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carrier reconciliation." > p3

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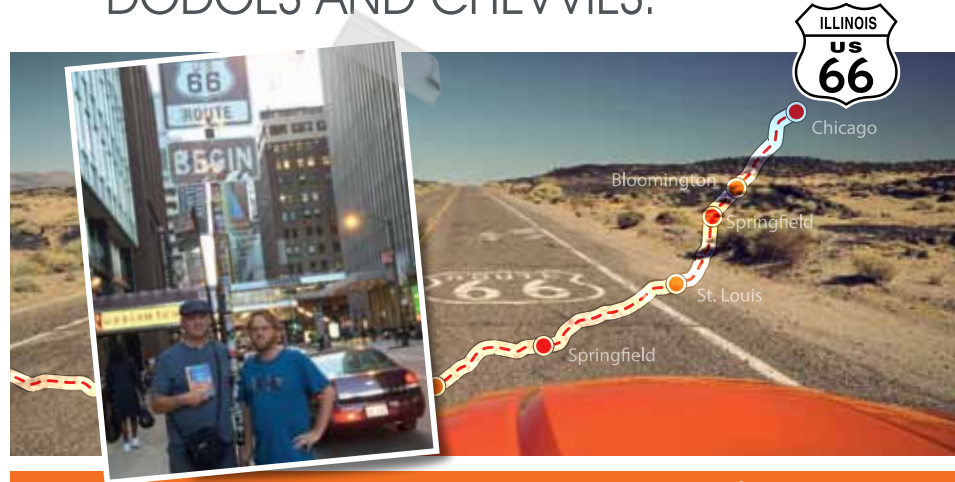


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Every year, Phillip Reynolds, CTO of Oak Innovation and David Reynolds, CTO of Oak Systems International, take some serious time out to go on an exotic journey.

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Their Route 66 road trip in 2015, for example, was where Clarify, Oak's latest call recording and quality measurement solution, took shape.

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Phillip Reynolds

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and watch this space for details of Phillip and David's next trip



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# Vodafone slapped by watchdog fine

**VODAFONE'S £4.6m fine is not only the largest amount ever levied on a telecoms provider by the regulator, it's also a stark warning to the channel.**

**SPECIAL REPORT**

THE fine was the result of an 18 month probe by Ofcom that uncovered mis-selling and billing glitches. The investigation also found that Vodafone had broken rules on handling customer complaints.

The affected customers collectively lost £150k over a 17 month period when Vodafone failed to credit the accounts of thousands of pay-as-you-go customers after they paid to top-up their mobile phone credit.

The regulator also found that Vodafone did not comply with its rules on handling customer complaints, and did not act fast enough to fix problems that stemmed from the firm transferring to a new billing system.

Lindsey Fussell, Ofcom's Consumer Group Director (*pictured*), said: "This fine sends a clear warning to all telecoms companies. We will not hesitate to investigate and fine those who break the rules."

Vincent Disneur, Head of Sales and Marketing at Union Street Technologies, commented: "This case highlights the importance for resellers to carry out thorough revenue assurance checks during the billing process, not just for their own benefit but also for the benefit of their customers."

"Mis-billing that occurs when buying services from a carrier can in most cases be mitigated by resellers so long as they're using a billing system that delivers robust and effective functionality for managing carrier reconciliation." > p3

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## EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

THE takeaway from last month's sensational Comms National Awards event (CNAs) – wow, what an industry we're in! And every month the pages of this magazine also showcase all that is great about our sector – people. People like Sir Paddy! (page 32) and channel favourite Clifford Norton (page 34).

The comms sector continues to attract more and more people as business leaders recruit to drive and manage their growth. One such company is The Pure Technology Group which aims to double revenues and boost staff numbers while pursuing a number of acquisition targets (page 8). It's one of many like-minded businesses driving for growth in an environment where M&A deals show no sign of slowing up post-Brexit (page 28).

All of this positive activity is occurring amid the flux of an industry defined by analysts as being in the throes of technological disruption and digitalisation. But it takes the skill, flexibility and adaptability of companies, people, to harness both the disruptive forces and growth drivers for the good of their organisations – a remarkable and unique triumph that was emphatically lauded at the CNAs in October, a thriving event that is emblematic of an industry connected by aspiration, ambition and excellence (page 40).

The theme continues this month as many of the sector's leading lights descend on Gleneagles Hotel for this year's Comms Vision Convention. Aside from industry leading content and world class keynote speakers, the event is a platform for the execs of leading organisations to ensure their finger remains on the pulse, network with their peers and define award winning strategies (page 51).

There is no time to dilly dally, such is the pace of change, a point that Gamma's newly instated channel chief Daryl Pile neatly summarises in his reflections on industry developments in recent years and forward looking pronouncements on his strategic objectives (page 46).

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

# Node4 seals buyout deal

NODE4 is set to drive additional growth opportunities, new channel offerings and infrastructure investments following the tie-up of a buyout with Bowmark Capital which has acquired a majority shareholding alongside the management team.

The incoming principle investor has also committed a further £40m of additional funding for Node4's growth and acquisition plans over the next three years.

Within the last three years Node4 has tripled staff numbers, grown its customer base to 900 and expanded its geographical presence and cloud services portfolio.

Node4 also expanded its Northampton and Leeds data centres, upgraded its DWDM network, launched a managed security offering and is set to roll out more cloud-based services aimed at the mid-market.

## Continued from page 1

FCS CEO Chris Pateman said: "The rules on customer complaints handling aren't hard, and Ofcom takes non-compliance seriously. Vodafone's fine is a reminder that the regulator does have teeth. A multi-million pound fine is a great headline



Andrew Gilbert

"Node4 has achieved every strategic objective it set itself three years ago, and our strong channel relationships have been a major factor in this success," said MD Andrew Gilbert."

Bowmark Capital bought out Node4 holdings from LDC, its previous institutional investor.

Bowmark Investment Director Stephen Delaney added: "We have been tracking the ICT managed services sector for a number of years and have been impressed with Andrew Gilbert and his team."

grabber. But it's not just about mobile networks and consumers. If you supply services to any business employing fewer than 10 people you have to comply with the same legislation. And Ofcom has the powers to fine any non-compliant business up to 10% of its turnover."

## SHORT CALLS

Microsoft resellers in the UK are facing a New Year price hike in enterprise software and cloud services. As of January 1st on-premises enterprise software will increase by 13% while most enterprise cloud prices will rise by 22% to 'realign close to euro levels'. In a statement Microsoft said, 'Where products are sold through resellers, final prices will continue to be determined by them'.

Onecom has signed three new launch partner agreements with CityFibre committing a minimum of 300 business connections on three of CityFibre's existing metro networks, Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham. The five-year agreement, with an initial contract value of £3.2m, builds on Onecom's existing CityFibre partnership in Southend.

Following Maintel's acquisition in May this year of Azzurri the organisation will operate as a single integrated business across all functions of sales, operations and finance under the Maintel brand. CEO Eddie Buxton said: "The integration of Azzurri has continued at pace and everything is going to plan."

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COMMENT: A FROSTY RECEPTION



Richard Carter

MOBILE phone reception in the UK is far from perfect but you would probably assume it's better than more isolated regions such as Iceland. But having digested the results of a new Uswitch survey and spoken to my colleague Chris Widocks, I'm afraid the opposite is true. Chris has just returned from a trip to Iceland where even on remote coach journeys free Wi-Fi was consistent and 100 per cent reliable. Phone reception was great

too – if only the same could be said for the UK.

According to the latest research from Comparison website uSwitch the capital sees almost 42 per cent of Londoners complaining of poor reception or no coverage at all in their own homes. The south west of England (41 per cent) follows in second place. Over a third of UK mobile users suffer from poor indoor coverage (34 per cent). Not surprisingly, those living in rural areas are the worse off.

The blur between our working and home lives shows little sign of slowing as the smartphone in our pockets retains its dominance. Massive leaps forward in terms of speed and features have taken place in the last 10 years but there's still lots of room for improvement regarding network reliability and coverage.

Our reliance on the Internet is set to grow even more, with IoT, virtual reality and even augmented reality gaining greater traction throughout 2017. Network infrastructure and higher bandwidths will be crucial in an ever connected always-on world. But as an industry we need the infrastructure in place first if we are to take advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead. Otherwise we run the risk of getting frozen out compared to other countries – even little Iceland.

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

# Acquisitive Nuvias swoops on Siphon

PAN-EMEA distribution firm Nuvias Group has acquired UC distributor Siphon Networks in a deal that promises to extend Siphon's influence in the UK and across the continent.

Post-acquisition it's business as usual for Siphon which will continue to be led by Steve Harris who remains MD.

"We will protect what has already been built by Siphon," confirmed Nuvias Group CEO Paul Eccleston.

"We will enhance it through the other capabilities in the Nuvias Group, and expand it across EMEA.

"Siphon's service and solutions capabilities for the channel are aligned with the Nuvias Group's philosophy and strategy. Siphon is also complementary to the cyber security, advanced networking and UC capabilities of Wick Hill and Zycko, the existing businesses in the Group."

Harris added: "This enables us to accelerate our growth plans and expand geographically in the UK and EMEA as part of a much larger organisation which shares our core beliefs and dedication to high service levels, and has the resources to help us realise our goals."



Steve Harris

Siphon began its commercial life in 2009 when Harris co-founded the company with a £50k investment in the midst of a global financial crisis.

In May last year Siphon received a £1.5m investment

from Finance Wales to drive growth and boost its presence in the UK and Europe.

Siphon currently generates around £20m turnover, has offices in the UK and Benelux, circa 50 staff, and works with vendors including Polycom, Oracle and BroadSoft.

In autumn 2015 Siphon was ranked as the 23rd fastest growing technology company in the UK and one of the fastest growing technology companies in EMEA by Deloitte.

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# Iconic phone box turns 80



GIANT images of BT's classic red K6 phone box were projected onto several of the company's central London buildings, including its HQ near St Pauls, to mark the design icon's 80th anniversary on October 5th.

The K6, or 'Jubilee Kiosk', was designed by English architect Sir Giles Gilbert Scott (1880-1960) and first introduced in 1936 to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of King George V. The kiosk became the first standard phone box across the UK.

Scott was also responsible for designing landmarks such as Battersea Power Station, Bankside Power Station (now home to Tate Modern), Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral, which also contains a K6, and Waterloo Bridge.

David Hay, Head of BT Heritage, commented: "The red telephone box and in particular the classic K6 is an important part of the UK's history and regularly tops the polls as a design and cultural icon.

"They're recognised around the world. Many are now found in countries as diverse as the US, Cuba, Brazil, Switzerland, Hungary and Germany."

Out of a total number of 46,000 working public payphone kiosks on the streets of the UK, around 8,000 are traditional red phone boxes, of which the majority are K6s.

The architectural significance of the traditional phone box has seen 2,400 kiosks designated as grade II listed buildings.

BT is also providing for sale a limited number of refurbished examples of traditional phone boxes. To commemorate the K6's 80th birthday a small number of kiosks are being painted in a Union Jack design instead of the standard bright red.

Since 2008 BT has encouraged communities where their local phone box is not being used to make calls to buy it with the payphone removed for £1 under the Adopt a Kiosk scheme. More than 3,500 kiosks have now been adopted and transformed into a variety of new uses.

Some have been fitted with life saving defibrillation machines, others have been turned into art galleries, mini libraries, exhibitions and information centres.

Neil Scoresby, Head of Payphones at BT, added: "The success of the scheme has shown the huge amount of affection communities have for red phone boxes, particularly the K6.

"They're loved around the world, so much so that lots of people have actually bought one from us.

"Owning your own phone box has been a huge hit and we think the Union Jack design will prove to be just as popular."



"We're ahead of the technology curve in Canada, and I let my dad know what he should be doing next"

David Reynolds

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Phillip and David Reynolds' Route 66 road trip, from the Windy City to LA, via evocative places like Tulsa and Santa Fe, was just the start of a journey for Clarify, our latest call recording and quality measurement solution.

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COMMENT: WINNING BUSINESSES



Pete Tomlinson

THE Comms National Awards has always been one the great highlights of the year and, as anyone who was lucky enough to attend last month will know, this time around was no exception. It's clear our channel is in great shape. We have become accustomed to celebrating innovative new solutions at these awards, but two things really stood out this year. This first was that the next wave of convergence is real and starting to happen on the ground. It was great to see some of the winners

being businesses with solutions that are living examples of successfully bring together the traditionally separate worlds of communications, software and IT services into genuine cloud and subscription-based services.

The other was the range of finalists themselves. This year saw many new and innovative players being recognised, with almost every category contested by a healthy mix of established and challenger brands.

Ours remains something of a fragmented industry and with the scale of the market opportunity we should expect no slowdown in investment across our sector. Much of that investment has been focused on consolidation, which can of course be a good thing, although that itself relies on the right supply of creative businesses that can add value. However, it also acts as a reminder that there remains massive scope for organic growth where businesses have the right attitude, people and proposition set to take advantage of the opportunity, regardless of the size of their business. That has to be the most exciting opportunity.

It was great to meet so many friends on the night, both new and old. Congratulations to all those who won. But to everyone... enjoy spending the coming 12 months creating next year's winning businesses.

Pete Tomlinson, Director, KCOM

# Metronet picks up Internet firm M247

LIVINGBRIDGE-backed Metronet (UK) has acquired Internet infrastructure and hosting company M247 for £47.5m.

The acquisition is the first step in a buy and build strategy that aims to create a disruptive platform in the connectivity space with 'last mile' control speeding up communications to end users, and a transit network across Europe.

Mid-market PE firm Livingbridge invested in Metronet in June 2014 as part of a £45m secondary buyout of the firm.

Metronet currently employs 150 people across two sites in Manchester and works with over 2,500 businesses, generating turnover of £21.5m in the financial year to 2016.

Following the acquisition Metronet will be able to offer a combined portfolio of connectivity and content services including wireless network services, data centres and managed hosting solutions across the UK and Europe. The combined business will have three data centres, over 200 staff and EBITDA in excess of £12m.

Metronet CEO Lee Perkins stated: "M247 provides the scale and reach to build upon our existing momentum and the



Lee Perkins

expertise and infrastructure to provide richer solutions to our combined customers."

M247 was founded in 2000 by Jonathan Buckle and Chris Byrd, initially as a web hosting services business before David Buckle, Jonathan's father, co-invested in the business to purchase a web hosting company called Open Hosting.

Open Hosting was then incorporated into the existing business before being rebranded as M247 in 2003.

Matthew Caffrey, Partner at Livingbridge, stated: "This is a fantastic step forward for Metronet as it expands its footprint across the UK and eventually into Europe. This acqui-

sition is the start of a journey to build an international, multi-offering Internet service provider and hosting business. Metronet has an exciting time ahead as it looks for similar acquisition opportunities."

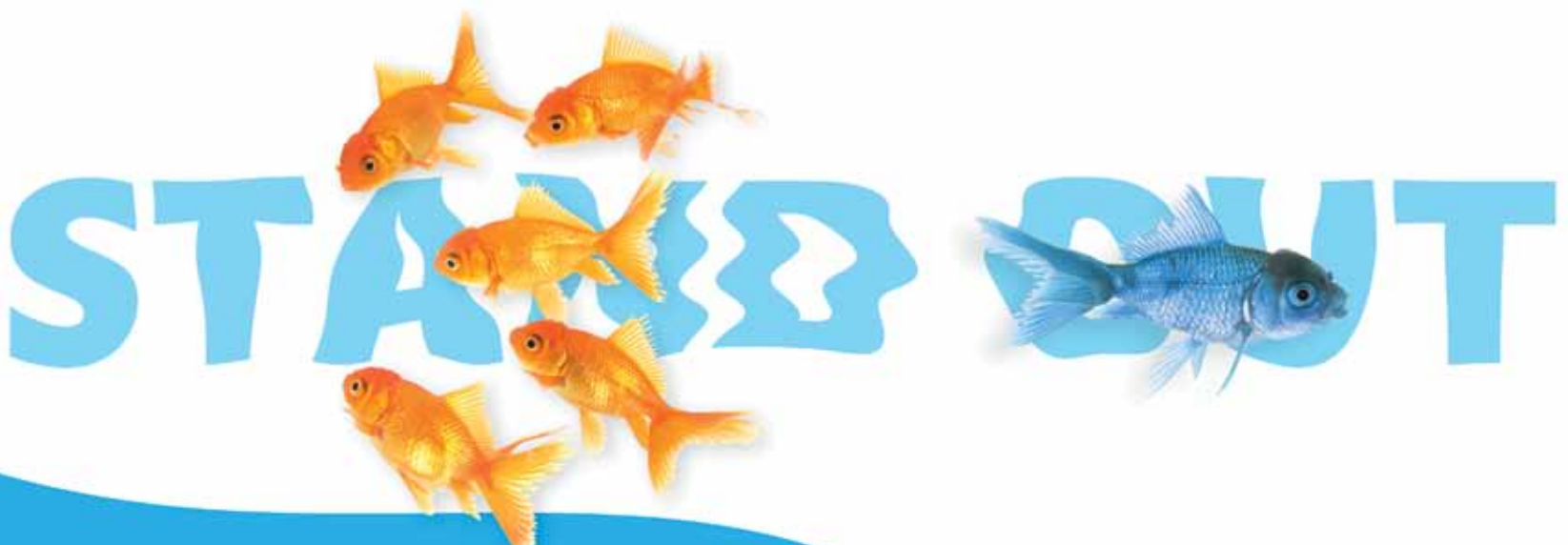
Metronet is currently one of the most exciting communications companies in Europe, according to Marcus Allchurch, Partner at Acuity Advisors. "As Acuity has consistently said, private equity backed buyers in this market are focusing on strategic acquisitions, and this is no exception," he stated.

"Metronet is significantly expanding its capabilities with M247's infrastructure expertise.

"Accounts have not been released for the year ended April 2016, however Megabyte suggested EBITDA of around £4m and growth to a potential £6m for the current year, all of which implies a run rate multiple of just under 10x EBITDA which is very much in line with the market for high quality targets.

"We can expect more acquisitive and organic growth from Metronet and its private equity backer Livingbridge."

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# Rebrand precedes busy buying spree

PURE Data Group, the umbrella company for Pure Data Solutions and Servatech, both acquired in 2014, has unified and rebranded to The Pure Technology Group and signalled its intent to pursue more acquisition targets and double revenues within three years.

Cliff Fox, COO, stated: "The different names and identities were causing confusion among our customers so we decided to unify our brand and embark on a new strategy."

As part of the company's push for growth it has recruited 14 additional employees in the past nine months including the appointment of Gary Saunders as Sales Director in August.

"We've made some key hires and are looking to grow our capability," Fox added. "It's all about having the right talent, from both a commercial and technical perspective."

The latest recruitment drive boosts the firm's overall headcount to 89 staff members.

"Acquisitions and organic growth will see our numbers grow to approximately 150 in the next three years," said Fox.

"We don't want to be the biggest company in the world but we have great ambition and



Cliff Fox

a well constructed and achievable strategic plan."

He aims to generate £40m-plus revenues within three years, doubling the current £20m revenue rate.

"Acquisitions are a big part of our growth plans, with 11 potential deals currently in discussion and three or four in advanced talks," he added.

"There's going to be much more activity in large enterprise and SME cloud over the coming two years, so acquisitions in this space will be important.

"We also want to extend our geography, so a southern-based company might be of interest."

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# Venture aids health sector

CHANNEL veterans Steve Mackervoy and Mark Hayes have teamed up to launch a new venture to help the UK health sector make savings and improve efficiency.

Their new venture 'Health in Touch' will be selling a full range of services to GP surgeries, the wider NHS, opticians, dentists, private hospitals and vets designed to help teams communicate more effectively with their communities.

The duo unveiled their offering at the Best Practice exhibition at the NEC last month.

The products range from basic WLR3 through to hosted voice linking with Oak's Patient Connect product.

"The interesting part for the channel is that there will also be electronic communications including secure email, file sharing/collaboration and other products to help the NHS get rid of outdated technology like fax machines," said Mackervoy.

"We will use video conferencing and mobile comms to help doctors assess more patients more quickly and cover the extended opening hours required of them by the NHS.

"We will also offer hybrid mail services to invite patients



Steve Mackervoy

to attend a consultation and help our customers use SMS to remind patients of upcoming appointments to improve 'did not attend' rates."

The Health in Touch email, file sharing/collaboration and hybrid mail services will be available to the channel under the Webpost brand.

"All of these products are available to our chosen market today, but not from a single supplier and not on a single bill with clear tariffing," commented Mackervoy.

Mackervoy sold his Beyond Communications business to TMS earlier this year and Hayes has previously worked for Cable&Wireless, Cable Telecom, Universal Office Automation and Commsolve.

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# £50m boost bolsters GCI

GCI has secured a £50m acquisition fund facilitated via the Royal Bank of Scotland and HSBC in a deal led by GCI's CFO Mark Allen and brokered with the support of KPMG.

Allen said: "In terms of strategy, we are focusing GCI's services and solutions around the need to support an increasingly mobile workforce, the need to enable and support digital transformation and collaboration, the need for increasingly sophisticated security and compliance solutions, and the need to support the 'rise and rise' of the omni-channel and diverse communications platforms.

"This £50m fund will help us robustly address those customer challenges and will help take GCI to the next level."

Adrian Thirkill, CEO, added: "We are already making very



Mark Allen

good use of the additional funding now available to us and will continue to invest in our capabilities around Office 365, Skype for Business, Azure, cloud PBX and our growing PCI compliance services."

Dan Salt, Regional Head for the Midlands and West, Royal Bank of Scotland Corporate Transactions, added: "We are demonstrating our confidence in this sector by backing a strong management team with a clear focus on what they want to achieve."

# Education key to IoT adoption

THE Internet of Things (IoT) represents a significant opportunity for the comms channel but to date it has largely been limited in its scope to connectivity, according to Comms365's MD Mike van Bunnens.

"However, as IoT continues to build momentum and SME customers in particular are educated about the operational efficiency benefits of an IoT solution for their business, it becomes a viable differentiator," he commented.

In a bid to unlock IoT market potential for channel partners Comms365 has rolled out the Affinity Partner Programme, offering partners M2M, IoT and mobile data Internet access services, as well as all other Comms365 services including bonded technology, Software Defined WAN (SD-WAN), MPLS Overlay, Secure IP-VPN, FTTC and Ethernet Failover.

"It is our aim through the Affinity Partner Programme to provide resellers and vendors with everything they need to successfully scope, sell and deliver a true end-to-end solution for customers."

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# Anti-bill shock alerts

AN ANTI-bill shock mobile feature launched by TeleWare alerts globally roaming users when they have reached 80% of their pre-defined limit.

When they reach the limit the data session is automatically disconnected unless it has been

increased by the administrator. Users have an option to increase data packages while abroad.

Danny Hensby, Head of Product Management, said: "We have worked with networks globally to ensure we can offer this protection internationally."



BIG hearted Comms Dealer Sales Exec' Sophie Timms has successfully completed the Wimbledon Half Marathon and invited the channel to support her Sparks charity long distance running campaign in the lead up to next year's London Marathon on April 23rd. "It was a tough run," she said. "The rain made the whole course muddy and slippery!"

With a Half Marathon time of 2 hours 33 minutes under her belt Timms is confident she can run below 5.5 hours next spring. "I have a personal trainer to help me strengthen my legs, back and core, as well as increase my lung capacity," she added. "And I'm entering as many half marathons as possible in the run up to the main event."

Completing the Wimbledon Half Marathon is an achievement inspired by the charity work undertaken by Sparks and Timms' dedication to raising as much sponsorship as possible in support of the kids charity.

"If someone had told me this time last year that I would be running the 2017 London Marathon, I would have laughed," she said. "Sparks has been so kind to take me on this journey. If you could donate, even just £1, to my Just Giving page then you can help me to help them." Pictured: Sophie with the race mascot following the Wimbledon Half Marathon.

Please visit: [www.justgiving.com/Sophie-Timms1](http://www.justgiving.com/Sophie-Timms1)

## Nuvola Distribution Delivers Total Unified Communications Solutions for Resellers



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# Comms companies get R&D tax relief

## IT Europa sets Summit date

DATAFOX has ratcheted up its campaign to ensure that telecoms companies receive the tax relief they are owed under the Government's R&D scheme.

"Comms companies and resellers are missing out on significant amounts of available tax relief and tax credits owed to them by HMRC for work that qualifies as R&D," said Jonathan Leefield, Director.

The R&D scheme is the single largest support for UK business and was developed to encourage them to carry out R&D as part of their overall strategy to remain innovative and competitive.

"We are increasingly discovering new opportunities for businesses within the telecoms industry to claim R&D tax relief they simply aren't aware they can claim on," added Leefield.

"The perception seems to remain that R&D must involve a form of lab research. But the reality is very different. For example, many companies have pursued successful claims for software development such as an internal CRM system, even where this development is not their core business."

Datafox's team has successfully claimed between £35k and



Jonathan Leefield

£950k for clients with average claims this year totalling approximately £100k.

"Companies can only claim on their previous two years filed accounts, so delays in claiming means businesses could potentially miss out on tens, if not hundreds of thousands of pounds," added Leefield.

Many telecoms firms fall under HMRC's small business scheme (less than 500 employees) and will see a return of 26% of relevant costs if their accounts show a profit (33.35% if loss-making). Large companies can claim 8.8% tax relief.

Leefield noted that Datafox's team has handled many claims within the telecoms industry in areas such as software devel-

opment and bespoke software adjustments, billing, customer dashboard and client interfaces, cloud technologies, next generation networks, cyber security, data trafficking and data centre management, along with technology updates for compliance.

To help comms companies make successful R&D claims Datafox has also launched a new partner programme for dealers and resellers including referral opportunities.

Leefield said: "We offer telecoms dealers an opportunity to refer business for R&D claims and add important revenue streams to their existing suite of services, with Datafox taking care of all the work preparing and submitting the claims."

COMMS Dealer sister publication IT Europa has set the date for the tenth annual European Software & Solutions Summit which will take place on 30th March 2017 at the Royal Garden Hotel in London.

Commenting on next year's event, which incorporates the European ISV Convention, IT Europa MD Alan Norman said: "Organisations across Europe are looking for solutions that deliver real value and business benefits. That means looking beyond traditional applications to the development of a new generation of digital solutions."

"The summit provides an opportunity for Europe's software and solutions communities to come together to address the issues affecting the development of applications."

"It also provides a framework within which major hardware and software vendors, as well as service providers and system integrators, can meet and engage with the directors and decision makers of Europe's most significant ISVs and solution providers to create new business opportunities."

Norman also confirmed that the European IT & Software Excellence Awards 2017 will



Alan Norman

be staged on 30th March 2017 in London.

"With the complexity of technology continuing to increase and new cloud-based and hybrid delivery models emerging, the role played by ISVs, solution providers and integrators in delivering solutions to end customers is becoming increasingly important," added Norman.

"The European IT & Software Excellence Awards are the only pan-European awards to recognise excellence in the creation and delivery of real solutions and are intended to encourage the development of partnerships between vendors and solution providers across the IT and telecoms industries."

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### SHORT CALL

SpliceCom is targeting companies with two to 80 users with a new end-to-end private cloud solution called SpliceCom Select Cloud Voice, which gives customers a dedicated virtual UC platform with on-net connectivity and SIP trunks. "We've utilised our own technology and bridged the two polarised extremes of hosted and traditional PBX vendors," said Stuart Bell, SpliceCom's Head of Sales for the UK&I.

## Masergy bought

US-BASED investment company Berkshire Partners is to acquire a majority interest in worldwide service provider Masergy Communications.

Masergy serves clients in over 75 countries, offering hybrid networking, managed security and cloud communications solutions to medium and large enterprise customers.

Chris MacFarland, Chairman and CEO of Masergy, said: "Berkshire brings the industry expertise required to help us fulfill our vision."



Chris MacFarland

Berkshire Partners MD Tom Kuo added: "Given the accelerating rate of change across the information technology landscape, there are significant opportunities for Masergy to continue its growth."

## ProVu adds 3CX

IP PBX software vendor 3CX has extended its reach in the UK market following a link-up with VoIP distributor ProVu. The move will see the availability, support and training of the complete 3CX product range.

ProVu MD Darren Garland said: "The 3CX range is based on the number of simultaneous calls required rather than the number of users. This enables resellers to create cost-effective, scalable solutions. The 3CX portfolio plays into our existing product ranges nicely. We



Darren Garland

hold strong relationships with Snom and Yealink, which with the addition of 3CX enables us to offer a complete package."

Paul Clarke, 3CX's Regional Sales Manager UK&I, added: "3CX is committed to growing its UK market share."



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# 6DG reaches Hot demand £100m mark for SD-WAN



Alastair Mills

SIX Degrees Group (6DG) has passed the £100m revenue milestone just five years after being founded by CEO Alastair Mills.

The company has grown from five to 500 employees and Mills attributes its stellar growth to a converged technology approach accelerated through solutions such as UCaaS, the expansion of data centre space, growth of cloud platforms and the roll out of a next generation network.

Acquisitions also played a key role in expanding 6DG's portfolio and expertise. These include the purchase of providers such as Capital Support, Carrenza and Insite.

In the coming months Mills plans to develop application monitoring, managed compliance and security-as-a-service solutions while continuing to

expand 6DG's public cloud integration services for Amazon Web Services, Microsoft Azure and Google Cloud Platform.

Mills said: "Six Degrees has achieved a great deal in its first five years with a healthy mix of organic and acquisitive growth.

"We will focus on three areas: To be innovative in the solutions we create, to deliver a more personalised service and nurture a great company culture that attracts and develops talented people."

A key aspect of 6DG's CSR ethos is its work with We-SeeHope, a charity that supports children orphaned or isolated by extreme poverty in Southern and Eastern Africa. The company has raised almost £400k. It also holds the Investors in People Silver accreditation.

COMMS365 is targeting the fast growing market for Software Defined Wide Area Networking (SD-WAN) solutions where demand is forecast to drive revenues of circa \$6bn in 2020, according to IDC.

Meanwhile, Gartner expects 30% of enterprises to be using SD-WAN products in all of their branches by 2019.

"The proliferation of data being consumed on a day-to-day basis by businesses is demanding a completely new way of managing networks," commented Comms365 MD Mike van Bunnens.

"Business owners and IT managers need to gain control over their critical and non-critical application traffic streams, utilise the combined bandwidth of dedicated private circuits and broadband access links for cost-efficiency and still deliver the experience their users expect and require."

In response to this market demand Comms365 has added Prism to its cloud solution portfolio, a SD-WAN application control service.

"Prism provides organisations with a lower total cost of ownership of their WAN while offering the equivalent

and enhanced capability of a MPLS network," according to van Bunnens.

"Legacy, expensive private networks are becoming saturated with cloud-based traffic. Furthermore, SME businesses are increasingly utilising Software-as-a-Service from cloud-based providers for essential business productivity.

"SD-WAN is rapidly emerging as a new way to design and deploy a WAN, giving end users, network engineers and service providers the ability to adjust, optimise, automate and test their WAN connections through software controls."

## SHORT CALLS

**telent** has climbed 35 places in the Sunday Times Top Track 250 securing 30th position in this year's listing. Highlights this year include a 14 year service contract with National Express Group and the near completion of a voice and data network on the new aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth.

**Magnetic North's** brand has changed direction and gone West following its acquisition by West Corporation. The integration of Magnetic North's cloud contact centre solution into West's UC services portfolio strengthens the firm's ability to offer seamless multi-channel communications.



CONTENT Guru welcomed James Puxley, Lord Lieutenant of the Royal County of Berkshire, who formally presented the firm with a Queen's Award for Enterprise: Innovation. The Award recognises storm CONTACT, Content Guru's multi-channel cloud contact centre product as an example of innovation. The award will be valid for five years. Content Guru's CEO Sean Taylor stated: "The award is the result of years of hard work from a committed and talented team."

## SHORT CALL

**Sheffield-based** Digital Exchange has expanded its team and undertaken a brand revamp including the launch of a new website. Commercial Manager Paul Gardiner said: "Although we have seen steady growth across a number of our digital services recently, it is virtualisation and the migration to cloud that we see as key factors for our clients' growth, while giving them a safe and interactive network to work from."

# Timico hails portal Storage heats up

TIMICO has enhanced the user management of its Virtual Data Centre (VDC) service following the launch of a new portal.

Timico's VDC cloud solution offers servers, storage, networking, security and other IT elements as a service from the firm's UK-based data centres. And the Timico Cloud Portal gives users more freedom to customise and manage their virtual environment.

New VDCs can be created as well as adding more resources to expand an existing environ-

ment. The portal also gives access to other features such as virtual machine metrics, CPU core usage and memory usage.

Andrew Fox, Director of Managed Networks, Connectivity and Cloud Services, commented on the new developments: "The new portal is flexible, intuitive and easy to use.

"It gives users complete control of their environment without needing to manage any of the software or hardware underpinning the service, making their servers truly software-defined."

LONDON-based Beta Distribution has revealed plans to drive its storage business so that it accounts for approximately half of the firm's £200m a year sales having agreed new targets with vendor FalconStor.

"With data rapidly expanding, storage is in high demand and we have altered our business model to support this," commented Tony Howard, who is the Business Development Manager at Beta Distribution.

"Our aim is to make storage account for at least half of

our business by the end of this year, and we believe an SDS layer such as FreeStor can drive this and help us meet customer demand," he added.

Tony Martin, MD UK&I, FalconStor, observed: "The storage market is thriving and it is crucial for distributors like Beta to facilitate a SDS layer that can help organisations avoid vendor lock-in, whether in the cloud or on-premise."

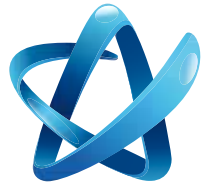
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# Advantex invests in phase of expansion CTO berates CBS initiative

GATESHEAD-based Advantex Network Solutions is investing more than £350k in new facilities, doubling capacity at the firm's Follingsby Park-based head office.

The company secured a £75k grant from regional growth fund Let's Grow North East as part of an overall funding package to support its expansion plans which include the development of a new data centre alongside additional office space to house a growing workforce.

New training and product demonstration facilities are also being developed as part of a package of measures that come on the back of 40% growth in sales for Advantex in the last financial year.

The firm has also earmarked part of the investment towards



Directors Stephen and David O'Connell

the development of new superfast broadband services provided to businesses across Teesside and Wearside.

Following the cash injection, the company will be eyeing further growth in the next 12 months as it targets £6m turnover by 2017.

Advantex Network Solutions co-founder and Sales Director

Stephen O'Connell commented: "We're seeing strong traction as economic confidence looks to hold up and businesses continue to invest while eschewing traditional approaches to IT provision and service support.

"The next few months promises to be even busier as we look to develop our presence further in core sectors.

"Education providers facing a changing IT landscape over the next year can benefit from new strategic IT and wider commercial and e-Learning packages and technologies."

Advantex was founded in 2002 and is a Microsoft, Cisco and Mitel partner currently employing over 60 people.

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A REPORT by Scottish Rural Action (SRA) that criticises Community Broadband Scotland (CBS) has sparked a strong reaction from Commsworld CTO Charlie Boisseau.

CBS is a Government initiative led by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Boisseau believes that its intent to provide superfast broadband to all properties by 2020 is a 'pipe dream'. He also berated its reliance on BT-partnered programmes.

"It would be difficult to disagree that the government has failed in its mission to provide broadband," stated Boisseau.

"Whether any one party can be blamed for this shortfall is open to debate, but if progress is to be made in providing everyone with superfast broadband the Government must open the building of network infrastructures to more companies."

Commsworld has spotlighted the capabilities of smaller service providers to help push things along.

Boisseau added: "Even with significant government subsidies rural areas are of little or no interest to tier one providers that stand to gain little from what is, comparative to city infrastructure projects, a lot of work.



Charlie Boisseau

"Although these projects are of vital political and local importance, the biggest providers will always leave the highlanders and islanders to last. That is if they pay them much heed at all.

"While larger companies may offer a cheaper service for the provision of broadband in the main, it is our view that the use of smaller companies to fill in the gaps they leave behind could establish a network that is a lot closer to meeting the Government's aims than the system currently in place.

"For this to work it must stop merely paying lip service to smaller providers and throw all their resources into getting companies of various sizes working on making Scotland a more connected country."



EXERTIS joined forces with vendor partners to undertake a two day charity cycle ride in aid

of Naomi House, raising £25k. Twelve cyclists took part in the 200 mile event (from Basingstoke to Shaftesbury and back) which was supported by Dell, Fujitsu, Samsung, Lenovo, Netgear, BT/Hive and Medion. Mark Kahr, Exertis Purchasing Director, said: "We are proud to have raised so much for our nominated charity Naomi House, for children and young adults with life limiting illnesses."

## SHORT CALL

SBL Group and Alcatel-Lucent Enterprise (ALE) have formed a channel training partnership that sees SBL provide engineer training on Alcatel-Lucent OmniPCX Office and OmniPCX Enterprise to ALE channel partners. "We are seeing an increased demand and interest for UK training on the Alcatel-Lucent Enterprise portfolio with a solid engineer led framework," said Peter Tebbutt, UK&I MD, ALE.

## iCall optimised for mobile devices

THE latest version of Tollring's iCall Suite, which can be deployed in the cloud, on-premise or as a hybrid model, is also optimised for mobile devices.

Tollring MD Tony Martino commented: "Our launch comes at a time when more end customers are reviewing their business processes and communications strategies as they consider migrating to cloud telephony.

"For those users who are not ready to embrace the cloud, they no longer need to choose between the previous desktop

version or the online version, they can now use one system with no loss of features."

Channel partners such as BT, Mitel and BroadSoft are already using iCall Suite 2016.

The new multi-tenant call analytics and call recording service for data visualisation and fraud detection enables organisations to monitor business-critical call metrics by accessing real-time reports, dashboards, visual wallboards and call recordings via live tiles that are optimised for mobile devices.

"Customers monitor inbound and outbound calls including call queuing and how many times a customer has called with no response," added Martino.

"Every unreturned missed call is a missed opportunity and can result in a dissatisfied customer and increased churn."

He pointed out that companies that analyse their business comms are proven to gain an advantage over competitors.

"Features such as utilisation analytics across multiple customers/tiers of partners pro-

vide valuable insights," added Martino. "Advice based on usage profiles highlights variances in behaviour; and revenue assurance tools are becoming not only a way for the channel to bill accurately, but even more importantly, a way to differentiate themselves."

iCall Suite 2016 also offers proactive fraud management using call limit profiling methods; self-provisioning in the cloud; and a pay-as-you-use commercial model with opportunities to white label.



## This is Rob's alarm clock.

Rob got an early wake up call this morning after receiving a SMS alert announcing that a customer's network was down. By the time the customer opened for business at 8:30am their network was back up and running. Having KCOM's monitoring system, Sentinel, Rob can proactively manage and respond to any network issue, reducing the impact to his customers and maintaining his reputation for trusted relationships.

Sentinel; unbeatable visibility that keeps you informed and your customers connected.



# NGC reports revenue rise



Directors Nikki Guest and Dean Harrop

NGC Networks has achieved £4.5m turnover after a strong performance across its products and services.

This year's results are up £0.5m on last year and the Wakefield-based business, which employs 30 staff, plans to hit £5m turnover in 2017.

NGC Networks provides business telecommunications and Internet connectivity solutions to companies across the north of England.

Director Dean Harrop commented: "We have enjoyed significant growth as a result of building on our work with existing clients as well as winning new ones, such as Bradford-based mail order business

Freeman Grattan Holdings, The Family Fund in York and First Choice Catering in Cannock.

"We have also consolidated our position in some key sectors including education and health where we provide telephony and Internet solutions to a range of academies, schools and medical centres across Yorkshire."

NGC's network services division has seen strong growth during the last 12 months, now routing 4.5 million calls per month, up from 1.7 million a year ago. The firm is currently recruiting for various positions at its Calder Park offices.

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# Taylor set for period of growth

FAREHAM-based Taylor Made Computer Solutions is fast expanding following a 20% increase in the past year, the biggest growth spurt in the company's 22-year history.

The organisation also upped staff numbers by almost 20% across a range of roles including IT engineers, sales staff, apprentices and customer service account managers.

Chairman Nigel Taylor commented: "What's important to us is that we stay true to the values we held dear when we first launched Taylor Made, to provide an expert and personal service for each and every client. Increasing our staff will ensure that we continue to do that now and in the future.

Taylor Made now employs 120 people and was the first company in Hampshire to receive Gold Investors in People recognition when it was first awarded in 2009.



The Taylor Made team

# Tech Data in recruit mode

TECH Data is aiming to recruit and on-board up to 30 new partners for the Microsoft Cloud Solutions Provider (CSP) programme by the end of the calendar year with its new CPS Accelerator initiative.

The company is looking to sign-up partners for the Tech Data Office 365, Azure and the Enterprise Mobility Suite (EMS) Accelerate Programmes.

Dwayne Earl, Software Business Unit Manager at Tech Data, said that the programme was being launched in response to rising interest in CSP.

"We've been involved with CSP from the outset and over the past year it has picked up. We are now seeing more Microsoft partners wanting to



Dwayne Earl

get fully on board and taking it forward as a strategic part of their business," he stated.

Earl also noted that Tech Data would be seeking up to ten resellers for each product set – Office 365, Azure and EMS – for the current wave.

The programme will be repeated on a six monthly cycle with the aim to recruit more partners each half.

## SHORT CALL

A sales training programme for BT Hosted Centrex with BroadSoft launched by Abzorb consists of web-based modules with tests to track progress through to completion and certification. Dave Axam, BT Director for Hosted Communications, said: "Our investments in training support has moved the needle in terms of sales. Abzorb recognises this. We both understand that great sales training delivers great sales results."

# Acquisition scoop

THREE acquisitions by Direct Response Contact Centres (DRCC's) have kicked off a new phase of expansion according to Group CEO Ian Mitchell.

Ipswich-based Ansaback and its sister business CallScripter have been bagged along with Kent-based GoResponse.

The deals were financed via DRCC's existing liquidity as well as an acquisition finance facility from investment company Boost&Co.

"These acquisitions represent a new and exciting phase

in the continued development of our business," stated Mitchell.

"Uniting these companies means we can open the door for organisations to easily embrace seamless multi-channel communications, business analytics and digitalisation. This offers significant new avenues of opportunity for both clients and our employees."

Chris Robinson, founder and Chairman, added: "We are poised for continued growth via future acquisitions and sustained organic sales."



CHILDREN'S hospice Julia's House has benefitted from a £1,600 donation made by Dorset-based Micron following a fund raising run in the Bournemouth 10k event by Team Superfast, a group of five Micron staff. They trained for six months prior to the event and smashed their original £750 target. "The team did us proud and put in a fantastic effort," enthused Jonny White, Group Development Manager. "We're already planning to go bigger and better at next year's event." Pictured l-r: Nina Thompson, Maxwell Brotherwood, Anna Williams, Gemma Hull and Dan Molyneux.

Introducing White Horse Telecom Managing Director Paddy Coppinger, a former helicopter pilot and seller of Magic Trees who branched into telecommunications and is aiming for a knighthood (see page 32).

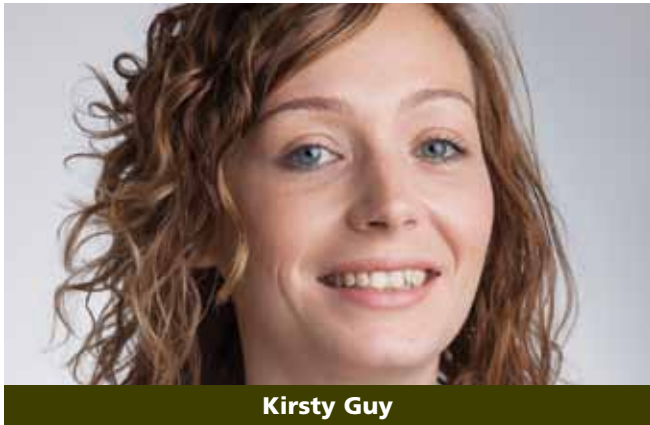


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# Distie in form for health kick



**Kirsty Guy**

TECH Data has swung its gaze onto the health sector and published a channel guide that supports a series of promotions aimed at unlocking the potential to generate revenue in healthcare environments.

The initiative reflects an increase in IT investments across the health service as the NHS seeks to make £22bn of efficiency savings by 2020.

According to research, ERP systems and the sharing of patient records and information are the top priorities.

Kirsty Guy, Public Sector Marketing Manager at Tech Data, commented: "The aim of the Focus on Healthcare campaign is to highlight some of the areas of potential.

"We always see a pick-up in activity in the healthcare sector at this time of year, so now is the right time for resellers to follow-up these opportunities and take some positive messages out to market."

Tech Data will update its Virtual Hospital environments with new products, noted Guy.

The company provides three primer health-focused resources – a Virtual Waiting Room, Virtual Ward Room, and Virtual Consulting Room.

"These areas show specific technologies that can be used in these key healthcare settings," said Guy.

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# New app quickens deal wins

NEW tools introduced by BNP Paribas Leasing Solutions will simplify the sales process for its partner network operating in the IT, telecoms and office equipment market, claims the firm.

"The Lease Offers app enables users to submit, track and edit credit applications in real-time, helping our partners to more speedily close sales opportunities," stated Tristan Watkins, UK CEO.

Another tool, called Sales-Aid, has been designed for the more complex needs of the farm, construction, materials handling and commercial vehicle sectors, explained Watkins.

"It can calculate quotes immediately and sync with the company's core lease management system in real-time," he said. "This allows partners to get a credit decision and generate electronic documentation."

An e-signature service that removes the need to send paper contracts to customers for signing has also been introduced.

"This LeasEsign service renders the process paperless and leaves no room for human error, and is accessible from any desktop or touch-screen device, for all markets," said Watkins.

# Welcome on board the Fidelity Energy train to new profits

If you can sell telecoms, you can sell energy. That's the advice offered by Welcome Telecom CEO Jack Michalski, who is the latest recruit to join Fidelity Energy's growing band of telecoms resellers now offering energy services to their established customers.

Gloucestershire based Welcome has always been outcome-based and, in the fast changing world of comms, understands how to integrate products to provide the most relevant services to customers.

Having worked with Fidelity Energy managing director John Haw whilst he was running Gamma's channel, Michalski was interested in the energy proposition and the opportunities it provided to his business and his customers. "It soon became clear to me that if you can sell telecoms you can sell energy. Of course there are intricacies involved with the supply and sale of energy services but Fidelity Energy offers

full support to assist with all details to ensure a professional approach to customers."

Welcome is focusing on customers with whom they already enjoy a good relationship, as Michalski explained: "Basically, we approach our customers and offer to manage their energy for them with Fidelity Energy's value adds making sure they don't fall on to 'out of contract rates'. We also supervise their termination with current suppliers and offer them a bill validation service."

With Fidelity's help, Welcome secured a large housing association contract with 50 plus gas and electric meters. The association previously had 10 suppliers and seven contract end dates all on different tariffs. Fidelity Energy consolidated the suppliers down to two, (one for Gas and for Electric) structured bespoke contracts all with common end dates and simplified the entire estate.



“There are intricacies involved with the supply and sale of energy services but Fidelity Energy offers full support to assist with all details to ensure a professional approach to customers.”

Jack Michalski, CEO, Welcome Telecom

## SHORT CALL

**ProVu** has added two new apprentices to its Technical Support Team. The firm has now taken on five apprentices following a link up with a local college's apprenticeship scheme in early 2015. New recruits William Dobson and Jordan Carr will undertake a two year course in IT, software, web and telecoms. MD Darren Garland commented: "Through apprenticeships we can nurture our own and help our staff to reach their full potential."



NIMANS hosted its own version of the Great British Bake Off in association with Macmillan's World's Biggest Coffee Morning, cooking up a range of baked goodies that raised over £300 for Macmillan. A homeless charity was given the left over cakes and tinned food. "At Nimans we have all the ingredients for success and the cake day went down a treat," stated the Manchester-based distributor's Investors in People Manager Sue Goldfine.



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# Vickerage to lead Europe Big guns aim at mid-market

SCANSOURCE Communications's VP for the UK&I James Vickerage has moved up the company ladder having been promoted to the role of President for Europe. He takes over from Ian Vickerage who is stepping down from the job.



**James Vickerage**

The new head honcho for Europe joined ScanSource through the firm's 2014 acquisition of Imago, a distributor of video and voice communications equipment and services.

"Since the acquisition James has held strategic leadership roles within ScanSource Communications in Europe," said Buck Baker, President of Worldwide Communications & Services for ScanSource (formerly President of Worldwide Barcode and Security). "His experience in the industry, as well as his wealth of knowledge of our suppliers and partners, will serve the company well in this new leadership role."

In other ScanSource leadership developments, newly appointed global co-Presidents Paul Constantine and Tony Sorrentino will bring a holistic and channel-focused dimension to ScanSource's Worldwide Barcode, Networking and Security operations.

The roles build on their current positions as President of the ScanSource POS and Barcode business unit and President of the ScanSource Networking and Security business unit in the US respectively. The pair will report to Mike Baur, CEO.

Mike Ferney, formerly President of Worldwide Communications and Services, has been named Innovation Architect for ScanSource, a newly created role.

"We are fortunate to have an established team of leaders at ScanSource," stated Baur. "Their level of experience, knowledge of the business and depth of relationships are instrumental to the growth and success of the company."

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SIX Degrees Group's (6DG) growth ambitions in the mid-market for converged cloud and application hosting have been significantly advanced following the addition of two big guns to the leadership line-up.

Former CEO of GTS Central Europe Danny Bottoms joins the company as Chairman and Paul Mills, ex-Head of Sales for Rackspace UK, has taken the role of Group Sales Director.

Bottoms brings 25 years experience in the comms and media industries including stints at PE backed companies. He is based in Virginia, USA.

Mills boasts 10 years sales management experience in the IT managed services space and has particular expertise in delivering across a mix of verticals and products.

6DG CEO Alastair Mills said: "The appointments are significant coups for Six Degrees."



**Paul Mills**



**Danny Bottoms**

"Danny has an excellent track record in PE backed technology companies, and Paul's experience in leading sales in managed hosting and managed services for the mid-market are exactly the areas we are targeting for our future growth around cloud platforms and application management services."

## SHORT CALLS

Exertis has sealed a supplier deal with Alcatel to market its full range of mobiles, tablets and wearables to UK retailers and resellers. Exertis Mobile Director Simon Woodman said: "Alcatel's multi-purpose devices fit with our strategy to offer our customers a mobile ecosystem."

Resellers working with distributor Cloud Telephones have deployed over 3,000 seats of Gamma's Horizon hosted VoIP service in the UK. "Growth is being driven by the increasing popularity of hosted services and the availability of higher speed broadband," said MD John Carter.

## VTech snares Snom

VOIP phone maker Snom has been pocketed by VTech, a manufacturer of cordless phones and electronic learning products, in a move that is expected to deliver synergies in hardware and software development, expanded market channels in VoIP telephony along with improvements in operational efficiency, according to VTech Telecommunications President C.H. Tong.

"VoIP is the future of business communication and the industry is now transitioning to a cloud-based Unified Communications environment," he commented. "As a pioneer in this field, Snom is constantly developing new IP technology solutions to meet the needs of businesses worldwide."

Andre Deloch, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Snom, added: "The combination of VTech and Snom will strengthen the product portfolios of both companies in the VoIP industry."

# Pricing power tool launches Egton gets cloud

INTERNET service provider hSo has unveiled its new 'Ethernet pricing powertool' that enables partners to view quotes for a range of connection speeds, contract lengths and carriers, with just one request.

"Connectivity buyers are often unsure about their options and uncertain about how much bandwidth they can afford," said Avner Peleg, hSo's Customer Development Director.

"hSo:compare MultiQuote addresses this problem by lifting the lid on Ethernet circuit

availability and pricing. hSo's channel partners will now be able to see hundreds of connectivity options on one screen.

"This will make it simple for them to give appropriate advice and provide their customers with pricing."

When using the tool, users can click on any price to be shown details of the underlying carrier and alternative quotes based on using alternative carriers' circuits. "Typically, channel partners just want our best price, so that's what our tool shows by

default," said Peleg, "However, some partners' clients may prefer to use a different carrier to improve network resilience or to raise the chances of meeting a challenging delivery timescale.

"Whatever the situation, hSo:compare MultiQuote gives partners the facts they need to accommodate clients' preferences and identify the most appropriate connectivity options, within seconds."

hSo:compare MultiQuote was created by hSo's in-house software development team.

A LINK-UP between Vapour Cloud and healthcare IT specialist Egton (part of EMIS Group) enables Egton to bring voice and cloud services to its client base.

Vapour Cloud CEO Tim Mercer said: "Like many other industries, healthcare is moving towards cloud-based technologies to help drive efficiencies and streamline processes, ultimately delivering enhanced services to patients."

Stephen Wilcock, MD of Egton, added: "The uptake of



**Tim Mercer**

new technology in the NHS is key to providing the cost and efficiency savings set out in the NHS forward view. Cloud telephony is a prime example of how technology can have a measurable impact on the way healthcare organisations deliver their essential operations."



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# App ensures safer driving Exertis nailed Hammer buy

COMMS resellers can now help customers with company car or van fleets improve the driver performance and safety of their sales reps and service engineers following a new partnership programme launched by driver and fleet performance specialist GreenRoad Technologies.

Central to the programme is the release of GreenRoad Mobile, a smartphone app that acts as a 'coach in the cab', warning drivers in real time when they stray from a safe, smooth driving style.

It monitors 150 vehicle movements, detecting risky manoeuvres such as harsh braking, sudden acceleration, sharp cornering and swerving.

It will also help company car drivers avoid the temptation of using their mobile while driving which now carries a maximum fine of £1,000.

"Our app is installed in the background of a smartphone and it can then either interact with the driver or it can give them a score at the end of their journey," explained GreenRoad Chief Marketing Officer David Rodriguez, who is spearheading the development programme.

"For example, if a sales person is driving and he or she



David Rodriguez

picks up the phone to look at an email or text, a notification will be sent as a 'safety event'.

"It makes sense to offer the app through telecoms resellers because it will be an added value proposition for them.

"For a low monthly fee per phone company managers will have the reassurance that employees are driving safely and it could pay for itself within three months based on the savings on fuel alone.

"If a reseller is trying to sell a large number of mobiles to a customer and can offer to help reduce their insurance claims, increase driver awareness or improve mileage capture along with the deal, it's an important added value sale."

EXERTIS has strengthened its enterprise portfolio, bolstered its capability in the mid and higher range server and storage market and extended its reach in Europe following the acquisition of Hammer Consolidated Holdings for £38.3m, a distributor of server and storage solutions (subject to approval from the European Commission).

Hammer has offices in the UK, France, Germany, Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands and employs 165 staff.

It generated sales of £155m for the year ended 31st January 2016 and distributes products from a range of vendors including Dell, Intel, Netapp, Seagate and Western Digital, to almost 1,000 value added resellers, cloud service providers and systems integrators.

Following regulatory approvals, expected to be completed by the end of 2016, Hammer will continue to operate as a standalone business with both entities capitalising on the benefits of the acquisition.

Niall Ennis, DCC Technology (which trades as Exertis) MD, said: "Hammer has enjoyed considerable success in providing value added services and bespoke solutions in a number

of vertical markets and has a well earned reputation as a storage specialist.

"The acquisition increases Exertis' expertise and solutions in the storage market and is complementary to our server and enterprise business, while providing Hammer customers and vendors with a platform for growth. It also deepens Exertis' presence across several European countries."

James Ward, Hammer MD, commented: "By leveraging the complementary strengths of both companies we can only add value to an exciting proposition for all stakeholders."

## SHORT CALLS

TeleWare has achieved Microsoft silver competencies for Data Analytics, Data Platform and Data Centre. Paul Millar, Chief Innovation Officer, TeleWare, said: "Being part of the Microsoft Partner Network is central to our business."

TES has completed a project at 5 Broadgate, the new 'ground-scraper' in the City of London. MD Keith Edwards said: "It's a stunning building and presented massive logistical challenges, especially as our team had to synchronise activity around other contractors' time scales to install a distributed antenna system."



A STRONG sales performance secured Nimans the Distributor of the Year award from headset firm Jabra for the second time. "Winning awards is a great testimony to the skills and dedication of our staff coupled with the support of our customers," said Nimans' Dealer Sales Headset Business Manager Jason Welsh. "We enjoy an excellent working relationship with Jabra which is set to grow even stronger." Pictured (l-r): James Burns (Nimans), Nigel Dunn (Jabra), Jason Welsh (Nimans), and Joel Hamon (Jabra).

## SHORT CALL

Red Box Recorders CEO Lee Jones has stepped down after ten years at the company but will continue in a non-executive capacity. Richard Stevenson takes over the role, moving from Standard Life where he was CEO of operations in Germany and Austria. Chairman Ian McKay said: "Richard has a successful track record in growing businesses in the software and financial services sectors."

# Nokia-Zycko deal Noetica gears up

NOKIA has hooked up with Zycko (now part of the Nuvias Group) in a move that signals a step forward in the go-to-market diversification at Nokia, extending channel and value added distribution to help expand the company's footprint in the enterprise and mid-market space across EMEA.

As Nokia's first pan-EMEA distributor Zycko will focus on hardware and software integration of IP routing and optical transport networks, fibre-based LAN connectivity infrastructure

for buildings and campuses, open standards DDI management software and software defined networking.

Dave Parker, who is Vice President of Strategic Partners at Nokia, commented on the partnership: "This appointment gives us access to a wide network of resellers experienced in communications and networking across the EMEA region.

"The type of distributor that Zycko and Nuvias are building internationally complements our own growth plans."

A CONTACT centre focused voice platform launched by Noetica has been embraced by trial customers including RSVP which is using the Noetica Voice Platform (NVP) across 220 seats at its London office with plans in place to replace all PBX units. Its new 100-seat Manchester site will be running NVP from launch.

The platform delivers ACD, IVR, voice recording, quality management and billing, and can be deployed either on-premise or in the cloud.

Prior to launch NVP was also in live production with ResQ and Parseq which have been able to reduce or eradicate their reliance on large enterprise telephony platforms.

Noetica's Chief Executive Officer Danny Singer commented: "Telephony is rapidly becoming a commodity and a 'one size fits all' way of delivering calls to the back-office and call centre is now obsolete."

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# Boom time in M2M as Bamboo whams barriers to uptake

BAMBOO Technology Group's M2M channel business is booming with a growing posse of reseller partners embracing its M2M proposition.

M2M was first introduced to Bamboo's Total Partner Programme in October last year and since January 2016 the firm has witnessed 31% average month-on-month growth in connected M2M devices and 71% average month-on-month growth in data volume.

MD Lorrin White attributes much of this growth to a flexible pence-per-kilobyte wholesale data plan that has proved popular among firms with small data requirements and large organisations that wish to create their own bundles.

"Our M2M channel has been a resounding success in the short time since its launch," commented White. "Despite being a relatively new technology for the channel the reaction from resellers at this early stage is encouraging."

"The barriers to wide scale M2M adoption have generally been one of two things – customers either struggling to conceive where M2M can deliver its own unique value in place of a regular cellular or fixed line connection, or resellers unconvinced about the long-term profitability and viability of M2M even at a small scale."

"We believe we have addressed both concerns with our M2M proposition."

Bamboo can also work with partners and customers to develop bespoke M2M packages and pricing structures.

"By giving our partners direct access to our pre-sales team, they have been able to demonstrate the real world potential of the technology to their customers," added White.

"As a result, we have seen new use cases as varied as mobile CCTV, temporary office Internet and even solar and wind farm telematics, in addition to the more traditional use

cases in fleet and asset tracking for example."

White says offering M2M SIMs on a wholesale pence-per-kilobyte basis has lowered the entrance fee for this market. "This gives our partners the flexibility to build their own bundles so they can succeed with customers of all sizes, from heavy data users to those that use very little data," she said.

"This wouldn't have been possible if we had enforced high volume data packages or fixed tariffs. Helping resellers to identify and understand the opportunity has been key. Whereas previously they may have walked away from a potential deal because they couldn't see how to make it viable, we now have the flexibility in the tariffs to meet even the most specific of requirements and deliver growth for all."

Bamboo's M2M proposition is powered by Telefonica, a long standing partner. Bernie McPhillips, Head of M2M Authorised Distributor Channel at Telefonica UK, said: "Bamboo's innovation in the M2M sector and track record within the mobile arena is clearly resonating with the channel."

Bamboo's M2M service also includes monitoring and control features via the Cisco Jasper IoT services platform; all SIMs deliver connectivity across multiple networks globally under one bill (due to 600 network roaming agreements worldwide, including 4G coverage in 26 countries); IPSec VPN for advanced network integration; and flexible deployment options such as the provision of test-ready SIMs.

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TEAM Virtual1 has completed the 2016 Windsor Park Spartan Race in aid of charity Restless Development. The 20-strong group tackled the five mile Sprint race which includes over 20 obstacles (jumping through fire, wading through mud and crawling under barbed wire etc) in a bid to raise over £5k towards Virtual1's charity target. Team member and CEO Tom O'Hagan said: "Virtual1 is a young, vibrant company, with a set of employees to match. Each day we face the 'it cannot be done' in our business lives, so tackling the Spartan Race was an obvious choice for us. We smashed our £5,000 target, with over £7,000 raised to date, which is a magnificent achievement that will benefit Restless Development greatly."

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# Stockford to lead Azlan's security unit



Robert Stockford

AZLAN'S new UK Security business unit is to be headed up by newly appointed Security Business Unit Manager Robert Stockford who leads a team of 20 staff pulled together from within the company along with ten new recruits.

The team exhibits particular expertise in a variety of vendors including Cisco, IBM, Landesk, McAfee, Sonicwall, Symantec, Veritas, VMware and BlackBerry/Good Technology.

Stockford joined Azlan in July 2016 with a remit to work on the development of a security value proposition. He was previously Director of Channel Sales at Forcepoint.

"With more customers now looking to make the most of virtualised and hyper-converged infrastructures, software defined solutions and cloud-based appliances and services to enable more flexible and scalable network and mobile environments, the need for expert advice and professional services on security has never been greater," said Stockford.

"Azlan is providing the specialist support and professional services that will allow resellers to address the security challenges faced by end users and the opportunities that presents for resellers.

# IT resellers plug skills shortages

IT SERVICE providers (ITSPs) are playing a key role in plugging the technology skills gap, according to research that found 36% of European IT leaders are using ITSPs to access skills that are not available in-house.

Andy Wilton, Chief Information Officer at Claranet, commented on the study: "The deficit in IT skills means that businesses must be more selective about the types of skills they employ in-house and those that they choose to outsource.

"Organisations are competing for a small pool of IT talent which requires making tough decisions about which exact skillsets are required.

"Public cloud is particularly specialised and it can be hard to find an in-house generalist who possesses the advanced skillsets to deliver the required capabilities with confidence.

"The future of any European organisation that wants to insulate itself from the growing skills shortage and compete at the forefront of digital transformation lies in the ability to work with an IT services provider who can provide the pivotal IT skills needed."

"Azlan will also focus on virtualised data centre, workspace mobility and data management to create propositions that address the whole spectrum of security needs, across platforms, networks and devices."

Azlan UK MD Rob Tomlin commented: "Security is the one key strategic area that needed a clear and defined focus. We now have the team and the partnerships in place and, combined with our capability and scale, we're ready to execute on our strategic plans."

# Timico on course for Jockey Club contract

TIMICO, sponsor of the Cheltenham Gold Cup, has secured a contract to supply The Jockey Club's nationwide portfolio of 15 racecourses and their offices with fixed line telephony, full reporting and management information delivered via the MyTimico portal.

Timico has taken management of The Jockey Club's 250 PSTN and ISDN 30 lines in a move that will see the organisation benefit from enhanced quality of service and billing as well as an improvement in the

scope and quality of available management information.

Charles Whelpton, Director of Enterprise at Timico, said: "In consolidating The Jockey Club's entire fixed line estate we've been able to drive costs down and perform an in-depth audit of usage to see which lines weren't in use and rationalise what was originally in place."

The service will be used for all inbound and outbound calls and can also be scaled up to accommodate spikes in demand from larger scale events.

# Dubber link for Simeetric

SIMETRIC Telecom has added on-demand call recording and playback services to its flagship Mobile-X product following a link-up with Dubber.

Dubber's cloud call recording platform records every call made on a landline or mobile anywhere in the world but only charges for recordings that are downloaded for use.

"The solution is especially popular in the financial and legal sectors where compliance is a critical issue and all calls need to be available for scrutiny," stated John Murray, Director of Simeetric Telecom.

"Businesses only incur charges for recordings which are retrieved on demand from their infinite storage in the cloud, all others are securely stored at no cost.

"Companies normally incur large storage and retrieval costs and are only be able to record calls on pre-defined extensions.

"We can now deliver a seamless integration of UC and



John Murray

call recording into both fixed and mobile services, helping our customers to manage their calls and to achieve compliance across devices and across international boundaries."

Steve McGovern, CEO at Dubber, commented: "Dubber is designed to go above and beyond legacy solutions, ultimately increasing the value of UC for everyone."

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A TEAM of 10 fundraisers put together by Focus Group's Director Chris Goodman have summited the tallest freestanding mountain in the world, Kilimanjaro, raising over £28k in aid of Chestnut Tree House (a children's hospice in Sussex), St Wilfrid's Hospice, Ronald Macdonald House, Teenage Cancer Trust and the British Heart Foundation. "Because of the altitude and lack of oxygen it took seven days to summit the mountain, but only one to get down!" said Goodman, pictured with his wife and two fellow fundraisers.



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# Investment to drive Auticon



Ray Coyle

SIR Richard Branson's Virgin Group and UK charity Esmée Fairbairn Foundation have invested in Auticon, a social enterprise that only hires IT consultants on the autism spectrum.

Auticon was founded in Germany in 2011 where more than 70 autistic IT consultants have permanent employment, with over one third of the DAX (German FTSE) on boarded as customers including blue chip clients Siemens and Allianz.

Auticon launched its UK office in spring 2016 and the investment will enable it to recruit autistic candidates from across the country.

The investment also offers Auticon a chance to promote

social change in attitudes towards autism and employment. Autistic adults often have extraordinary cognitive abilities, yet many find it hard to secure or maintain employment.

Auticon's Group CEO Kurt Schoffer commented: "We have received hundreds of applications from adults on the autism spectrum across the UK, France and Germany, and hope this new investment will enable us to see many more."

Auticon's UK CEO, Ray Coyle, commented: "It is great to see such renowned British investors provide the backing to enable us to build our business in the UK, based on the successful model that has already been proven in the German and French markets."

"This will enable many more companies in the UK to tap into the strengths of autistic adults."

Sir Richard Branson said: "Employment rates among autistic adults are a challenging social issue. Helping companies and employees overcome these hurdles is crucial if we're to enable autistic people to use their unique skills successfully in the job market."

In the UK, only 15% of autistic adults are in full time employment despite 79% of people with autism on out-of-work benefits wanting to work.

Of those who have worked, 43% have left or lost a job due to their autism.

## Storming progress

AN ORDER from Storm Technologies has taken distributor Westcoast past the 100,000 CSP seat milestone in the UK.

Westcoast was appointed as a Microsoft Cloud Solutions Provider in 2015.

Mark Davies, Westcoast's Cloud Services Director, said: "That says a lot given we only started accelerating our CSP programme last September. Since then we've absolutely rocketed. Our partners have seen their cloud numbers surge and their businesses boom."

Georgina Block, who is Head of Cloud Sales at Westcoast, commented: "The technology hasn't changed no matter which Microsoft agreement is chosen. What has changed is the way in which our partners now sell their products, creating margin from value added services and building solutions."

## Fuze aims at Europe

UCAAS provider Fuze (formerly ThinkingPhones) has joined Intelisys Global's European Supplier Partner portfolio, a move that builds on its relationship with Intelisys in the US since August 2012.

Gregg Henebry, who is the Vice President of Worldwide Channels at Fuze, commented: "The Intelisys technology services distributor model proved successful for Fuze in the United States so we are keen to replicate this in the UK and European markets."

"Signing up as an Intelisys Global Supplier Partner brings new opportunities for Fuze to broaden its reach to channel partners and grow our expanding customer base."

The Intelisys Global distribution channel was launched into Europe in July this year.

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### SHORT CALL

IT SOLUTIONS provider Imerja has achieved Gold Partner Status with network access provider HPE Aruba. Since the partnership began in 2011 the two companies have worked together to deploy and deliver a number of networking projects across the public sector. An example is the IT infrastructure deployed for the Innovation Hub at Alder Hey hospital, which allowed clinicians to trial, develop and test new health technologies.

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# Bumper time despite pos

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

**T**his last quarter has been a bumper one for corporate activity in UK telecoms and networks, somewhat ironically given the concerns over potential post-Brexit vote impacts. We have seen a flurry of strategic M&A and private equity investment in the sector, as well as in related hosting areas, the latter involving strong US private equity involvement. Public and private company financial updates have included strong performances from Gamma but summer order weakness at Alternative Networks and Maintel.

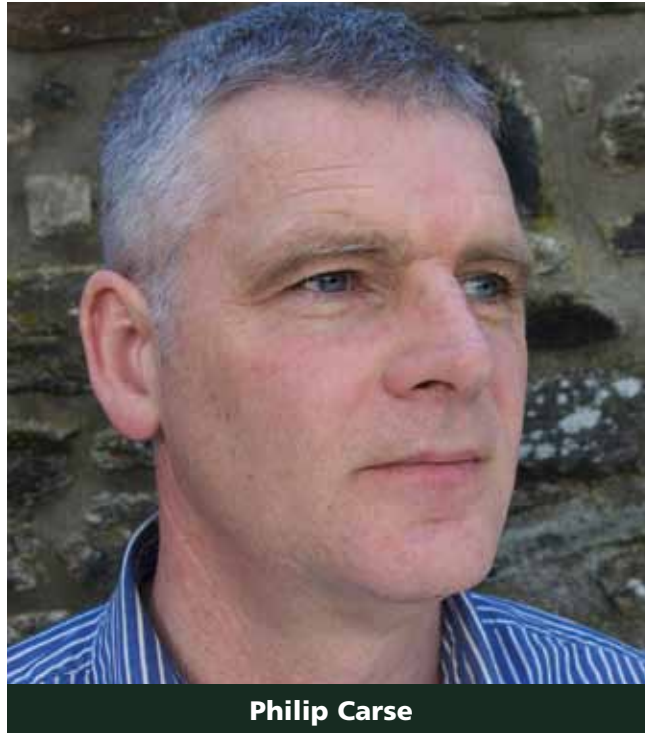
The most interesting M&A deal was the acquisition by Livingbridge-backed wireless ISP Metronet of neighbouring data centre services and connectivity provider M247 for £47.5m/ 8x current EBITDA. This is undoubtedly a transformative deal for Metronet, both in terms of the financial impact (doubling profitability) and strategy, extending Metronet's reach from the desktop through to the data centre. The company also confirmed strong FY16 (to March) numbers, with revenues and EBITDA growing 32-36% to £21.5m and £6m.

Another significant deal saw consolidation involving major Vodafone service providers, with Onecom acquiring Evolve, adding about £25m

to its run rate £75m revenues and with significant cost synergies on offer. Other reasonably significant business comms reseller deals included Solar/RDC and Elite/NetCentrix, whilst small business focused, multi-utility reseller Verastar (formerly Universal Utilities) acquired insurance broking and digital marketing capabilities.

Other interesting M&A news includes the acquisition by Virgin Media Business of Arqiva's retail Wi-Fi activities, and at least £20m of revenues, with the latter focusing on wholesale wireless infrastructure ahead of a potential IPO. Similarly, wholesale fibre network operator CityFibre acquired Redcentric's (ex-Redstone's) Solent and Cambridge MANs for £5m, following the early 2016 £90m acquisition of KCOM's national network.

Following Lyceum's acquisition of contact centre specialist Sabio in July and the June investment by Livingbridge in Southern Communications, private equity activity continued with Beach Tree and Growth Capital Partners buying stakes in business comms resellers Wavenet and Arrow Comms respectively, both deals estimated at around £30m. In related areas, Bowmark bought out LDC from ISP and data centre and hosting specialist Node4,



Philip Carse

and ECI acquired IT specialist IT Labs. Meanwhile, two private equity backed hosting businesses – Adapt and Attenda – were acquired by US-based private equity backed trade buyers Datapipe and Ensono respectively. They join data centre/hosting peers Pulsant and Six Degrees Group with significant US private equity backing.

#### M&A facility

Also in corporate activity, GCI announced a new £50m bank M&A facility that we estimate could help fund the acquisition of £5-6m of EBITDA on top of the company's current £10m run rate, post at least four deals already this year including Outsourcery. This compares with 2015 actuals of £7.9m EBITDA on revenues of £48.2m.

The pick of the results as usual came from Gamma, with first half 2016 adjusted EBITDA up 25% to £16.3m on revenues up 13% to £104.7m, with profitability driven particularly by the

sale of growth products (SIP, Cloud PBX and Inbound) through the indirect channel. The company subsequently launched its new MVNO mobile service.

In contrast, both Alternative Networks and Maintel highlighted temporary weakness in customer orders over the summer. For Alternative this means that EBITDA for the year to September 2016 will be well below market expectations of £20.3m (versus 2015's £22.1m), already reduced following issues earlier in the year around non-EU roaming. Maintel reported 2016 interims including two months of Azzurri, with fairly meaningless headline revenues and EBITDA of £38.1m (+54%) and £4.4m (+23%) respectively. Aside from the demand softness, highlights included a decision to pull back from small customer mobile, and a generally positive initial experience with the integration of Azzurri, with synergies on track

and the company's ICON managed services platform continuing to grow strongly.

Results from Focus Group and Southern Comms were also worthy of note. For the year to November 2015, Focus Group reported revenues and EBITDA up 16-19% to £34.3m and £3.9m respectively, all organic. On an update call, management noted a recent acquisition, adding Mitel capabilities. Accounts to March 2016 for Southern Communications confirmed the headlines given to us on the announcement of the Livingbridge investment, with EBITDA up 78% to £5.4m on revenues up a mainly M&A-driven third to £30.7m.

In share price terms, UK public telecoms and networks companies have generally under-performed both the FTSE All Share and particularly the broader Megabuyte universe over the last three and 12 months, with average declines of 6% and 13% versus +4% and +15% for the Megabuyte universe and +4% and 0% for FTSE All Share. The main fallers over the last year have been Alternative Networks (-51%) and TalkTalk (-39%), and the main risers Gamma (+34%) and Maintel (+29%).

Megabuyte also covered results and/or updates from Adept Telecom, Britannic Technology, Cablecom Networking, MeetingZone, Onecom, Redcentric, Spitfire, XConnect, BT, Vodafone and Virgin Media among others. ■ **IS Research publishes www.megabuyte.com, a company analysis and intelligence service covering over 400 public and private UK technology companies. philip.carse@megabuyte.**



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# st-Brexit jitters

## COMPANY NEWS ROUND UP

### Onecom 2015 accounts confirm down year before big jump

Calendar year 2015 accounts from leading Vodafone service provider Onecom Group show revenues and EBITDA down 9% and 31% at £54.0m and £13.0m respectively, as the company renegotiated its Vodafone contract and invested in fixed line services. The numbers are, of course, somewhat different now given both a return to significant growth and the recent Evolve acquisition.

### Spitfire loses EBITDA growth record

Business ISP Spitfire Technology Group's consistent record of rising revenues and profitability came to a halt in the year to March 2016, with EBITDA falling 23% to £1.5m on revenues up 6.5% to £24.1m, due primarily to a rise in the wage bill. Cash flow remained exemplary.

### Fluidata + One Point = FluidOne

The Rigby Group has announced the merger of two of its investee companies – fixed network specialist Fluidata and mobile specialist One Point – to form a new £30-35m connectivity business called FluidOne.

### Commsworld passes £10m revenue mark

The first set of detailed accounts from Scotland-based network and unified comms service provider Commsworld, for calendar year 2015, show EBITDA doubling to £0.5m on revenues up 16% to £10.4m, though with poor operating cash flow of £0.1m, and

capex of £0.3m. Year end net debt was £0.6m. In March 2015, Commsworld signed up as anchor tenant on CityFibre's Edinburgh Gigabit city network, and in September the companies announced a new seven year £5.6m contract extension, potentially upgradeable to 19 years and £16m, all of which suggests another year of growth for Commsworld in 2016.

### MeetingZone dials up strong trading

GMT-backed conferencing services provider MeetingZone has reported a solid year to March 2016 with revenues and EBITDA up 5.3% and 16% to £19.4m and £4.1m respectively, at near 100% operating cash flow conversion. Founder and CEO Steve Gandy outlined particularly progress in Skype for Business, a key strategic initiative for the company.

### GCI raises new £50m M&A fund

Acquisitive BGF-backed business comms provider GCI has announced a new £50m debt package from RBS and HSBC to be used primarily for M&A purposes. The fund should finance a substantial uplift on the firm's current £10m EBITDA run rate, with at least one acquisition hopefully to be concluded by the end of the year.

### Surf Telecoms maintains growth in external customers

Surf Telecoms, the communications arm of Western Power Distribution (WPD), has reported full year results to December 2015, with adjusted EBITDA falling 23% to £8.8m on revenues

down 1.6% to £25.9m, with strong growth in external customers (21%) offset by the transfer of about 40% of Surf's networks assets (£21m) to the WPD Group during the year. Other highlights included a substantial dividend payment of £21.7m.

### Redcentric in line, better cash flow

Managed IT services provider Redcentric has issued an in-line but positive update for the first half to September 2016, highlighting single-digit organic recurring revenue growth, ongoing planned declines in low-margin product sales, some M&A-led growth (data centre operator City Lifeline acquired in January 2016), mid-teens growth in EBITDA driven by synergies (and last year being impacted by Calyx costs), and better cash flow. Full year consensus is for EBITDA of £28.5m on revenues of £120m, both up 10%. The company also announced the appointment of ex-Computacenter's Mo Siddiqi as COO.

### Inclarity accounts point to fuzzy way ahead

Long-established hosted voice provider Inclarity Communications, which is owned by an overseas trust, has reverted to abbreviated accounts for the year to July 2015, but there is nothing to suggest it has reversed its long-term decline. Against a trend of revenues declining from £3.7m in fiscal 2012 to £3.1m in fiscal 2014, at continued EBITDA losses of £0.3-0.9m, fiscal 2015 retained profits and loss and net assets had a £1.2m negative move.

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# Christie branches out

Christie hopes to establish the first peering point in north east Scotland, an ambitious challenge that shows his determination to provide businesses with infrastructure that is fit for purpose. "Currently, nearly all data that is generated in the region is sent via a peering point in Edinburgh, or more often London, before it reaches its end destination," he explained. "With a local peering point, emails and phone services could be delivered faster for local businesses. Over the coming decade there will be more self-employed people working from home, with many based outside our towns and cities. Therefore, connectivity for our rural communities is crucial."

Over the past two years Converged has invested in developing its service standards, facilities and connectivity network. It has access to Brightsolid's new tier 3 data centre in Aberdeen and CityFibre's superfast Internet network in the city. Converged has also invested in unbundling nine Openreach exchanges in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. "This gives us access to more customer bases, but we need to win new business to recoup the outlay," said Christie.

The company was established in 2005 by Christie who adopted a technical role and a co-director who worked in a business development capacity. The firm launched the same year as YouTube and Google Maps, a time when more people were accessing the Internet via broadband rather than dial-up. "Our goal was, and still is, to provide a single point



Neil Christie

Infrastructure is the future of communications. It's the new kid on the block and the nation requires more of it. With that in mind, Neil Christie, Managing Director of Aberdeen-based Converged Communication Solutions, aims to ensure that his customers get what they need.

of contact that can take care of telephony, Internet and IT support," said Christie. "We wanted to reduce the number of suppliers or contracts a customer would need, and by providing passionate customer service we hoped to eliminate the grey areas that otherwise existed between a customer's IT support, Internet provider and BT/Openreach. We also aim to provide as many services as possible in-house and not just act as a middleman between the customer and ultimate supplier."

Converged's support model is based on the industry standard ITIL framework, with all of its support team ITIL-certified. The firm's customers range from small local businesses to large companies operating in multiple locations throughout

the UK and internationally. The client base currently numbers around 300, and in the last financial year (to the end of November 2015) Converged generated over £2.2 million turnover. "We have experienced steady growth throughout our history, adapting as the industry itself has developed," added Christie. "Bundling of services and more service level orientated decision making by customers are areas we're working hard to explore."

#### Key acquisition

In a move to advance this strategy, Converged snapped up Aberdeen-based IT provider Century Business Systems (CBS) this summer, its first acquisition. The deal, valued at circa £500k, significantly strengthens Converged's in-house service operation. CBS was

established in 1999 by Brian West and Kevin Sinclair and supplies computer hardware, software and technical support to businesses across north east Scotland. The firm's team have transferred to Converged and relocated to its premises, increasing the workforce at Converged to over 25.

"This is a notable move for us," commented Christie. "To date, we have grown and expanded naturally, so our first acquisition is a major step. Brian and Kevin, supported by a talented team, have built a strong business and its integration into Converged will enrich the service that we offer to clients."

Christie plans to continue to grow Converged at a steady pace while staying in touch with established service

values. "If we try to grow too quickly we may lose what our clients like and respect about us," he commented. "In five years, I would like to see us being regarded as the leading connectivity provider in north east Scotland and having grown our market share across Scotland and parts of the UK. Aberdeen will always be our home, but as we expand we need to look at how we deliver our services while remaining local to our clients. Continued hard work by the whole team, along with investment, evolution, innovation and putting the needs of clients first will take us there." ■

#### Just a minute with Neil Christie...

**Role model:** Steve Jobs and Bruce Springsteen, both excelled in their fields

**What talent do you wish you had?** Time management

**Your strengths and what could you work on?** Juggling lots of projects comes naturally, but I have a tendency to leave things to the last minute

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I started using computers because my handwriting was poor

**What do you fear the most?** Being left behind

**One example of something you have overcome:** A reluctance to rely on others

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** Long distance lorry driver

**Top tip:** Work in the customer's best interest and try to differentiate

**Three ideal dinner guests:** For their amazing stories: Billy Connolly, Leonardo Da Vinci, Sir Alan Sugar



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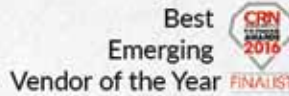
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**Question 1:** What would happen if you hired two private detectives to follow each other all day?

**Question 2:** If you ate yourself, would you double in size or disappear completely?

**Question 3:** Are the Best Wholesale Provider (CNA finalist 2016) and the Best Convergence Distributor (CNA finalist 2016)/ Best Emerging Vendor (CRN finalist 2016) teaming up to launch the only UC platform your customers will want in 2017?

Answers:

Q1: Who knows?

Q2: We don't recommend finding out.

Q3: YES.



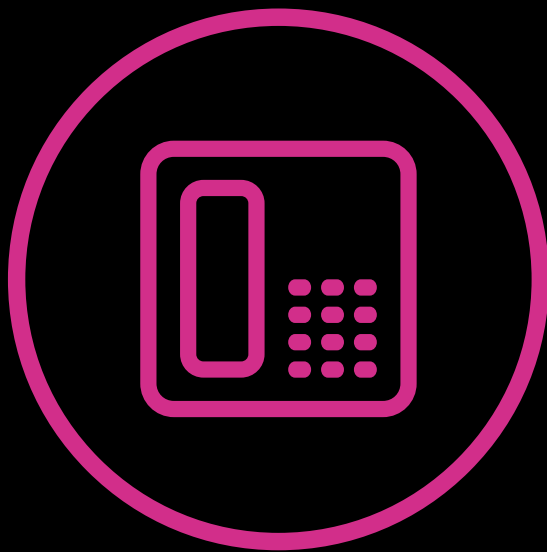
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# Doff caps to Sir Paddy!

Enter White Horse Telecom Managing Director Paddy Coppinger, a former helicopter pilot and seller of Magic Trees who branched into telecoms and is aiming for a knighthood.

**A**lthough he would like to be remembered as 'Sir Paddy Coppinger!', it is perhaps more likely that Paddy will be recorded in the annals of comms as a characterful and ambitious technology entrepreneur. Yet his destiny could have been very different. Having finished school, Coppinger curtailed his educational career early when he decided to drop the idea of gaining a university degree to train as a helicopter pilot. "But the post-Gulf War global economic downturn largely put paid to that," he commented. "As an unemployed pilot I found jobs where I could, undertaking a variety of roles from van driving to bar work and ultimately falling into a sales 'repping' position in the automotive aftermarket industry where I showed a talent for selling. I noted that a number of friends who had recently graduated were turning up at my place in increasingly flashy cars, bragging about how much money they were earning for the (seemingly little) work they were doing within the tech sector. Telecoms beckoned."

Coppinger then joined a small cable franchise in west London that after a number of acquisitions ultimately became Virgin

Media. He then moved to Energis before taking on a Wholesale Account Manager's role at what was to become Verizon. "I spent five years there, dealing with a variety of resellers of all shapes and sizes before I decided to strike out on my own," stated Coppinger.

He founded White Horse Telecom in January 2006, printed up order forms and business cards and set off door knocking. "In the beginning we were very much about calls, lines and not much else," explained Coppinger. "The business has evolved dramatically from those humble beginnings to a major player in the converged voice and data space. White Horse Telecom is an early adopter and each new product enables a further significant leap in growth, be it broadband a few years ago or hosted telephony today."

The company has demonstrated steady yet significant growth year on year since its beginnings. "We are considered, primarily, as a trusted advisor by our customer base which is typically made up of UK-centric, multi-site organisations," commented Coppinger. "The majority of our customers are not desperately price sensitive but they do value first



**Paddy Coppinger**

class service at all times. To that end we could be viewed as, what I regard to be, one of the first proper business-to-business telecoms boutiques in the UK."

#### Expansion

During the past two years White Horse Telecom has expanded to a new office in Hungerford, broadened its product portfolio and increased sales. Coppinger sees future growth coming from a variety of areas. "These include strengthened relationships with existing suppliers, growing the team, consolidation – which may include acquisitions – as well as good old-fashioned organic growth," he added.

"My main priority is to grow the business. There was a time when we had to make strong and sometimes unrewarded efforts to make customers more sticky by introducing multiple products to them. Today, almost all of our customers take more than three products from our portfolio. Customers

these days cannot help but be sticky. To that end, our role is far more consultative than it's ever been. And our role as a key supplier to these companies means that we have to deliver on our word and according to agreed time scales."

White Horse Telecom's main routes to market have been either through direct sales or through a dealer channel, and Coppinger has witnessed more and more end user customers embrace the propositions offered by smaller comms and IT providers. "I see a greater willingness from large companies to engage with smaller CPs," he added. "The trick going forward will be how resellers of all sizes maintain levels of customer satisfaction and introduce new products while still turning a profit. The move towards IP-based technology is also fascinating. Coupled with the imminent demise of ISDN, we see a clear direction towards cloud and hosted IP telephony products."

Coppinger rates setting up White Horse Telecom and getting it past that 'mythical five year bump' as his biggest career achievement to date. The company's culture is firmly founded on the watchwords 'treat others as you would expect to be treated yourself', and a 'work hard, play hard' approach towards business. "I don't think I'd do anything differently," noted Coppinger. "Everything I've done has contributed in some way, however small, to the success of White Horse Telecom. From selling Magic Trees to working for the world's largest carrier."

#### Just a minute with Paddy Coppinger...

**Role model:** In one way or another, I find almost everybody I meet an inspiration

**What talent do you wish you had?** To be musical

**Your strengths and what could you work on?** Visionary, charismatic, professional with attention to detail, but I procrastinate and can be something of a 'control freak', which could in some circumstances be considered a strength

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** My favourite sock colour is red

**What do you fear the most?** Spiders, heights and Microsoft

**One example of something you have overcome:** Dyslexia

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** Running a classic car business

**How would you like to be remembered?** Sir Paddy Coppinger!



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# ELITETELE.COM TO EXPAND ITS SALES AND MARKETING TEAM WITH £1 MILLION INVESTMENT

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We want to be the leading provider of IT and unified communications' solutions, and we know our people are key to achieving this.

Adam Turton, Sales Director, Elitetele.com

the team can exceed their earning potential.

"Working at Elite has been the best career move I've made. There is a strong sales-led culture and entrepreneurial spirit in the business. Every day I work with a motivated and driven team of people who respect each other. It's hard work, but the business supports the sales team and there are great rewards

there for the taking if you are prepared to work for it," says Steve Bell, Corporate Account Manager.

It's an exciting time for everyone at Elite. Not only are we enjoying significant organic growth and investing in the expansion of the sales and marketing team, but we recently completed our 13th acquisition since 2008 with the purchase of NetCentrix and

SystemHOST in July. Broadening our capabilities in Managed IT Services and cloud-based technologies and helping cement our position at the forefront of the market. We are continually looking for the right businesses to acquire and have a further £20 million to invest in M&A.

We are currently recruiting for 20 new positions in our national sales and marketing team, with roles based in the north and south of the country. For those joining us in sales we have an established blue chip customer base with a huge opportunity for growth and additional cross sales. Now is a great time to join our successful and driven team.

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# A Channel for success

Being recognised as one of the fastest growing technology businesses in the UK for the second year in succession is a big achievement for service provider Channel Telecom, but owner and Managing Director Clifford Norton believes the best is still to come.

**W**hen outsiders imagine the telecoms industry, more often than not they probably see an image of a 20-something whippersnapper over-hyping the merits of the latest smartphone. The reality of this established sector is a current contribution of £56.5 billion to the UK economy and an opportunity for remarkable growth. Walk into Channel Telecom's offices, based in the up and coming area of Buckhurst Hill in suburban Essex, and you'll see the real business of telecoms at its best.

A bright open plan office is populated with smartly dressed, dedicated staff, all focused on expanding the company's channel empire. This commitment has meant that the £5 million revenue target Norton set when he opened the business just five years ago was significantly exceeded with over £10 million recorded in 2015. When revenue surpassed £5 million in 2014, the company was thrilled to meet the requirements of entry into the Sunday Times Hiscox TechTrack, a highly regarded recognition it has now received two years running.

As befits its name, Channel Telecom is 'channel only', which means its success hinges on the performance of its partners and the company's 78th placement in the 2016 TechTrack survey is testament to the growth

it has achieved and makes Norton a happy man. "If our partners are growing, we are growing. It's as simple as that," he said, which somewhat underplays the effort put into the partner support which sits at the core of Channel's philosophy and rapid growth.

The company is committed to providing everything a partner needs to make more network sales, specifically added value ones, as Norton explains: "I think what differentiates us from other service providers is that we are completely flexible and we want to help our partners build their business by delivering every single service we can to help them.

"We have reseller partners and dealer partners. With the dealers it's all about adding value to their existing business. On the wholesale side, which has grown massively in the last two years, we offer a billing system and a back-up bureau service where we basically take care of everything for the partner. It gives them the opportunity to go out do what they are good at – building customer relationships and selling. Those partner sales have risen exponentially on the back of data lines, particularly Ethernet, which facilitate added value up-selling.

"Over the last three years we have really pushed data connectivity and recently



**Clifford Norton**

sold a huge amount of Ethernet lines. Once the data connectivity is there and your customers are getting better speeds than that's the time to go back in and offer SIP, Skype for Business, data recovery, business continuity and all of the hosted solutions that customers now want rather than just calls and lines."

#### Rare opportunity

With ISDN disappearing by the end of 2020, Norton believes that the opportunities are huge with more flexibility for customers and better margins for resellers. He is also convinced that the path to real prosperity is through package deals or bundling. "It's all about making it as easy as possible for our partners to sell the products we offer," added Norton. "The customer will say 'I want a bundle of seats, a hosted phone, mobile and MS 365 all for one monthly

cost'. That's the way the whole market is going. It's a complete price per person model and it's a strategy that is already working for us."

As well as easing the selling process Channel is also helping partners plan or execute their exit paths. "We are looking to buy as many of our partners as possible that would like to sell," explained Norton. "We have got some flexible arrangements whereby if they want to come on board and sell in 18 months we'll give them a pre-buy out now.

"Every partner is different. Some like to sell the base and want to go now, but most want to take all the hassle out of the billing and the cash flow and simply get back to selling. In these cases, we'll buy a percentage, or most, of the business and the owner can stay on and grow by selling our products to customers, bring the profit

up and get another multiple in a year to 18 months. This strategy is good for all of us because the partner carries on working with us and makes more money long-term. The customer migrates to Channel slowly and gets a good experience from all the value added products we offer."

The formulas Norton has put in place certainly seem to be attracting resellers to the Channel family. Since 2015 the number of partners on-boarded has increased from 150 to 340, and as Norton confirmed 'they are doing the numbers'. "The recognition we have achieved in the FastTrack 100 is to do with our growth, but it's also judged on profit," he said. "As we are channel only, it's obvious to say that our partners are bringing in the business, but it's a team effort. We don't just give them a rate sheet. It's about giving them constant training, regular webinars, keeping them updated, helping them grow, giving them what I believe to be the best rate, the best products, and then going out to help them sell.

"I am confident that the partnerships we are continuing to develop will secure us an even better position in FastTrack 2017. I have never enjoyed business so much as I do now, and with massive opportunities on the horizon, we will achieve even greater success." ■



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# Events are all about plan



**T**here are so many events these days; industry exhibitions, local business shows, networking forums, online webinars and now even 'virtual' exhibitions. The big question is: which ones should you spend your marketing money on? Exhibiting at a trade show can be pricey – especially when you account for the additional costs of getting to the venue, making your stand attractive, overnight accommodation and expenses, not to mention time spent away from the office. ROI is critical so it's always important to question the event organiser on expected footfall and the quality of delegates expected; will they actually want to buy from you and will they be decision

makers? Many firms are turning to webinars and online meetings to minimize venue expenses which have many benefits, but they lack the ability for face-to-face introductions. Whatever event you decide to attend or run its vital to set goals and have a 'pre' and 'post' strategy. Think about who you want to meet, how you're going to spend your time during the event, and how you're going to follow-up after. With educational events make sure your event title and marketing materials clearly explain who should attend and exactly what they will learn. And if your registration numbers are a little bit lower than expected don't panic - if you've marketed the event right, quality leads will outweigh quantity.



JOE DOYLE  
ANNODATA

“ Although events can form a valuable part of an organisation's marketing plan, unless selected correctly and effectively managed, they can be a massive drain on resources. I always execute a number of important activities. Ahead of the event, scrutinising the relevance and volume of the audience is crucial. As is pre-event marketing to ensure you're busy on the day(s). Once there, briefing the team on objectives/expectations of the day is vital, as is having a mechanism to attract people to your stand or room. Post event is all about utilising the captured visitor data from the day to do a thorough and professional follow-up campaign. Success is never guaranteed but performing these activities will certainly maximise the chances of a solid ROI. ”



RICHARD CARTER  
NIMANS

“ In an increasingly digital dominated world it's fair to say the role of exhibitions has diminished considerably over the last 5 to 10 years. Information is now much more freely available online either via webinars, websites or email. In addition, new product launches often take place away from exhibitions and with much less reliance on hardware – due to the growing influence of the Cloud - there is often less 'physical' product to touch, feel and see first-hand. Where events still work very well is on the networking side to build and strengthen personal relationships and forge new ones. The key for us is to communicate to the right target audience – and to continue to support the channel in a high profile way. ”



ERICA JONES  
TOTAL

“ In my opinion, the traditional trade show or exhibition lost its way a long time ago. Delegates need to gain real value to justify attendance - and all too often, you will find those present trying to sell to you! Never sign up as a sponsor without having attended a new event yourself and speak to other exhibitors. Organisers should understand and facilitate this. Of course, there are exceptions; certain vertical events, or in fact Comms Vision – where we know the quality of organisation and audience, and returns are transparent. Instead, we generally focus on hosting our own events, where we control attendance, content, venue and can easily track ROI. This still demands financial investment and time, but risk is minimised. ”



BRENDON CROSS  
STL

“ Having spent years investing in events, such as football, trade shows and exhibitions, that produce little or no return we now keep things really simple at STL. Sponsorship of the regional business awards, which includes involvement with the judging process and a table at the awards dinner always yields several new customers whilst helping to increase our profile in the business community. Close relationships with most of the UK based F1 teams also provides us with a unique opportunity to invite prospective and existing customers to the British Grand Prix or on a reference visit to see STL solutions working in the harshest of test environments overseas - technology deployed in a technical sport would appear to be a winner! ”

## OK, let's grow

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# Planning and follow through



CHAS DAVIS  
SAS

“ With the increased adoption of digital marketing tools SAS does not support exhibitions. Despite all the technology the most powerful and successful events are still our thought leadership workshops. For these the venue needs to be and the content needs to be of high value. The most effective attendee volume is between 10-15 customers or prospects in a round table environment with ample time to have short presentations mixed with discussions around real challenges and solutions, as well as live technical demonstrations. Where possible we like to include existing customers, whose practical experience adds value to the discussions and credibility to the whole endeavour. Since customers buy from people they know, like and trust, we usually include a social element such as dinner. ”



CHRIS MORRISSEY  
LILY COMMS

“ With anything that we do from a marketing perspective ROI is absolutely key. Physical exhibitions and events can be costly when taking into consideration taking two or three sales people off the road for a day and then adding the cost of the event on top of that. It can become expensive and therefore sometime difficult to prove a positive ROI. However, with online webinars the cost is virtually zero and you are speaking to an audience who have already shown an interest in your product. The majority of our marketing focus is based around online activity and webinars are an avenue we are currently looking to explore. ”



DAVE TRIVETT, ASSEMBLY  
MANAGED SERVICES

“ For us, as a channel business, events are a crucial part of our growth strategy. Different events appeal depending on what we think we'll get out of them. We're a people company, and our success is based on excellent personal relationships, so this is a priority for us. We've just got back from World Telemedia Marbella, which was fantastic for different reasons. International events are an opportunity for us to get a feel for the global market, and importantly to see what fresh, margin-rich innovations we may be able to translate into new services for our UK partner clients. ”



MARK ELWOOD  
TELEWARE

“ Start by setting clear objectives which are aligned to the business strategy. I always have a wide range of events within my plan, each playing a different, but crucial role. Exhibitions are best for brand building and creating a buzz around product launches, but are not cost effective when evaluated purely on lead generation. Webinars build subscribers who then receive ongoing communications to help build a relationship. Understanding the strengths of different types of events is crucial. My favourite event this year was Microsoft's World Partner Conference in Toronto. This was a great networking opportunity and really helped us to tell the TeleWare story to a very targeted audience, which has been incredibly successful. ”



SEAN BODSWORTH  
INFORM BILLING

“ The first priority is to focus on what we need to achieve. Is it to create brand awareness or demonstrate our software? Or is to build customer loyalty? It may be a combination but we try not to dilute the primary objective. We also consider potential missed opportunities and our competitor's activity – it may not be the right fit for us, but something that is successful to someone targeting the same audience is always worth considering. On the flip-side we also look for events where other attendees will complement our offering and prospects are less likely to shop around. The most valuable events are those that combine the opportunity to portray our brand, products and services as well as networking and socialising. ”



CRAIG HERRETT  
VOIPON

“ Event venues are not always comfortable and ROI is not guaranteed. Preparing for shows can be time consuming where you could spend the same resources on existing systems, however mobility is always required every step of the way. Access, accommodation and proximity to venues influence your decision whether to attend. Because we operate in the emerging technology market, its impact on the very shows you choose to attend can seem redundant at times because of access to such powerful platforms already having been rolled out. Such recognition and advertising can be equally satisfied through media content via video and text over the platforms available. Therefore, you can simply focus on your existing opportunities and find new ones with the existing channels available online. ”

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# Packer bundles the perfe

Placing innovation and diversity at the centre of all strategic campaigns is the only way to compete and survive in a fiercely competitive market, according to Silver Lining Convergence Managing Director Allan Packer.

**A** combination of self-belief and the strong influence of previous work experiences, leadership mentors and company cultures set Packer on the road to building a successful and creative business with long-term viability. His career began on the Isle of Wight after leaving college at 18 to become a telemarketer. Three years later, following redundancy, he joined Sotel which was opening a call centre on the island. "I was interviewed by Dave Bramley," recalled Packer. "He was one of the owners and a great guy. I said to him, 'I am prepared to work hard, I just want an opportunity at making something of myself'."

Having secured the position, Packer soon made his mark and became the number one telemarketer every month, at the same time showing an equal zest to learn more about the technology, products and services. "I loved the spirit of the company, it had a great ethos," he stated. "Dave Bramley and Jim Thatcher were great leaders with vision and they made everyone feel valued and part of something special. That has stuck with

me all these years, and I have always felt that if I can emulate that in my business, everything else will follow."

Aiming to replicate this model, take control and turn ambition into action Packer set up Fareham-based Silver Lining Convergence in 2007 with two friends. "I was frustrated with the job I was in at the time and wanted to do things my way," he stated "I guess I wasn't destined to be an employee for ever and had to be in control of my own destiny despite the country being in the absolute pit of a recession. My friends and family thought it was crazy, but my wife supported and encouraged me to do what I thought was right.

"We started out in an industrialised unit in Gosport. Whenever we were tempted by new offices we managed to differentiate between sanity and vanity and invested the money in people instead. Once we had grown to a certain point, we knew it was time to relocate for both the image of the business but also for the wellbeing of our people. An opportunity arose for us to move into a great building locally called The Granary. It has lots of character, loads of



Allan Packer

parking, great outdoor space, it's well located and a great environment for everyone to work in. Moving to our new offices in June 2015 was a significant milestone for us."

#### Integration

Packer took an early view that for Silver Lining to be master of its own destiny he needed to create a true converged solutions provider of both communications and IT services. "Working

with partners for IT support and services just wasn't effective," he stated. "This is important as the market is evolving at such a rate and the risk of attrition of traditional telecoms revenues is getting ever greater."

Silver Lining provides managed voice, IT, data and mobile solutions to businesses, focusing on managed services, creative solutions and customised

products and services. "We aim to organically grow our business through the diversification and evolution of our portfolio," added Packer. "We are currently focused on PCI compliance solutions and comprehensive enterprise hybrid cloud solutions. There is an opportunity to drive innovation in the way cloud services are served to both resellers and customers, so we created our new



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# ect Convergence package

Revolution Cloud platform. We have spent the last two years on planning, building and commercial modelling. Over the next three months we are launching our new cloud offering in stages and everyone from our technical guys, to sales, operations and even some of our partners are so excited about it."

Where others have rushed to market and failed, Packer believes that the groundwork done over the last two years provides a springboard for growth. "We talk about cloud in a far more comprehensive way than many of our competitors," he stated. "We are looking to provide an entire suite of services from the connection to the desktop, back up, compliance, voice and much more. We are looking to deliver this securely from a single managed platform with guaranteed performance and service."

Another turning point in the context of this strategy was bringing onboard a new business partner and investor, Peter Appleton. "As we drive the business down a more converged communications path focusing on becoming a true converged solution provider with our own ISP and cloud offering, we really benefit from Peter's expertise in the ISP and cloud arena," added Packer.

The company currently employs 40 staff and generates £7 million-plus revenues. In financial year 2013 Silver Lining generated £2.6 million turnover but the introduction of new cloud services and PCI solutions significantly catalysed revenues to over £6 million in 2014. "With rapid growth comes a variety

of expansion challenges," added Packer. "One of our big issues is getting the extra skills and resource we need. Recruitment can be a slow process. Our strategy has been to demonstrate that we have something exciting and new to work on, and that captures the interest and imagination of candidates."

## Strategic plan

The main strands of Packer's growth strategy are working with partners to speed up Silver Lining's route to market. "As a small business we have historically relied on referral and word of mouth for us to penetrate the market," he said. "We are now focusing more heavily on targeted event-based marketing activities and partner procurement. We see the partner channel route as being a major part of our strategy for growth over the next two to three years."

Packer also wants to enhance the company's position within its base as a managed solutions provider, which is partly why he was an early innovator of PCI solutions. "This helped us achieve significant growth and also opened up a number of doors into some great new opportunities," he commented. "It also demonstrated to our customers and our staff that innovation and diversity is good for both growth and security in the business."

In terms of diversity, if Packer finds a gap in the market he will try to fill it creatively. "We recently started providing TVs and Wi-Fi to hotels," he explained. "However, we wanted to do it better so developed our own hospitality TV and Wi-Fi controller based solution.

There will undoubtedly be more gaps in the market that come to light and as they do we will work to fill them. We are technically led and excited by the potential of evolving and customising technology. This approach leads us by referral into some exciting opportunities whether it be providing cloud services to the NHS or developing a completely new emergency communications system for the RNLI."

Packer also monitors regulatory changes in the industry to determine his innovation strategy. "Two years ago regulatory changes steered us to PCI, more recently we are launching some new lone worker solutions that we have designed and developed in house," he explained. "If you can make problem solving easy and affordable everyone is a winner. Having our own development team and constantly trying to be

## We see the partner channel route as being a major part of our strategy for growth over the next three years

aware of the challenges our customers face helps us to define which solutions we invest time and money into developing."

Packer is also keeping a close eye on commodity attrition, as many of the

commodities that telecoms businesses have relied upon such as call and data revenue are declining: Bandwidth pricing is constantly reducing, most inbound revenue is moving from higher value mediums such as 0800 and 084x to lower value 033 or even back to geographic numbers. And outbound call charges are disappearing with the introduction of low cost calls on SIP and call packages on SIP trunks.

"This means we have to focus on diversifying our products and constantly evolving to ensure that we have solutions and value added propositions to both maintain commodity income but also diversify away from it," he commented.

According to Packer, if resellers don't evolve to offer true value add they are likely to go 'extinct'. "A lot of businesses are jumping on the bandwagon of hosted voice, but these revenues are already at risk and resellers are going to have to innovate and diversify to maintain revenues and profitability in a market that is becoming ever more challenging," he commented. "Ultimately, we will see less resellers, but those that survive will be offering more creative and bespoke solutions."

Packer rates his ability to read the market and constantly evolve as his biggest achievement. "If we had sat back after a couple of years and patted ourselves on the back we wouldn't be where we are today," he said. "Diversifying our business into PCI, IT and eventually cloud has given us an edge. It involved a significant investment and was risky at the time, but worth it." ■

## Just a minute with Allan Packer...

**Role model:** Richard Branson. He has a great vision for diversity within his businesses and also lives life to the max

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I don't do social media

**What talent do you wish you had?** To play the piano

**Give one example of something you have overcome:** Gambling addiction (20 years ago now!)

**How would you like to be remembered?** As someone who inspired others to achieve with vision and opportunity

**What do you fear the most?** The unknown

**Three ideal dinner guests?** My dad: He is no longer with us and there are so many things I wish I had asked him; Will I am, a creative artist who fascinates me; and Stephen Hawking because I love science and physics, but some of his theories of black holes and the big bang irritate me!

**What possession could you not live without?** Car

**Industry wish:** For the market to unite against telco fraud

**Your greatest strengths and what could you improve on?** I never take myself too seriously, and have an ability to learn quickly and embrace change; but I'm terrible at time keeping and planning, not always good at conveying what is in my head, and lack patience!

**Industry bugbear:** The amount of time it takes to get connectivity installed

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** Medicine



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## CHANNEL DIAMONDS A CUT ABOVE

With a record awards entry, a stunning stage set, an inspirational 'Review of the Year', top notch hospitality and a high class presenter in TV's Gabby Logan, last month's Comms National Awards finals night was unquestionably the industry event of the year.

Sponsored for the fourth year running by Nine Wholesale, the Awards - recognised as the most coveted honours in the UK ICT sector - enabled all types and sizes of channel players to acknowledge success and provided a perfect platform for the industry's diamonds to celebrate in style.

This year's hall of fame saw Timico founder Tim Radford recognised as 2016 Entrepreneur of the Year and Olive and Incom pick up the Overall Enterprise and SME Reseller of the Year Awards.



The Comms National Awards sound and vision backdrop was spectacular



Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent introduced proceedings



Nine Group Marketing Director Mark Saunders set the tone



Sports presenter Gabby Logan was a brilliant host



Entrepreneur of the Year, Tim Radford (Timico)



The Comms National Awards TV studio was sponsored by Channel Telecom

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Service Provider Category



Cloud Communications Solutions Category



Software Application Category



Telephony Category



Partner Services Category



Contact Centre Solution Category



Vertical Market Solution Category



IOT Wireless Category



The event was completely sold out



What a great night...cheers!



Matt Hill, Ethos. "They're not holding me up, honest"



A truly stunning line up



"Don't start singing, we're supposed to be posing"



A big thumbs up from Cisilion



"You didn't?" "I did" - Chloe Emm (Oak) and Darren Scott-Healey (Peach)



"You won!" "I know!" - James Emm (Oak) and Bart Delgado (Akixi)



Come on, we may win the Strictly Award



Come on it's time for a selfie



When does this superglue wear off? Clifford Norton (Channel Telecom) and Alan Shraga (Fidelity Group)



Quick, smile, we're on camera!

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Comms National Awards Entrepreneur of the Year – Tim Radford

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



Best Wholesale Service Provider (above £10m turnover) – DAISY WHOLESale



Best ISP – ZEN INTERNET



Best Installer/Maintainer – IPNETIX

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Best Convergence Distributor – PRAGMA

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Best Call Management Solution – AKIXI



Best Billing Platform – UNION STREET



Best Mobile Distributor – PLAN.COM

Sponsored by **Telephony Category**



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Best Enterprise Telephony System – ERICSSON LG



Best End Point or Device – JABRA



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Best Enterprise Contact Centre Solution – STL

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The Nine Customer Service Award – ICA

## Vertical Market Category

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Best SME Vertical Market Solution – CLOUDSOURCE TECHNOLOGIES



Best Enterprise Vertical Market Solution – 4NET TECHNOLOGIES

## SME Reseller of the year

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SME Reseller of the Year – INCOM

## IOT/Wireless Category

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Best SME M2M/Wireless Solution & Best Enterprise M2M/Wireless Solution – ISN

## Enterprise Reseller of the year

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Enterprise Reseller of the Year – OLIVE

## Cloud Communications Category

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Best SME Cloud Solution – INCOM



Best Enterprise Cloud Solution – OLIVE

## Unified Comms Category

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Best SME UC Solution – LILY COMMS



Best Enterprise UC Solution – SILVER LINING



# Cradlepoint bids for EMEA

Cradlepoint has big growth plans in EMEA and the man spearheading its channel expansion campaign is Hubert Da Costa, Vice President of EMEA, whose career path and industry experience dovetails neatly with the US-based company's expanding global ambitions.

**D**a Costa's IT career began in 1998 at Symbol Technologies, followed by a move to Juniper, then Avaya and Sonus Networks before dovetailing with Cradlepoint. Individually, Da Costa's biggest career achievement is winning his first one million dollar deal at Symbol. "Just as important is the time I spent in major companies under the tutelage of some world class leaders," he added. "This has given me the equivalent of a working MBA. My career experience has enabled me to touch every aspect of the networking mobility world, and I have brought all of this together at Cradlepoint."

He is gunning for Cradlepoint to become a global leader in software defined wireless WAN solutions to the distributed and mobile enterprise. And 15 months into the his EMEA expansion campaign Da Costa remains focused on the company's biggest opportunity – verticalisation of the business through localisation. "We will continue our investment in the channel and our vertical approach in the market," he explained. "Channel expansion has been a challenge that we've worked to address via a two tier route to market. We aim to double our EMEA business within vertical and horizontal markets year-on-year over the next five years."

Cradlepoint is currently investing \$4 million in EMEA expansion and plans to grow at 80-plus per cent next year, increasing the team by eight in continental Europe to support the expansion it made into the ME region this summer. Incremental roles will be marketing, sales, channel, technical and business development focused. "We have developed a platform for growth through a 100 per cent channel-led route to market," stated Da Costa. "We will never take a deal direct. This feeds into our personal approach, so that our big accounts have a direct touch from Cradlepoint to enable the channel to grow faster. From here we plan to expand through local execution. We will continue to grow but instead of branching out from the UK into EMEA countries we will have local entities in those countries. We've already started this in the Middle East."

Founded in 2006, Cradlepoint is a privately held company with headquarters in Idaho and has shipped over a 1.4 million routing platforms, offering solutions certified and promoted by major worldwide carriers. These include cloud-based wired and wireless WAN networking solutions for distributed and mobile enterprises, with strong wireless and broadband performance and network system interoperability.



Hubert Da Costa

Cradlepoint's family of router platforms are deployed in mission critical applications that require 24x7 connectivity. With both integrated wireless and wired WAN and non-integrated versions, its solutions are designed for distributed and mobile operations and emerging industries that require either remote connectivity or multi-WAN redundancy. Cradlepoint's Enterprise Cloud Manager enables enterprise network administrators to monitor, manage and maintain their

distributed network running on different WAN sources from a single location.

**Embracing opportunities**

"An increasing amount of enterprise network traffic is moving off private IP networks and onto the public Internet and we are starting to see SDN as a solution," noted Da Costa. "This is the market opportunity for Cradlepoint and we are already embracing it through a product called NetCloud, a new brand that represents the combination of all our

cloud-based management and software defined routers and EDGE software with the Pertino network as a service. Through this we can not only grow the business, but make a real difference to the customers we already serve."

There was a time when Cradlepoint provided connectivity via boxes. But with a recent technology integration (from the acquisition of Silicon Valley based SDN pioneer Pertino) the company is fast becoming all about cloud-



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# EA growth Jade surges on growth in Wi-Fi

based network solutions for connecting people, places and things over wired and wireless broadband. "We are now taking the core intelligence at ground level and putting it into the cloud, connecting people, places and things," added Da Costa. "Initially, our mantra was 'always connected always protected'. We were able to do this with the advent of LTE for business. LTE was the key driver for us and we hit the market with a high degree of success. Now we're experiencing another big turning point for connectivity in the cloud."

Cradlepoint started out by focusing on retail as it could demonstrate RoI quickly in this vertical. However, its channel operations took it down a different route and the company quickly adapted to support different vertical markets. "Key sectors for us now are transportation, banking and finance, government and healthcare, as well as retail," added Da Costa. "Because of our close relationship with the channel we've been able to develop products specifically for those markets. The channel has been truly instrumental in the evolution of our business as we develop specific products by vertical market. We now have a business growing month-on-month, quarter-on-quarter."

The company grew 56 per cent in the 2014-15 financial year and continues to expand at a double digit rate. "We expect to close the year on a minimum 50 per cent over last year," added Da Costa. "In the last 12 months alone Cradlepoint has seen its EMEA business double. This rapid growth is set to continue as organisations

across the region embrace cloud, mobile and IoT technologies to increase their business agility, empower distributed workforces and gain operational insights.

"What everyone is looking for today is something 'as a service'. If resellers evolve over time they will have to embrace the move from a capex to an opex model to better serve today's markets. They will need to take anything, whether voice, mobility or software, and deliver it as a service. This is the future."

## Just a minute with Hubert Da Costa...

**Role model:** Every son's hero is their dad. In terms of business, I learned the most from my former boss Todd Abbott. He helped to shape my reasoning and logic and embrace systems and processes

**What talent do you wish you had?** To play the piano

**Your greatest strengths and what could you improve on?** I lead from the front and foster a sense of empowerment in my team; but I need to work on my delegation

**What do you fear the most?** Losing

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** Head of a group of Michelin star restaurants

**Give one example of something you have overcome?** Loss

**What possession could you not live without?** A fine cigar

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** When I was younger I wanted to be a priest

**Top tip for resellers:** Deliver on your commitment

**D**emand for enterprise Wi-Fi deployments continues to intensify and at the forefront of market developments is Mark Brackley, Managing Director of Jade Solutions. Here, he provides insights into his experience, outlook and growth strategy...



Mark Brackley

## Career background

I left school at 16, served an apprenticeship as an electrician, moved into project management, entered the early data cabling sector followed by business management. I dealt with IT directors at an early age and delivered state of the art cabling solutions. This experience has helped me to build strong relationships with customers.

## Potted history of Jade Solutions

Jade has been trading for nearly three decades. I joined almost 20 years ago and completed a MBO 10 years later. Since then we have transitioned the business. When I joined we mainly did work for the channel. After the MBO we moved to direct, developing end user relationships. We built on our abilities to design, install and manage Wi-Fi networks and all the mobile devices that connect to the Wi-Fi. Jade is now focused on the enterprise market and raising vertical strengths.

## Ongoing sales and managing growth

Jade employs 45 people and recorded revenue of over £12 million in 2015. That represents 30 per cent sales growth in the last

two years. The customer base is made up of mainly blue chip organisations such as major UK retailers, transport, logistic businesses and manufacturers. We are taking on additional project managers, technical consultants and engineers to ensure that we have the delivery capability to meet our sales growth.

## Key vendor partners and propositions

We choose our vendor partners carefully and work closely with them. Hence we have a small list of vendors including Aerohive, Zebra, Honeywell and Cisco. We also launched our Crowd brand, leveraging our fast paced multi-site roll out capabilities and Wi-Fi expertise to deliver enterprise grade Wi-Fi solutions in restaurants and retail. We also offer a managed service that delivers an end to end solution with business intelligence and analytics.

## Do you have any gaps to fill in the portfolio?

We are looking to add an IoT platform and help customers further leverage their IT investments. We are investing more in innovation projects, such as the Crowd brand, capitalising on IoT

## Describe the Jade Solutions culture

We are a fast-paced and innovative business, but from a human perspective we're open, warm and non-hierarchical. We encourage staff to share ideas and collaborate. This culture empowers our people to contribute more and makes Jade an exciting business to be involved with. Many of the team have been at the company for a long time and stayed with us through relocations and ownership changes, which says a lot about the culture within the organisation.

## What is your biggest opportunity?

The cloud gives us an ability to sell scalable solutions outside of the UK. Therefore, we are starting to witness growth in solutions provision internationally with projects now completed in the US, Canada and Australia.

## How will the role of resellers evolve?

Resellers will need to show and deliver market expertise, not just an ability to position hardware, but demonstrate to customers that they understand their business, and that the proposition delivers a solution to a problem, and adds value to the customer.



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# Channel leadership stack

Gamma's Daryl Pile has pledged to elevate the company's partner strategy following his promotion to the role of Channel Managing Director in September.



**T**he incoming channel chief took up the mantle following a 13 year stint at Gamma, and the move is the latest development in a 20 year career working in the comms channel in a variety of senior business development roles. With his feet now firmly under the table Pile wasted no time in reaffirming his commitment to Gamma's

guiding principles – listen to partners, innovate, develop and deliver. "It's a simple philosophy," he stated. "Gamma has always been channel-centric. It was true yesterday, it's true today and it'll be true tomorrow. With the vast majority of our revenues coming from resellers, it allows us to plan and develop our services specifically for the

channel, often designed nearly completely by our channel partners."

#### Evolution

Pile's observations on how Gamma has developed over recent years is as much a story about the channel's ability to adapt and evolve with the times. "During my time at Gamma the biggest change I've seen is

the number and breadth of products our channel partners are now selling," he added. "In the early days it was all about cheap minutes and diallers. I remember when wholesale line rental and dial up Internet access were cutting edge. As the market has evolved, partners have expanded their portfolios to meet the increasingly complex

voice, data and mobility requirements of today's businesses. Now, partners provide a variety of VoIP, cloud and SaaS solutions. Suppliers such as Gamma are investing in making these next generation products and services easy for the channel to sell. Markets once reserved for the most sophisticated channel partners are now far more accessible."



# ks up for Pile

He also noted that on the supplier side there's a diminished list of specialists whose business models are focused on, and depend on the channel, as opposed to suppliers who attempt to address the channel as a secondary target. "I believe that in a market as competitive as ours a channel partner's success hinges on working with suppliers that have a channel-centric focus, where products and roadmaps are designed to give the channel an edge," commented Pile. "Secondly, it's clear that end users want an increased number of services from one supplier, while partners do not want an unsustainable increase in the number of trading relationships and service platforms."

## Early adopters

According to Pile, the channel partners that prosper most are those that invest in becoming early adopters of new solutions. "They gain a sales and operational head start that helps them to sweep up the low hanging fruit," he added. "Those who focus only on 'the today' end up entering a much more mature and competitive landscape running like topsy to catch up. It's also important for partners to have a clear understanding of where their strengths lie and the value they add. Partners who concentrate on these aspects as they develop their sales strategies, target markets and verticals tend to progress most quickly."

"Most importantly, resellers who have the right people, in the right culture, incentivised for the long haul usually build a successful environment. As this gains momentum it usually attracts more

## Markets once reserved for the most sophisticated channel partners are now far more accessible

successful people and the whole scenario becomes self-fulfilling. It's one of the pillars of our success at Gamma."

The biggest challenge for resellers moving into voice is the heritage of what many voice-centric channel partners take for granted, but has in fact taken years to build up through their experience of indirect access, CPS and WLR, observed Pile. "These represent an enormous service, provisioning, billing and tariff knowledge base that, compared to those uninitiated in the finer arts of voice, are a huge competitive advantage," he stated.

The next five years will be an interesting time for the channel, believes Pile. "It will prosper," he said. "We'll see data services increase in both capability and quality but continue to decrease in cost. This will drive a growing number of available services in a hosted flavour and will be key in making them more competitive. We'll also see network-based convergence in fixed voice and mobile become a reality. At the same time, voice will become a mere application of the respective data service, and suppliers that are early entrants will gain a significant foothold and quickly gain a larger share of the

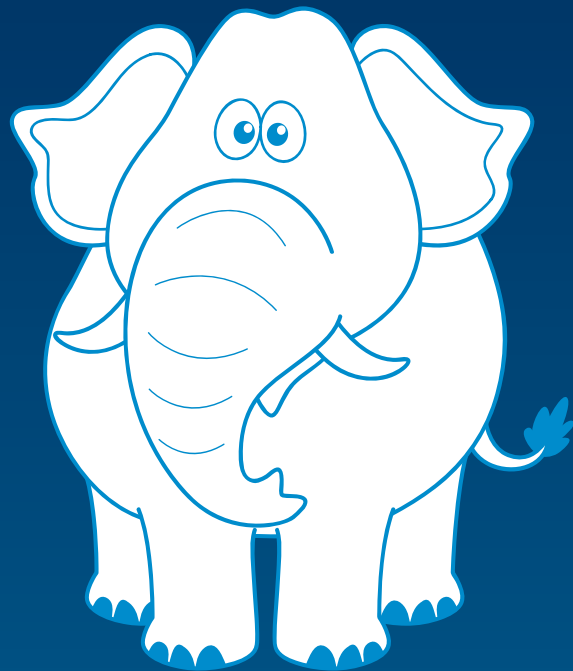
customer spend. Over time more and more millennials will move into decision making positions. They are inclined to embrace the latest technologies with an expectation that things just work, in the office, on the move, at home, seamlessly.

"As the services we provide become more complex it's Gamma's responsibility to ensure channel partners are properly trained, equipped and adorned with all the tools and knowledge they need to effectively sell, provision and support our products to their absolute best ability, either as a whole or as part of the solution they deliver. Continuing to automate the mundane, streamline provisioning processes and put real-time support tools into the hands of our partners drives sustained gains in their efficiency, a better experience for their customers and ultimately a benefit to all of our bottom lines."

Reflecting on the past five years at Gamma, Pile recalled several products that have gone from relative obscurity to mainstream market via a loyal army of channel partners. "The frightening thing is we know we can do better in many areas," he added. "There are some obvious priorities around driving sales activity, particularly in the latest product innovations coming down the track while maintaining an acceleration in the uptake of our hosted and SIP portfolios. However, it's in the on-boarding, ongoing training and improved partner support systems that we must continue to advance as part of what we call being easy to do business with." ■



## Ignore the Elephant in the Room at your peril!



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# Plan for cyber security

A key component of all cyber security strategies should be detailed preparation, according to Andy Patel, security advisor at F-Secure, who outlines the crucial steps businesses should take when formulating a crisis management plan.

**B**usinesses of all sizes are facing threats from both crimeware and targeted attacks. But while larger enterprises typically have the budget and resources available to purchase and implement solutions towards addressing these problems, smaller businesses often don't. "In a majority of companies we've worked with, cyber security wasn't taken as seriously as it should have been," stated Patel. "This includes larger organisations. We also found that cyber security wasn't a topic being discussed at the highest levels of management. The fact is, regardless of the size of your company, awareness and preparedness are going to be your best tools in the fight against cyber threats."

We've all read stories about organisations that were hit by a ransomware infection and subsequently paid to get their files back. What isn't mentioned is that, in many of these cases, the organisation (which was the victim) would have had the capability to restore files from back-up, pointed out Patel. "However, since they were unprepared for the incident, they quickly figured it would be far cheaper to just pay the ransom," he said. "It goes without saying that organisations shouldn't rely on that sort of strategy."

A strong cyber security strategy starts with a

good crisis management plan. "Every company conducts fire drills," noted Patel. "But when it comes to cyber security, most companies have no clue what they should do when something goes wrong. By defining a clear plan for crisis management and then rehearsing that plan, you ensure everyone from the top down knows what they need to do to ensure safety and get back to work as soon as possible."

"To formulate a crisis management plan, organisations should first start by asking themselves what the impact of a breach or ransomware infection could mean to them, and how they'd address the fallout of such an incident both internally and externally. The company's leadership team absolutely need to be involved in this activity."

## Guidelines

In order to be fairly well protected from cyber threats, organisations should follow Patel's action plan:

- Have properly deployed and configured perimeter defences (such as firewalls and anti-virus). Make sure they are kept up-to-date and that alerts are monitored and handled.
- Configure them to be less possible to attack. This means turning off unneeded services, making sure unneeded software isn't installed, configuring security settings and other



Andy Patel

system settings that would make the machine more secure than by default.

- Enforce mandatory disk encryption on laptops.
- Configure file shares with access control lists.
- Identify and back-up business critical data frequently. Back-ups should be tested for integrity and restore scenarios should be run periodically.
- Use two-factor authentication on any internal systems that require a sign-on. If two-factor authentication isn't available for the service in question, it should be replaced.
- Utilise network segmentation.
- Enforce VPN connectivity for all remote connections.
- Enforce that BYOD connect to a separate, non-corporate network while at your company premises.
- Frequently educate staff on security matters such as how to spot and deal with phishing and scam emails,

how to properly handle confidential documents and other security practices.

- Deploy a breach detection or intrusion detection solution or managed service.
- Employ staff who keep up-to-date with the threat landscape and make sure your security infrastructure is configured to catch the latest attacks.
- Perform regular threat assessments on your organisation's network. Simulate the attacks you're most likely to face. Patch all weaknesses found.
- Harden and patch all public facing systems. Unwanted public facing systems and services should be removed as soon as they're no longer needed. Don't leave systems to rot.
- Understand security practices used by partners, suppliers, consultants and anyone else who might connect to your network or access your systems. Ensure their security

practices are in-line with yours. Upstream attacks are incredibly common.

- Formulate incident response and crisis management plans for breaches and other cyber security related events. Make sure everyone involved knows what to do in the case of an incident. Practice them on a periodic basis.

"It goes without saying that most organisations, even large ones, don't have the resources or capacity to keep up with all of the above," said Patel. "It is therefore necessary to prioritise items that are most likely to protect your organisation. Often the first steps involve minimising the attack surface by taking unwanted services offline, hardening Internet-exposed systems and training staff. As most companies don't have forensics experts on staff, it's also recommended to keep an incident response service on retainer."

"The fact is that cyber security has become a lot more complex and targeted attacks are no longer being launched purely by nation states. Criminal threat actors are becoming a lot more creative. We've even seen extremely unskilled hackers break into organisations that were security compliance certified. Doing things 'by the book' just to pass compliance requirements won't make organisations safer, actually identifying and addressing potential attack scenarios in concrete ways will." ■

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# Sold on Glamorgan



Joe Volosky (left) and Michael Kennelly

THE sales operation at Cardiff-based comms firm Glamorgan Telecom has new leadership following the appointments of Michael Kennelly as Sales Director and Joe Volosky as Head of Telesales. The pair are tasked with expanding the firm's presence across south Wales and south west England.

Their appointments follow a MBO by Managing Director Kelly Bolderson who aims to boost revenues by £1 million a year until 2018. Bolderson said: "Michael and Joe's experience and skills will be a huge benefit to us as we continue to expand our service offering across Wales and the south west."

Kennelly added: "Technology has advanced at pace in recent years and there is a great opportunity for us to provide cost-effective solutions to our clients and drive growth. My job is to make sure we communicate that clearly."

Volosky said: "This role will allow me to play a big part in how the telesales department operates, and there is plenty of room to grow and nurture the team to support our prospective and current customers."

# Birchall has north focus



Quentin Birchall

AVSNET has strengthened its northern presence with the appointment of Quentin Birchall as new Regional Director for the North of England and Scotland, and the opening of a new Manchester office.

Birchall brings 25-plus years of experience in the networking, comms and AV industries, including a stint as Managing Director of Tiscali's Business Services division, SVP of a 4G wireless operator and Commercial Director of an AV business.

Graham Fry, Managing Director, said: "Our strategy is to support customers throughout their collaboration journey with us and that includes a growing number of companies in northern regions. Quentin's experience will be beneficial to these customers, especially from a network and UC perspective."

Birchall said: "The north of England and Scotland are key regions and this expansion enables us to bring the benefits of business collaboration to more organisations than ever before."

## Also on the move...



Jane Aikman

JANE Aikman has joined KCOM Group as Chief Financial Officer. Previous roles include a stint as Chief Financial Officer and Chief Operating Officer for Phoenix IT Group up until its acquisition and merger with Daisy

Group. She was also Chief Financial Officer of Infinis, Wilson Bowden and Pressac. Aikman spent five years in south east Asia with Asia Pulp and Paper Co and three years as an internal audit manager with GEC Alsthom. Aikman qualified as a chartered accountant with Ernst & Young. Bill Halbert, CEO, said: "Jane brings fresh perspectives to discussions at both a board and senior leadership level."

TOSHIBA long-timer Daniel Fuller-Smith has joined South West Comms Group as Sales Manager of the south east office. He worked for Toshiba for



Daniel Fuller-Smith

26 years, latterly as Sales Manager for the UK and EMEA. Sales Director Sarah Flowers said: "Daniel was well known to us during his role at Toshiba. His expertise and location means he is a natural fit for our growth plans in the south east." Fuller-Smith added:

"This is an exciting opportunity for me. We already have clients in these areas but know we can support many other businesses in the same way with the addition of extra staff dedicated to the region."

# Invosys gets product boss



Stephen Taylor

FOLLOWING a series of stints working for big telecoms businesses Stephen Taylor's search for a new role within a more dynamic smaller company where plans can more quickly be turned into action has culminated in his

appointment as Product Manager at Manchester-based Invosys. He moved from Sage Software where he managed a portfolio of compliance products for UK&I-based accountants. Previous roles also include Campaign Implementation Manager and then Business Change Manager at BT, followed by five years at Opal Telecom/TalkTalk Technology.

Taylor said: "Having always worked for large incumbents I had a desire to be a bigger fish in a smaller pond where I can help deliver innovative solutions that make a difference to the user base in realistic timescales. Invosys is a fast-paced, ambitious and dynamic organisation with big plans. Who wouldn't want to be part of that?"

Invosys founder Peter Crooks commented: "Stephen's expertise will help us achieve our vision to become the global innovators in the communication software industry."

Invosys was established 10 years ago and specialises in developing, hosting and deploying network-based call management technology.

# Yarham in new marketing role



Jade Yarham

EXPERIENCED channel marketer Jade Yarham has joined Internet telephony service provider VoIP Unlimited as Marketing Manager with a remit to ramp up its presence in the industry, help accelerate new growth and build brand awareness.

"My experience in the comms channel will help drive VoIP Unlimited's strategy for fast growth," she stated. "Until now the company has done phenomenally well through organic growth alone, but it's time to raise our profile in the industry so it becomes synonymous with our technical capabilities. I am here to propel VoIP Unlimited into the channel's front line to be an automatic consideration for partners."

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**EVENT PREVIEW**





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9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2016



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# Inspiring digital leaders

Content Director Paul Cunningham sets the scene for this year's Gold Standard Comms Vision Convention.

**D**igital transformation is now on the agenda in many boardrooms, and each is at a different waypoint in its journey. And even within those businesses already on their way forward, the 'Luddite' versus 'Progressive' argument will be in full swing with no clear battle lines drawn based on function, experience or business scale.

The consequent radical shifts in business models, customer behaviour and workforce expectations will have a significant impact on the shape and momentum of digital enterprise transformation in the next decade, and this has directly informed the themes and content for Comms Vision 2016. It's clear that just doing what we have always done is not going to be sufficient to both survive and thrive in the next decade. Creativity will be required.

With this need in mind, our opening keynote speaker is an unrivalled advocate and exponent of creative thinking in business. Jamie Anderson is co-founder of the thought leadership network Connected Visions and Affiliate Professor of Strategy at Antwerp Management School. He has held permanent and visiting positions at some of the world's top business schools, such as London Business School, IMD, ESMT Berlin and the University of Melbourne. In his Comms Vision session

he will focus on the creative process as a starting point for managing and innovating in a complex world, exploring the interaction between personal and organisational creativity, and demonstrating that for organisations to innovate and deal with complexity they need to foster the right environment in which both individual and collective creativity can thrive.

Few would question that successful creativity requires time, space and focus. Yet we find ourselves in a working environment and wider market context that is highly pressurised, fast-moving, competitive and technically complex. In these circumstances how do you not just maintain performance, but actually improve it to levels that may previously have been thought unattainable?

Guest speaker Dave Alred MBE has been at the top of the game as a world leading performance coach for the past two decades. His achievements range from nurturing Jonny Wilkinson into rugby's most feared kicker to helping Luke Donald achieve the position of world number one golfer. In his presentation at Comms Vision, Alred will expand on the concepts of his book *The Pressure Principle*, demonstrating practical techniques and models for personal and team development that have delivered such outstanding results.



Paul Cunningham

Perhaps the greatest example of the impact of creativity in business thinking is the inexorable rise in the variety and quality of business software applications that are embedded technically and culturally in our personal and business lives. This development represents massive opportunities to build intellectual property and value into our businesses, but at the same time offers challenges in terms of technologies, partnerships, skill sets and processes.

#### Market leadership

Another guest speaker, Hans Peter Bech, is an Amazon bestselling author, speaker, economist and advisor. He addresses issues related to taking software driven companies to market leadership. He will lay out the foundations for developing and managing an effective business model in a marketplace that is increasingly software-focused and partner dependent.

While we may be able to improve our own performance and behaviour in pursuit of success, the behaviour and choices of customers remain outside our direct influence. Today's business customers are seeking products, services, and more importantly experiences and outcomes that match their preferences and needs as individuals and diverse sub-groups rather than as large, collective and homogenous market segments where one size of solution and message fits all. By contrast, savvy customers are looking for simple, non-intrusive interactions that deliver their desired results.

This challenge will be the subject of one of our keynote sessions at Comms Vision 2016. In his keynote, founder of Wild Orange Media and former Head of Digital Marketing at Microsoft, Allister Frost, will consider approaches to understanding and supporting technology-

empowered customers, and look at enabling better real-time customer experiences where 'helping is the new selling', with content pivotal to business success.

The role of the business leader is also critical, along with the development of winning teams and the means by which culture is communicated inside and outside the organisation. Leadership, alliances, working practices, software tools and the physical characteristics of the workplace are all factors that contribute to the shaping and sustaining of an effective culture, not just for essential business innovation at the current tipping point but for making it stick in the long-term.

Can an effective innovation culture be built (or acquired)? Or does it just grow organically? What organisational models and techniques are working and why? Our guest speaker in this area, Henry Warren, is an independent innovation and product development consultant and specialises in building and leading organisations, projects and software applications that have impact at scale in disruptive digital markets. In his session at Comms Vision, he will examine the role of technology in learning and organisational development, and how it can shape an effective culture of collaboration and innovation.

At Comms Vision 2016, our unique blend of expert speakers and partner business leaders will be exploring with delegates how real businesses are not only meeting the challenge of enterprise digitisation, but succeeding in the act. ■



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# Prime time in the cloud

There's never been a better time for the contact centre industry: The current drive towards customer service and multichannel interaction is greater than ever and with agile, cloud-based scalable and innovative technology, the opportunity for partners is huge, writes Charles Aylwin, Director of Channel & Public Sector at 8x8.

**W**e all know the frustrations of bad customer service when we're a customer ourselves. Whether it's waiting on hold for long periods of time, being passed between multiple agents trying to find someone with the expertise to help, or having to repeat information over and over again. A poor experience can ruin your relationship with a company. In fact, our research shows that bad service has driven one in eight callers to start searching for competitors online during a call, and one in ten have actually posted live on social media to name and shame a company during a poorly handled call.

This matters more today than ever before. The contact centre is becoming the only place that customers interact directly with a company, more specifically with the people on the front line that represent the business. For partners that can support their customers in improving customer service, the opportunity is self-evident. This is particularly true for e-commerce companies that don't have the presence of a physical store. In an era where brands are defined by the service they provide, not just the products they sell, the actions of the contact centre team are fundamental. The customer experience of a phone call makes a brand what it is.



Charles Aylwin

But what does the contact centre of 2016 look like? You may be thinking of a huge building filled with hundreds of agents wearing headsets. In fact, it's much more common to see an individual agent taking customer calls from various Internet-connected locations, including their home. For partners, this is a huge opportunity to steal a march on competitors by providing the latest cloud-based contact centre technology to help businesses improve their customer service.

With cloud-based contact centres, you can offer your customers the opportunity to run contact centres of any size, with staff based in any location in the world. Businesses are able to add

or remove seats based on fluctuations in demand, which is perfect for those that face seasonal demand in calls, facilitating a truly flexible workforce.

#### Clear benefits

The benefits for your customers are clear. By helping them improve their customer service you can help them build customer loyalty, and ultimately increase their revenue. The right technology can make sure customers are connected to the right agent with the right expertise first time. Technology can match a customer to any agent in the world who is able to answer their query to cut down on waiting times. Agents can also have the full history of a customer's interactions with a company at their fingertips,

so that there's no need to repeat any information.

Cloud-based technology also helps customers turn plans for a remote working policy into a reality. Using the latest cloud and collaboration tools, your customers' employees can quickly and easily work from any location with an Internet connection.

To ensure this is seamless, 8x8's solutions allow customers to control both front and back office with the touch of a button, with the ability to switch from desk phone to desktop or mobile system at any time. For partners that embrace this functionality there's a huge opportunity to differentiate from the rest of the channel, add value for

customers and, ultimately, increase your bottom line.

Cloud-based solutions are able to offer more advanced features that are more easily scalable than a traditional on-premise system. Solutions like 8x8's Virtual Contact Centre and EasyContactNow are built to enhance the great customer experience contact centre agents are able to offer by making sure customers are always sent to the right agent, with the right expertise, at the right time.

It's also key to choose a partner solution that puts security and reliability first. We ensure 99.997 per cent uptime across 8x8 products, which means less than 24 minutes of downtime per year, so your customers will always be running at full speed. It also adheres to the strictest security criteria, including ISO27001, HMG Cyber Essentials Plus and many others, so you can guarantee your customers' data will be protected.

The revenue potential that cloud-based contact centres can open up for channel partners is huge. However, making the most of this opportunity comes with its challenges. At Comms Vision, attend one of our sessions in Queens 1 boardroom and find out how to maximise the contact centre opportunity, meet your customers' strategic needs and increase your long-term revenue. ■



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# New context for comms

The age of the platform is driving rapid transformation in business communications but this shift to contextual communication should be embraced, not feared, argues James Hennah, Managing Director Fixed, BT Wholesale.

**W**e will make a prediction: In less than 30 years people will be able to live and work anywhere in the world and communicate seamlessly with friends and colleagues regardless of time or location, talking, smelling, even touching as if they are in the room. The current collision of technology development from mobile communications through to AI, virtual and augmented reality suggests that there will be a continued drive towards increased integration and growing expectancy around how we communicate. All senses are being explored across a range of devices. Communication will never be the same again.

It's a strange but wholly believable future and one that is being built on the almost relentless pursuit of new products and services, particularly in communications. Platforms, such as Facebook, have already re-written how populations communicate and share information. People and businesses are growing accustomed to an on-demand service culture, demanding communications services as and when they need them to fit within the context of their current function, whether it's mobile calls, device sensors or data. There is an insatiable hunger and as generation Z starts to emerge into the world of work, there is bound to be

an explosion in innovation and digital development.

But what is going to make this all possible is the underlying infrastructure? Yes, telecoms businesses have provided and will continue to provide the connections on which these future services run but here we reach a fork in the road. Turn right to continue on the same path or go left to evolve and develop a new path. Is this really such a difficult decision for a telecoms provider?

Interestingly, a recent Citi report, 'Re-Birth of Telecoms into a New Digital Industry', was a little more direct, 'dump the dumb pipe', it says. It's a great phrase. If telecoms firms want to continue to just provide the dumb pipe to the digital ecosystem they can do so but will have to streamline as pressure mounts on their profitability. The second option is to embrace digital transformation and add intelligence to networks.

BT took the decision to dump the dumb pipe route some time ago. BT CEO Gavin Patterson even set a date for ISDN migration completion last year stating that by 2025 all customers will be on the IP network. This is just the start. The evolution of networking technology is gaining momentum as we continue to push the ceiling on what is possible in terms of speeds, reliability and flexibility. G.fast



James Hennah

is just one example of that. OpenReach expects that over 10 million premises will be connected to G.fast by 2020.

#### Top priority

Adding value to this and any other pipe is now the number one priority. As we look at the emergence of technologies such as WebRTC and the increasing demands of data and analytics, we have to transform the way in which products and services are not just packaged but delivered. It's increasingly about offering flexibility and speed of delivery in ordering and bundling propositions such as our Ethernet VPN services or Managed WAN. Understanding how customers consume technology now and in the future is fundamental

to how we shape our offering and help our resellers stay on top of the demands of the market.

This market is being consumed by change – digital transformation – and that change is based on platforms. On the impact of platform technologies on enterprise businesses, an Accenture report stated, 'Powered externally from the outside in, these technology-driven business models are based on platforms that create value within and across the new ecosystems. And they are redefining the future of industries'.

By 2018, IDC predicts that more than 50 per cent of large enterprises – and more than 80 per cent of

enterprises with advanced digital transformation strategies – will create and/or partner with industry platforms. Incidentally, IDC predicts that the number of industry clouds will reach 500 or more by 2018, up from today's 100-plus.

Businesses want to tap into products, services and capacity as and when they need it and without owning it. This is what the platform model serves and why companies such as Apple are masters of it through the provision of a platform dedicated app store. In fact the mobile ecosystems are a good example of how the mind set has changed. Businesses increasingly expect this approach to products and services and while this rips up the historic value added approach to reselling, it is also a new opportunity for repeat business and upselling.

As we back ourselves to meet these new demands, through continued investment in Software Defined Networks (SDNs) and Network functional virtualisation (NFV), our integration with EE mobile and our drive towards simplicity, we believe we are adding intelligence to the dumb pipe. It is this intelligence that will continue to drive us and our resellers forward, helping to put communications into context for customers and meet the challenges that change presents a little more easily. ■



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# Mobile forces change

There's no doubt that the communications landscape has been dramatically shaped by mobile technology over the past decade. According to Ofcom, 93 per cent of UK adults own a mobile phone and more people use smartphones than they do laptops to access the Internet. Whether people are communicating in transit, offsite or in remote areas, mobiles form an integral part of modern business operations. The challenges thrown up by employees using their own devices for business have compelled organisations to think about how they manage mobile devices. They can also see that, as they bring mobile into the whole ICT infrastructure, that there is an opportunity to unify their comms so they can be more dynamic, flexible and responsive.

Looking to the future, it's an easy prediction to make that mobile momentum will continue growing. Take the millennial generation – native to technology, they've grown up online, expect technology to work and will go elsewhere when it does not. Their proclivity to technology is helping to reshape our economy. Globally, the average millennial (aged 16-30) with Internet access spends 3.2 hours a day on their mobile devices (the equivalent of 22.4 hours, almost a whole day every week). Combine that with the growth of IoT and M2M and it's clear to see that mobile is no longer just about making calls on the go – the future of mobile is about data and this is reflecting into business environments. So, what does this mean for the channel? In any modern



Bob Falconer

## Gamma CEO Bob Falconer on how mobile is transforming the telecoms channel, and the implications for channel resellers.

marketplace, the value of differentiation is huge. Being able to stand out from the crowd with a unique product offering, or a specific area of expertise, is a marketing win that can give any company an untouchable competitive advantage. And when a marketplace becomes busier, the need to extend these points of difference becomes all the more important. That's the current state of play in mobile telecommunications reselling, where channel partners are competing to acquire the same set of customers. And then there's the blurring lines between telecoms and IT specialists, with both looking to take advantage of the colossal opportunity that is mobile.

Choosing the right business model is key for mobile success. Many resellers who have recognised the opportunity that mobile presents have become mobile dealers for one of the big three operators in the business market, getting a cash commission for every sale and backing off support to the mobile operator's call centre. This was OK when

the mobile networks wanted to work with resellers, and staffed their call centres well. But as they increasingly focus on selling direct on the high-street and online, and with call centres offering increasingly long wait times, the mobile dealer approach with the big boys often fails to deliver a mobile service fit for business and of course the ownership of the customer, and the value that brings resides with the mobile operator.

### MVNO model

The alternative is to become a Mobile Virtual Network Operator (MVNO). This gives channel partners the control they need to deliver a true business-class service – from flexibility with regard to how products are positioned, to real-time customer care and the scope to develop closer customer relationships – all under the banner of their own brand. This used to be an expensive and difficult transition, but Gamma has sought to make this much simpler.

Of course, every channel business is different.

Experience, expertise and unique customer demands all play a part in shaping the nature of their business strategies. The biggest challenge for mobile providers is adding value and enabling channel partners to fully own their customers without imposing onerous contractual obligations and targets on them. For resellers, flexibility and rapid response will help them stand out from the crowd.

Business customers want a better overall mobile service and one that is supported by someone who really understands their needs. Gamma's new mobile service, together with its channel partners, can make this a reality. By owning the core network, Gamma has full control of the mobile service, in addition to the control it already has over its fixed voice and data network and is quite relaxed about passing that control over to channel partners for their own customers.

The Gamma Mobile service is designed for business, including true business-class

support such as near real-time control (compared to the typical 48 hr turnaround with other providers) over network provisioning, barring and usage alerts through Gamma's portal. With its MultiNet bolt-on, Gamma can also provide coverage from multiple UK networks from the same SIM. With these new capabilities Gamma believes it is well placed to help the channel provide increasing converged fixed and mobile services to the UK business market and give them more of an edge when competing with the large mobile networks.

When it comes to offering a true business mobile service, you need to look beyond just the latest mobile devices. It's about providing features designed with business users in mind, having the commercial flexibility and control to offer a tailored service while retaining customer ownership, all backed up by an extensive and reliable network.

During our boardroom session at Comms Vision we'll be exploring both the here and now of business mobile, as well as what to expect moving forward from what's becoming an exciting and continuously evolving market. The main topics we'll cover include:

- How the channel can deliver business value with mobile today;
- The latest innovation in business mobile and where Gamma fits in;
- How to get customer ownership, control and flexibility with mobile services;
- What the future holds for fixed/mobile convergence;
- And why channel resellers need to start preparing for this now.



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## Gamma Mobile

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Quickly and easily make changes to mobile numbers via an online portal

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### **Choice**

A choice of MVNO models to suit your requirements

### **Stand out from the competition**

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# Building a fibre future

An industry-wide and unwavering commitment to building a modern fibre infrastructure is needed now if we're to avoid letting down UK businesses, and there is no time to waste, writes Rob Hamlin, Commercial Director at CityFibre.

**H**eavy reliance on cloud storage and hosted applications is already commonplace among businesses. And although 4G rollouts continue and the likes of NFV and SDN are still gaining momentum, attention is already on 5G and the applications it'll enable. The promise is for an even more connected world, one where the cloud-based intelligence of connected devices, machines, applications and buildings is already far beyond a level once belonging to futuristic sci-fi fantasies.

And for cities these days, 'smart' is the new black. With it, the need for fast connectivity, good service and flawless reliability is both implicit and vital for their increasingly bandwidth-hungry business communities. Mobile providers are already crying out for dark fibre to provide cost-effective, scalable connectivity to every mobile site. And, if not already, every public site, school and business will need affordable gigabit services that are installed on time, operate invisibly and repaired faster than ever.

The ICT industry has embraced the Internet of Things (IoT) as a major driver of future bandwidth requirements. Although linguistically vague, it's not that we don't know what those 'things' are, it's

because the possibilities are vast and potentially limitless. Or are they?

## Where does the line get drawn?

What could leave the sensational on the shelf, make the imaginable impossible and frustrate the forward-thinking? The fly in the ointment of ICT advancement and economic prosperity in the UK is the copper network. The UK's Victorian-age infrastructure has delivered far beyond what was ever intended. Credit to those who've delivered technologies to keep it alive for this long. But now, as a collective, we need to back a new horse and redirect those resources with immediate effect. Our industry deserves it, businesses and communities need it and, at CityFibre, we're all over it.

When it comes to building modern, pure fibre networks our shared infrastructure model is the answer. Often when people think of sharing they think of split fibres and ask about contention ratios. Our well planned city model is different. It's more about sharing vertically, not horizontally, and that means working with partners across different sectors to bring the costs down for everyone.

## Build once, build right

In Hull, we built a 56km network connecting 37 sites for Three UK and EE. Multiple



Rob Hamlin

fibres were provided to each site to support current and future requirements, ensuring a vastly reduced long-term TCO. The lion's share of the build took just seven months and, at the point of switch on, a massive 380 per cent increase in data traffic was recorded by Three UK alone. As a project it showed the speed at which we can deliver and the immediate value of the network investment.

## Capacity counts

The story doesn't end there though. The initial build was for the MNOs but we knew other sectors could benefit from the same footprint. So, we followed our usual 'build once and build right' approach by adding stacks

of spare capacity. What now lies beneath Hull, along with each and every Gigabit City we build, is enough fibre to serve unlimited bandwidth to every business, every school, every public sector site and every home for the next 50 years and beyond.

Within months of completing the network, Pure Broadband came on board as our service provider partner. Through its newly formed Pure Speed division it's now providing our Gigabit capable active services to businesses across the city. And with it, alternative infrastructure choice for the very first time.

We live, breathe, install and sell fibre: We already own and operate 40 dense metro

networks across the UK and are on track to hit at least 50 by 2020. Eighteen of our networks are now 'launched' Gigabit Cities with hand-picked partners, like Pure Broadband, selling affordable, active service over them and partners like Commsworld and Highnet using dark fibre to build their own solutions.

This time last year we had just six Gigabit Cities. Our rapid growth is thanks to multiple network asset acquisitions, not to mention a dedicated team working round the clock to make them fit for our standards of service. It's great to reflect on what we've achieved, but there's no time to rest because the UK urgently needs more fibre in the ground.

This is our first time at Comms Vision and we can't wait to be part of it. We're not short of talking-points and no topic is off the table. We're happy to discuss everything from daily trading relationships and service capabilities to launch partner opportunities, asset migrations and bespoke projects. Our goal, as always, will be to keep the word 'no' out of our vocabulary as much as possible.

Let's be clear though, one thing we'll not be swayed on is our belief that the only viable future for the UK is one that's built on a pure fibre infrastructure! ■



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# Energising the channel

Fidelity Energy made its debut at last year's Comms Vision with a simple message for the UK's leading comms and IT providers that attended: put some energy into your client relationships.

**A** year on and the company has already signed over 80 new partners and is looking forward to adding to that fast growing list at this year's event. "The Comms Vision platform is a superb opportunity to showcase the benefits to technology businesses of managing their client's energy needs and now that we have some genuine case studies to discuss we are really looking forward to meeting with potential new partners at Gleneagles," said Fidelity Energy MD John Haw.

Fidelity are totally committed to the telecoms and IT channel and have a team that truly understands the challenges faced by telecoms and IT businesses when adding new products to the portfolio. "It's this insight that is allowing us to work with these partners in a positive way and to add the energy management platform to their business. Someone recently asked me why Energy was relevant to their IT business. The answer I gave was simple: You solve customer problems using technology - that's exactly what we are doing in the energy space."

## Magic ingredient

The 'magic ingredient' the delegates at Comms Vision have are strong customer relationships and Haw and his team are positive delegates will quickly understand how they can leverage those relationships to maximise on the energy opportunity. "I am not a big

fan of trusted adviser phrase, but the truth is the delegates at Gleneagles really are trusted by their customers to manage a number of critical elements of their business. The current world of energy is full of brokers that speak to their clients maybe once a year or every two years.

"Compare that to a reseller, who bills them every month, manages changes to the IT estate, perhaps upgrades the client's mobile handsets, fixes line faults and troubleshoots computer issues. In truth most probably engage with their clients weekly. This means the old energy adviser is easily displaced, because trust and relationship always win out."

## Energy portal

Fidelity Energy is using all they have learnt in the telecoms space about automation, pricing portal and CRM systems to ensure they are moving the goal posts in the world of energy. "The Energy Portal we have developed in the last six months is streets ahead of anything else in the market and couple that with the relationships the partners bring and it's a very compelling partnership," said Haw.

"Also at Comms Vision I am keen to dispel the myth that selling energy isn't just for businesses that offer and support complex IT and telephony products. While a large portion of the customer base is simple - just like in telecoms - we also have a significant



**The Fidelity Energy team at Gleneagles: John Haw, Simon Payne and Paul Havell**

number of clients that we have rolled out far more significant solutions to."

Haw quotes one significant example: a 68 site Housing Association, that needed a partner to audit the estate, collate the information from six different suppliers, prepare a set of contracts that all end on the same date (as currently they had nine different contract end dates) and recommend the right suppliers with the customer service standards they expect. "The partner introduced us, we prepared the audit, used our online portal to work out the best options and helped the client select the service wrap. The housing association was delighted and as a result the partner is now more entrenched in the account," confirmed Haw.

## Industry buzz

"Everyone is talking about Energy at the moment. The oil price is hitting the headlines almost daily and there is a real buzz about the offering in the partner community. It's a

manage their customers and, perhaps more importantly, lead the market in customer experience for Energy."

Haw believes that the flexibility of converged resellers and systems integrators gives them an edge and ability to move into Energy supply and provide a level of service others cannot match. "Big companies can't afford to sell to small business as very often they only sell one product whereas partners will be selling several. This will always give them an edge in the market. Partners exist to make profit, solve customer problems and in most cases grow enterprise value. The biggest risk they face is complacency, arrogance and a refusal to innovate. There are some great examples of hugely successful businesses that continue to evolve and innovate. Focus Group for example added an energy business to their portfolio a few years ago.

"We know partners are very precious of their customer relationships and rightly so. They need a partner that provides all the energy experience, problem solving and technology portal needed to effectively service a customer. We can offer this, day from day one. We will do everything for the partner, as they learn the product and upskill on the services they take more and more control and use the portal to facilitate the customer management. It's a great natural journey that adds significant value." ■



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# It's time to go hosted

If someone wanted to appear to be an intellectual heavyweight, or a thought leading business, they would probably offer up a thesis on the impact of digitalisation. I'm not going to do that, writes Pete Tomlinson, Director, KCOM.

**N**ot because it isn't an interesting or important subject, but as you're reading this you already have a pretty good sense of what's happening. After all, it's been going on for a very long time. Items that once needed to be done physically are now happening digitally. I used to send a postcard in the mail, now I Snapchat. I used to write a cheque, now I wave my iPhone. It seems there are countless new and exciting examples of these disruptions created almost daily. The important piece for us and our channel community, the piece I want to focus on, is how this impacts our customers and how we can support them to take advantage of these opportunities.

To do that, let's start at the beginning. It's a cliché that 'connectivity is king', however it's never been more true than it is today. That's not to say there aren't heaps of other new and exciting opportunities, but everyone needs to be connected and their requirements are becoming ever more sophisticated.

Fast speeds and increased capacity are no longer enough. Businesses are now looking for robust solutions involving multiple access technologies, resilience, broadband backup and even mobile. Likewise, pro-active monitoring and

application management are now considered as requisite features.

The good news is there are clear signs that businesses are putting a greater value than ever on the critical nature of connectivity. So while the cost per Mb continues to come down, the overall demand and margin profile remains positive. We see evidence for this all around us. Our own sales growth in these areas shows no sign of slowing and the market has seen huge interest and investment in alternative access providers.

At the same time we have reached a tipping point where cloud consumption models have become normal. Businesses no longer worry about relying on applications like Salesforce.com, Office365 or Hosted Communications services. This, together with some helpful awareness, driven by the mass marketing campaigns of Microsoft Azure and Amazon Web Services, means businesses are now ready to move their core data and business applications into a hosted or cloud environment.

While finding our place in the value chain for providing and integrating business applications will continue to be an increasingly important part of the mix for channel businesses, there's also a real and immediate need to help SME and mid-market organisations access the



Pete Tomlinson

benefit of transitioning to a cloud-led model for hosting their own platforms and data.

## Second wave

Many people will be familiar with me talking about the convergence of software and communications as the second major wave following the coming together of voice and data services – once very

separate markets. During that first phase of consolidation, I never really understood why so many great channel businesses from a voice heritage struggled to replicate that success in the data world and vice versa. Today, the statistics around how much new data is being created daily are mind blowing and when combined

with the need to make that data available, in real-time, to customers and colleagues wherever they may be, that presents a real challenge for many businesses.

It was very much with that in mind why we, at KCOM, set about creating a hybrid hosting capability to make entering the market really straightforward and a natural extension of existing sales and service conversations. For comms resellers, the great thing about this shift towards cloud hosting is that they have little to worry about in preserving the status quo of yesterday's on-premise model. It's not like having to get your head around transitioning your whole business model. That's what the traditional VARs are worrying about right now.

Of course I'm looking forward to reviewing the lasting and great trends driving digitalisation at this year's Comms Vision, but let's also address the real and immediate opportunities it presents. Our customers, more than ever, need fantastic connectivity and that goes hand in hand with moving their data to the cloud. I mentioned earlier our hybrid hosting solution which does just that in an easy, straightforward way. And with our current promotion of 100 per cent margin until 31st March 2017 on private cloud I definitely think it's time to get started. ■



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# Harnessing innovation

Alex Tempest, Director of Partners at TalkTalk Business, provides an insight into the network operator's product and service strategy and discusses how the channel can make the most of disruptive industry innovation both today and in the future.

**T**alkTalk Business is proud to be sponsoring this year's Comms Vision and once again exhibiting alongside some of the biggest names in the UK ICT channel industry. In particular, we're looking forward to discussing the future of the industry and how technology and disruption will affect the channel in the coming years. Disruptive innovation is a hot topic in the ICT space, but it's important to know exactly what this means in practice. If prepared for properly, new technology creates huge opportunities for the channel and for our end customers. If not, we risk slipping behind the rest of the industry and, even worse, the rest of the world.

For our part, we're no strangers to new disruptive innovation and have seen its effects over the last few years. We want to ensure that we're equipping our partners with the latest technologies so that we can continue to build the network of the future. It's not enough to simply know about new technologies, we also want to get them into the hands of our partners.

New technological innovation is all well and good, but new applications and Internet-delivered services are also putting more and more pressure on the underlying network. The network is now the foundation on

which businesses operate, but it is also a great platform for our partners to offer new and exciting products and services.

As businesses continue to require more data and faster speeds, we want our partners to stay ahead of the bandwidth demand curve and meet the needs of their customers. The strains on networks will only continue to increase as we see 4k video conferencing, cloud collaboration tools and even virtual reality being used by businesses in the years to come.

In preparation for what's ahead, this year we introduced our Network Brilliance programme, a key project at the heart of our investment strategy. By ensuring that we're investing in the right places, we are ensuring that we remain one step ahead of the bandwidth demand curve over the coming years and are taking our partners with us on this journey.

## Product innovation

In addition to putting a plan in place to deliver a future proof network, we've also been adding new innovations to our product offering, such as SIP and Hosted Voice. We know from our partners that many of their customers want flexible and scalable voice solutions, and they want to make sure their offices are ready well ahead



Alex Tempest

of the ISDN switch-off. We're now offering a range of SIP Trunking solutions, as well as new packages which include bundles of free SIP calls.

In addition, Wholesale Fibre is playing an increasing role in fulfilling the needs of businesses that demand more and more bandwidth but are outgrowing their existing connections. Similarly, fibre to the premise, or FTTP, will continue to roll out, while IPVPN will continue

to deliver the benefits of a reliable network.

While we love celebrating the new products we've released in the past year and are looking forward to discussing more at this year's conference, we also understand that many will be more interested in the new technologies on the horizon. On this note, we're developing new technologies to make use of dark fibre, an untapped

resource with the potential to completely disrupt the B2B data market. It's early days for the technology, and there's still lots to agree before we can roll it out, but we're excited about the potential opportunity for businesses by opening up more of these resources to meet the exponential growth in data demands in future.

## Service innovation

Finally, we've also been innovating the way that we support the ICT channel and the services that we offer. Take for example the significant improvements we've been making to our MyNet portal this year, most recently with changes to the ways that we report installation times so that partners can best manage customer expectations with Openreach connections. By creating an open channel of communication with Openreach, we've also worked together to successfully bring down the installation times of our customers.

The ICT channel continues to be an exciting and dynamic industry, and there is a strong appetite to keep making the network, products and services we provide even better. We are sure that we'll have plenty to discuss with everyone at this year's Comms Vision, and look forward to hearing from all of you about what you see as the future of the industry. ■



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**TalkTalk  
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A photograph of two women in a professional setting. The woman on the left has curly blonde hair and wears glasses and a white polka-dot shirt. The woman on the right has dark hair and wears a red top. They are looking at a tablet held by a third person whose back is to the camera. The background is a blurred office environment.

## Staying ahead of the game matters

At TalkTalk Business we have over 20 years' experience in delivering what matters to our Partners. That's why we work closely with them to understand their needs and deliver the products and services that give them the competitive edge. To learn about the new innovations we are bringing to market and how they will help you unlock more margin, meet us at Comms Vision and join our boardroom session at 3pm on Thursday 10th November.

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# Uboss boosts BroadSoft

VanillaIP's 'big reveal' is certain to win a rousing Comms Vision Conference reception when the company lifts the lid on a new high priority channel campaign based on a unique blend of its Uboss platform, extensive BroadSoft functionality and unbeatable commercials.

**M**uch effort has gone into the development of VanillaIP's new proposition to ensure that it pays off for resellers across all levels of the market. And the company has pulled off a unique triumph in raising the appeal of its Uboss portal, introducing new premium functionality alongside attractive commercials and aggressive wholesale rates. "Our true white label offering will redefine and strengthen BroadSoft's influence in the UK channel, enabling resellers to address new customer demands for a seamless blend of more sophisticated solutions combined with simplicity in the buying and deployment process," said Iain Sinnott, Sales Director.

Uboss is a hosted solution that seamlessly connects to BroadSoft platforms and any other vendor solutions that customers may need to integrate. Uboss helps to maximise revenue by getting service providers to market quicker with a more sophisticated product offering. It enables resellers to increase revenue, improve differentiation, drive customer self-service and ARPU by consolidating back office functions and combining multi-vendor services within an on-demand user portal.

Uboss merits the overarching importance it has acquired because it also enables resellers to put their own stamp on the market and

realise their ambitions. "New Uboss functionality also gives a reseller's back office team the power to manage more customer service questions," said Sinnott. "And it gives customers even more opportunities to self-serve and self-manage, again driving down costs for resellers as their base grows."

The appeal of VanillaIP's new proposition goes deeper. It has overcome the challenge of balancing 'smart' and 'complex' solution elements with the need for simple services at the customer level and simplicity in reseller package creation, driven by the abilities of partner sales teams. The key here is that VanillaIP's 'smart bundles' make the reseller package easy to adopt and take to market, ensuring they are armed to create their own unique market offer, while allowing them to add their own services for further differentiation.

This model can be replicated across all markets and VanillaIP's other achievement has been to scale up from its SME stronghold and unlock revenue opportunities for resellers in more sophisticated environments such as call centres, international offices and organisations with other complex requirements. "As an established and powerful player in the core SME zone we have developed the tools to address any scenario in larger businesses, while maintaining our



Iain Sinnott

simple reseller friendly product and service packaging and unbeatable commercials," said Sinnott.

#### Commercials that count

The benefits aren't hard to articulate. "We have introduced fantastic commercials that make our core telephony solutions available to partners at aggressive wholesale rates," enthused Sinnott. "We've also launched disruptive commercials on smart apps for PC and mobile. In base line telephony we have BroadSoft extensions at sub £4 wholesale, a 2,000 minute bundle that can be added to any base pack, and a mobility pack that enables true modern working. Essentially, 70 per cent of the extensions deployed to a standard business using premium features can be delivered for less than £4.50 wholesale including minutes."

VanillaIP's task as a leading channel provider is simple – to help reseller partners build their businesses and

extend their market reach. The multi-dimensional nature of VanillaIP's proposition dovetails neatly with the requirements of ambitious resellers and an increasing population of end users who are smarter in their understanding of the cloud and what it can do for them, therefore becoming unresponsive to limited single bundle offerings.

"We have the most sophisticated implementation of BroadSoft in the UK," confirmed Sinnott. "All providers can be different in their deployments, but we have unlocked and exposed to the reseller all the features, plus the apps and reports we have developed on top. All other BroadSoft deployments have a greatly limited feature-set and they typically offer a single bundle. Our multi-faceted proposition allows resellers to close more complex higher value opportunities and stand out from the crowd with a more sophisticated own branded offering."

Nor is that all. As well as introducing a new level of automation and customer self-service, Uboss promotes agility, accessibility, visibility and ease of use while significantly reducing back office operational costs. "Our proposition for prospective resellers is that our Uboss portal gives them a unique branded presence and full automation for provisioning and billing at the back end," explained Sinnott. "As a single portal for SaaS and portfolio management, Uboss also includes key features such as zero touch billing, automated toll fraud locking, NOC enablement with packet analyser and bulk build with configuration capabilities."

VanillaIP says its new true white label offering will redefine and strengthen BroadSoft's influence in the UK channel, enabling resellers to address new customer demands for a seamless blend of more sophisticated solutions combined with simplicity in the buying and deployment process. "The enhanced capabilities of VanillaIP's channel proposition have been designed to unlock the potential for more complex and higher value market opportunities," reiterated Sinnott. "The new strategy reflects the uniqueness of VanillaIP's BroadSoft implementation which boasts a level of sophistication unmatched by other providers, supported by our ground breaking pricing and commercials." ■



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# Daisy's win-win formula

**D**aisy Wholesale (a division of Daisy Group, the UK's largest independent technology and communications service provider) is a leading business telecommunications and IT service provider delivering cloud, data, voice, mobile, Wi-Fi and security services to the reseller channel, writes **Terry O'Brien, Managing Director of Daisy Wholesale, and Sales Director Garry Growns**. Offering a comprehensive portfolio of services designed specifically with the SMB market in mind, Daisy Wholesale serves over 1,000 partners across the UK.

Daisy Wholesale is dedicated to helping its partners grow their business by working collaboratively. Daisy wants its partners to benefit from the broadest portfolio of products and services available in the market. This provides a great cross-sell opportunity to develop



**Garry Growns**

new profitable revenue streams while helping lock-out competitors from their hard won customers.

Daisy is seen as visionary in the telecoms arena as it continuously spots opportunities in the market and adapts to them. It identifies

areas of development on existing propositions and in new services while building a true wholesale portfolio tailored to the channel. An example is Daisy's new hosted telephony solution, HV.Select, built specifically for the channel in partnership with BT. As the traditional ISDN market moves towards being 100 per cent IP-based by 2025, it is critical for all channel partners to have a market leading proposition.

The HV.Select licence includes a better feature set as standard, better quality of service, better pricing, better handsets, more minutes, more flexibility and more functionality through what is possibly the best partner portal in the channel. Hosted telephony is a huge growth market and it is a tremendous opportunity for partners to broaden their own product portfolio and increase their revenues. Daisy is proud to be able to deliver a truly best of breed solution.

HV.Select is just one example. Others include our massively successful One & Only mobile proposition, DaisySentry (a managed solution for network security, PCI compliance and data networking); Break-Fix (a maintenance service for the channel); and Daisy Wi-Fi (a business grade Wi-Fi solution).

A key factor behind Daisy Wholesale's success is that everyone in the company recognises that it only generates revenues when its partners are successfully selling its services and as a consequence partner service and support is at the forefront across the business. Combining its portfolio breadth and innovation and its service delivery and support capability, with the customer reach of the channel resellers, delivers a win-win scenario for both Daisy and its partners. Daisy Wholesale: Great Portfolio, Great Service, Great Value, Great Partnerships, Great Position. ■



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If you wish to find out more about Daisy Wholesale and to learn how we can help your business grow call us **0808 178 4555** [www.daisywholesale.com](http://www.daisywholesale.com)



# Enabling transformation

**S**peed to market isn't just about releasing products or services in a timely fashion, it's also about how quickly you can provide a service to a customer, **writes Darren Farden, Head of Marketing, Entanet.** Think about it: You're more likely to buy a car if the salesman can show you, instantaneously, how differing variables will impact the cost and so help you make a decision.

The same principle applies to your own business and to those of your customers. Having information relevant to a customer (or supplier) at an employee's fingertips can mean the difference between an average experience or a great one, the difference between a sale or no sale. Bill Gates wrote a whole book about this concept called 'Business at the speed of thought'. He believed that connecting and integrating technology into business relationships



**Darren Farden**

and operational processes has enormous transformative power.

Our experience of this has centred around business customers adopting the cloud for ease and speed of access, to improve customer service and ultimately to deliver a better overall customer experience. We're also seeing increasingly complex IP VPN projects being introduced to us, making it clear that businesses need access to information to be

fast and secure. Given the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) will be implemented in less than 18 months, security of data is becoming an even more pressing issue, as is ensuring that the connectivity adopted is suitable for a business's digital strategy. For some, this will mean a complex solution involving virtual private networks and Ethernet connectivity, while for others a business-grade broadband connection will suffice. It's important for channel resellers to recognise these differences and design solutions that meet the specific needs of each customer.

With this in mind, businesses clearly need to work with a solution provider – and in turn a reseller's service provider – with the credentials, experience, longevity and trustworthiness to inspire confidence. Entanet has long helped businesses meet the challenges of digitisation via the reseller channel.

For the last two decades we've been delivering core connectivity and hosting services that are integral to day-to-day operations, providing robust wide area networks to keep data secure and, this year, we've introduced private links with cloud service providers such as Microsoft Azure and Amazon Web Services.

Our API means that partners can connect with our systems and so provide information at the speed that their customers need, particularly in terms of quoting for leased lines. What's more, we make it our business to help resellers properly equip themselves to address the aims and fears of their business customers. This is why we're keen to meet delegates at Comms Vision and also those unable to attend. Book a 1-to-1 or call us about having the right partnerships in place to meet the demands of an increasingly connected world. ■

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## LET'S GET ONE THING STRAIGHT


The beauty of working with you as a channel partner is that, by supporting you to grow your business, we benefit too. That's why we don't limit your potential, set quotas or targets and won't insist you place all of your business with us.

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# Funder raises the game

**H**enry Howard Finance (HHF) funded in excess of £50 million of telecoms equipment for more than 300 partners in the last year alone, writes **Dan Proctor, Commercial Director**. And as the leading independent finance company to the telecoms channel, HHF commits that its financial products are exactly fit for purpose. We provide fast and flexible leasing solutions for PBX, hosted voice and mobile handsets with transaction values from £250 for single handsets.

The HHF platform also offers a range of innovative products and pre-pay facilities to support more complex installations. Our experience in providing extensive credit facilities to our channel partners allows businesses of all sizes to make decisions with confidence, particularly if they are transitioning to a service based model.



**Dan Proctor**

Earlier this year, HHF was recognised by both the leasing and telecoms industry for the development and implementation of our innovative online leasing portal, known as HowApp. Using the latest technology, HowApp works by providing vendors with immediate credit decisions and generating documentation for customers to complete electronically. Since launching in June, HowApp

has been successfully adopted by many high profile suppliers and partners, allowing users of their system to manage the sales and leasing process online and onsite.

Users of the portal claim that HowApp has contributed to significantly reduced customer transaction times, up to 90 per cent in some instances. At HHF, we believe that this technology has revolutionised the way that vendors across the channel incorporate leasing into their sales processes. The open nature of our API enables partners to access our services from their own CRM and web shops, meaning that a completed transaction via an electronically signed document can be achieved in a matter of minutes.

HowApp was produced by HH Vendor Finance, the branch of Henry Howard Finance that specialises in sales aid finance to support resellers

in the reprographic, telecoms, security, vending machines and health marketplaces. HowApp can be used on any device, including laptops, tablets or smartphones – allowing sales people to transact lease agreements online from anywhere, at any time. Crucially, the reliability of the system, and our expertise in channel support ensures that both HHF and HowApp are trusted by leading manufacturers, wholesalers and distributors.

HHF offer more than just leading technology and immediate credit acceptances. Our experienced vendor team also provide tailored marketing collateral to support our partners, including telesales resources that willingly undertake sales campaigns on behalf of our vendor partners. Our aim is to satisfy both equipment suppliers and the end customer, and we strive to help vendor accounts succeed and grow. ■

## HH Vendor Finance are the leasing specialists for the UK's telecom market.

We provide fast and flexible leasing solutions for PBX, hosted voice and mobile handsets, and have extensive experience in vendor sales.

Our innovative online leasing portal HowApp provides immediate acceptances and correctly completed paperwork.

HowApp can be used on any device, including laptops, tablets or smartphones – allowing online transactions at any time, from anywhere.

HH Vendor Finance support our partners with a depth of expertise.

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# Billing market redefined

**S**trategic Imperatives delivers innovative on-demand, BSS and OSS solutions to many of the UK's largest communication providers making them more efficient, productive and competitive, **explains Wail Sabbagh, Managing Director, and Head of Business Development Tim Sayer.**

We are recognised as the UK market leader in multi-carrier fixed line provisioning and have transformed the billing landscape with our revolutionary SaaS platform Elevate.

When we introduced Elevate to the channel our intention was to transform the billing market. This is not a statement we made lightly. We have backed it up with significant investment, industry engagement and commitment. We recognised that the channel was dependent on outdated, cumbersome and inefficient billing systems and identified the need for a new approach to billing.



**Sayer and Sabbagh**

Elevate eliminates the need for complex infrastructure, large upfront investment and expensive in-house operational expertise, while delivering a highly streamlined real-time and functionally rich cloud-based billing solution underpinned by industry standards and best in class user experience.

Elevate's pioneering 'Power of Now' approach is changing how communication providers view and use their billing platform. 'The Power of Now' is about real-time that

is powered by true dynamic auto scaling. Elevate works in real-time, responding instantly to changes in customer and pricing data to provide a constant up-to-date picture of profitability and business performance while acting as an early warning system to combat fraud, churn and pricing errors.

Alongside billing, Strategic Imperatives is a leader in fixed line provisioning with award-winning multi-carrier solutions for Local Loop Unbundling, Wholesale Line Rental, Fibre and traditional broadband that manage millions of lines, traditional broadband and fibre connections. Our clients demand best-of-breed systems to support their business which means billing, CRM, provisioning, ticket management and revenue assurance systems must easily communicate to deliver an integrated business process. All our solutions provide a comprehensive

library of published interfaces and APIs to facilitate rapid integration and enable full automation.

Strategic Imperatives is not just about technology. We know that our clients demand responsive and effective support, and our team value our clients' businesses as much as their own and fully understands the demands and challenges they're facing on a daily basis. We do not offer tiered or premium support, just great support that is offered as standard with all our solutions.

At the heart of our channel strategy is outstanding customer service, SaaS-based solutions with no on-premise requirements and a highly intuitive user experience. We continue to grow and are proud to name many of the channel leaders as our clients including Vodafone, Plusnet, Fujitsu, TalkTalk, Daisy, Gamma, Chess, Entanet and Zen Internet. ■

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# Gain the cloud advantage

**V**antage Cloud is the brainchild of a former telecoms engineer who had the vision to build a simple yet highly flexible platform to increase productivity across the UK data market. Inspired by the lack of synergy between business systems and the limitations of existing software, in 2014 work began on constructing one of the industry's most efficient, cost-effective and highly integrated systems. Vantage Cloud enables IT providers and their consumers to fully manage data products throughout the full-service lifecycle in a single and easy to use interface.

The Vantage Cloud workflow builder pioneers a new approach to delivering IT services by enabling organisations to break down their quoting, ordering and delivery processes into digitised workflows. With integration into some of the



**Lee Watts**

leading CRM and ERP systems, it can efficiently track, process and monitor almost any product alongside existing software and send out alerts when things start to steer off course

Organisations now have the ability to design their own provisioning and quoting processes without having to engage software companies to build them a one off system. "The main problem with commissioning bespoke software is that the development team often have no vision to the

overall objective," said Lee Watts, Director and founder of Vantage Cloud. "Our system has been designed to work specifically with the UK telecoms industry. By using our system, clients get the full flexibility to configure the application to work the way they need it to while being safe in the knowledge that the product is constantly being maintained, secured and development by our team."

To further empower users, Vantage Cloud integrates directly with the top connectivity carriers and wholesalers via API. This makes it the only product that can enable clients to deliver live quoting directly from their providers to their customers while allowing them to keep 100 per cent of their margin.

"Data is extremely important to any business," added Watts. "It can empower organisations to effectively plan and improve their

services to give them an edge over their competitors. In order to keep data accurate, we have adopted the philosophy that information should only need to be entered once. Vantage Cloud works alongside existing software to provide a centralised, fully responsive interface to input and maintain data once."

For Watts, there is no better place than Comms Vision to launch his latest innovation aimed at helping businesses provide a personal value added service to their customers without investing in inflexible off the shelf or bespoke software. "Our strategy is to partner with IT service providers of all sizes and help them to deliver connectivity and cloud solutions," he said. "By empowering our customers to sell and manage more effectively, we aim to support our clients through sustained growth and be on hand to provide our expertise as they evolve." ■

## Giving you the edge

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# Altos: Ahead of the times

**M**uch has changed in the world since MyPhones.com launched its Altos hosted telephony platform five years ago, writes **founder and Managing Director Dr Stuart Marsden**. We've watched wars, natural disasters, economic crashes and political leaders come and go, and the uncertainty continues while we await the outcome of Brexit negotiations. Of course, it's not been all bad: Sepp Blatter stepped down from FIFA, we've shot up the medals table in the Olympics and there have been developments in technology to inspire us.

Altos, too, has changed, and for the better. Driven by its thriving list of resellers, MyPhones.com is adding additional features, including Skype for Business, and improved soft client and CRM integration to the platform's already long list of call handling and management features. In addition to



**Dr Stuart Marsden**

voice calls, Altos now also handles video and video conferencing calls, as well as communications features that include presence, instant chat, text messaging and email via the Altos Phone Buddy 3 app.

But some things just have to stay the same, and that includes the MyPhones.com approach. Altos was developed specifically for the reseller market, designed to be flexible, affordable and reliable. We concentrate on managing and

developing the platform and give our resellers complete control over how many licences they take and how long they hold them; which SIP trunk, broadband and minutes providers they work with, and the makes and models of handset they prefer to put with their systems.

MyPhones.com is currently working with Cisco to bring its new range of handsets to market. 'Reliable' might sound boring, but sometimes reliability is exactly what you need. The integrity of the Altos platform is central to everything we do. Our 99.99 per cent record for continuous uptime is the product of careful planning and meticulous attention to detail. That's not something we would ever set aside. At the end of the day, resellers sell the ability to make and receive phone calls, and if that bit doesn't work, then it doesn't matter how many features you're offering.

Another area where MyPhones.com can be relied upon is pricing. Our pricing structure is very simple – a standard Silver licence comes with everything except call recording, auto attendant and video calling, all of which are included in our Gold subscription. And we have only two optional extras, wall boards and a fax to email subscription for dedicated fax machines, which can be ordered as separate items.

Altos licence fees have remained the same since the platform launched in 2011, with monthly subscription charges still from as low as £1.95 for a fully functional seat. There are no minimum contract periods, no set up or termination charges and no minimum volume commitment. In fact, signing up with MyPhones.com is straight forward. Our resellers are our partners and our policy on fair and reasonable pricing is an important element in our approach. ■

## What do you look for from a hosted telephony platform?

- ✓ Bags of features?
- ✓ Quick, easy installation?
- ✓ Flexibility around SIP trunks, broadband and handsets?
- ✓ HD voice and video capability?
- ✓ Skype for Business, CRM and soft client integration?
- ✓ Genuine track record for reliable uptime?
- ✓ Freedom to rebrand and make the product your own?
- ✓ A timely response when you've questions or problems?
- ✓ Affordable licences and a simple pricing structure?



Altos from MyPhones.com. White label cloud telephony designed specifically for resellers.

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# Oak thrives on new ideas

**H**ere, **Oak Innovation CEO James Emm** discusses the thinking behind the company's ethos and evolution and what it all means for partners: At Oak, we take time to think big. Phillip Reynolds, our CTO, and David Reynolds, his son and Canadian counterpart at OakSI, regularly get away from it all to dream up new product ideas. Earlier in the year this involved a broadband-free trip along Route 66. More recently it was a trek across sunny Snowdonia. And we've grounded a lot of blue sky thinking in reality.

We've brought in fresh methodologies, technologies and people. We're making changes in HR, sales, marketing and development. We've changed our company name to Oak Innovation and have expressly put ideas at the core of what we do with the new strapline 'Ideas that change everything'.



**James Emm**

Most importantly, our latest products are brand spanking new. The '(I)nnovation Series' is inspired by customer feedback, market developments and lightbulb moments, and is custom-built to support a business' unique goals. Using the award-winning Oak Communications Platform (OCP), the new products offer an exceptional degree of business intelligence and the tools to bring about performance improvements. Yes, Oak will continue

to offer our best-selling X Series of call recording and reporting products, but now we can also provide competitive hosted and cloud-enabled solutions for the growing number of customers who want them.

## Introducing Clarify

Clarify comes fresh from the development studio, billed as a Call Recording and Quality Measurement tool for advanced business applications. It's a project-managed, customisable modular solution. It's easy to use, with an attractive web-based UI, and does everything you'd expect from a good call recorder, plus a whole lot more including enhanced screen recording, stereo recording, advanced quality measurement, trend reporting, plus an API for cross-systems integration.

## More from Evolve

Evolve is the Call Reporting and Performance Analytics solution for

businesses and contact centres. It has already scooped awards for delivering affordable real-time reporting and sought after features like accurate wait times, a record of all 'lost' calls, and enhanced supervisor control. Managers can use Evolve to monitor agent and call activity with the ability to change agent status, interrupt and support them on calls, and even move calls across queues – keeping wait times down and customer satisfaction and sales up.

## Add in Adapt

We have also developed a portfolio of 'assist' style products to support automation and integration across communications. These include progressive and predictive diallers, SMS Messaging and media blending, with more ideas in the pipeline. So, with a fistful of new products and plans to talk about, I very much look forward to catching up with everyone at Comms Vision this month. ■

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ideas that change everything

# Pragma's in ascendency

**D**uring 2016 Pragma has continued to grow its business with a strong performance across the SME, mid-market and enterprise sectors, driven in part by the launch of Ericsson-LG's iPECS Cloud Platform. With year-on-year revenue growth of 29 per cent, the team at Pragma have an energised channel, are hungry, and focused on the year ahead.

At the heart of this growth has been an unrivalled focus on the channel and the resellers that take their technologies to market. With a recent award win at the Comms National Awards for Convergence Distributor of the Year, along with Ericsson-LG scooping the Enterprise Platform award, Pragma is confident it has a compelling proposition.

With the launch of iPECS Cloud Pragma has set its sights on the UK cloud telephony market and



**Tim Brooks**

already disrupted the channel with full PBX functionality, resilience and integration into its on-premise iPECS platforms and handset range. By helping its channel and end users evolve to the



**Will Morey**

cloud, Pragma is seeing a rapid adoption of its cloud technology.

Pragma founders Tim Brooks and Will Morey explain what they feel is making the difference to their

channel partners and helping them to continue to post record growth year on year: "A total commitment to the channel is our only approach," they said. "Pragma is a channel-only business and never sells direct. This, combined with a truly innovative cloud and on-premise platform from Ericsson-LG, helps us provide the technology, support and resources to help our channel partners win in their markets."

The Pragma team have undertaken a selective approach across the UK, recruiting resellers in targeted areas of the market. This controlled distribution policy has helped maintain the margin on the product and the differentiation that resellers need to win customers. Pragma continues to recruit high growth resellers who are looking to establish a true partnership and take advantage of the significant benefits of partnering with Ericsson-LG. ■



We are Pragma, the multi-award winning channel technology provider. Working with Ericsson-LG we enable high growth resellers with cloud and on-premise Unified Communications. To start winning with iPECS and Pragma, contact us today on [sales@wearepragma.co.uk](mailto:sales@wearepragma.co.uk) or call 01444 480 900 [www.wearepragma.co.uk](http://www.wearepragma.co.uk)



# Channel intent affirmed

**T**elcoSwitch was launched to the channel in January 2016 by serial entrepreneur Russell Lux who established one of the UK's fastest growing IT companies, LuxTech, in January 2001. TelcoSwitch has already witnessed a remarkable level of growth from an initial and growing group of channel partners attracted to the company's reseller engagement model and differentiated hosted telephony and UC proposition. "Our presence at Comms Vision serves to announce to the channel that we are here, serious about channel partner engagement and reseller recruitment, and to show how our product truly sets itself apart," stated Sales Director Paul Gibbs. "We are looking to strategically recruit more like-minded partners."

He says the market is saturated by a large number of players offering the same old functionality



**Paul Gibbs**

and highlighted just one of many differentiating factors that set TelcoSwitch apart. "We have built our product to provide true CRM integration, not just popping, each call is logged and can be taken from cradle to grave through the CRM platform," explained Gibbs. "This has proved irresistible to channel partners and end users. Our proposition is fundamentally grounded in

enabling new and existing channel partners to differentiate against their competition, while also retaining margin through true product differentiation. Our target is to formulate a group of resellers that succeed through product specialisation. And Comms Vision allows us to engage with the channel's top players while providing the correct platform to showcase our product and proposition."

TelcoSwitch's high level of intent and commitment to partner recruitment is undeniable, and to build on its unique triumph as a fast growing newcomer to the channel Gibbs underscored the importance of Comms Vision as a platform to further establish the company's credentials. "Comms Vision allows the channel to see the pedigree of our products, and our vision and determination to become the hosted provider of choice," he added. "We

are extremely passionate about our products and truly believe that once given an audience channel partners will be impressed, not only by the offering but also the channel model we have put in place."

TelcoSwitch's bespoke on-boarding programme enables resellers to work with its products while also moving through a modular training programme. Gibbs also explained that the company's approach to the channel is primarily based on achieving harmony between the products, reseller engagement and end user requirements. "We listen to feedback from resellers to gauge the changing end user wants or demands," commented Gibbs. "And being different around functionality allows resellers to build real value around their price, setting them apart from the flock. Adapting to these constant changes is key and almost guarantees success." ■

 **TelcoSwitch™**  
HOSTED TELEPHONY FOR THE CHANNEL

## The unifying theory of telephony

- TelcoSwitch revolutionises business communications, providing the world's most unified, turnkey and open standards hosted telephony platform. These solutions have been developed as a direct result of our deeply engrained experience in the telecommunications market place. This in turn brings peace of mind to channel partners whilst enabling them to deliver a truly enriched, differentiated product to their end users.

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# TeleWare in world first

**T**eleWare is guided by one simple principle: We believe that better communications creates better business, **writes**

**COO Nick Reaks.** Over the past 25 years we have developed solutions that have transformed how many of the world's leading organisations communicate. For example, we do this through solutions such as our SIM-based mobile call recording or our Intelligent Number, a unique number that can be accessed on any device across the globe.

But, we don't just sell technology, we develop commercial, beneficial and creative partnerships with our strategic business partners. This is driven by our 'Think Beyond' philosophy, which means we work hard to explore and develop creative solutions to communication barriers. This approach has enabled us to work closely with our partners to create compelling and differentiated



**Nick Reaks**

unified communications propositions that, in turn, increase customer acquisitions and improve retention.

### Partnering for growth

As companies strive to manage the challenges of growth and complexity, they are increasingly turning to strategic partnerships to help them reach new customers and mitigate risks. Alliances are becoming vital to delivering access to new geographies, markets and customer types. More and more, businesses are turning

to strategic partners to acquire new technical capabilities, accelerate product development cycles and improve competitive positioning. In a survey by Frost & Sullivan, CEOs cited strategic partnerships as their number one growth strategy. Our work with Ovum has validated this as innovation, agility and flexibility have been highlighted as the main qualities sought by partners. We embody all of these and believe that successful companies embrace partner collaboration, share common interests and create synergies for the mutual benefit of both parties.

'Think Beyond' has helped us to develop market leading propositions. An example of this is our work with Microsoft on its Azure cloud platform. As an early adopter of cloud, we have been concentrating on developing our solutions to work with Microsoft Azure and, on the 13th September, we delivered a

world first. At 12pm, we were able to route, record and analyse a call in real-time through Microsoft's Azure cloud computing platform in a fully encrypted, compliant environment. This was something that many had advised wasn't possible because the cloud just wasn't ready for this yet. However, we were able to demonstrate that it was achievable without further enhancements to already deployed products. It also shows that the overall goal of going 100 per cent cloud is possible.

We work with a select number of partners to ensure that we can give them the focus to help them achieve growth. Alongside our developers we have expertise across sales, marketing, product management and operations who will operate as an extension to our partners' operational teams. We're always looking for new strategic partners to join our exclusive partner network. ■

**Think Beyond**

## TeleWare

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# Strong mid-market focus

**O**ur partners have cracked the exciting mid-market segment by leveraging our portfolio of advanced features and international reach to 72 countries, writes **The Voice Factory (tvf) Managing Director Paul Harrison**. We provide access to high end hosted Unified Communications features such as full hosted inbound call centre, SaaS integration, PCI-based call recording, call analytics and access to our open eco system.

Our partners can promote their brand by white labeling our service as their own and therefore become trusted advisors to their customers, safe in the knowledge that tvf is delivering an advanced hosted Unified Communications telephony solution. tvf's complete feature set also enables our partners to fully meet the business requirements of their prospects and exceed their expectations.



**Paul Harrison**

So, why tvf? We don't lock the service down and work with our partners to ensure we find the right solution to secure their customer. We are 100 per cent indirect

and will never compete with our partners. The team at tvf has over 20 years of BroadSoft and hosted telephony experience, with our partners benefiting from having full access to this knowledge.

All of our partners have access to our sandbox, allowing their development teams to enhance their software solutions to become voice enabled, thus bringing a more compelling offering to their customers. This integration and development makes tvf very collaborative with our partners subsequently they become very sticky with their end customers. To date, we have zero churn in our customer base.

We have created a unique service which is unrivalled by any premise or hosted provider, and continue to lead from the front. This makes our service 'fit for future' with predictable costs and a strong mid-market

focus, with productivity features that enhance this space by opening more doors to different verticals.

Building our product and service strategy we have also strengthened our senior management team by appointing Jamie Hughes as Partner Account Manager, Adrian Penny in the newly created role of Client Services Director. Director, Ian Whitman is now focused solely on our infrastructure development and delivery. We created these roles to support this continued growth

With thanks to our partners, tvf has experienced strong growth over the past six years. This has enabled us to evolve into the global telecommunications services company we are today. This is an exciting time for tvf and it's paramount that we maintain the levels of service our partners expect, as we firmly believe the 'Cloud is just the beginning'. ■



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# VERTICALS



# Brand new chapter opens

**W**e all know that in our industry the one constant is change – and this year has been no different for us, just with an extra big change too, **writes Andrew Fletcher, Head of Channel at Bamboo Technology Group.** In May we were delighted to launch a new brand and strategic vision. The culmination of two years work across our business – looking, listening, learning and careful repositioning – Total became Bamboo Technology Group. We have expanded our remit beyond pure comms and aim to enable growth for all our partners, by realising the full potential of ICT.

Of course, while many things have changed, others have stayed very much the same, such as our core values and service promises. Our rebrand signals a fresh way of doing things and a broader ambition for the business as a whole. For our channel in particular, it symbolises a sharpening



**Andrew Fletcher**

of our focus and the crystallisation of even greater ambitions. As a result, the Total banner remains strongly in place for our partner programme. Its brand equity and reputation within the channel is pivotal to our long term success.

So how can we deliver better value for our partners and together play the long game? Account management has been realigned to optimise support

and better serve partners, regardless of their size, location or needs. We've brought new people on board, across our teams and introduced new roles. Our Helpdesk continues to deliver an enviable sub 30-minute response SLA (which is regularly under 10 minutes). We have invested significantly in our backend systems, automation and integration to allow partners more direct control over their services.

As you would expect, with 20 years experience, mobile, remains a principle product. But we've also expanded our channel offering with fixed and data connectivity, hosted solutions, professional services, technical pre-sales and consultancy, as well as bureau billing, Direct Debit collection and white label online billing for end customers. Our wholesale M2M proposition has got off to a flying start. Barely a year old, our partners are already enjoying some great success, with

month-on-month connectivity growth rates of 31 per cent and data volumes growing by 71 per cent.

With dealer, reseller and wholesale propositions, flexibility and transparency are the only way forward. We don't believe a one size fits all approach actually fits anyone at all. Instead, we help partners open up new markets and revenue streams by tailoring the individual support they need to sell and service new products. By choosing Bamboo, our partners continue to benefit from the stability and comfort of working with a proven business partner that continually delivers innovation at the forefront of our ever-evolving industry.

So, a very busy year so far, but we wouldn't have it any other way. And we couldn't have done it without our partners. We are grateful for their support, and look forward to building and growing these partnerships. ■

# Part-nerd

Def: **Nerd** (*n*) a single-minded expert in a particular technical field

Whilst that might be true, we prefer *partnered*.

For you, it's about experience, support and the tools to help you to succeed and meet your goals.

For us, it's all about people and true partnership, with your business future at the top of our agenda.

In short, it's about enabling growth for all.

To find out more about our partner programme, email [partners@connectgrow.co.uk](mailto:partners@connectgrow.co.uk) or call us on **0800 804 4047**



# Powered by data analysis

One of the key themes of this year's Comms Vision Convention is enterprise digitalisation, a term which succinctly identifies both the rapid adoption of technology by the business community and the increasing dependence of businesses on this technology to facilitate operations, writes **Vincent Disneur, Head of Sales and Marketing, Union Street Technologies.**

Although the primary drivers behind enterprise digitalisation will in most cases be related to efficiency and productivity benefits, enterprise digitalisation is also enabling businesses to aggregate operational and transactional data on a much larger scale than has previously been possible. The business community is quite rightly paying ever closer attention to this data, using it to gain deeper insights into customer preferences



**Vincent Disneur**

and behavioural patterns. As such, analytics is beginning to drive business forward in all sorts of ways.

At Union Street, the opportunities presented through data analysis have fascinated us, and to some extent they have acted as the inspiration for our Benchmarking Service which is a significant and logical extension of this practice. Launched earlier this year, Benchmarking is an analytics service that enables our reseller partners to compare

their business performance against industry averages that are derived from a large sample of our partner base. Benchmarking provides an insightful executive dashboard on a range of business performance data, all of which can be accessed from a secure area of our website.

By harvesting anonymised data from our aBILLity billing platform, Benchmarking provides our reseller partners with valuable business insights, comparing their performance with that of the wider industry. These include reports on revenue growth, profit margin and charge rates, as well as analytics for how revenues are split between services, calls, and by carrier.

With close to 500 reseller partners using our aBILLity billing platform, our customer base represents a significant proportion of resellers operating in the UK. The

consolidated data harvested can therefore provide a strong industry benchmark average, and a valuable indication of business performance for resellers against their peers.

We're the first company within the channel to develop meaningful analytics based on billing data. By sharing this information with our partners we can help them visualise their business, perform better, and understand their relative competitiveness better. Best of all, as Benchmarking gains traction it will help Union Street's partners to spot trends in sales of certain services early on so they can focus their sales and marketing activities in those areas.

We're looking forward to discussing the potential of Benchmarking at Comms Vision and welcome the opportunity to discuss any thoughts partners might have on how the service could be developed further. ■



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# Vaioni extends its reach

The Ethernet landscape is constantly changing and with customer demand, accessibility and bandwidth increasing, it is clear how important connectivity is to a business, writes **Vaioni Wholesale Managing Director Sachin Vaish**. Also, the complexity in how a business uses connectivity today places a lot of emphasis on available options, network quality and best design.

So how do channel partners compete to retain and win business? Our strategy is to provide channel partners with the biggest choice of Ethernet options while also offering our own competitive Ethernet product in key hubs. In addition, we have invested significantly in our network, resulting in 100 per cent uptime and the ability to build any possible network requirement with the biggest set of standard features including free backup and free SIP trunks.



**Sachin Vaish**

Vaioni Wholesale has been leading the way in Ethernet Connectivity for some time now. As a boutique Network Operator we bring the biggest Ethernet footprint to channel partners, offering more Ethernet carriers and options than any other provider. More than 200 channel partners work with us because we offer an honest, reliable and competitive portfolio of connectivity. We are recruiting on average five new partners a month specifically on the back of our V.E.N. proposition.

As well as our 10-plus operator relationships, Vaioni Wholesale also connects six digital hubs with its own Ethernet footprint, including London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Newcastle, delivering unbeatable 100Mb and 1Gb cloud-ready Ethernet services which directly connect to a number of services from a growing number of cloud partners.

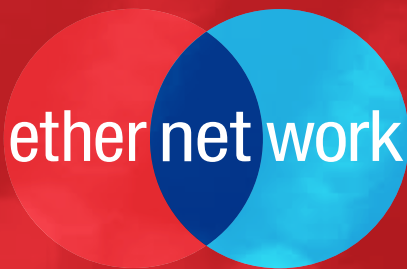
We recently set-up more interconnects with cloud partners including Gamma and TalkTalk to meet growing demand for end-to-end QoS on SIP and related services. Our interconnects have been in place for sometime but we are seeing strong demand from channel partners to directly interconnect to key providers of various cloud services. We are more than happy to help our partners achieve these goals, including interconnects with cloud providers such as Microsoft Azure and AWS, as well as some standard

ones. We always set-up multiple connections to ensure resilience. With the interconnects in place, our partners can reassure their customers that they are receiving end-to-end quality of service, guaranteed lower latency, privacy and security.

Vaioni Wholesale has helped its channel partners win even more Ethernet business with big promotions on V.E.N. promoting 100Mb services and more recently on 1Gb services. The advantage of V.E.N. is we have complete control on the end to end commercials, so running promotions across our channel base or with individual channel partners on something more specific is quite straight forward. In addition, our Ethernet comes with rich features such as free SIP trunks, free backup connection (with diverse operator), free QoS and a 30-day money back guarantee if we fail to deliver a high quality service. ■

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# The essence of Virtual1

**W**orking exclusively for the channel, Virtual1 enables its partners to create bespoke connectivity and cloud solutions for their customers, **writes CEO Tom O'Hagan**. With increased bandwidth and computing power central to the growth of many UK businesses, our mission is to help our partners empower those businesses to bring their products and services to market faster and stand out among their competitors.

Virtual1 owns and operates a state-of-the-art carrier network built across our own resilient dark fibre network, delivering high performing Ethernet services from 10Mb up to 10Gb+. Using our own award winning network, and interconnecting it with the UK's leading tier 1 carriers, we can provide solutions across one of the largest UK network footprints, delivering



**Tom O'Hagan**

high speed, resilient Internet, MPLS or layer 2 access, regardless of location. Through key international partners we can further extend this reach to over 130 countries.

We know that empowering our Partners, and making ourselves easy to deal with, is just as important as the solutions we deliver. So we are continually investing in 1Portal, our award winning customer portal. From here our partners can quote, order and manage their customers'

solutions online; and with our smart integration to our systems and wider network, we enable our partners to improve their service levels and realise revenue faster. 1Portal offers:

- Ability to quote for Internet Access, MPLS and Layer 2 with results in seconds
- On-line ordering and automated paperwork, including E-sign from anywhere
- Partner enablement toolkits speeding up your time to market
- Provisioning and support case progress updates in real-time

As a constant companion to 1Portal, our 1View application delivers effective network monitoring that is so essential to managing customer networks. 1View provides detailed network analytics, giving instant information of what is happening on the network, in real-time, 24/7/365. 1View helps to predict trends, plan effective change management,

and alerts for compromised devices or unusual user activity. 1View can be run in a partner NOC to manage an entire estate, or by an end customers access to their solution, improving transparency and offering zero cost investment in monitoring for the Partner.

With the digital transformation of UK businesses well underway they are looking for complete solutions, not just components. That is why we have put their business outcomes at the heart of our network. We have introduced our own 1Backup, and 1Cloud (private IaaS) solutions, as well as peering directly with the leading players such as Microsoft Azure, AWS, Mitel, Avaya, ShoreTel, TalkTalk Business and Gamma to provide our partners with complete and secure on net, SIP, UC or cloud propositions. Our partners can bring those products to market with no capex, or technical work required. ■

**Virtual1**  
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## Not just Network Provider of the Year but a ready-made partner ecosystem

By placing the leading UC, SIP and Cloud solutions at the heart of our network, we ensure that our Partners can bring them to market with no capex or technical work required. These include:

- Our 1Cloud (private IaaS) and 1Backup solutions
- Private access to Microsoft Azure and AWS
- Direct peering to leading SIP and UC providers: Mitel, Avaya, ShoreTel, Gamma and TalkTalk Business

This focus on empowering our Partners has been critical to Virtual1 winning the 2016 Comms National Network Provider of the Year.

To find out more come and see us at the Virtual1 suite.



# WebRTC era approaches

The evolution of WebRTC is now at the same stage as SIP and hosted telephony 11 years ago. In other words, it's on the verge of being massive, writes **Voiceflex Sales Director Paul Taylor**. We now accept SIP Trunks to be the default standard for connectivity for on-premise telephony systems, and hosted telephony as the creditable competitor to on-premise telephony applications.

An area that has major implications for unified communications is web browser support. As a result, almost all of the major browsers have now announced support for this open API, including Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Opera, and Microsoft Windows 10 Edge browser. Both Android and iOS support the application as well.

WebRTC presents intriguing possibilities for small and medium-



**Paul Taylor**

sized businesses. Not only does it have applications across the organisation – from sales and customer service to product and business development – but its potential for frictionless, unified communications may make traditional telephony systems obsolete.

In an analysis of the market conducted by Webtorials, 90 per cent of IT professionals said they

believe WebRTC has the potential to improve contact centre performance and 67 per cent see it as a potential solution for external video communications. Not surprisingly, 47 per cent of IT professionals said they are using, or will use, WebRTC in the next 12 months.

Mobile workers may be among the biggest beneficiaries of WebRTC, which can make it easier for companies to support a wider range of devices. Because audio, video and data sharing are implemented directly from the browser, there's no need to require employees to choose a particular device. Plus, because WebRTC doesn't need a proprietary plug-in or technology, IT support issues are minimised.

In 'Unified Communications' Rory Lidstone wrote, 'An open standard for peer-to-peer unified communications that enables businesses to embed

rich communications in apps and websites without proprietary plug-ins or technology is the perfect companion to mobile and web-based communications'.

WebRTC will change telecommunications as we know it, and the change has already started. Businesses will look for providers that can support WebRTC and therefore those that adopt WebRTC will no doubt see commercial and competitive benefits. The opportunities for the channel are massive and resellers should be taking full advantage.

Voiceflex has a WebRTC strategy and we are in early discussions with customers about the technology and sharing ideas to identify which applications can be delivered via WebRTC. To find out how we can help you, come and see us at Comms Vision 2016. ■

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# Zen enters growth phase

**Z**en has significantly expanded its exchange footprint with Points of Presence (PoPs) across the UK and announced a multi-million pound investment in its next generation network, writes **Stephen Warburton, Managing Director, Zen Channel Partners**. We currently have more than 270 PoPs in BT exchanges, a figure that will rise to more than 400 by January 2017. Zen will also add 20 PoPs in London alone, bringing its presence in the capital to 60.

The major investment programme will significantly extend our reach from 408,000 to 537,000 postcodes, covering nearly every corner of the UK. We have designed our next generation network to help us provide the best service in the industry and position Zen as a real alternative to larger carriers which don't offer the same level of service, support and care to customers.



**Stephen Warburton**

This investment will further bolster our wholesale, channel and voice-based ambitions. As a carrier-grade provider our customers can run their critical connectivity on a network that has been tested and engineered to meet 'five nines' high availability standards, with fast, automated fault detection and recovery that can be achieved in milliseconds.

The investment will also give Zen one of the largest networks in the UK and an increased on-net presence which means we can offer robust, cost-effective connectivity to more businesses than ever before. The reliability and scalability of our network are critical for our partners in the channel. Our new, improved network will deliver even more value added services and bring us even closer to customers.

Privately owned Zen is small enough to provide a personal service and

big enough to cope with complex requirements. The company was established in 1995 and has revenues of £54 million and a reputation for providing award winning products and services. We recently won 'Best ISP' at the 2016 Comms National Awards and was also a finalist in the 'Best Wholesale Provider' category.

We have partnerships with over 450 partners who benefit from a feature-rich portal and API, extensive training and marketing support and sales incentives. Zen employs over 400 staff, all experts in their field, who are committed to supporting their partners.

At this year's Comms Vision Zen will showcase its wide portfolio of products and services for channel and wholesale partners including Data (Broadband, Ethernet, MPLS, Layer 2), Voice (WLR, SIP, Hosted Voice) and Hosting (Data Centre, Cloud). ■



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# Post-Brexit M&A vibrant

**M**ost people can remember exactly where they were and how they felt when they woke up on June 23rd this year to discover that the UK had voted to leave the European Union, writes **Paul Billingham and Adam Zoldan, Directors at Knight Corporate Finance**. We all expected markets to collapse, interest rates to rise and the UK economy to grind to a halt. The impact of Brexit, many thought, on merger and acquisition activity would be catastrophic.

At the time, Knight Corporate Finance was involved in numerous transactions and our first thoughts were about what was going to happen to those transactions, many of which had been worked on for several months. As the dust settled it became clear that while some M&A activity was going to be put on hold, activity



**Adam Zoldan**

in the ICT sector would continue with barely a flicker of doubt.

Since June 23rd, we have seen institutional and trade deals continue unabated. Private equity has invested substantial sums in Arrow, Wavenet and Sabio, while Node4 has completed a secondary buy-out, swapping LDC for Bowmark. Private



**Paul Billingham**

equity was considered most at threat from the Brexit fallout, but all of these deals, which started before the vote, were completed in the months following Brexit and highlight how highly regarded and valued the sector is for institutional investors. Trade deals have also continued, with Solar, GCI and Rigby Group's Nuvias acquiring Response Data, Packet

Media and Siphon respectively. The latter is interesting as Siphon is pan-European in its focus, but the Brexit vote did nothing to derail the process. The largest trade deal since Brexit in the sector has seen Virgin Media acquire Arqiva's Wi-Fi business.

Interestingly, since Brexit, ICT stocks have under performed the wider market. But that is largely as a result of Alternative Network's second profits warning this year and the knock-on effect that has had on its peers. However, the fundamentals of the sector (contracted and recurring revenues, business critical solutions and huge growth potential from new technologies) remain. While it will take years to understand the economic implications of Brexit, what is clear is that once again the ICT sector is seen as resilient and robust against wider macro-economic factors, and seen as a safe harbour in uncertain times. ■



We are celebrating the following recent exits, acquisitions and fund-raising deals:



Advised the Shareholders of Callstream on its sale to J2 Global



Advised the Shareholders of One Point on its sale to SCC



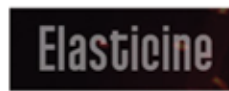
Advised the Shareholders of Fusion on its sale to GCI



Advised the business on its disposal to Nuvias



Advised Growth Capital Partners on its investment in Arrow Business Communications



Raised EIS finance for Elasticine to enable the live music market of the future



Raised finance for NetCS to enable a management buy back of shares held by an investor



Advised Connected World on its acquisition of CE Services

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