoying a varied career across all aspects of comms including systems, voice and BT wholesale services, data and connectivity, IP voice and UC. During this time he achieved significant results driving revenues, training sales teams, restructuring departments and developing businesses. "I then saw an opportunity to disrupt the market and do things differently by providing businesses with both cellular and hybrid connectivity solutions," stated Boyle.

He founded Winchester-based Cloudcell Technologies in 2016. The company generated steady growth up to 2020 when Covid-19 hit and Cloudcell lost a significant percent of its recurring revenue overnight. "The future seemed uncertain and I was forced to furlough all staff except myself and an apprentice," added Boyle. "Working hard through the pandemic, our grit and determination meant that we made a major bounce back during the autumn months,

achieving impressive year-on-year net growth despite the dire outlook at the time."

2021 proved to be an exceptional year for Cloudcell with its reputation as a supplier of robust and reliable connectivity solutions growing stronger by the day. Last year the company generated 50 per cent growth driven by an expanding reseller partner base and hot demand from direct construction clients. "With a 10-strong workforce we grew our annual revenue by over 50 per cent between 2020 and 2021," explained Boyle. "The team and I have ambitious plans to achieve another record increase in turnover by the end of 2022."

**Solutions for all**  
Cloudcell's cellular technology and engineering expertise have combined to provide solutions and tools that help overcome the most challenging connectivity issues presented by Covid-19, pointed out Boyle. "Wireless broadband solutions have many potential uses and can boost connectivity, providing a more reliable



Kevin Boyle

and well rounded end user experience," he stated. "Cellular and SDWAN as a connectivity solution is a viable alternative to standard forms of connectivity. Cellular

core mission into new territory. The mission has always been to provide businesses with access to connectivity that they can trust anytime and anywhere.

**We have been brainstorming ways to combine satellite and cellular connectivity to provide the ultimate high connection speed and low latency service to customers**

is about much more than simply back-up. It is an entire solution in itself and offers great opportunities to resellers of all shapes and sizes to secure revenues from new and existing customers."

This year Boyle aims to continue his partner recruitment campaign which is known for its marketing and sales support. Not so obvious is his evolving plan to advance Cloudcell's

Therefore the company is network agnostic and has relationships with all four MNOs. These will develop as 5G comes into the frame, as will a strategy around SpaceX's satellite Internet constellation called Starlink.

"Since 2019 there has been a lot of talk and buzz about the 5G network and ultrafast connectivity," added Boyle. "Many cellular providers have been pushing this. However,

we have refrained. Despite the obvious advantages of 5G we feel that the infrastructure in the UK isn't where it needs to be right now. With full 5G coverage across the UK expected by early 2022, and based on extensive network testing including speed and network stability aspects, we hope to provide 5G connectivity to our customers soon thereafter. We're also excited by satellite connectivity such as SpaceX's satellite Internet constellation called Starlink. We have been brainstorming ways to combine satellite and cellular connectivity to provide the ultimate high connection speed and low latency service to customers."

Boyle hopes that within five years Cloudcell will become a major player in the connectivity industry. "We will see significant organic growth," he added. "Our mission has been to educate the nation on the benefits of cellular-based and hybrid connectivity. Fixed line services have always been seen as the holy grail, while cellular-based connectivity has been dubbed the poor cousin. This couldn't be further from the truth. Following years of development and significant investment into cellular infrastructure, cellular connectivity provides so many opportunities for business, especially in rural locations.

"As a telecoms provider, you understand better than anyone how important it is to offer customers a choice. Cellular connectivity is growing in popularity and there is a significant opportunity for resellers to drive revenue by including cellular and hybrid options in their service portfolio." ■

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# Neos Networks steps up

Neos Networks has enjoyed extraordinary growth since its rebrand and strategic rebirth last year – expanding and promoting its aggregation network, making big strides in underpinning Three UK's 5G strategy, and charging ahead with plans to become universally synonymous with high capacity mission critical connectivity. To merit the status Managing Director for Wholesale and Smart Infrastructure Sarah Mills is advancing projects and campaigns on a number of fronts – and it's time to take note.

**S**SE Enterprise Telecoms rebranded to Neos Networks in March last year as part of the company's wider business transformation journey, which began in 2019 when Infracapital acquired 50 per cent of the business with SSE Group retaining the other half. "Rebranding in the midst of a pandemic was not the plan, but it was a success and a pivotal turning point for the company," said Mills. "It allowed us to step out from the shadows of our parent organisation, SSE, and enabled us to position ourselves as a B2B connectivity provider doing what we do best – providing leading edge business connectivity. It's our mission to make sure that when it comes to high capacity UK connectivity, Neos Networks is the first company on peoples' minds."

From full fibre to IoT and smart cities, from layer two connectivity services to advocating collaboration among service providers for the greater good, Mills has emerged as an industry beacon. And her quest for Neos Networks to achieve industry acclaim is a bellwether for the high levels of proactivity required by today's market. Not



Sarah Mills

## Rebranding in the midst of a pandemic was not the plan, but it was a success and a pivotal turning point for the company

surprisingly, brand reinvention and invigoration is reflected in Neos Networks' activities on the ground, investing heavily in, and extending its network to 550 exchanges now on-net, representing a doubling of numbers. "We've also grown our customer facing and operations teams," added Mills. "We've added approximately 150 new employees since

Covid-19 began. When the pandemic was at its worst we maintained a business-as-usual approach, delivered our largest customer project on time and ensured none of our employees were furloughed."

### Investment

Lockdown has shown that disruption can challenge old ways of doing things, therefore according to

Mills 'investment is critical'. "Alongside the extension of our exchange network we've also announced a change in strategy to offer access networks, providing fibre connectivity direct to the offices and buildings in four metro cities – London, Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester – while allowing us to bypass third party providers," she added. "This

end-to-end service enables us to provide partners with better visibility and more competitive pricing, and supports the Government's full fibre ambitions."

Mills was also quick to identify that the industry is starting to demand higher capacities than ever before. "As part of our exchange roll out programme we made sure that the majority of our 550 on-net exchanges had capacity options up to 100Gbps as standard," she commented. "All of these exchanges are available to quote and order on our online pricing and ordering tool which offers full transparency over our own services and pricing, and the services of key third party providers across the UK including BT Wholesale, Openreach, Virgin Media Business, Vodafone, TalkTalk Wholesale Services, Colt, Sky Business and CityFibre."

According to Mills, the reality is that service providers with growth on their minds need a bigger vehicle to promote their ambitions. "The key thing I see developing over time is the concept of collaboration," she explained. "Service providers, more than most, are aware that in order to succeed they must

# growth march

often rely on each other. But as the requirements of our end customers grow, smart cities become the norm and technology continues to push the boundaries, there will be a point in time where, to serve all of the exciting changes coming to the industry, strategic alliances will be both necessary and hugely beneficial to all."

Neos Networks' Wholesale and Smart Infrastructure team provides connectivity to 400-plus service providers and their end customers and supports more widely known names like mobile network operator Three UK. "For me, some of the key growth areas are channel providers, the telecom tower industry, hyperscalers and the energy market," added Mills. "We believe these sectors are about to, or are already, experiencing rapid growth or change and that the right connectivity is critical to their success."

If anyone knows what there is to know about connectivity, it is Mills. She has worked in the telecoms industry for over 15 years, eight of them at O2 UK and seven years with Telefonica in Madrid. In 2018 she moved to Neos Networks as MD of Wholesale and Smart Infrastructure, working with channel partners, network operators and altnets to develop and support their digital initiatives.

"Telecoms is the industry to be in," she commented. "It is such a dynamic and fast-paced sector. But I'm aware that, in order to stay relevant, we need to keep pushing the boundaries, support the development of next generation technologies and those that serve it and

continue to encourage growth in the sector."

Seduced by the comms sector's vibrancy, it follows that Mills would be equally attracted to a company that displayed a clear set of growth ambitions, which she says Neos Networks has in spades, spearheaded by CEO Colin Sempill. "I saw a real and fantastic opportunity," she added. "I quickly agreed to be part of this exciting journey to help shape success and execute the businesses strategy. We know who we want to be and how we're going to get there."

#### Laser focus

Mills' goal is to remain focused on the business connectivity market in the UK only, and not be distracted by consumer requirements or trying to tackle overseas territories. "We also know what we're good at – connectivity – and our intention is to continue to excel in this space by constantly growing our network reach and delivering critical national infrastructure for our customers," she added.

To this end Neos Networks plans to connect an additional 150 exchanges, taking its reach to approximately 700 BT exchanges to grow its aggregation network. This, and access network build-outs in the four cities mentioned above is just the beginning, Mills pointed out. "We want to be known for providing high capacity core connectivity, so you'll likely see us invest in more data centres and landing stations for those hyperscalers looking for access to the UK," she commented.

For the wholesale market, Neos Networks' product set is very much built on fibre connectivity. Its core focus is layer two connectivity services where it provides Ethernet, Dedicated Internet Access, Optical and Dark Fibre. "Another point of interest for me is the adoption and development of next generation technology," observed Mills. "We've all heard the buzzwords – digital transformation, 5G, IoT, AI (and many more) – but we want to make sure that all of these developments have the underlying connectivity in place to power them. Our work with Three UK to support its 5G ambitions is a great example of this."

Mills noted that this is one of the most exciting projects she has been involved in to date. It began when Three UK approached Neos Networks (then SSE Enterprise Telecoms) in 2016 looking for an expansive core fibre network and high capacity business grade backhaul network that it could leverage to roll out 5G connectivity across the nation. "To do this we supported Three UK with its core and aggregation networks, connecting 20 data centres across the UK in regions decided by Three UK and its 5G strategy," commented Mills.

"Since then we have connected those data centres diversely to nearly 500 exchanges across the UK. Managing a supplier base of around 30 organisations is no easy task, but we were pleased to deliver ahead of schedule despite the pandemic and enjoy a great working relationship with Three UK as we continue to support its 5G ambitions." ■



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# What's top of mind?

**The comms channel over the past two years faced a tremendous challenge in responding to the Covid-19 crisis, but what will be the primary challenges, uncertainties and opportunities facing the sector in 2022?**

**H**aving absorbed the brunt of the pandemic and facilitating the move to home working, it is fair to say that the comms channel has emerged stronger. "Absolutely, many companies have adopted new technology and brought new, stronger partners on board to safeguard their new way of working," stated Britt Megahey, founder and Managing Director, Barclay Communications. "More than ever, business owners have experienced the benefits of comms technology, and customers have advanced five to 10 years faster in terms of comms tech because of the pandemic."

From the outset of the pandemic, organisations quickly learnt that they need resilient infrastructures to absorb future disruption. "The pandemic was a harsh lesson for many organisations," added Megahey. "One of the biggest lessons has been knowing the importance of pairing with a robust and capable partner that supplies

the most reliant and stable technology. Many customers were stuck, and that had a challenging impact. Taking the right action and making the best decisions to ensure existing solutions can scale up quickly, and partnering with the right technology partners who respond quickly is vital for the years ahead."

With the infrastructure environment shifting, and 2025 on the horizon, it has become urgent for resellers to reshape their outlooks, strategies and portfolios for long-term growth. "This is one of the most exciting times in the channel," added Megahey. "Customers cannot sit still. The 2025 roadmap means we know what's happening, which is rare in this industry. Therefore investment for the next three to four years has to be paramount to scale for this change. The channel has the choice to provide a roadmap for customers and ensure they are prepared."

Megahey is investing heavily in infrastructure and Barclay Communications' ability



**Britt Megahey**

**The channel has an opportunity to be even bigger and stronger, and those with ambition will have the most loyal customer base**

to scale. "Our top priority is to familiarise customers with our products, ensuring they understand and can use our entire portfolio," he commented. "We have already prioritised multiple changes such as our CRM, our order and support capabilities as well as our diverse multi-skilled sales teams. We can't pigeonhole our customers and that means we need to accommodate their

bespoke needs. It's about investing and re-investing again and again."

**Acceleration**

The pandemic has fast-forwarded the adoption of new technology and as a society we are more open to upgrades. "Customers are driving demand rather than the channel," said Megahey. "The channel has an opportunity to be even bigger and stronger, and those

with ambition will have the most loyal customer base."

As noted, the real drive will be the magnetism of technology and it is safe to assume that proactive ICT resellers will stand to gain most. "Demand is strong, especially driven by hybrid working policies and shaping IT to deal with more distributed work forces," stated Graeme Watt, CEO, **Continued on page 34**





# CHANNEL CHAMPIONS

7<sup>th</sup> July 2022, Regents Park

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**Continued from page 32**

Softcat Communications. "Resolving the challenges of component shortages and the recovery in enterprise demand as people return to the office will also lead to incremental growth. Demand for mobility and collaboration supported by comms has clearly spiked positively. It will remain at these high levels as companies refresh and continue to invest in their networking environment so that they are fit for purpose."

Watt's priorities for 2022 include growing and taking share while remaining 'a great place to work'. Other focus areas are managing a distributed workforce, recruiting talent, driving cloud leadership, developing a stronger presence in central government and defence, and investing in supporting UK customers with their global requirements.

"The need and demand for digital transformation has been clearly demonstrated," stated Watt. "Investing in digital is no longer discretionary and businesses need to be digitally enabled to give the right level of customer and employee experience, as well as to survive and show leadership in their chosen sector. Comms providers are well positioned to deliver on



**Graeme Watt**

**The need and demand for digital transformation has been clearly demonstrated.**

this opportunity. The most successful will be those who take time to understand the customer's needs and deliver to commitment with an outstanding attitude."

Watt's stance is clearly in line with the needs of the market and supported by a solid and holistic strategy. "We have built out our skills and offerings to support the workspace and do it in an environmentally responsible manner," he added. "Our vendors are dispersing their manufacturing across the globe and putting it nearer the technology consumer. This way they can still manufacture and assemble

product if one part of the world gets hit by a crisis. Customers will, with our help, select the technology most suitable to protect them and deliver their required outcomes. My advice would be for companies to keep their IT infrastructure current and above all else to make it secure."

**Room to grow**

Forward looking resellers are moving towards an ever closer relationship with end users, making them stronger and best positioned to grow their business. "There is room for everyone in the market – cybersecurity, digital workspace and hybrid

infrastructure are the key technology areas that we are focusing on, as driven by our customers," added Watt. "Those technologies will be supported by hardware, software and services and span on-premise as well as private and public cloud. There is no doubt that cloud adoption, digital transformation, data management and edge computing are key. Most resellers should be focusing on some or all of these elements if not already."

At the heart of Redsqid CEO Sohini Raithatha's planning is upskilling, and to drive this he has shifted up a gear.

"Redsqid is experiencing significant organic growth, and we need to ensure that we get the right people on board to help us drive our purpose and vision," he said. "Through 2022 one of the biggest challenges will be finding talent to join our organisation. The industry skills gap is very real and something that will affect many organisations like ours."

"To overcome this, we are investing in upskilling our team and currently have over 40 per cent of our workforce enrolled in degree level training courses. The skills gap is not a short-term problem and unless we all

invest in the industry now the problem will follow us for years to come."

Raithatha is equally determined to get his customers on track with the future of communications and has wasted no time in preparing for 2025 and beyond. "Connectivity is the backbone of our ability to work from anywhere and the opportunity here will remain," he stated. "Preparation for the 2025 switch-off should happen now and is something everyone should have been talking to their customers about for a long time. With only three short years to go, it is important that we keep educating our customers and informing them about what the future after the switch off looks like."

"I am also evaluating our product portfolio and making sure we have no gaps in terms of what our customers need from us, and what skills and technologies we need to acquire as a part of our growth strategy."

Meanwhile, SMEs and larger enterprises have learned the value of their ICT providers in managing a pathway through lockdowns and 'the unexpected' while removing complexity from their digital transformation journeys. "The pandemic has shown us that organisations need to be prepared for the unknown and that everyone needs to be set up with technology that brings flexibility and agility," added Raithatha.

"With hybrid working, the focus on security keeps increasing, so managing devices is important and cybersecurity technologies will be a big investment hot spot. The channel faces so many opportunities like this, making it more innovative and exciting than ever before. However, those that refuse to change and adapt will disappear quietly or as part of the surge in M&As." ■



**Sohini Raithatha**

**Cyber security technologies will be a big investment hot spot in remote working.**



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# 2022 goals: Setting out strate



ANTHONY QUINN  
SILVER CLOUD

"In 2021 we completed a big strategic change into a fully-fledged Managed Services Provider, with a broad offering across IT, telecoms and the full spectrum of business communication. Our goal for 2022 is to use that new offering to take advantage of opportunities in the marketplace, and we see many of them. The pandemic has transformed the way everyone works and communicates. In many ways, it's moved things forward by a decade. Previously, some organisations saw digital transformation as something they could think about in the future. Well, the future is now here. Most businesses now realise that they need to adapt if they want to survive."

**W**hilst the pandemic has warped and moulded the world of business around us, the ICT channel has continued to transform despite two years of tumult and disruption, writes Greg Denholm.

Shrewd operators have turned risk to reward and become keystones in the UK's response to homeworking during the pandemic. At this dawn of a new year, despite the constant reminders of Omicron's virulence, we hope 2022 will see a return to some form of normality.

This new era beckons a raft of new ways to exploit opportunities in security, cloud, fibre and 5G, whilst it demands that companies look inwards and act towards promoting diversity and enhancing sustainability efforts.

It takes a brave soul to predict what trends will pay out, but luckily our industry is full of them (both brave souls and lucrative opportunities, that is.) We therefore asked our contributors to look forward into the 2022 and shed light on the following:

- Their business aspirations for the coming year
- The top trends they believe will dominate the industry
- The best opportunities for businesses to maximise on
- Their key strategy and focus for the year ahead.



ROB SIMS  
ELITE GROUP

"During 2022 Elite aspires to increase our levels of customer service, increase the number of services sold to our customers and continue our acquisition strategy. The industry will be dominated in 2022 by increased productivity and security tools supporting a more 'normalised' flexible working environment. IoT and integrated mobility products, and work 'anywhere' solutions will be key trends. Opportunities will come from being true 'thought leaders' to customers. Showing them how technology can overcome the challenges they face and allow them to take advantage of the opportunities available. Businesses should maximise on developing cloud-based flexible working solutions and crafting software development to fully integrate customer solutions. Our key focus for the coming year is people, people, people. We aim to have the best skilled, productive, and best rewarded staff in the industry."



NIKKI GUEST  
NGC NETWORKS

"In 2022, meeting end-customer expectations will be more challenging than ever. For NGC, this means driving our technology roadmaps forward. NGC's role as a key technology partner is to ensure our customers have the best tools at their disposal to keep them competitive and achieve the best outcomes for their own customers. Customer excellence is one of our core values and we want to ensure that we are enabling our end users to focus on their own customer experience. For the first part of the year, we'll be concentrating our efforts on bolstering our account management teams and processes to ensure that we can support and understand our customers' technology requirements. Additionally, we are reviewing our product portfolio in an increasingly diverse and disruptive market to ensure we can deliver on those requirements. This will be the big focus for NGC in 2022 and beyond."



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# Technology in the era of uncertainty



DAVID HUGHES  
INCOM-CNS

"The turbulence in our industry and the wider world over the last couple of years has presented both challenges and opportunities. The trend of flexible working means there are, essentially, no more 'single site' businesses and we have seen an increasing move towards XaaS as we encourage customers to migrate away from traditional voice solutions. The challenges of home working include an increased vulnerability from the number of connections into a network, which is generating conversations around connectivity infrastructure, resilience and data security. Alongside security, the hot topic (both in-house and with prospective customers) is sustainability. Net Zero strategies are already a differentiator for public sector procurements and that trend will inevitably gain momentum. We continue to invest in the 'people factor' of our business, enabling individuals to step up to more responsibility and take opportunities for training and talent innovation, empowering our team to collectively become even stronger."



SOHINI RAITHATHA  
REDSQUID

"2022 is going to be an exciting year for us as we continue to help our customers through their digital transformation. From a product perspective, cyber security will continue to be our focus as we see threat levels rising every day for all size businesses. During the last year we have started implementing IoT technologies, and the demand for these solutions will keep on increasing. With Cyber Security, IoT and the ISDN Switch-Off, we will use 2022 to make sure our customers are protected and equipped for the coming years. Finally, we are looking to achieve 20% organic growth and at least two further acquisitions in 2022, which may be around product offering or geographical. It's looking to be a big and exciting year for both the industry and us at Redsquid."



TIM MERCER  
VAPOUR

"2022 won't just be about CX, we'll all be talking about CXXX! Customers are more demanding than ever before and adoption rates for previously untapped technologies are through the roof. As suppliers, we therefore need to be putting in triple the effort when it comes to delighting our customer base. This will be key to our strategy over the next year, we'll stick to cutting the jargon, devising solutions based on what customers need rather than what we want to sell, and leaving no stone unturned when it comes to fulfilling expectations. Application Monitoring as a Service will be huge for us this year, and we're having more conversations about our security-first SD-WAN solution for flexible working, than ever before. I also predict that automation will rise in popularity, irrespective of organisations' size and budget, and there's going to be greater consideration for environmentally friendlier tech stacks, and rightly so."



TIM SCOTT  
ADEPT

"Cloud, Convergence and Continuity are still key themes for 2022. That doesn't mean the market has stood still. The acceleration of cloud, initially centred on the heavy lifting of IT resources in larger organisations, has now moved into all domains of the ICT spectrum. Organisations that deployed tactical solutions during the pandemic are now understanding the interactions of technology, understanding more about the benefits of convergence and, critically, understanding the importance of business continuity. High profile vulnerabilities such as the Apache Log4J Zero Day Vulnerability are typical. More generally, the DCMS 2021 Cyber Security Breaches Survey concludes 'among those identifying breaches or attacks, their frequency is undiminished'. Our aspiration, as an MSP, is to help customers make sense of technology and to protect them from threat. With a focus on SASE technology and our own cloud environment 'Nebula', AdEPT's strategic response to themes of Cloud, Convergence and Continuity is cemented."



AIDAN PIPER  
WELCOMM

"In 2022, our ambition for both Welcomm and our sister business Leversedge is growth. We aim to increase the number of local people we employ by 10%, plus grow our combined turnover by an ambitious 20%. Our key focus will remain the wellbeing of our people, as we see remote working continuing throughout 2022. As an employer of 90 plus people, the biggest opportunity we see for Welcomm internally is to enhance our staff benefits package. By retaining and attracting the best talent, we aim to support our customers throughout their digital transformations, by bolstering in-house expertise and strengthening our partnerships with a wide range of vendors. Into 2022, we recognise that the WLR stop/sell is likely to cause disruption amongst smaller businesses that are unprepared. A key opportunity for us will be to consult with these commercial locations and ensure they are aware of their options moving forward."



MATTHEW PARKER  
BABBLE

"We made five acquisitions last year and if everything goes to plan, we should have done 10 deals by the end of this year. I think Babble can grow just as quickly in the next 12 months. As we look at the current market, I think customer experience is going to become more important for businesses and organisations, generally. The move towards UCaaS, collaboration-based tools, and cloud contact centre solution lends itself there. So, customer experience is going to become a more important theme in terms of how organisations think about engaging internally and externally. We're focused on developing regional hubs. It's about building scale and being a national player that's serving customers the way they want to be – by local people. As we've added scale, we've also been able to build on our core pillars and have experts in all of them, helping us to excel our organic growth."

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# Razorblue ups HR



**Joanne Finkeldey**

MSP Razorblue has strengthened its HR provision through with the promotion Joanne Finkeldey as People Director and investment in a system called IntelliHR which streamlines all aspects of human resources.

Razorblue CEO Dan Kitchen commented: "Bringing Joanne on to our board means we have an additional element to our decision making, beyond technical and financial. We welcome her expertise and empathic input to ensure that we harness the power of communication and involve our people in every step of our journey.

"Labour is our biggest cost and we know we need to get it right. As the company continues to grow across several locations it's important that our culture is not diluted.

Our people need to feel appreciated and heard regardless of job title or location."

Finkeldey added: "The system gives insight into how our people are doing at any given time, both in work and a personal capacity. The last 18 to 24 months have reminded us just how important it is to take a more holistic view of looking after our people." Razorblue has a 140-plus headcount.

## Also on the move...

BATH-based Truespeed's CEO Evan Wienburg is stepping down, making way for incoming chief exec James Lowther, who was Group Chief Commercial Officer at mobile company Lebara, and previously



**James Lowther**

Chief Marketing Officer at Gigaclear. Lowther brings over 16 years comms sector experience and also spent four years in Sweden at quad-play service provider Com Hem (now Tele2 Group) where he was Director of Business to Consumer. This followed a six year stint at Virgin Media in senior roles. Truespeed Chairman Clarke Osborne said: "We are embarking on our next major growth phase to bring ultrafast, ultra-reliable full fibre broadband connectivity to hundreds of thousands of families and businesses in the south west. James is taking over the CEO reins at a pivotal time."

TOLLRING'S partner marketing programmes have received a boost following the appointments of Ian Bevington as Product



**Ian Bevington**

Marketing Manager and Richard Jones as Product Manager. Bevington moves from Oak Innovation where he was Business Development Director; and Jones joins from Apple reseller Jigsaw24 where he spent over 20 years, latterly as Commercial Director.

Tollring's Chief Marketing and Experience Officer Hilary Oliver stated: "Richard and Ian have joined Tollring at an exciting time. They bring industry knowledge and a wealth of relevant experience."

CTS MD Tom Ray (pictured) has taken over the Group CEO role with group companies CTS and CloudM now under his wing. He takes over from CEO James Daggart who assumes a Founder Director role following nearly 10 years at the helm of the two companies. Ray's appointment comes after a record year for both businesses with Google Cloud Platform (GCP) revenue figures up 79 per cent for CTS, and 86 per cent growth for CloudM's SaaS platform. CTS'



services arm is Europe's largest dedicated Google Cloud partner

and was recently named by Google as EMEA Workspace Enterprise partner of the year and EMEA Public Sector partner of the year for GCP. The group's software brand, CloudM, is a SaaS data management platform that enables organisations to optimise Microsoft 365, Google Workspace and other SaaS apps. Customers include Spotify, Netflix and Uber.

# ITS brings in Origin CFO

FORMER Origin Broadband Chief Financial Officer Andrew Simpson has joined forces with ITS as CFO. As well as fibre market experience Simpson has a



**Andrew Simpson**

track record of catalysing growth and M&A activity, overseeing the sale of Origin Broadband customers to TalkTalk. Simpson also spent seven years at Openreach as Finance Director for the Commercial and Strategy teams, plus the Ethernet Delivery teams. He previously operated in the energy and rail markets. As part of the move Carl Kameen has been appointed as ITS Commercial Director.

ITS CEO Daren Baythorpe said: "Andrew's appointment comes as we continue to roll out our fibre networks at pace across the UK, with emphasis on driving growth through indirect markets and commercial partnerships, including public and private sector collaboration. Andrew will play a key role in helping us during this exciting chapter of the ITS journey."

# Wragg targets net zero goals



**Kevin Wragg**

TECH Data has put net zero goals and cross-UK ISO standardisation of practices and processes front and centre with the appointment of Kevin Wragg to the newly created role of Director for Environment and Quality Compliance. He was previously Tech Data UK's Sales Operations Director, a role he held for 32 years. "There has never been a better time to embrace the energy and passion that exists around moving towards net zero carbon," said Wragg. "Also, at some point, customers and vendors are going to want to know where Tech Data is on its journey and ask us to demonstrate our environmentally friendly actions and processes."

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