



Zen CEO on what good leadership looks like today p30

Why Gale is acting quicker and more decisively p42



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This month's movers and shakers



Tech recruits in the driving seat

CHANNEL businesses seeking to bring in staff are facing the demands of a newly emboldened pool of tech recruits with hybrid working, attractive salaries and wellbeing high on their agenda.

SPECIAL REPORT

More than 12,800 technology jobs were advertised in 2021 with IT roles outstripping all jobs in 2020, according to a report by recruitment consultancy Robert Walters.

Overall, tech companies accounted for almost 54% of all new IT vacancies in England and Wales. And last year the average tech salary rose to 50% higher than the mean for all vacancies in the UK.

"Individuals are in a much stronger position to demand higher salaries," said Konftel Sales Director Jeff May. "This means the whole recruitment process can take longer with many companies initially unwilling to pay more than their original expectations."

Some companies, such as Jola, are upgrading packages to meet the demand. Jola CMO Cherie Howlett (pictured) said: "Companies that have set their sights high will fare better."

Howlett noted that Jola pays market rate salaries benchmarked by an independent agency. She also outlined initiatives already taken to nurture staff retention and address the swing in power towards new recruits.

"We pay annual bonuses to all staff against agreed KPIs, and all staff are invited to join the share option scheme," she added. "Many of our staff are set to benefit from six figure windfalls at the next Jola corporate transaction." See pages 44-45

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

I WAS left in no doubt that the full fibre campaign convoy rolling across the nation is gathering steam, when at 8am two Sundays ago we were shaken from our beds as concrete crushing hammer machines on big wheels smashed

through the pavement next to an Openreach cabinet opposite my house. A bit annoying though, but they were done and away in four hours.

Yet there are many comms providers, right now, digging a hole for themselves that they may not be able to get out of – those who are slow to fasten their strategy to the 2025 switch off, the transition to all IP and of course full fibre.

Last month's two Comms Dealer Insight Sessions, held in association with BT Wholesale (see pages 24 and 32), underlined that resellers who are fixed on extending legacy revenues may be far too distracted from the inevitable change that is fast approaching, and that their chances of long-term success could be blocked by an all IP brick wall.

It is true that many comms providers may face challenges during this transition, all of which were discussed during the Insight Sessions. But it is also a fact that help is at hand from many upstream suppliers wanting to assist their partners in taking forward steps that will advance their all IP journeys.

All panellists urged legacy focused resellers to wake up to the reality of the transformation and the need to shake their customer base now, rather than wait to be physically shaken themselves by seismic waves caused by early risers digging near their customers' doorsteps as they deliver the UK's digital future.

In any case, why would anyone want to cling to the copper cliff edge by their fingertips when a vast expanse of as-a-service opportunities have opened up under their noses? To ensure you harness these new opportunities see pages 10 and 14-15.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Ex-GCI execs boost MITSG



Mark Allen

FORMER GCI top execs have joined forces at Managed IT Services Group (MITSG) in a PE backed venture to create a major MSP in the SME market.

The campaign kicked off with the acquisition of CSS Group which is made up of Charles Street Solutions, MICL and Opus UK.

MITSG is headed up by the former GCI executive team of Mark Allen (CFO) and Phil Smith (COO) with GCI's ex-CEO Adrian Thirkill serving as Non-Executive Chairman.

The CSS transaction follows MITSG's May 2021 acquisition of IT Farm, a Manchester-based provider of cloud services. This was followed by the purchase of SIP carrier contact centre firm Nexbridge Communications in August last year.

CSS Group is its largest acquisition to date and brings the MITSG headcount to 70.

"The acquisition of CSS is the ideal time to announce ourselves as a new player in the UK managed services space and gives us the scale needed to aggressively target the small and medium business market," stated Allen.

Smith commented: "MITSG was established to offer SMEs the full range of managed services across four specialist units – cloud and remote desktop, networks and security, voice and contact centre, and IT managed services.

"There will be further acquisitions by the group throughout 2022 to allow us to create depth and balance in our product and service portfolio."

NEWS ROUNDUP

WILDIX continues to ramp up in expansion mode posting growth stats that build on strides made since 2018. The channel-only UC vendor reported 35% global growth for 2021 and a 36% hike in staff numbers. UK revenue growth for the period was up 91% compared to 79% in 2020 and CEO Steve Osler is clear on the drivers for expansion. "We made a decision to be specialised in increasing sales for our end customers, helping our partners convert their business model from capex to opex with a gradual but crucial change to the as-a-service approach," he stated.

BT GROUP is primed to recruit more than 600 apprentices and graduates for its September 2022 intake. The new recruits will fill roles in engineering, customer service, applied research and cyber security across several BT offices. BT has recruited over 2,000 apprentices and graduates in the past three years and has approximately 4,000 employees working towards qualifications at any given time. The company also plans to bring greater diversity into its workforce, aiming to have a 50% gender split, with 25% from an ethnic minority group and 17% with a disability by 2030.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

SUPPLY chain hardware, software and services company Renovotec has acquired IT solution provider Jade Solutions. The deal boosts Renovotec's annual turnover to more than £50m and increases its headcount in the UK and Europe to more than 160 employees. Jade began its commercial life 30 years ago and its customers include Pret a Manger, Marks & Spencer, Nando's and Bet Fred.

TECH Data has launched Identity and Access Management as a Service (IAMaaS) in a bid to alleviate the threat from cybercriminals and also make the shift to hybrid working more secure, because the management of identities and network access poses a greater challenge for organisations. Alison Nixon, Director for Security and Advanced Solutions, UK and Ireland, said: "Identity and access management is on the front line of enterprise digital defences and should be a critical element of every organisation's security posture. But many customers don't have a policy or a solution in place – and many partners do not have the skills and capabilities to manage IAM and deliver the right outcomes. This service breaks that impasse."

UKCloud bought by Hadston 2

AN INVESTMENT vehicle called Hadston 2 led by UKCloud Chairman Jeff Thomas has acquired the business. The deal was also backed by existing investors including BGF Group and Digital Alpha.

Thomas said: "The funding provides a strong foundation on which to assemble a portfolio of businesses promoting the ethical and sustainable use of data to drive positive change in our communities and economy. Organisations and governments increasingly share a belief in these crucial outcomes."

UKCloud CEO Simon Hansford added: "UKCloud has powered digital transformation across the UK public sector for over a decade. This investment is a significant milestone for UKCloud, funding the business through to profitability and accelerating the development of capabilities to help organisations of all sizes embrace the obvious benefits of cloud and digital transformation."



Simon Hansford

Top sales job for Kennedy



Ruth Kennedy

TALKTALK Wholesale MD of Wholesale Richard Thompson has left the business to pursue new interests. The move follows a 20 year stint at the company and paves the way for Ruth Kennedy who has been appointed Chief Sales Officer.

She has worked for TalkTalk Group for 10 years across a number of roles in Wholesale and most recently was Group Fibre Development Director.

Nick Gunga, MD of TalkTalk Wholesale Services, commented: "Ruth is ideally placed to ensure we keep our partners and customers at the heart of everything we do as we push towards a future based around full fibre and higher bandwidth data services."

Kennedy added: "High quality affordable connectivity is such a fundamental plank of everyday life that it's no sur-

prise that an increasing number of companies in all sorts of sectors are looking to offer it to their customers."

Got a news story? email: sgilroy@bpl-business.com

NEWS ROUNDUP

TOOB'S FTTP roll out in the south west of England is set to accelerate following an £87.5m boost from Sequoia Economic Infrastructure Income Fund. The deal builds on the £75m invested by Amber Infrastructure Group in 2019 and will fuel the altnet's ambition to pass one million premises by 2027. CEO Nick Parbutt commented: "With this investment we will expand into more towns across the south of England, bringing the benefits of full fibre broadband to more families, businesses and communities." Sequoia also invested £60m in LightSpeed, an alternative network builder rolling out full fibre in south Lincolnshire and west Norfolk.

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Midwich gets stake in DVS

MIDWICH'S presence in the video and security marketplace is strengthened following its acquisition of a majority stake in Cardiff-based DVS.

DVS began its commercial life in 2003 as a distributor of CCTV and video recording technologies, going on to diversify into complementary technologies such as access control, intercom and intruder detection.

Midwich Group MD Stephen Fenby commented: "The acquisition gives Midwich access to a significant segment of the security market in which we currently have little presence, and which is expected to grow at around 8% per annum for the next five years.

"The knowledge and support of the DVS team should help realise new opportunities for our customers in an increasingly converging technology market.

"Similarly, we believe that much of DVS's customer base uses or could use our core AV products in their projects."

DVS MD Tim Goodson stated: "The Midwich team quick-



Stephen Fenby

ly grasped an understanding of our technologies and how they could also be used by its own customers in an ever-converging space."

Mark Lowe, Midwich UK & Ireland MD, commented: "The security market is an exciting place and this acquisition presents abundant opportunities. 2022 will be an exciting year for both businesses."

The DVS management team of Goodson, Gavin Dunleavy (Commercial Director) and David Davies (CTO) maintain a stake in the business and will continue to work with Midwich.

NEWS ROUNDUP

MAVEN Capital Partners has exited Quorum Cyber in a deal the saw Livingbridge provide the next growth boost. Maven invested in Quorum in 2020 since when the MSSP tripled managed service revenues in the 12 months to May 2021. Quorum CEO Federico Charosky said: "The Livingbridge investment enables us to accelerate the evolution of our solutions while scaling our Microsoft security capabilities with a strong focus on IoT, OT, multi-cloud, compliance and insider risk."

INDUSTRIAL Internet of Things (IIoT) solution provider Konektio is eyeing European and US expansion following the securement of a £2.1m investment. This latest cash round was led by fund managers Mercia and Foresight, investing from both the Midlands Engine Investment Fund and the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund, and included existing investor Tern. "We are entering a scale-up period and expect to grow revenues significantly over the coming months," said CEO Peter Stephens.

IT channel bosses position resilience at top of agenda

NEARLY all UK IT channel leaders have elevated resilience towards the top of their agendas and a significant portion of them are in strong agreement that the channel has the wherewithal to continue building greater resilience this year.

That's according to research by Agilitas which also confirmed that Covid-19 has forced decision makers to double down on future resiliency plans – with IT resellers taking the most proactive approach.

"The last two years have taught us a valuable lesson in what it means to be resilient,



Shaun Lynn

both in business and everyday life," commented Agilitas CEO Shaun Lynn. "For the UK IT channel, there is no doubt that

this change has forced leaders to place a sharp focus on how they ensure the safety of their business and plan for any eventuality that might impact their people, planet and partners.

"It is positive to see decision makers commit to growing stronger, more adaptable and buoyant in a world of continuous change. Should the sentiment in our findings become reality, we are certainly on the precipice of a more resilient and sustainable ecosystem."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

LOTHIAN Broadband's mission to tackle digital inequality in rural Scotland has been given a £20m boost by The Scottish National Investment Bank. The new funding significantly builds on a £5m investment from Lothian's existing shareholders. The Scottish ISP plans to invest £75m to connect over 70,000 premises in rural communities and small towns across Scotland over the next four years. CEO Gavin Rodgers commented: "The backing supports our commitment to building quality digital infrastructure and our inclusive, community-based approach to every village and town we serve."

A LINK UP between Full Fibre and Kickstart could enable the altnet to fill ten vacancies across four sites with 16 to 24 year olds. The Kickstart Scheme provides funding to create new jobs for young people at risk of unemployment, offering them the potential of a full-time position after a six month placement. Full Fibre CEO Oliver Helm commented: "As well as offering experience in the field we have openings across many of our departments. All candidates will be provided with training to strengthen their skill sets and prepare them for a successful future."

Truespeed in £100m boost



James Lowther

BATH-based Truespeed has secured a second tranche of funding from Aviva Investors. The extra £100m boosts the full fibre infrastructure provider's roll out to more homes and businesses across urban, semi-rural and ultra-rural areas of south west England. It follows an initial £75m investment made by Aviva Investors in 2017.

In the past year Truespeed has doubled the size of its network. As well as expanding its footprint in hard-to-reach rural areas the firm has extended its build to the heritage cities of Bath and Wells.

And in December 2021 it announced the start of its network build in Glastonbury, Shepton Mallet and Street.

Sean McLachlan, Senior Director, Infrastructure, Aviva Investors, commented: "Since our initial investment Truespeed has continued to deliver gigabit-capable broadband infrastructure to underserved locations across the south west of the UK.

"This second tranche of funding reflects our belief that the company and its activities not only represent a sound investment, but also creates social benefits for local communities across the country."

James Lowther, Truespeed CEO, commented: "This next tranche of investment will allow us to significantly accelerate our roll out as we embark on our next phase of growth."

inTEC inks Provident Tech deal

MANCHESTER-based inTEC Group's buy and build campaign continues with the acquisition of Dublin-based Provident Technology.

The deal is inTEC's ninth and its first outside the UK, and according to CEO Simon Howitt many more acquisitions are planned this year.

Provident Technology CEO John Malone commented: "Bringing a new Microsoft Gold Partner to the consolidated Irish market will introduce some healthy competition. Provident and inTEC's respective skills and services complement each other, and we have the opportunity to leverage each other's expertise across the UK&I market to accelerate group growth."

Colin O'Callaghan will head up Business Operations and will be retained as a Director.

Howitt added: "I will be working with Colin and his team to further develop their plans in Ireland."



Simon Howitt

NEWS ROUNDUP

NUVIAS UC's European expansion bid has been boosted by the acquisition of Germany HQ'd distributor Alliance Technologies, strengthening its influence across the DACH region. Nuvias UC CEO Jeremy Keefe commented: "We have seen increasing demand for end-to-end UC solutions in continental Europe. In particular, we wanted to have a greater local presence in DACH where partners are looking for distributors with a portfolio to meet the needs of businesses transitioning to a hybrid work environment."

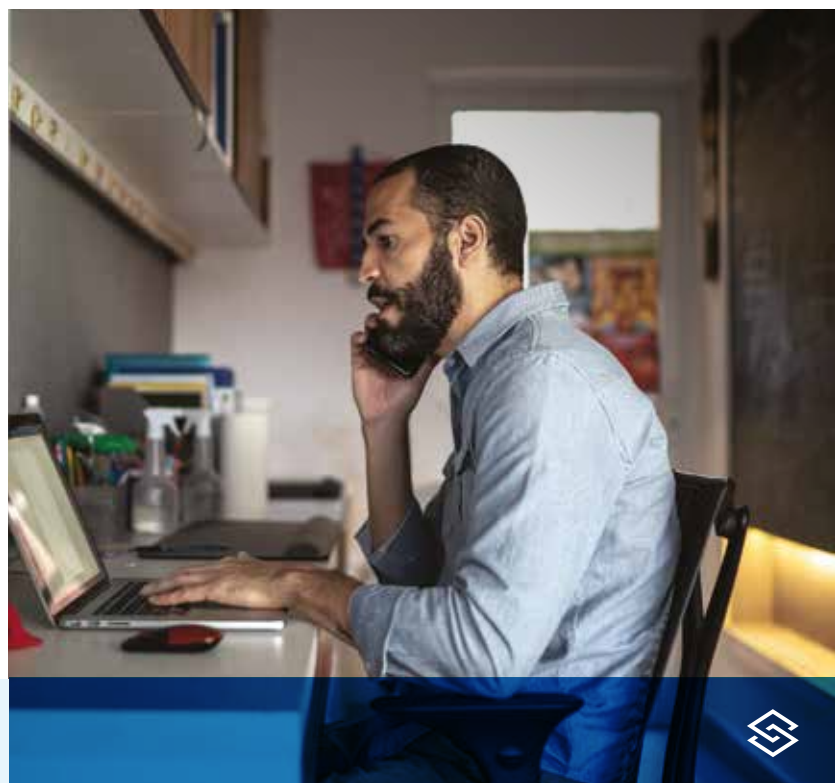
INVESTMENT firm Gresham House has ploughed £164m into Borderlink (trading as GoFibre) to boost its full fibre roll out in Scotland and the north of England. The deal follows a £10.5m investment by Gresham House into Borderlink last April and will help it target 500k rural homes over the next three years. Borderlink also plans to double staff numbers to 200 and open new offices in Berwick-upon-Tweed and Edinburgh. CEO Alex Cacciamani said: "This investment allows us to bring GoFibre broadband to the people who have been left behind, ensuring those in rural areas and towns can live their digital lives fully."



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The first and only dedicated site for fibre providers

A DEDICATED news and resource platform for UK fibre providers has been launched by BPL Business Media.

FibreProvider.net aims to further enable the UK's digital transformation through trusted editorial and clarity of information, and according to CityFibre Head of Wholesale Andrew Wilson the platform will also aid the development of strategic partnering within the sector.

"Our community needs a noticeboard from which it can be informed and a platform where organisations can form strategic relationships," he said.

The roll out of full fibre is progressing at pace as Openreach and alternative network operators gather steam, yet this booming sector faces

tough challenges and complex issues as well as unprecedented opportunities – all of which will be fully addressed by FibreProvider.net.

"The fibre provider community needs a media resource that brings this content together," commented BPL MD Michael O'Brien. "FibreProvider.net will serve as a focal point for industry stakeholders and provide a platform for organisations to raise their profiles."

BPL Business Media also announced the launch of the UK Fibre Awards (with CityFibre taking headline sponsorship of the event) – to be staged June 9th 2022 at the London Marriott Hotel, Grosvenor Square.

For more information visit www.fibreawards.com

FLUIDONE'S presence in the mid-market and enterprise space is expected to be more strongly felt following its acquisition of managed services provider SAS Global Communications.

The deal adds capabilities in SD-WAN enabled global hybrid networks and according to FluidOne CEO Russell Horton the combined portfolio provides greater options for customers.

"With FluidOne being an SD-WAN partner with Fortinet and VMWare, and SAS having strong SD-WAN experience with Cisco, combined this gives more customer choice in SD-WAN and hybrid networks," he commented.

"With SAS Global Communications' strength in serving larger mid-market and enterprise customers, the FluidOne board and I saw a great fit to our connected cloud solutions strategy, broadening the offering to our combined customers."

SAS was founded in 1989 by main shareholder Stephen Stanway and now has over 150 customers with sites in 65 countries, with a focus on companies of over 1,000 employees.

Stanway added: "When I met with Russell and the FluidOne Board to discuss the potential of



Russell Horton

SAS joining FluidOne, I could see a strong alignment in staff culture and values. Our teams are already working on joint

bids, including offering cyber security services from CSA to complement our hybrid-network solutions."

BT Wholesale set to roll out professional services

BT WHOLESALE has launched a new professional services programme encompassing site audits, analysis, training and logistics, which can also be white labelled.

The programme is aimed at helping channel partners migrate customers to all IP products and services in advance of the PSTN switch off in 2025.

Outlining details of the offer at BT Wholesale's Partner Plus Live event at the BT Tower, Head of All-IP Steve Blackshaw said: "We are offering two types

of service: The first is a remote audit as we've got a certain capability to set networks remotely, or more commonly we'll use over 1,000 engineers to do enterprise field audits.

"We can do WAN, LAN, wireless LAN and a full portfolio analysis and mapping. We also offer service set up, namely the full data access service and voice proposition which we manage and install.

"On top of that there's full service migration and a bolt-on option around on-site training."

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Bill proposes flexible rules

BUSINESS leaders have been urged to prepare for potential new rules that could give workers the right to request flexible working arrangements from their first day of employment.

At the moment workers can only request flexible working after six months in the job.

The Flexible Working Bill, which was put to Parliament late last year, also proposes that company leaders respond to requests for flexible working faster than the current maximum of three months, and it would force firms to explain why requests are refused.

According to Uplands Communications MD Paul Hooper these possible measures 'could see thousands of employers wrong-footed and ill-prepared' unless they invest in the enabling technology.

"Businesses have worked hard under testing circumstances to safeguard their workforces during the pandemic and to keep their organisations afloat," he stated. "One of the many challenges they have faced



Paul Hooper

has been the wholesale shift to flexible working. This move has brought benefits and some nuanced challenges.

"It has impacted the way workplaces function, the way customers interact with businesses, the way people cope emotionally and socially – and we have seen many firms working flat out to meet the new technical challenges that home working creates.

"If this Bill is adopted it will embed hybrid working as a norm. Furthermore, the future of the pandemic remains unknown. Resellers are well versed in driving change and are positioned to help customers meet these challenges."

NEWS ROUNDUP

DIGITAL Space has achieved BT Wholesale Elite Partner status. The Newark-on-Trent-based company has earned access to executive sponsorship, resources and tools. "We now have a stronger foundation to provide technical advice," commented Digital Space CEO Neil Muller. "During a time of considerable digital innovation such as the PSTN switch off we can help customers respond fast."

DISTRIBUTOR Exertis has ramped up its positive change programme with the appointment of Kim Lonas as Global Diversity & Inclusion Programme Lead, a newly created position. She was previously HR Director, Exertis North America. Tim Griffin, DCC Technology & Exertis Group MD, commented: "This is a crucial role and will prove to be a catalyst for accelerating our journey towards a more equitable, diverse and inclusive workplace, where everyone can unleash their full potential."

Got a news story? email: sgilroy@bpl-business.com

Capita to part with non-core Trustmarque in £111m sell-off

SERVICES firm Capita is to sell non-core business Trustmarque to One Equity Partners for £111m. The deal is the first in Capita's plan to dispose of most businesses in its portfolio division to strengthen the balance sheet and focus on its two core divisions, Capita Public Service and Capita Experience.

CEO Jon Lewis said: "Once this sale is completed we will have exceeded our disposals target and achieved this much earlier than originally planned.

"It marks another significant step towards materially reducing our debt as we continue to



Jon Lewis

simplify and strengthen Capita and become a more successful business for the long-term.

"We are now focused on selling the remaining businesses in our portfolio division, with the goal of disposing of the majority by the end of 2022."

The Trustmarque senior management team and employees will remain with the business. The sale of Trustmarque follows the recently completed sales of software businesses AMT Sybex and Secure Solutions and Services.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

BEECH Tree-backed Transparency has expanded its application development capabilities on the Microsoft Azure platform with the acquisition of Ballard Chalmers.

Transparency CEO David Jobbins commented: "We are looking at likeminded acquisitions such as this to strengthen the core areas of our Microsoft strategy." Ballard Chalmers MD Andrew Chalmers added: "Customers are asking us to manage their transition to Azure end-to-end and being able to join Transparency means we can offer the whole stack."

MAINTEL has outsourced 65,000 tech devices to Agilitas IT Solutions in a bid to drive stock efficiency, including the transfer of inventory management and stock ownership. Maintel Operations Director Gillian Bailey said: "We were 'OK' at logistics prior to the outsource but we lacked automation and general logistics know-how." Agilitas CEO Shaun Lynn added: "Automation is at the heart of modern inventory management and working with Maintel represents its power to drive operational efficiency at scale."

Got a news story? email: sgilroy@bpl-business.com

XaaS forum set to launch



A NEW channel event aimed at helping all ICT resellers benefit from emerging 'as-a-service' solutions will take place in London on May 5th.

The Everything-as-a-Service (XaaS) Summit, to be staged at the St Paul's Etc. venue in the City of London, will comprise an educational seminar and networking arena focused on developing recurring revenue opportunities including Workspace-as-a-Service, Software-as-a-Service, Desktop-as-a-Service, UC-as-a-Service, Security-as-a-Service and others.

The event is a joint initiative between Comms Dealer publisher BPL Business Media and sister company IT Europa.

"The experience of the Comms Dealer and IT Europa teams are converging to launch the XaaS Summit which will address the growing need for

channel knowledge about the shift in IT and communications provision towards true service models," commented BPL and ITE MD Mike O'Brien.

"With digital transformation accelerated by the pandemic and rising demand for revenue-based consumption models, the XaaS market is proving to be one of the most exciting areas to be working in."

BPL organises key telecom focused events including the Comms National Awards, Comms Vision and the 'Margin In' series, while IT Europa stages IT centric events such as Channel-Sec, Managed Services Summits in Europe, London and the north plus the IT Europa Channel Awards.

MSPs and resellers interested in attending the XaaS Summit should register at www.xaas-summit.com.

Irish MSP Ergo nets co-IT firm

ERGO'S €25m acquisition of fellow Irish MSP Asystec creates a €150m entity with 500 staff operating across Ireland, the UK and North America.

The deal adds €40m revenues and AWS skills, building on Ergo's Microsoft Azure and HP specialisms.

The combined organisations is forecasting revenues of €250m over the coming three to five years along with expectations of doubling staff numbers to circa 1,000.

"This is a transformative deal for the Irish market," stated Ergo CEO Paul McCann.

Asystec MD Les Byrne added: "We are becoming part of Ergo at a pivotal moment in the evolution of the IT services sector. Together we will deliver future proof IT strategies for fast changing markets."

Byrne joins the Ergo board along with Asystec Sales Director Aonghus O'Neill.

Asystec is Ergo's fourth buy since 2010. Its first acquisition was CDSOFT which delivered Microsoft expertise, followed by iSite in 2015 which expanded its CRM practice. In 2016, Ergo added Micromail, one of the largest Microsoft licensing solutions providers in Ireland.

NEWS ROUNDUP

GAMMA has strengthened its Clearing product portfolio for universities with the addition of Horizon Contact, its cloud-based contact centre solution. Over a third of UK universities are served by Gamma.

Andrew Robinson, Head of UCaaS Practice, Gamma, said: "We'll be working closely with our channel partners over the coming months to support them and the universities to deliver this product. We're adding more features for 2022 including webchat and call back."

VODAFONE'S intention to retire its 3G network in 2023 is an important step towards a sustainable future, according to Sharad Sharma, VP Head of Network and B2B Business at NTT Data UK. "This represents a positive move away from legacy technology towards more efficient 4G and 5G services," he said. "The greater efficiency of these technologies also supports Vodafone in its strategy to reach net zero carbon emissions across its UK operations by 2027." Vodafone is retiring 3G after 17 years and nearly 500 billion minutes of calls. Today, less than 4% of the data used on Vodafone's network travels on 3G in comparison to more than 30% in 2016.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

TELECOMS law firm Trenches Law plans to recruit 30 more employees to meet demand for its wayleave, commercial legal counsel and Code powers knowhow. The company appointed 25 new recruits last year to help progress big projects including wayleave automation and legal support for Ogi's £200 million full fibre project in south Wales and the completion of a Master Services Agreement between network provider ITS and its wholesalers and resellers.

PULSANT has completed the acquisition of a Manchester-based data centre and associated clients from M247. The move is the first acquisition since the company received investment from Antin Infrastructure Partners and follows its colocation partnership with Exertis. The deal also marks the latest expansion in Pulsant's network of interconnected regional edge data centres. The transaction includes a transfer of 40 clients and all site staff from M247 which will become a customer of Pulsant. Pulsant CEO Rob Coupland said: "This is an important step in our strategy to bring the benefits of edge computing to every business across the UK."

ICT firms fall under more scrutinisation

TWO thirds of enterprises are re-evaluating their digital service providers and half of them are planning to reduce the number of tech providers they deal with, according to Camille Mendler, Chief Analyst at global technology think tank Omdia.

Speaking at BT Wholesale's Partner Plus Live event at the BT Tower, Mendler warned resellers that these decisions are not based on price but on support and responsiveness.

"Enterprises now want certainty, simplification and transparency from digital service providers," she stated.

"The question is whether you are in that group of organisations that can be trusted to deliver what enterprises want."

Mendler also noted that businesses large and small are gravitating towards providers that can do it all for them and be accountable. "I don't think players that offer one service and deliver one product, however well, can now survive in this market," she added.

Debunking false statements on expenditure cutbacks and delays in transformation projects, Mendler said that while enterprises are judicious in their choices the majority are set to



Camille Mendler

increase ICT spending in the year ahead.

"Of the enterprises we surveyed globally, and about 500 in the UK, 59% told us they are going to be increasing their IT budgets. Not hugely, but it signifies a return to growth with judicious investments in digital technology. Covid-19 has rebalanced priorities."

In terms of setting priorities for 2022, Mendler suggested that ICT providers should focus on sustainability, cloudification, security and improving the customer experience.

"Sustainability is the number one priority and cloudification is high on the list for enterprises that want to move to a cloud environment and switch between different providers,"

she commented. "Security is an evergreen issue that never goes away, but the challenge continues to evolve."

Digitalisation has also raised customer expectations, so much so that Mendler says resellers do not sell connectivity, they actually sell experience facilitated by connectivity. "That is where the value lies in what you do," she explained.

"If we are selling a real-time world that is all IP, it's shocking that very few of the largest enterprises have real-time access to information about the digital services they are buying.

"In fact, the more services that large enterprises buy from service providers, the less likely they have a single portal, or a single window to view the performance of their services together. That's partly because of legacy infrastructure and legacy management systems.

"You need to provide APIs so customers can integrate service data into their own service management systems.

"Why should they have to hunt and pick between on average six to eight different systems to view the performance of their Ethernet, SD WAN or UC? It's outrageous."

NEWS ROUNDUP

DATTO'S endpoint detection and response services have received a boost following the acquisition of Infocyte. Datto CEO Tim Weller said: "The addition of the Infocyte team and technologies augments our capabilities within the critical Protect, Detect and Respond stages." Infocyte CEO Curtis Hutcheson added: "Securing endpoints from advanced threats continues to be a top challenge for SMBs. With Datto's partner community and growing security portfolio we will be able to expand our reach to millions of endpoints under management."

SPEAKING at BT Wholesale's Partner Plus Live event (staged at the BT Tower on January 13th and streamed live to over 140 resellers across the UK) Head of Propositions Gavin Murphy outlined how the company plans to build value for partners and help them map their digital transformation strategies. "We are shifting from just being a speed provider by adding much more value, and addressing some of the unknowns within digital transformation," he said. "Organisations are now allocating 10% of their revenue to fuel their digital strategy. This is not a flash in the pan type of opportunity."



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Riding the bounce back

A clear picture of the post-pandemic ICT provider landscape has already emerged and there is no doubt as to the extent of change. Here, we share insights from three CEOs not caught out by lockdown and genuinely facing new growth and leadership opportunities.

With Covid hopefully all but over, there must come a day of reckoning for CEOs on a number of fronts – and for many there is a positive story to tell. Far from emerging hesitantly from a tough two years, our expert panel displays a bullish optimism about their prospects for growth supported by a fresh perspective on what leadership means today.

“As leaders we all need to be more agile in responding to customer and people needs,” stated Simon Crawley-Trice, CEO, Six Degrees. “Adaptability in this evolving landscape is key, as is a high level of empathy for the challenges our customers and our people are going through. The new type of leader should strive for two-way engagement with their people. Whether that’s through videos, coffee catch-ups or any number of other communication methods. The days of leaders communicating solely via emails are long gone. I understand better now

how to maintain care and attention around mental health. It’s been a real focus for us, and personally I believe I’m a better leader for the lessons I’ve learned through this. I’ve also found inspiration in the passion of our people working together through the pandemic.”

According to Ross Gray, CEO, Cloudsoft, leaders today have a number of qualities and motivations that define them. “It’s a combination of having integrity, defining your mission and being responsive to changes that drive opportunities or challenges,” he commented. “While the need to be agile has always been a requirement of a leader, it’s particularly important to have a growth mindset in today’s world, adapting to sometimes unprecedented challenges to scale your offerings to reach more people and organisations.”

For James Arnold-Roberts, CEO, Voiceflex, the pandemic brought many unanswered questions and uncertainty, but there is only one answer



Simon Crawley-Trice

I understand better now how to maintain care and attention around mental health. It’s been a real focus for us

– proactivity seasoned by managed risk. “It confirmed my belief that we need to take chances and act otherwise opportunities will pass us by,” said Arnold-Roberts. “More importantly, business is all about people. We have a team of skilled, knowledgeable individuals and empowering them delivers results. Covid has tested my values, but at the same time I found inspiration along the way. Technology transformed our world. It opened up possibilities and opportunities that may have otherwise taken years to develop.”

Acceleration

Crawley-Trice also noted that lockdown has seen an acceleration in some key technology trends, namely

the adoption of public cloud services, the proliferation of agile working and the increasingly hostile cyber security landscape. “Many businesses have learned the hard way that securing their expanding technology estates is more involved than they were prepared for, and that they don’t always have a good handle on security end-to-end,” he stated.

“During the past two years we’ve really leaned our strategy and focus into cyber security, the accelerating adoption of public cloud and adopting agile ways of working. This has been in line with the key technology trends that the pandemic has accelerated. Our priority is to drive the shift towards these growth areas through

unified communications and collaboration technologies. I see massive opportunities within these areas over the coming years as businesses need to be more agile to meet their customers’ needs.”

Cloudsoft’s main changes over the past two years have all had to do with growth. From 2019-2021 it grew revenue by 83 per cent and increased staff by 43 per cent. “Lockdown emphasised for us that important business services are most resilient when powered by a combination of people and technology,” said Gray. “It’s about ensuring that knowledge and understanding resides not solely in peoples’

Continued on page 20







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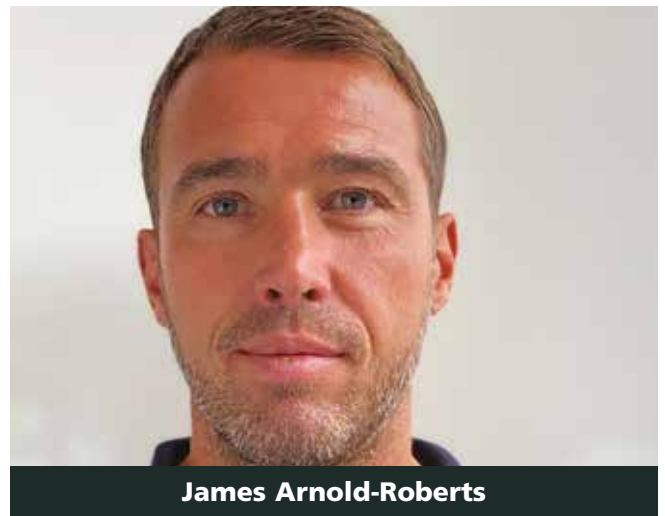
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Continued from page 18 heads. If you codify and automate then you can reduce strain and spend more time on innovating."

Covid pushed many of Cloudsoft's clients and partners to consider different approaches to their technology and business. "One type of innovation we're seeing is around the consumption of carbon," added Gray. "The ongoing climate emergency has us thinking about how we can reduce the impact of technology on the environment, and we know the tech sector can do a lot better. AWS's Sustainability pillar for its Well Architected Framework will hopefully encourage developers to make decisions that are more climate friendly. We've also taken steps internally to address this. We've been developing a new software product which will help organisations to more efficiently provision cloud resources and understand their carbon impact."

Arnold-Roberts' current priorities include building the business for the world after Covid with new tools and structures that meet the changing needs of its client base. He is also focused on the 2025 switch off, aiming to build market exposure and gain market share as part of a land grab exercise. "We are also building the development team to deliver voice centric applications



James Arnold-Roberts

that provide automation/ API solutions and mobile apps," he added. "Finding and recruiting the correct talent is a challenge."

Outsourcing demand

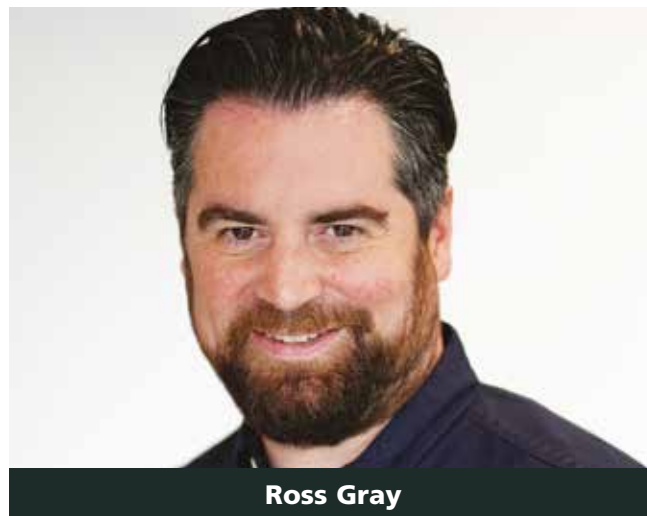
With a shortage of talent generally in the marketplace, Crawley-Trice is seeing more and more organisations lean into partners like Six Degrees to access expertise to help businesses execute against their transformation plans. "We've seen cyber security as a core competency for several years now, and I believe the pandemic has validated that approach," he commented. "Applying security-by-design in everything we do for ourselves and our customers, and being able to demonstrate this, has been key. Especially as we've seen other organisations claim to be agile and secure until they were truly put to the test."

Analysts are forecasting the UK security market to grow eight per cent CAGR

between 2022-25, driven by managed security services and systems integration. The UK cloud market won't be far behind with forecasted growth of seven per cent CAGR during the same period. "We expect to take advantage of organisations set to increase managed services spend as a result of a lack of internal resources," added Crawley-Trice.

Gray also observed that hybrid IT is continuing to grow. "Despite a huge growth in public cloud adoption, it's rare to see a large enterprise fully rely on it – something we've always expected," he said. "What we're seeing now is teams choosing the right tool for the right job to ensure complex enterprises can have all their needs met. This has become so common that Gartner has tied it up in the concept of Digital Platform Conductors. There has been a growing need for digital platform conductors which has led to a number of great opportunities for us.

"Regulation, especially around resilience, is also coming to the fore. Not a week goes by where we don't hear of an outage, whether a significant public one or a smaller scale outage that is no less impactful to customers. With UK FCA regulations coming into effect this year and the EU DORA on the horizon, financial services firms especially must prioritise resilience."



Ross Gray

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Market ripe for high quality

Now is the time for resellers to be at the forefront of a high quality mobile voice empowered workforce, according to Gamma Product Director for Mobile Steven Lowe. Here, he debunks the myths surrounding mobile voice and explains how key services on offer meet the requirements of a changed mobile network and a transformed channel and business landscape.

Lowe wears his passion for all things mobile on his sleeve and as the market conditions prove ever more propitious he has turned up the volume on Gamma's latest campaign to educate resellers about the mobile opportunities on their doorstep. This comes as Gamma gives the megaphone to its Voice over LTE (VoLTE) service which is available across the whole of the 3UK 4G network and, claims Lowe, has the potential to transform how businesses communicate.

"The service is available over the 800MHz spectrum which offers broader and deeper coverage," explained Lowe. "And the impending 3G switch off means that mobile customers must use VoLTE (voice over 4G) if they are to continue with native voice services. Furthermore, the planned PSTN switch off also means that customers will need to act if they want to retain voice services, either by switching to broadband with a voice application or by replacing PSTN with mobile.

"These major industry shifts provide a significant opportunity for the promotion of high quality voice services and a reason to engage positively with business customers. There are approximately 10.8 million business smartphone users



Steven Lowe

There are approximately 10.8 million business smartphone users in the UK, so there is a huge addressable market

in the UK, so there is a huge addressable market for the channel to engage with."

Mobile networks around the world are starting to decommission their 3G networks. AT&T in the US is expected to close down 3G at the end of February 2022 and UK networks will start to decommission 3G in the latter part of 2023. "It is essential therefore that mobile operators, MVNOs, resellers and dealers start to work with customers as soon as possible to ensure that they have access to VoLTE compatible devices," added Lowe.

His enthusiasm for his subject yields much food for thought for resellers, particular as he dismantles misconceptions about mobile voice. "We want to bust the myths surrounding mobile voice quality," he added. "It is extremely high, especially over LTE and using the EVS codec. This is absolutely appropriate as a service for business customers."

The EVS codec includes a multi-rate audio codec, a source controlled variable bit-rate (SC-VBR) scheme, a VAD, a comfort noise generation (CNG) system, and an error concealment (EC) mechanism

to offset the effects of transmission errors resulting in lost packets. Its channel-aware mode feature further improves frame/packet error resilience. EVS codec for 4G voice calls is also adaptive, so that if poor signal quality is detected then it will adjust to a lower quality in order to preserve the call.

Quality matters

It is clearly not the case that mobile voice quality is lower than landline voice quality. "Quite the opposite in fact," stated Lowe. "Mobile voice quality always matches or exceeds landline voice quality. On a mobile to landline

or landline to mobile call, landline codecs actually constrain mobile voice quality. In order for the call to work, the call falls to the lowest common denominator - the PSTN codec, G711, has been in operation since 1972."

So we can see that mobile voice quality has historically been constrained by having to conform to minimum landline specifications, and that VoLTE with the EVS codec is of a substantially higher quality than fixed line PSTN voice. The positive difference in favour of VoLTE lies in the fact that while the G711 PSTN codec offers

ity mobile voice

bandwidth between 300Hz and 3.4KHz, VoLTE with EVS offers bandwidth at up to 20KHz along with a number of advanced features, offering high definition voice of the highest quality.

"All UK MNOs now offer VoLTE and if the EVS codec is applied this delivers an extremely high-quality voice experience," emphasised Lowe. "The main requirement is for increased coverage, rather than quality, and while all UK networks promise in excess of 98 per cent indoor coverage, this is calculated on the basis of the building being a standard residential

antenna, through to private networks where spectrum is procured to meet local coverage needs."

Gamma has spent the past two years building its new Gamma Mobile platform with 3UK, and Lowe forecasts that in three to five years time Gamma Mobile will be the most successful UK B2B MVNO operating across all UK business segments. "We will do this by maintaining our laser focus on the business market, understanding and delivering end-to-end solutions to meet end customer and channel partner needs, and leveraging

can be impacted by the characteristics of the device being used, whether over fixed or mobile, it is important to be confident that the devices sold to customers perform well with the service, including voice. To gain access to 4G voice, customers require a VoLTE compatible device. The vast majority of modern devices are VoLTE compatible but there remains a small percentage of non-VoLTE compatible devices in use with business users. "We test devices across the various price ranges for performance on the network and across various applications," noted Lowe. "The resulting list of recommended devices is made available to all of our mobile channel partners for information and guidance."

Gamma has a strong relationship with 3UK with equal access to the network. This means that as new network technologies are developed Gamma and its customers have immediate access. "While 3UK provides the network that is at the heart of our mobile service, Gamma also has its own network, provisioning, channel and customer support capabilities that enable us to offer an end-to-end proposition laser focused on the business market," added Lowe.

"High quality voice is an important component of our mobile service going forward. This operates over 4G today, but voice over 5G will be available in the future. But right now, the impending 3G network shutdown will be a big catalyst for the sale of VoLTE and associated high quality mobile voice. And the PSTN switch off will be another accelerator." ■

Major industry shifts provide a significant opportunity for the promotion of high quality voice services and a reason to engage positively with business customers

building, rather than an office complex which may, due to the layout and construction materials used, inadvertently block external radio signals.

"For businesses with fixed broadband, Ethernet, FTTP or SD-WAN, native WiFi calling via mobile can be an elegant and free in-building coverage solution. The solution is seamless where it supports SMS and voice with two-way seamless handover to the mobile network. If in-building coverage is an issue and there is no fixed connection, other solutions are available, from Repeater solutions which bring external coverage into the building and amplify it, to Fixed Wireless Access where a business runs all its communications over 4G/5G via an external

the network advantages that we will have across 4G and particularly 5G," he stated.

The quality of the network signal is another traditional limiting factor, caused by the distance from the cell tower as well as other environmental variables. "It is important to remember that 4G has roughly double the spectral efficiency of 3G, therefore able to provide better quality voice for the same signal quality," pointed out Lowe. "The new EVS codec for 4G voice calls is also adaptive, so that if poor signal quality is detected then it will adjust to a lower quality in order to preserve the call."

Because the quality of any network service experience

"Security is mortals' chiefest enemy" –

William Shakespeare

Hello and my best wishes to you for the coming year. In this and subsequent columns I am going to share my thoughts on how you can make a difference to your clients by identifying and addressing the most important cybersecurity threats facing businesses today.

According to the UK Government's Cyber Security Breaches Survey 2021, 39% of UK businesses reported a cybersecurity breach or attack in the previous year. This might be a shockingly high figure, but it is actually down from 46% in 2020, reflecting the fact that, faced with the potential for large losses and GDPR fines, businesses are taking security and data protection responsibilities much more seriously.

Equally remarkably, over 80% of cyberattacks now come in via email. As other defences have improved, helped in no small part by the shift to the cloud, fraudulent email (particularly business-to-personal email, which accounts for over 90% of these attacks) has become the number one security weakness.

I have worked in the channel for over twenty years, but my direct experience in cybersecurity stems from around eighteen months ago when I started working with StayPrivate to develop their channel proposition. Although not a cybersecurity

product in itself, StayPrivate ensures that business-to-personal email stays private, thereby solving this important cybersecurity and data protection problem for SMEs and their customers.

Equally importantly, StayPrivate is an easy addition to any existing stack and provides partners with a straightforward opportunity to generate significant additional recurring margin.

Working with StayPrivate has given me a great vantage point from which to observe how the market is evolving and where vendors are failing to adapt to the challenge of ensuring that information remains safe as more and more business is being conducted online and our customers are, rightly, increasingly concerned about the risk of falling victim to online crime and what the consequences of that may be.

I look forward to sharing more with you on this over the coming year. I will begin next month with GDPR and how its introduction has changed not only businesses' obligation but also consumers' expectations around data protection practices.

Find out more by looking at www.stayprivate.com, emailing partners@stayprivate.com or talking with one of our distribution partners such as Zest4.



Adrian Barnard

Over 80% of cyberattacks now come in via email. Particularly business-to-personal email, which accounts for over 90% of these attacks.

After early gains, it's time

The defining mode of the industry is now a matter of pushing ahead with initiatives to ensure that the 2025 switch off is met with success, according to delegates at last month's online Comms Dealer Insight Sessions (held in association with BT Wholesale). The two debates (see also pages 32-34) drew out an accumulation of challenges, opportunities and actions to be addressed by all stakeholders as part of a coherent strategy capable of full implementation before the deadline, and revealed how resellers are approaching and progressing towards their all-IP futures.

The comms industry's pursuit of an all IP transition in 2025 is, encouragingly, to some extent on track. But significant challenges remain, and the various efforts to overcome hurdles speak of a sector more than ready to pull together. Yet despite the advances made, a reasonable observer could assume that the market messaging around 2025 has been somewhat casual. "We've had the innovators and early adopters, now we're moving towards the majority," commented Ian Dunstan, Managing Director, Cobalt. "Laggards could make us over subscribed and we may not have the capacity to deal with them. So it's

important to inform people that the funnel is only so big. Many older legacy businesses really aren't looking at this. They need to see a consistent message through education and advertising."

Neil Bayliss, Director, HubTel Communications, also wasted no time in emphasising what many see as a hole at the heart of this transformation, and that hole is education, the lack of which could breed pessimism and ultimately bring about a high octane all IP scramble. "There is always issues with people who don't believe what they see and hear," he said. "On the whole it's positive for us. But a situation could occur where there is a



Ian Dunstan

Laggards could make us over subscribed and we may not have the capacity to deal with them. So it's important to inform people that the funnel is only so big.



Steve Blackshaw

We recognise that we need to wake up the market

bottleneck of people close to the time of the shut off."

Compared to the publicity preceding the analogue TV switch off, Operation 2025 has, to now at least, almost been 'covert', according to Chris Horne, Senior Product Manager B2B, Your Co-op. "2025 has been planned for so long but many people are still unaware of it," he commented. "There is plenty going on in terms of channel chatter and targeted campaigns are coming primarily from resellers to end customers. But in reaching

the market directly there is not enough publicity."

Misplaced cynicism

Slipped dates in the past have induced cynicism in some quarters of the ICT sector and led fair-minded people to think pessimistically on the matter. "I was recently talking to someone who owns a security company and he simply didn't think this was going to happen and is still putting in analogue lines," noted Shiv Passap, Director, BTT. "We are seeing this from a lot of people. But while the industry needs to

start moving on advertising, 2025 and the 2023 stop sell has been in our thinking for a long time. We have expanded our team, particularly in the provisioning department."

Rebecca Leeming, Managing Director, 360 Coms, was not an early adopter of IP but has nevertheless made strides and shown more traditional resellers the way forward. "We were quite late to look at the switch off," she said. "It wasn't a main focus of ours but now we're pretty much there. We have some customers in remote areas running off 4G routers which will cause a problem. And we have some customers that still don't think it's going to happen."

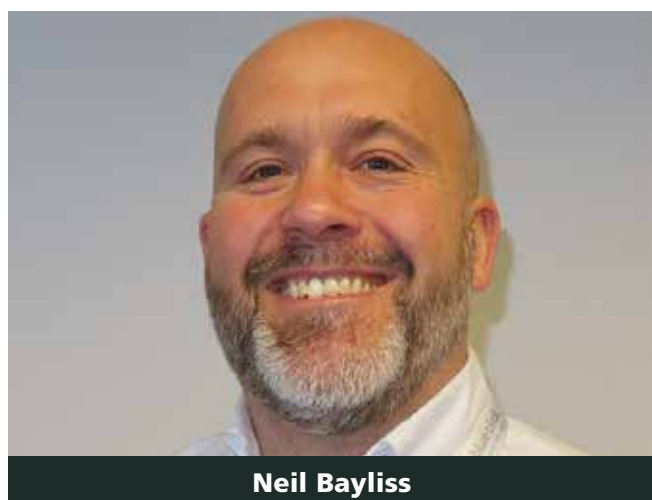
The good news now is that the industry is showing a capacity to independently engage with businesses and consumers directly, a move that promises to gain traction. Steve Blackshaw, All IP Program Manager at BT Wholesale, observed: "The switch from analogue to digital TV was supported by a £120 million advertising campaign taken out of the licence fee payer's pocket. We don't have £120 million, but a number of CPs have

Time to double down on 2025

come together and created, with Ofcom, a standalone independent body called TechUK which is running a campaign from March that will focus on both the B2B and B2C channel. A number of CPs are running their own multi-campaigns at the same time. And a BT specific campaign is in the planning. There will be a set of materials specifically for wholesale partners."

Key approach

Blackshaw also emphasised that a multi-stakeholder approach is vital to avoid a sleepwalk into 2025. "The larger CPs need to run a campaign against their own customer and acquisition base in retail channels," he commented. "In the wholesale channel we need to arm our partners – it's that simple. Our partner engagement will ramp up significantly this year. As well as launching Professional Services BT Wholesale will arm partners with a dedicated marketing team funded from my programme with materials that partners can share. We recognise that we need to wake up the market."



Neil Bayliss

There is always issues with people who don't believe what they see and hear. A situation could occur where there is a bottleneck close to the shut off.

BT is on a mission to enable resellers to wield marketing tools and motivate the market to meet the 2025 deadline. Such a change will be aided by more traditional marketing support for resellers, noted Katrina O'Mahony, Senior Sales Manager, BT Wholesale. "We drive education through new propositions, marketing and sales support, events, workshops and service improvements," she explained. "We have a new digital marketplace on Hubco with campaign-in-a-box for different product sets including IP transformation and how to sell it."

The move to IP can reasonably be seen as tantamount to a rite of passage for traditional

The move to IP is tantamount to a rite of passage for traditional comms resellers

comms resellers. An ordeal that tests their ability to stand the heat of business transformation. Surely, therefore, the inevitable transition to all IP is best

tackled sooner rather than later, especially as the clock is ticking. "We sold our first IP connection in 2014," stated Dean Bergin, Managing Director, Boxx Communications. "Prior to that we were fundamentally an old fashioned stack it high sell it cheap, WLR, CPS etc reseller. But we decided to do something smarter and it has been a hard journey to get to where we are today. It was brutal because we were stuck in a mindset. If I was that pre-2014 business today there's no way I'd do it in time. I'd get out. It's a massive challenge for those not already selling IP. We are a different business now and deal with transformation and technology – and we are ready for when the product and demand is there."

At times like this we need a cross-industry roadmap based on the essential preconditions for change, which Blackshaw says has already taken shape. "There are three enablers that are required," he stated. "One of the dependencies to make this programme work across the industry is the regulator backing the providers of infrastructure. We have seen Ofcom actually backing Openreach for the first time in announcing dates. The second is the Government getting serious about it. Both of these enablers are now in place. The third enabler is a portfolio that's fit for purpose – that B2B portfolio is absolutely there."

Ajit Jadeja, Voice & Hosted Practice Lead, BT Wholesale,



Chris Horne

We are in a good position and have access to multiple IP streams, but the biggest problem is across our consumer base where we have circa 15,000 lines.

has been engaged in various activities that he hopes will accelerate the IP transition, ranging from device management and suitability, data analysis on fibre to number porting.

"We work with CPs to get problem statements and have a range of cases," he said. "We are also looking at router and device requirements to overcome challenges on the ground. We are helping clients to navigate Openreach tranches on the timetable. You need to be laser focused: As soon as you have FTTP available and an option to switch

over you need a detailed plan. You can't wait until the whole country is fibred up – that will be too late."

Jadeja also noted that Ofcom is running a number of workshops that look at various technologies to improve the thorny issue of porting. "That will be one of the challenges during the migration where we have tens of thousands of lines to migrate," he stated. "It needs to have automation with APIs for example. There are improvements that can be made. It's a question of the industry collectively

Continued on page 26



Shiv Passap

I was recently talking to someone who owns a security company and he simply didn't think this was going to happen. He is still putting in analogue lines.

Join Partner Plus and help your customers get ready for an all-IP future.





Rebecca Leeming

We were quite late to look at the switch off. It wasn't a main focus of ours but now we're pretty much there. We have some customers that still don't think it's going to happen.

Continued from page 25 raising this with Ofcom, BT and the other IP exchange players in the market and coming to a programme that will improve porting at the same time as the transition."

It is fair to say that 2025 success should not have to depend on product and process readiness, except that it has everything to do with it. Yet it is good news that B2B portfolios are well advanced. But in certain cases there is still a way to go, notably relating to fibre coverage and smaller firms with one line plus home users. "Once that single order line journey is easy, that's the opportunity to grow at the smaller end," said Bergin. "Most of our business customers are educated on this. They understand and are already on that IP journey. The significant

opportunity is the micro and consumer end. But this opportunity does not exist until the product is right."

Horne is another old hand at the IP game, and he also highlighted an issue with his consumer customers. "We are in a good position," he said. "We have access to multiple IP streams but the biggest problem is across our consumer base. We have circa 15,000 consumer lines, people who are not ready for IP transitions. Moving these is our biggest challenge. We won't be ready technology wise until there is a suitable product in the wholesale channel. On the B2B side I have no concerns. It's a more engaged market space."

2025 success depends as much on a proactive and receptive market as having the right products at the

right time. Yet the single best decision a reseller can make now is, quite simply, to think all-IP and avoid being left behind by the likes of Passap. "We started the whole IP piece in 2007, so when we set up the network services side of our business we had a full focus on going IP," he commented. "Our marketing team posted a blog about the transition from ISDN to IP products and it is our most read content. That's where a lot of current opportunities come from. But for our existing base we have already moved a lot of them across. Because we are an IP-based company we don't really have the headache."

When the industry is being asked to deliver nationwide all-IP, every stakeholder, including non-IP resellers, is entitled to see a way forward and be helped with potential challenges in understanding the whys and wherefores

added. "It's not just voice. We are solution providers so it is our job to educate customers and talk to them before somebody else does."

In the wholesale channel we need to arm our partners – it's that simple

of the IP transition. "From talking to our customers the barriers seem to be time and resources to get ahead of the game," added O'Mahony. "It's more than the PSTN – it's the complexity behind all of the legacy and making sure everyone is aware of that. It's our job as a supplier to make sure customers are aware that there is ageing network equipment with end of life elements and scarcity of spares. As it scales up and you have a bigger base that's when the complexities really hit."

But the challenges for IP savvy players like Dunstan are scaling up for the opportunities he is starting to see. "We are innovative, looking for more opportunities and engaging with people in vertical markets on, for example, analogue alarm lines," he



Dean Bergin

We sold our first IP connection in 2014. If I was that pre-2014 business today there's no way I'd do it in time. I'd get out. It's a massive challenge for those not already selling IP.

RedSquid's IP journey also started many years ago. "Educating is not just about talking, it's about social media and the information you have on your website,"

our customers through this migration. Of course we have some yet to start their digital transformation, especially the larger ones, and it's our responsibility to educate them and begin that journey now. Our base is 65-70 per cent IP and the rest SIP at the moment. But Teams has changed the dynamic."

In Blackshaw's experience of IP transitions in other countries, the governments and regulators got 99 per cent of customers over the line. A few cases were treated as exceptions, not consumers nor normal businesses, usually to do with defence of the realm. On a more granular level, there is much to be said for resellers at the coal face such as Neil Barrall, Managing Director, Telecoms World, who puts a strong emphasis on localism in his marketing approaches.



Ajit Jadeja

As soon as you have FTTP available and an option to switch over you need a detailed plan. You can't wait until the whole country is fibred up – that will be too late.



Katrina O'Mahony

We have a new digital marketplace on Hubco with campaign-in-a-box for different product sets including IP transformation and how to sell it.



Sohini Raithatha

The pandemic kick started the move for many of our customers. We had to educate, upskill and recruit to make sure we were equipped to guide them through this migration.

"We work with suppliers in an area that's going to be live in the near future and go on a land grab to educate new customers," he said. "This is a good opportunity to upsell into customers you already have or win new business. We do a lot of pay-per-click in an area where FTTP is available and stop-sell has happened and try and educate those people. The only thing that could put a brake on is whether Openreach can get full fibre in the ground in time."

According to Blackshaw, the big opportunity and challenge for the industry is Openreach's coverage. "If that coverage comes at the same time of raised awareness there is going to be a gold rush," he said. "My concern as a Programme Director is that the gold rush comes in

2024-2025. Suddenly there will be a massive demand for skills and pressure on businesses. There is a big opportunity but we need to level the curve rather than have a huge hockey stick."

For Bergin, it is also about getting the timing right and thinking beyond the copper cliff edge. "There is a lot of talk about 2025, but post-2025, if you haven't got your systems, your processes or your automation and you are not streamlined and efficient you are going to miss the bottom of a hockey stick curve. We will become smart technology businesses in dealing with transformations and migrations, able to change services to a new provider in a heartbeat."

For more insights into how CPs are approaching 2025 read our second BT Wholesale Insight Session on page 32.



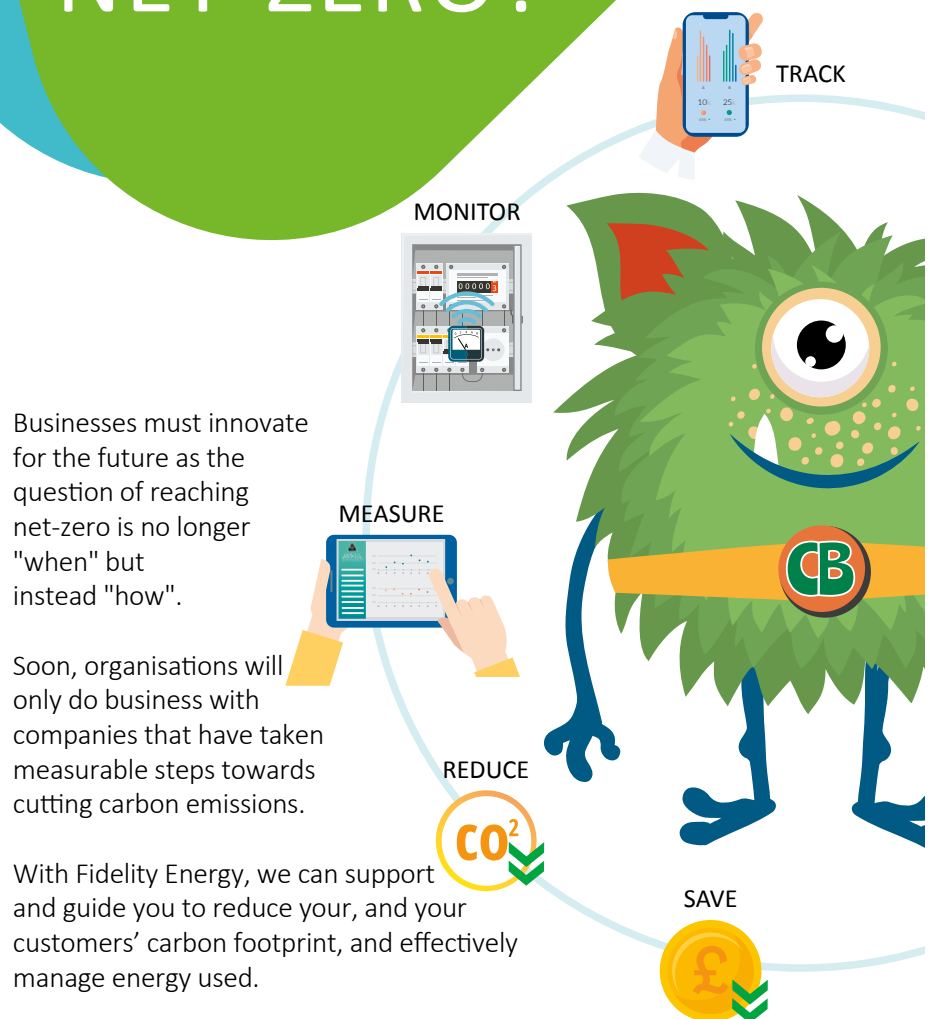
Neil Barrall

This is an opportunity to upsell to customers you already have or win new business. The only thing that could put a brake on is whether Openreach can get full fibre in the ground in time.

Preparation is key to digital transformation.



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Razorblue chief aims for

Investments into infrastructure, processes, people, security, automation and acquisitions have put MSP Razorblue on the road to becoming a leading MSP for SMEs in the UK, according to CEO Dan Kitchen.

Kitchen's big vision is for North Yorkshire headquartered Razorblue to become the UK's leading managed IT provider for SMEs. The company currently has seven offices and works with over 500 businesses (typically with 50 or more users), providing a range of services including managed IT support, connectivity, cloud solutions, business applications and telephony. Its 2020-21 financial year saw 32 per cent growth with turnover rising to £9 million – and Kitchen is targeting £20 million turnover by 2023, driving expansion through a strategy of locally-focused operations. "In each new region we have expanded into we have built a team of engineers and account managers on the ground, making the company accessible and relevant to customers in that area," he stated.

Razorblue is already well established in the north east and north west, with the western region team growing by 170 per cent since 2018 and winning the 2021 GMCC Entrepreneurial Success award. But while growth in these two areas remains a focus, so does expansion in Scotland following a 2021 acquisition in Stirling. This has already prompted a move to larger premises with completion expected at the end of February 2022. Kitchen also noted that he has more acquisitions in the pipeline.



Dan Kitchen

The cyber space is moving rapidly and some traditional services could become irrelevant in just a few years

Razorblue was launched in 2006 when Kitchen, then a 17 year old technology enthusiast and self-taught infrastructure engineer, quit college after three months to pursue full-time employment. What began as a start-up in a room at Kitchen's parents' house is now a business

with bases across the UK, having merged with Tokoda in 2009 and then acquiring two more firms in 2019 and 2021. "The traditional model of IT support was outdated as it focused on selling a service rather than becoming a true partner," said Kitchen. "This is what

Razorblue has focused on being, enabling us to offer support and also service the growth potential of clients."

Strong pedigree

Razorblue evolved into an ISP with its own core network in 2009, coinciding with the merger with Tokoda, which

was followed by the launch of a low cost 100MB Internet service on several business parks. In 2012, the company moved to a new head office and the business applications division was incorporated, with a further five offices opening over the next seven years and headcount

MSP top spot

increasing by over 500 per cent to 80. Technology partners include Microsoft, HP, Sophos and Mimecast – and Razorblue has a string of new accreditations including Microsoft Gold Partners and Cyber Essentials Plus. Kitchen is investing in automation, enabling Razorblue to provide the optimal experience for customers and support them in growing their own organisations in a more efficient and streamlined way.

Apps for business

Razorblue has also evolved its business applications division and a new director, Chris Gill, will lead further expansion of the team to service growing demand from customers. “Our applications division is exploring opportunities in AI and automation, while our IT division is building on our cybersecurity offerings,” explained Kitchen. “The cyber space is moving rapidly and that could mean that some traditional services will become irrelevant in just a few years.”

In 2020, Razorblue worked on a business applications project which supported the Covid-19 testing effort as the country was thrown into chaos with the start of lockdowns, enforced working from home and unprecedented change. “Rather than struggle, Razorblue seized this opportunity and not only supported its clients in quite literally an overnight change to remote working, but also grew its own headcount by over 20 per cent to 140, and saw our most successful financial year to date,” added Kitchen.

Another major focus area is recruiting the right people in the right way,

including a new People Director to ensure there is a true people-focus in decision making from the top of the business. “There is currently a significant skills gap in the industry, making it a competitive landscape when recruiting new people,” commented Kitchen. “Razorblue has taken this opportunity to create a robust induction process. For example, new starters are introduced to people at all levels of the business, including myself, within their first two weeks.”

Not surprisingly, staff turnover is low with a large number of people having been with the business for more than five years with some progressing from entry level and junior roles to more senior ones. “The skills shortage is unlikely to be resolved in the short-term and it’s imperative that MSPs navigate their way through this with care,” added Kitchen. “This is something Razorblue has taken a stance on and there is an exciting project underway as a result.

“MSPs also need to reposition themselves as a partner rather than a provider, because customers will continue to expect more than an internal IT department might be able to provide. The beauty of working with an MSP is that staff holidays, sickness and the skills gap etc are no longer concerns for customers, as well as upskilling and monitoring industry changes. From a cost perspective, outsourced IT makes sense but only so long as the MSPs involved continue to adapt, evolve and embrace change. Those who don’t will soon fall out of favour.” ■

Just a minute with Dan Kitchen...

Biggest career achievement: Building the business to where it is now and creating opportunities for 140 colleagues.

In hindsight? I would have conducted deeper financial analysis and reporting from day one.

Your main strength and what could you improve on? Being hands on is probably my greatest strength, and also my weakness. I’m highly aware of what’s happening at every level which enables us to be proactive rather than reactive, but it often means that I find myself short of time.

Biggest fear: I still hate losing an account and want to know what we could have done better.

Name three ideal dinner guests: Elon Musk, Steve Jobs and Bill Gates – all phenomenal technology entrepreneurs that have each taken very different approaches.

If you could transform any aspect of the ICT industry, what would it be? To restrict the use of buzzwords. We suffered years of ‘cloud’ being used for services that were not really cloud, and now we’re into zero trust, SASE and SD-WAN without any real knowledge of what it all means.

Best advice you have been given? Look after your staff, customers and P&L – in that order.

Tell us something about yourself we don’t know: I’ve never had any other job. I started Razorblue straight out of college.

Biggest risk you have taken? Acquiring another business is daunting because you have to ensure you get a return on that investment, and the process of making it successful is one you have to consider in a lot of detail.

How comms smartsourcing gives non-telco players a voice

We got such a great response to my last column about smartsourcing. Smartsourcing – if you didn’t know – is when partners flexibly outsource specific elements of technical operations.

The great thing about smartsourcing is that it’s different things to different people – a business accelerator or a business enabler; a resourcing backfill or a key strategic capability.

What’s really exciting is how comms smartsourcing is bringing new faces into the market, leveling the playing field for those without comms and telco expertise.

Here’s how we see comms smartsourcing supporting the evolution of the industry landscape in 2022.

FTTP players with voice obligations and opportunities

We’re seeing a lot of activity from an increasingly competitive FTTP marketplace of providers. A common challenge is the need to facilitate voice services as well as broadband. And that’s the whole end-to-end provision by the way, delivered as a managed service, from order provisioning to hardware staging, onboarding support and in-life care.

These guys want to focus on building out and providing access to their fibre networks – not learning how to be a telco. Many want to offer these services despite having no intention to make them a core part of their internal skillset.

Tech giants cornering the ‘voice services’ market

Perhaps the biggest impact will come from the tech giants reshaping the market for voice services. We’ve seen this most notably via Microsoft and its Teams platform, but don’t discount further moves from the likes of Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google.

Currently these players are B2B focused when it comes to UC and contact centre; not really focusing on residential communications services – at least not yet. This could change very rapidly, using smartsourcing to achieve it.



Tamsin Deutrom-Yue

IT specialists and MSPs with no telephony heritage

Another group capitalising on smartsourcing is a broad church of IT-centric suppliers. This includes MSPs, IT system integrators and traditional VARs – even boutique consultancies specialising in cybersecurity, DevOps and infrastructure.

What they have in common is zero heritage in voice, telephony, telecoms and telcos. Smartsourcing helps them complete their propositions without learning or internally resourcing new disciplines.

Comms players acquiring and retaining more customers

Last but by no means least are the core constituency of comms partners. For them, smartsourcing is a lever to support greater customer acquisition, customer retention or both.

Comms partners are different because they possess the appropriate technical skills; they understand their products and know how to implement and support them.

But that doesn’t make it easy to achieve, especially when they’re focused on growth, finding it hard to recruit good technical people, and under pressure to divert finite resources to presales and firefighting and away from onboarding, project management and customer success.

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What good leadership lo

As Covid-19 shifted technology awareness and adoption up a gear, so has the nature of leadership been elevated, according to Zen CEO Paul Stobart, who believes that modern, post-Covid captaincy demands a new approach.

If any lesson is learned from Covid-19 it is that people should never be under prioritised. "Engagement of people has always been the biggest driver of business success," stated Stobart. "And during lockdown it was the engagement, drive and the determination of our people that enabled us to navigate the pandemic successfully. What I also learned was the degree to which sustained lockdown can put pressure on people. As a result, we placed more emphasis on doing what we could to look after the mental health and wellbeing of our people."

The channel's CEOs and business leaders today, perhaps, face many more challenges and opportunities than ever before, potentially changing the nature of traditional leadership. "Having effective and inspirational leadership in place is key to ensuring that people within an organisation remain engaged and aligned," added Stobart. "Modern, post-Covid leadership demands a different approach. The modern leader leads with authenticity and empathy, appreciates the efforts of others, inspires teams of people to work collaboratively and effectively to a common purpose, communicates effectively using the power of story telling to give meaning to everyone in the business, listens to others, asks great questions, is curious, and



Paul Stobart

Having effective and inspirational leadership in place is key to ensuring that people within an organisation remain engaged and aligned

recognises that the CEO's role is to serve the organisation."

Following the pandemic, Stobart feels better equipped to push himself and his team to the next level. "We are ready! We are more resilient, more focused, more discerning and more disciplined," he enthused. "There is no shortage of market opportunity and to take advantage we need our people fully engaged with a passion to serve a new cadre of far more demanding customers to the best of our ability. We're

also talking more, and with increased transparency around topics such as mental health and wellbeing."

Business philosophy

For many business leaders the pandemic validated their thinking and direction. Conversely, it may have prompted some to look at challenges and opportunities from a new angle. But Stobart's business philosophy 'hasn't changed one iota'. "I truly believe that inspired and well led people that are fully engaged will deliver a superior customer experience

and that in turn will deliver sustained financial over-performance," he added. "It has always been people, customer, performance, in that order – and that rings true both in a pre and post-pandemic world."

Yet the pandemic produced a flex in the nature of employee expectations, a change that aligns perfectly with Stobart's approach. "Employees have changed," he added. "People will no longer accept the status quo. They're after a very different employee experience and

want to work for a business with a real purpose that takes its responsibilities to all stakeholders, including the community and the environment, seriously. They desire more flexibility, better benefits and a share in the success of the organisation. They will hold their leaders to account for fulfilling their environmental, societal and governance responsibilities."

Not surprisingly, Stobart's current priority is to place increased focus on Zen's people agenda. The company is introducing new benefits,

ooks like today

more learning opportunities and investing in Diversity and Inclusion through the work of its Women in Tech, BAME, Pride and Faith groups. Zen has also increased its focus on the sustainability agenda, and is now a certified B Corporation on a path to net zero, investing in energy and carbon emission reduction projects including the installation of solar panels at its Rochdale headquarters.

"Climate change is no longer simply a political issue," added Stobart. "It has become an issue for businesses and consumers. Business clients request as

network. "One of the biggest changes has been the speed with which the full fibre roll out has gathered pace," observed Stobart. "Over the next three or four years the entire landscape will change, with millions of consumers and thousands of businesses migrating to new technology.

"To keep ahead of this wave of new technology businesses need to act with speed, creativity and ingenuity. It also follows that business success will be derived from having the best, most engaged, innovative, and technically expert people wholly focused on providing

Stobart. "The pandemic has been terrible for humanity in so many ways, but one silver lining is the leap forward that we have seen in digital transformation. IT transformation is now at the top of the board agenda for many businesses, and this brings significant opportunities for the wider IT community."

Inflationary pressures

On the flip side, Stobart identified inflation as the biggest threat facing the channel. "I am old enough to remember what it's like to live and trade in an inflationary environment, whereas many people today have never experienced it," he explained. "In our industry, costs of connectivity are increasing as infrastructure players seek a return on the colossal cost of full fibre roll out. This cost-push inflation is already feeding through to prices in broadband markets and this trend is set to continue.

"In an inflationary world it's easy to become over reliant on price as a way to drive revenue growth. But this is not the right way to think. It's the creativity of your propositions, the integrity of your brand and the differentiated service provided by your people that will deliver sustained success." ■

Stobart's perspective...

Are you a better leader post-pandemic? Without question: Older, wiser, humbler!

Have you found inspiration in some unexpected places during the past two years?

Lockdown has reminded me of the power of the simple things in life – family, nature, the environment, walking, fresh air, mountains, staycations. We don't need a jet setting life to be happy!

When it comes to sustainability we have to be informed and demonstrate that we're not just empathetic, but actively engaged with a real plan

standard any information we have regarding our climate change ambitions. Consumers want to know not just that we are carbon neutral but what initiatives we have in place to get to net zero. When it comes to sustainability we have to be informed and demonstrate that we're not just empathetic, but that we're actively engaged and have a real plan."

In terms of technology, Zen is embarking on the next phase of its network upgrade programme, including the unbundling of a further 250 exchanges to take its estate to 700 exchanges. Once complete Zen will be able to take 80 per cent of all ultrafast orders on its own

customers with a great experience. Our focus on the people and customer agendas has never been more pronounced. We are improving our systems and our portfolio of digital assets to give our people better tools to look after customers, and creating tiered propositions that take into account the new world order and deliver enhanced value."

It is clear to see that the root to success lies in strength – strength of purpose, people and propositions – all of which ensured Zen experienced double digit growth throughout the pandemic. "We were lucky to be in a sector that turned out to be a fundamental enabler to home working," added

Channel Trends for 2022

It's that time of year when companies are looking back, reflecting and planning ahead for 2022.

Ensuring you stay ahead of competitors is critical every year but making sure your digital transformation plans are innovative enough for your customer's expectations is just as important.

In 2021, vendors and resellers continued to develop their Cloud propositions and focused on enhancing their remote working deployments, which saw the rise in social selling and subscription-based services.

Great ideas often come from inspiration, and to help you find that magic, we've listed the top five trends that we think will shape the channel in 2022:

1. Everyone in the channel is becoming a SaaS company

As-a-Service is now the dominant business model in the channel. The organisations that are winning and will keep winning have adapted to this and follow a subscription strategy. The technology mindset is Cloud, but the business model mindset is "as-a-service". Ensure your sales, marketing, technical and service delivery teams can articulate and deliver the value of Cloud and "as-a-service" and are optimised to deliver it.

2. Digital customer experience is critical

Those who invest will win - it's as simple as that! The pandemic was the trigger for organisations to invest in digital transformation. People now expect you to have this sorted, deliver a smooth digital experience, and handle any future disruptions from the pandemic. Make sure your digital customer experience is embedded in your processes and organisation, and you are primed to be the trusted advisor on how to deliver this for your customers.

3. Customer acquisition is now

As savvy resellers have spent the last 24 months securing their base and upgrading their customers to Cloud,

it will be time to focus on attacking the competition. Ensure you are advanced in your base upgrade programmes and focus on acquiring new business. Fighting on two fronts is tough, so make sure you have a plan.

4. Talent war

The critical challenge for resellers is to retain your people and make sure you can differentiate and offer people something different for staying with you or you are worth making a move for. What is your proposition to new talent looking at your business?



Will Morey, Sales & Marketing Director, Pragma

5. Sales merge with marketing

Salespeople will increasingly need to focus on self-generated leads and not rely on telemarketing or being fed with digital leads. The best salespeople will have strong marketing instincts and will be able to utilise these skills to further establish their personal brand using a range of digital tools and platforms such as LinkedIn to ensure they have a constant pipeline of opportunities to work.

At Pragma, we work hard in supporting our resellers whatever the challenges, trends and opportunities in the market. Ericsson-LG Enterprise has been helping resellers drive growth for over 30 years and has been committed to a reseller-only model for the entire time.

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Preparing for 2025: And on

Comms Dealer's Insight Sessions are a regular health check for the UK channel and last month's second industry debate on migrating to all IP (held in association with BT Wholesale) revealed that channel players are feeling optimistic about the switch over – but they also need a clear view of the path to 2025 and the right tools to overcome hurdles and maximise the opportunity.

Despite their optimism and readiness to embrace 2025, challenges still exist for our panelists. And anyone seeking a foretaste of what's to come need look no further than this Insight Session's key talking points, which reflect distinctive paths being taken and issues to be addressed. Challenges around knowledge and education continue to pose a problem, according to Sara Sheikh, Senior Product Manager, Gamma. "There is a lack of knowledge in the sector," she stated. "That's because of inconsistent messaging. You don't know what product will be end of life and when, and what's happening in certain areas. When you get into the detail there are inconsistencies.

We need clarity. This is a fundamental issue that needs to be solved before we can even touch a marketing strategy. At the moment we don't have the basics."

If we learned one thing from this Insight Session it is that the channel needs a dose of realism to contextualise 2025 optimism. "We've been on this journey since 2010 and still have a lot of legacy systems out there," commented Aidan Piper, CEO, Welcomm Communications. "The barriers for us are mainly around the availability of the right connectivity and the length of contract terms, particularly on Ethernet. The biggest challenge is that we are ready, our customers are ready, but it's about making sure the networks are ready."



Steve Blackshaw

Those telcos that benefit from the all IP switch over will be the ones that embrace change, wake up their base and move them

All of the panellists are reshaping, or have already transformed, their businesses to make the most of the transition to all IP, but steps that can advance them further on the path to 2025 cannot be taken until key factors are brought into line. "There's a commercial, technical and operational discussion to have," added Barry Ward, Director of Disruptive Technologies, Wavenet. "Right now I don't think the industry is aligned around those. On upgrading

single lines to SoGEA or FTTs and porting numbers - that process is not there yet and there's a lot of numbers that will need porting. We are ready, taking the steps and segmenting customer use cases, but it's going to take the whole industry working together to get us over the line in 2025."

Control of BT's all-IP transition has passed to Steve Blackshaw, All IP Program Manager at BT Wholesale, and he is totally focused

on getting everyone into the all IP arena, supported by initiatives that address many of the issues raised by panelists. "I've spent the last 20 years around the world helping telcos to do this," he stated. "It is a massive generational change for the industry yet the UK market has been static in this space, and while it presents a massive opportunity there is potentially a threat to the customer base. Those telcos that benefit from the all IP switch over will be the ones that embrace change, wake up their customer base and move them."

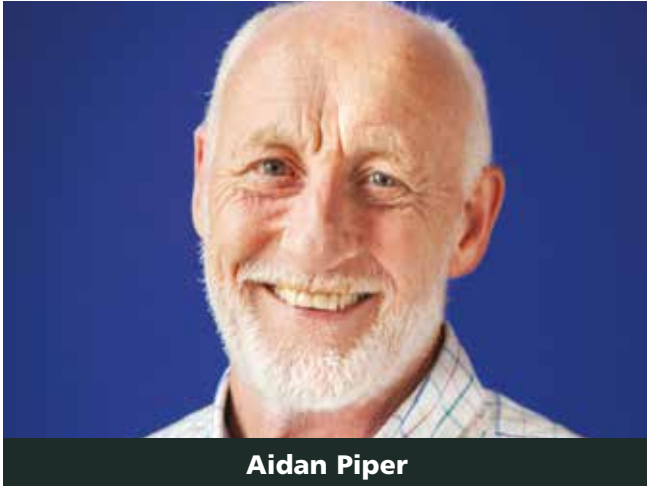
The highest cost in all of this is to do nothing. And whatever the perceived virtues of remaining wedded to legacy margins may be, CPs are sure to come to regret turning their back on the all IP opportunity. "Looking back at other countries that have migrated to IP and we see winners and losers," added Blackshaw. "An early adopter was KPN in the Netherlands – a large incumbent that provides consumer and enterprise services which moved quickly. That meant waking up their base which was commercially painful. KPN quickly learnt they would lose some customers, but because they were so advanced



Sara Sheikh

We need clarity. This is a fundamental issue and needs to be solved before we can even touch a marketing strategy. At the moment we don't have the basics.

Overcoming the challenges



Aidan Piper

The biggest challenge is that we are ready, our customers are ready, but it's about making sure the networks are ready.

with their substitutional portfolio and their maturing quality of service in new IP services, within a year and a half customers came back. Fast adopters around the world experienced a similar scenario. If you have sound corporate offerings you will get back to a parity or an even better position."

Last year Phil Race, CEO, AdEPT Technology Group, set up a 'hit squad' to target those organisations with legacy services and move them to alternative options. "We had some success, but not resounding," he explained. "There was inertia and resistance to

change. However, we saw growth within our cloud portfolio when prospecting to clients. We are witnessing a migration by stealth. Businesses don't see this as switching legacy off and replacing with something else. We are seeing companies invest in options that will liberate their business, a more attractive option compared to being motivated by a cliff edge. My mission with the sales team is to get them to think about the bigger picture. A like-for-like change is a kind of failure, it means there was no conversation about the big opportunity. That's where we need to be."



Barry Ward

There's a commercial, technical and operational discussion to have. I don't think the industry is aligned around those.

James Banks, Group Technical Director, Charterhouse Voice & Data, agrees that the switch off should be viewed as a wide reaching opportunity that requires careful handling to make sure it's delivered in the right way. "Most resellers and integrators have a great number of legacy in their bases of all sizes," he said. "The drivers cannot be around something that you have to do. It's got to be around the benefits of adopting the technology and what that will enable for end users. There are opportunities for resellers who continue to invest and develop their own capabilities."

Urgency

Bringing that vital point to life, Daniel Davies, CTO, Maintel, noted that his company conducts detailed analysis of its entire base and has formed a three year migration plan. Yet 2025 success is by no means guaranteed. It is put in doubt by inertia and access to tools. "The majority of customers we speak to are aware of 2025 but not the urgency," he stated. "We all need to start preparing because a lot of migrations will happen at the back end. If the resource availability, the processes and automation are not in place that will be a huge barrier.

"We have a DevOps team and an automation platform ready to go, so need engagement on how we can hook that into APIs to drive provisioning automation. We are not going to be able to migrate our legacy base without automation, and don't want to employ an army of people to do that." It is clear that for a number of reasons, including product options, some



Phil Race

We are seeing companies invest in options that will liberate their business, a more attractive option compared to being motivated by a cliff edge.

channel businesses may be vulnerable on the road to 2025. "Not everyone has an understanding of the right connectivity," added Carla Barrow, Regional Senior Sales Manager (North), BT Wholesale. "Some of the barriers we hear from CPs are time, money and resource. They are aware of what they need to do and the time scales but they are all different and at various levels. It's about putting their plans in place and engaging with end users."

The good news is that end user organisations are more receptive to IP propositions

than ever before. "Because of the past two years customers are more open to change," said Tim Mercer, CEO, Vapour. "They've had to think about working from home, security, the network etc. Customers now see that it's not as daunting as they first thought and they are much more open to changes."

For this reason alone traditional CPs must now make peace with the prospect of all IP if they are to generate the revenue on which their business depends. But, as reflected above, the route to success

Continued on page 34



James Banks

The drivers cannot be around something that you have to do. It's got to be around the benefits of adopting the technology and what that will enable for end users.

Help businesses take the leap towards all-IP with BT Wholesale's simple, flexible and reliable portfolio.





Daniel Davies

We have a DevOps team and an automation platform ready to go, so need engagement on how we can hook that into APIs to drive provisioning automation.

Continued from page 33 lies in consultancy as well as consistent and timely market messaging. “We’re not just talking to customers about the switch off and stop sell, we’re talking about the benefits of moving to IP, rather than using it as a threat,” added Piper. “We need to do more on the education piece. The larger players could talk more about the benefits rather than a switch off.”

While there are specific aims around 2025, megaphoning the all IP era at the wrong time will be counterproductive. That said, it is important to understand that to downplay this is not to ignore it. “It’s all about timing,” added Race. “If you go too early and the 2025 switch off is not seen as a precipice you’re laying a message into an

audience that isn’t receptive. So when you actually need them to do something they are immunised from that message. Timing is very important. If you go too early people will switch off.”

Having brought timing into the debate, it is critical that businesses do not take themselves to the edge of the cliff come the end of 2025. But challenges around apathy continue. “No-one likes change,” added Mercer. “Asking a customer to change what works for them today is sometimes daunting. It’s our job to make sure they understand the strategy. Customers need to understand that we know what we are talking about and not just selling. As providers we need to make them feel comfortable that we can deliver the solutions we put forward.”



Carla Barrow

Some of the barriers we hear from CPs are time, money and resource.



Ajit Jadeja

The opportunity is for us collectively to become trusted advisors.

In order to provide appropriate advice and solutions it is absolutely key to understand not just the services a customer base has but what they are used for. “There is a real opportunity for resellers to engage and work with customers to understand what their wider objectives are, particularly in the current climate,” added Banks. “If customers still have ISDN they’ve been saying no for a decade. Resellers who are in a position to offer genuine consultancy and advice around the art of the possible are well positioned to differentiate the proposition and maximise the opportunities. For us it’s proven vital for our teams to engage with customers, work through that journey and arrive at a scenario where both we and the customer understand a great deal more around their estate. We are then ready to position a genuine solution.”

Focus point

Another important response to the switch off is to focus on 2023, believes Joline Thomas, Head of Channel, Focus Group – but every plan requires a capacity to be fulfilled, and on this point improvements are required, she said. “Stop sell in 2023 means businesses have to bring forward their plans for moving to IP and future proof connectivity,” observed Thomas. “It’s opening up a whole new conversation which is great, but it’s about how we are supporting that.

“The biggest challenges we face are ADSL replacement delivery, a timetable to install lines and service assurance packages that sit on the back of that. These are all unclear. Replacement services are more expensive so there is confused messaging for customers. From a commercial perspective there is overall margin erosion due to lower margins with IP. We’re having to manage that and make sure we have product penetration to fill



Tim Mercer

Customers are more open to changes compared to two years ago.

those gaps. We need support from the networks. We’ve got to get a handle on this by the end of 2023, not 2025.”

To meet all of these industry challenges BT Wholesale’s focus has more than shifted, there has been a restructuring of approaches, operations and processes. Ajit Jadeja, Voice & Hosted Practice Lead, BT Wholesale, shared insights into these positive moves and what they mean for the channel. “The point on connectivity and availability is critical,” he stated. “Up to now we’ve all been working in silos – voice, connectivity etc – but it is about converged solutions so we can longer work in silo fashion. We are giving as much insight as possible. For example, identifying where FTTP is available today. And when you have so many different scenarios for number porting it can get complicated. It needs to be automated with APIs. The opportunity

is for us collectively to become trusted advisors and help the UK economy grow in the digital world.”

Resellers must therefore snap out of their legacy thinking and establish a platform for success based on migrating their customers to all IP, and follow the distinctive pathway that BT Wholesale is setting. “It’s not just a technology change for us it’s a business and relationship change,” added Blackshaw. “The biggest concern is sales momentum and awareness which go hand in hand. That’s also the biggest opportunity. So understand the inventory of customers before you speak to them. And you need a conversation with the customer to understand the attributes of their lines and use cases. BT Wholesale is offering a white labelled audit capability, remote and field, and a range of professional services to help CPs on their all IP migration journey.” ■



Joline Thomas

We need support from the networks. We’ve got to get a handle on this by the end of 2023, not 2025.

Symbiant Technologies Celebrates 21 Years in Billing

This month, Symbiant Technologies is celebrating its 21st birthday! It was founded by Dave Turnbull back in 2001 and to this day is still a truly independent billing provider. They were the first billing system provider to introduce functionality, now regarded as commonplace, including billing lines & calls on one bill and bundled call packages. The company's core activity is to deliver a cost-effective, bespoke billing solution. Although billing is at the heart of what they do, the solution offers clients so much more than just billing.

Dave Turnbull comments, "Symbiant has grown significantly since it's launch 21 years ago but we still remain hungry to improve our billing solutions further. Additionally, Symbiant is looking to increase market share and introduce new clients to our unique brand of bespoke billing services and best in class client support."

Symbiant's growth ambition was reflected at the end of last year, by the appointment of Jeannette Goodred, the new Head of Marketing and Sales. She says, "Options for resellers to have a truly independent billing solution provider have been reduced by a number of recent mergers and acquisitions. I am really excited by the opportunity to work with the Symbiant management and solution development teams. In particular, Symbiant is able to offer resellers a truly unique and customisable solution, to help them stand out from the crowd"

Keith Pearshouse, MD of Symbiant Technologies commented: "Telecoms is one of the fastest changing industries in the world and the landscape is drastically different from when I first started out with Symbiant, so to reach 21 years in business is a great achievement"

Keith continued "We would not have been able to achieve this milestone



Jeannette Goodred

without the support of our clients and the strong relationships that we have built over the years. Many of our clients have worked with us right from day one!! It's fair to say our partnerships with these companies have overcome challenges and enjoyed successes over the years. The loyalty and commitment to Symbiant, shown through this time has been fantastic – a thank you does

not seem sufficient! As we have evolved the product range over the years, we hope that we have been able to help our Symbiant clients to develop their businesses as well. We are extremely grateful for the support, loyalty and ongoing business given to us. We will continue to work hard on our new and innovative products, to maintain this client commitment, long into the future."

Symbiant's systems, which incorporate automation of key processes and integration with accounting and other core business systems, are not limited to the needs of their clients. As well as offering the obligatory client portal with reporting functionality. Symbiant, can also provide capability for clients to manage and support their partners, including sales and commissions management.

Keith Pearshouse commented "We recognise the importance of providing first class support and pride ourselves in delivering a great service to our clients. We want to promote the symbiotic relationship and focus on the Symbiant meaning "an organism living in symbiosis with another", a mutually beneficial relationship between different people or groups.

Symbiant has development plans in place to support its current and future clients to meet their needs in our



Keith Pearshouse

rapidly changing industry"

Jeannette concluded "Looking ahead, Symbiant is thrilled about the future, the company's growth and the opportunities to work with new clients. The business has come a long way since 2001 and the Symbiant team is excited about what lies around the corner. ■

Championing analytics

Resellers' relationship with analytics solutions must strengthen to the point of becoming embedded in long-term strategy if they are to secure future success, according to Akixi Head of Marketing Hilary King.

Champions of analytics, like King, make much of its role in the future of business strategy and operations. And the value of analytics lies in its simplicity as a proposition as much as its application to a number of problem solving scenarios, she says. "Many companies have long had an appreciation for data and its capacity to drive stronger decisions," stated King. "Some use data to detect patterns in their customers' buying behaviours, others rely on analytics for collecting important insights into the inefficiencies of various day-to-day processes. But as companies move to a remote and hybrid working future, we're relying on data not just to monitor customers and operations, but also productivity and team engagement levels."

For IT resellers and service providers, analytics solutions represent an opportunity to add value to everything from customer service to the business performance landscape, believes King. "What's more, the right analytics solutions don't require a great deal of additional up-skilling," she added. "The simplicity of

these tools makes them easy to implement into a range of environments."

As such, analytics is becoming a value added solution for companies striving to support their teams in an ever changing workplace. "With the right tools, business leaders can address important demands for things like better workplace wellbeing and employee safety," added King. "Managers can use analytics to check workers are taking sufficient breaks or ensure there aren't too many people in a meeting room at once. At the same time, analytics tools are becoming essential for managers who would otherwise struggle to understand their team's workload in a hybrid environment."

Analytics does not just offer companies a way to keep track of distributed teams – the right tools can bridge the gaps between employees and allow for a more meaningful flow of information and knowledge, pointed out King. "Some analytics and reporting solutions are even being used by remote workers themselves to help maintain productivity," she added. "For instance,



Hilary King

online leader boards give employees goals to strive for. Individual reports help team members to see areas of weakness and strength in their performance."

Key investment

The pandemic has changed the way we live and work. As a result, analytics tools are rapidly becoming an essential investment in understanding the evolving

we can keep our fingers on the pulse of our target market in an unpredictable world. Many companies have discovered they need to evolve, adapt and digitally transform to continue serving their customers effectively post-pandemic. However, we need analytics to provide the map for exactly what this transformation should look like. The right tools show businesses how customer

Analytics will provide companies with the critical agility they need to make essential decisions about their products, services, employees and operations

customer and the changing team landscape, according to King. "From an employee management perspective, analytics allow business leaders to track metrics on team performance, wellbeing and operational outcomes," she explained. "In the hybrid world of work, it isn't easy to imagine how any company could thrive without these essential insights. From a customer perspective, analytics ensure

preferences and expectations have changed, and how they need to adjust."

King has witnessed increasing interest in Akixi's omnichannel reporting solutions among customers who had not before considered this route. The growing number of companies considering alternative channels for consistent, meaningful customer interactions

is strong evidence of how the landscape is changing and creating new opportunities in analytics.

"As we head into a future of unprecedented digital transformation, analytics will provide companies with the critical agility they need to make essential decisions about their products, services, employees and operations," added King. "The right tools will be crucial to preventing expensive mistakes for business leaders. In a world where companies are under more pressure than ever before to adhere to customer expectations and drive performance results with minimal budgets, analytics are key."

Resellers failing to take advantage of the analytical landscape could be missing out on future opportunities to become the critical partner and trusted advisor for their customers' transformation initiatives, believes King. "After all, the path to a brighter future starts with a foundation of reliable knowledge," she said. "Of course, the key to ensuring success with analytics solutions is guaranteeing data quality. Because of this, resellers will need to ensure they're investing in analytics tools which allow companies to manage, leverage and sort through information with caution, for clear, actionable insights."

"Knowledge has always been power in the business world. Now that we're living in an increasingly digitised landscape, the power of data is already all around us and the channel has a responsibility to give customers the tools required to leverage that data." ■



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Netify is a Network Union company.

What can WE do to repair

The ICT industry kept Britain working during the Covid 19 pandemic but now faces calls to address a bigger emergency and take action immediately on mitigating climate change.



On January 10th, the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service reported its preliminary analysis of satellite measurements taken across the planet and the results were grim.



Zen Internet CEO Paul Stobart speaking at Comms Vision 2021

It found that the last seven years were the warmest on record with 2021 the fifth warmest year ever, fuelled by extreme heatwaves in the Mediterranean, vicious wildfires in Greece and disastrous flooding in Central Europe.

Prof Rowan Sutton from Reading University said we should see the record-breaking weather events in 2021 such as the heatwave in Canada and floods in Germany "as a punch in the face to make politicians and public alike wake up to the urgency of the climate emergency".

His words echoed with the message delivered by Zen Internet CEO Paul Stobart at Comms Dealer's Comms Vision symposium staged at Gleneagles in Scotland in November, where he pleaded with channel leaders to take climate change seriously and act, not next year, not next month, but now.

There may be climate change sceptics in our community and as was overheard at Comms Vision 'will anything we do really make any difference?'

Any internet search on climate change or global warming will deliver thousands of articles and an unending stream of advice on what people can do both at home and in business to become 'carbon neutral' and hopefully extract a nail, however small, from the planetary coffin.

CONFUSION

It all becomes a cacophony of information that can leave the most reasonable channel business leader confused and disillusioned. Some may believe the horse has already bolted and climate change is something we'll all have to get used to.

In the UK, a record number of companies are making climate pledges, but experts warn the pace of action remains glacially slow in the face of a fast-accelerating climate emergency.

At least a fifth of the world's 2,000 largest public companies have now made some kind of "net zero" pledge to cancel out their carbon emissions. They are investing billions in clean energy, moving to electric vehicles, pledging to halt deforestation, and urging the governments to step up climate action.

The private sector is also being increasingly pushed by employees, activists and consumers to take meaningful action and it is inevitable that at some point both public and private organisations will only do business with suppliers which have committed to Environmental Social Governance policies. Investors too are considering value based on long-term sustainability.

If the ICT solutions supply sector is going to help

support the transition to a more sustainable future, market participants and firms need high quality information, a well-functioning ecosystem and clear standards. And customers need to be able to rely on firms to take ESG seriously, avoid

change issue, focusing on the positive initiatives others are taking. We hope it will provide the impetus needed to help you act now.

As Stobart stressed at Gleneagles: "We could all choose to reduce emissions

"By 2100 it's estimated that sea levels will have risen by two metres, enough to see London under water from Canary Wharf to Dartford"

'greenwashing' and deliver on their ESG promises.

So, where do we start? What steps can channel directors take quickly to improve their green credentials? In the months ahead, Comms Dealer is committed to offering our readers knowledge and inspiration on the climate

by half from tomorrow. There will be costs and implications involved – but if we don't, our grandchildren will not forgive us. You've got to measure very accurately what you are emitting. Make your people part of the issue. You'll be amazed at how many ideas come out of nowhere."

Recycle end of life telephones

WITH copper connected PABXs fast reaching end of life, millions of unwanted phones and peripherals are set for landfill as we approach the PSTN switch off.

Recycling responsibly under the UK's Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) directive requires organisations to employ recycling methods that will not bring any harm to the environment.

Rob Govier runs engineering business Telecom Green, which is also one of the UK's longest-established telephone system removal and recycling specialists.

"Restrictions and procedures on plastic recycling are about to change significantly, and this will make recycling of telephony equipment significantly more expensive. It's set to be a significant issue for the channel," he said.

www.telecomgreen.co.uk

www.recyclingyourit.co.uk

our planet?

Action Takers

IPSUM solution automates company carbon footprints



Sean Dixon

Fidelity Energy is leveraging the benefits of IoT to help its partners and their customers manage their carbon footprints.

The channel energy specialist has partnered with AyMa IoT to rollout its IPSUM Carbon and Energy Management Platform Solution to the ICT channel.

Fidelity Sales Director Sean Dixon explained the IPSUM approach which is based on four steps.

STEP 1: Access and understand the data that already exists in the business infrastructure and estate.

"IPSUM takes data from all points of energy usage and provides real-time readings which enable automated data analytics and reporting, real-time energy use monitoring and carbon emission tracking."

STEP 2: Understand the compliance and reporting scopes.

"Legislation is in the wings which will soon impact every size of company and the reporting burden will be considerable. Automation, as delivered by IPSUM, eliminates the tedium, cost

and complexity of reporting."

Step 3: Create a Carbon Reduction Plan.

"Without detailed insight into point-specific carbon creation, it will be close to impossible to build a workable reduction plan. Once again, making sense of the data—in a far more accurate fashion that simply poring over past utility bills—will become increasingly critical."

Step 4: Report and meet regulatory requirements and stakeholder expectations

"Companies have the option of paying consultants to do this, which can cost tens of thousands of pounds, depending on company size, do it themselves, which will be tricky, error-prone and not much cheaper, or let technology do the work for you

"Through IoT connected sensors, AyMa IoT's IPSUM solution delivers real-time visibility of the energy usage status and optimum attainable levels of energy usage across all the operations of a business. It helps businesses to make a difference by taking the local action they can, to help address the global problem that's relevant and pressing to all of us."

Dixon stresses that IPSUM provides automated reporting for regulative documentation such as ESOS/SECR and supports the transparency required for ESG reporting and Scopes 1&2 of GHG Protocols.
www.fidelity-energy.co.uk/ipsum/

WHERE DO YOU START?

CLIMATE change is such a big issue it's hardly surprising many believe it's for politicians and world leaders to come up with answers. If you take that view, you are not alone according to climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe

"Most of us feel exactly the same way," she says. "Fifty percent of people feel hopeless and helpless when it comes to climate change, they don't know where to start and do nothing. The reality is, anything we do makes a difference, anything."

By offering and facilitating remote working and digitalising customers, the ICT industry is already making a big impact, but there are other changes channel businesses can take:

The UK has set out in law the target of achieving Net Zero by 2050 which critics argue is far too long a time frame, but any moves to offset carbon emissions will improve your status and image with customers and stakeholders. Explore websites which explain how you can reduce your carbon emissions and become a certified Carbon Neutral business.
www.ecologi.com
www.positiveplanet.uk
www.carbonneutralbritain.org
www.normative.io

The Paris COP conference back in 2016 dictated that all transport is to be zero emission, again by 2050, so it's time to look at electrifying your sales and engineering fleets, which will also reduce your carbon offset targets and maintenance costs as there are fewer moving parts in electric vehicles.
www.electrifying.com

Most offices have recycling policies these days but think of the bigger picture. Recycling apps link employees together and make green initiatives easier to manage.

www.recycleright.org.uk
www.irecycle.london
www.foodrescuehub.uk

Action Leaders

Andrew Skipsey – Giganet



Andrew Skipsey

Why do you personally believe climate change is an issue everyone in business and the channel should take seriously?

We all want to be more sustainable and leave things in a better place than how we found them. With increasing emphasis on climate change and our carbon footprints, businesses must look to take action now, not later.

When did you first believe you should take some action in your businesses?

My son Joshua's final project for his business degree in 2020 was associated with the sustainability challenges of UK SMEs. As part of this, he interviewed me and other business owners and it was clear we all find it a hard area to be able to make a meaningful difference. His dissertation brought it home that we should do more.

Please describe the actions you have you taken?

I was somewhat cynical about how we might get a few trees planted to offset our carbon footprint, until I signed up with Ecologi. They answered three big questions for me. How much carbon is our workforce responsible for? How do we offset this at a reasonable price? And are initiatives and tree planting independently accredited? See www.ecologi.com/giganet for our growing impact so far.

What are the business and cultural benefits?

Culturally you want your people to feel that we take the topic seriously. At Giganet, we steadily share what we are doing, display the Ecologi badge and stats on our website and have even bought additional trees as milestones are achieved. As we foster a culture of honesty, responsibility and accountability, this positive impact grows and develops.

Do you think there will come a time when customers demand that their technology providers are carbon neutral?

Yes, I think this is rapidly becoming the norm. It is already happening such that when we are discussing requirements with potential customers, we are asked about our ESG credentials. This is sure to spill into supplier selection criteria.

Do you think the 'noise' on climate change is just too confusing and preventing businesses from taking action?

No, because of the steady publicity in the press, on TV and on the political agenda, I think most people can see that sustainability, quality carbon offsetting and good practice has to be adopted. A potential blocker is other business priorities and the demand on time. It takes firm leadership to get carbon offsetting and sustainability to sit alongside usual work and to then take some action.

Any other comments?

I like the ripple effect that Ecologi encourages where you get some recognition when you have influenced others. Doing something positive needs to become a movement. The very fact you are devoting valuable print space to the topic is commendable as was Zen's talk at Comms Vision, which was not about their business or offerings but gave a clear explanation of how life will be in the UK if we do not step up.

www.ecologi.com



CHANNEL CHAMPIONS

7th July 2022, Regents Park

It's time to recognise your amazing teams!

Channel Champions will return to Regent's Park, London on July 7th 2022 to celebrate the brilliant teams that have performed miracles over the course of another challenging year.

Now's the time to recognise those achievements and hard work by entering your teams into the popular and prestigious Channel Champions Awards process.

The Channel Champions Awards delivers awards across all functions of channel businesses including:

- Sales & Account Management
- Marketing
- Tech Support and Engineering
- People & Culture
- Billing & Finance
- Executive Leadership

There are also special awards for teams that have run quality apprentice schemes, run amazing business events and raised funds for good causes.

Channel Champions offers a unique promotional opportunity to associate your organisation with high achievers. And we have made entering simple and easy to do. Just register on the awards website www.channel-champions.com, which will enable you to view all the categories and download the entry forms.

The entry deadline is May 5th, 2022, so there's plenty of time to enter. If you are shortlisted, you will then join other finalists who will gather at a celebratory summer garden party with the awards ceremony staged in an open marquee followed by networking in the glorious surroundings of London's most elegant Royal Park.

Terry O'Brien, CEO of Channel Champions headline sponsor DWS, commented: "We are so pleased the Comms Dealer team is determined to give people in our industry the event they deserve after working so hard during the pandemic and helping millions of key workers to keep Britain working.

"As headline sponsor of both this event and the Comms National Awards later in the year, we are delighted to play our part in paying tribute to the amazing professionals in our fantastic industry. Staging Channel Champions in the open air with a festival atmosphere make this an event to remember and once again I can't wait," he added.

Channel Champions Event co-ordinator Nigel Sergent said entries will be based on work and activities carried out between March 1st, 2021, and March 1st, 2022.

"This has been another challenging time in the channel's history - when so many teams performed miracles to make sure the UK's crucial organisations could keep working and millions of staff and management across all sectors could embrace flexible working," he said.

"It's been said many times over the course of the last two challenging years, but the ICT sector has been Britain's fourth emergency service during the pandemic, providing vital communications to millions and we aim to reward these heroes again at the Channel Champions event in Regent's Park, which represents a very exciting day for our industry and the highlight event of the summer.



"Given the times we have been through, I am sure all ICT companies will want to take the opportunity to properly acknowledge their teams by entering and with the entry deadline not until May 5th, there's plenty of time to get submissions completed," added Sergent.

Terry O'Brien urges all channel businesses to get involved in the process to recognise teams which do not always get the credit they deserve.

"Winning, or even being shortlisted for these Awards, will bring a huge uplift in morale as everyone feels valued and they can see how their hard work is paying off. Channel Champions will yet again be a fantastic opportunity to recognise the contribution teams have made not only to their business, but to the wider Channel as well."

To enter go to www.channel-champions.com

SPONSORS LINING UP TO RECOGNISE THE CHANNEL'S TREMENDOUS TEAMS



EVOLVE IP

"Evolve IP UK is delighted to be supporting the Channel Champion Awards in 2022. Working with Comms Dealer as a Supplier Sponsor, we thought it was the ideal opportunity to celebrate our partners as they have helped us grow and continue to outperform - year on year. Taking part allows us to highlight our reseller's achievements and gives us the chance to acknowledge everyone's hard work, even during some incredibly hard times."

Paul Harrison, Managing Director EMEA



GAMMA

"It's an honour and a pleasure for Gamma to once again sponsor the 'People and Culture Team' category at the Channel Champions Awards. These awards celebrate many of those teams that don't often receive enough recognition for their hard work. People and culture teams have played an integral part within their business, particularly throughout the past two years, and we're pleased to be able to celebrate their accomplishments at this important event. We will certainly be encouraging teams within the Gamma partner community to enter."

Daryl Pile, Managing Director - Channel



NFON

"NFON is delighted to be supporting this year's Channel Champions awards. As a 100% channel focused business, our partners are at the heart of everything we do. Against the difficult backdrop of the on-going pandemic, the channel rose to the challenge and richly deserves recognition for its role in taking the UK along a road to recovery. We look forward to toasting the winners and, crucially, celebrating the success of our whole industry at this year's award ceremony."

Myles Leach, Managing Director, NFON UK



VIRTUAL 1

"As a wholesale provider, the channel is the lifeblood of Virtual1. So, we are delighted to be supporting the Channel Champions awards once again in 2022. In our highly competitive industry, the end user experience is critical. The Channel Champions are those teams that gallantly deliver on their customer promises, making sure that their service not only succeeds, but is a roaring success. I'm very much looking forward to seeing everyone again at Regents Park to toast to all of the hard work and dedication of the teams across the Channel."

Neil Wilson, Product Strategy Director

Gale's post-Covid plans

The pandemic has brought business leadership into a new realm, according to Sabio CEO Jonathan Gale who gets things done quicker and more decisively these days. Here, he discusses the impact of lockdowns as an accelerator of business growth and as a driver for reassessing strategies and values.

Where Sabio stands is clearer than ever, as lockdowns have helped to bring about a clearer vision and focus on what really matters. "Lockdown taught us to always put employees and customers first, act decisively and quickly and pre-empt and over communicate what we are doing," commented Gale. "I want to ensure we never lose sight of the need to do all of these, all of the time. We also decided to grow our range of skills and capability, and therefore enhance our value proposition to customers through acquisition as well as significant hiring once we cleared the first lockdown. This decision was a good one given that many of our competitors were understandably battering down the hatches, not hiring nor growing."

With the volatility and unpredictability that the pandemic has brought, business leaders and their

executive teams need to constantly be on their toes and to expect the unexpected, pointed out Gale. "That mindset goes against the grain of traditional leadership which is built around structure, strategy and long-term thinking," he added. "The pandemic changed that. Of course, strategic and long-term thinking will always remain. But far more emphasis is now being placed on the here-and-now and trying to ensure the business remains resilient and flourishes in a fast changing world."

Gale believes that the key to executing strategy successfully in the here-and-now is having a motivated and empowered team who know what the strategy is, what the objectives of the company are, what's on strategy and what's not, and they make decisions rapidly, even when the chain of command is not available to sign something off. "It's about acting, not



Jonathan Gale

endless analysis to find the perfect plan or the perfect decision," he added.

Gale also noted that the pandemic forced Sabio to make some firm decisions quickly – like the geographic markets to focus on, the evolution of Sabio's customer value proposition and how to differentiate, for example. "We decided to double down on a few key

relevant, urgent and intense," added Gale. "It lowered switching barriers, reduced internal resistance to rapid change and opened peoples' eyes to just how quickly and seamlessly you could move from rapidly created proof of concepts of innovative AI and automation solutions into fully working deployed solutions across an entire business. We've had ten years of progress in just two. That

It's about acting, not endless analysis to find the perfect plan or the perfect decision

areas of expertise in deep partnership with our clients," explained Gale. "These clients invariably have a lot of customers – most have many millions – they operate in fiercely competitive markets and so providing a better customer experience than their competition is a crucial component of their strategy."

High intensity

The effect of the pandemic was also to intensify inbound volumes of calls, emails, chat sessions, social DMs etc – all went through the roof. "This made the aspects of digitally transforming the CX strategy of our customers even more

does of course give everyone, including our employees and our customers, a new perspective."

Early in his tenure Gale looked at Sabio with a fresh perspective and realised that it needed to add more capability in a number of areas, such as AI, automation and CRM capabilities in particular. As well as this, Sabio had to diversify its partnerships to add some of the newer CCaaS and CPaaS vendors. "Looking at CRM especially, typically you don't tend to find many technology partners who operate with credibility in both the CRM

space and the CC space," commented Gale. "That's mainly because, in the minds of many people, they are substitutional rather than complementary. We don't believe that. In fact, with the right approach they are entirely complementary."

"When you assess the exploding capabilities of CX focused ML, AI and automation solutions then it gets really exciting. It's where these three markets collide that we want to establish Sabio as the leading company for brands looking to positively and digitally transform the customer experience they deliver to their customers."

Being comfortable and confident in his strategy has helped Gale to build an array of capabilities and expertise across a broad set of technologies, processes and areas of specialisation within the CX landscape. "On reflection, our decision to be expansive during lockdowns appears to have worked well for us and our clients," added Gale. "As some organisations remained cautious due to uncertainty around the pandemic, we made a decision to be aggressive in terms of growing our business organically and inorganically."

"With more than 600 customers globally across 65 countries, that gives you a flavour of what we were faced with. Having been pushed as hard as that at the beginning of the pandemic it has to make you better equipped as an individual, as a team and as a business. We are always challenging ourselves and the pandemic has only made us stronger, robust and more resilient." ■

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Power shifts towards applicants in the pursuit for the best talent

The job market is recovering post-Covid with the number of employees on payroll now well exceeding pre-pandemic numbers.

Conversely, acute skills shortages have pushed vacancies to record levels with the number of unfilled roles in the UK currently sitting above 1.1 million.

Considering this mixed picture, we are asking our contributors this month: 'Is the skills issue improving or worsening?'



DAVID GISBORNE
WAVENET

"The IT and telecoms industry, by its very nature, is fast-moving. New technologies are quick to appear and advancing the skills of employees is key to keeping ahead of the exponential technology curve. We focus on preventing a skill gap before one appears. Wavenet is committed to providing opportunities for the next generation whilst also ensuring that we do not experience a gap in skills for our longer-term colleagues. We have invested heavily in a new graduate programme that launched in 2021 and have also taken on apprenticeships for many years. By investing in internal training at all levels, but particularly at a grassroots level, we can ensure that skills are not only present but are nurtured and grow over time. This way, as people become more experienced in their roles, they are encouraged to pass this knowledge on to others."



JEFF MAY
KONTEL

"The jobs market is becoming much more competitive for employers with record numbers of unfilled vacancies due to a combination of factors. Brexit has had an impact in certain sectors but equally the pandemic has made a lot of people re-evaluate their work-life balance. Some have made lifestyle choices of retiring earlier or changing careers for example. There's now a supply and demand market imbalance, with individuals in a much stronger position to demand higher salaries. This means the whole recruitment process can take longer with many companies initially unwilling to pay more than their original expectations. But to attract the best talent they are finding they might now have to. Recruitment and retention are two of the biggest challenges facing the channel. Long-term success rests on nurturing the next generation of leaders and skills. It's important to strike the right balance between experience and youth."



DUNCAN WARD
ENREACH

"We need action from businesses and the government now more than ever to reskill and upskill prospective workers, as the growing skills gap in the workforce has the potential to slow the UK's economic recovery post Covid-19. Most of a company's investment in its people is in rewards, but it's important for employers to train employees in tech and digital to reduce the skills gap which will contribute more value to the company. Of course, employment incentives are successful, and since 2020 a hybrid approach seems to be deemed as one of the most important in recruiting staff. However, we know from a large body of research on organisational behaviour that most people want some level of choice and voice in what they do at work, and individual personal development which leads to greater commitment and increased performance. As leaders, we will continue to take opportunities for training and talent innovation by investing in our team."



DAVE REYNOLDS
XELION

"There are a variety of roles in the ICT channel and the skills set for sales is very different from IT support or development. The differing roles require different remuneration packages and incentives. Salespeople expect to be rewarded on a results basis so it's best to offer a reasonable basic package with big rewards for exceeding on target earning goals. Tech staff do not respond well to results based remuneration packages and need to feel valued in different ways to remain motivated. An important part of senior management responsibility is to provide the appropriate rewards package for everyone. We don't see the workforce becoming significantly younger. Experience is required to become fully effective in most ICT roles. If anything, the move to WFH is encouraging more older people to stay in the ICT employment market. We have had no recruitment issues and it has not inhibited our growth, which has been spectacular in recent years."



CHERIE HOWLETT
JOLA

"There is more competition for the very best people in our industry and companies that have already set their sights high will fare better. This requires a well thought-out and meticulous recruitment process. The company must be 90% sure they have the right person and new candidates must feel they have earned their position and that they will be joining a high performing team that is enjoyable to work in. At Jola we pay market rate salaries, benchmarked regularly by an independent agency. To reward overachievement and loyalty we pay meaningful annual bonuses to all staff against agreed KPIs and every member of staff is invited to share in the increased value of Jola through an EMI share option scheme. We endeavour to keep our team as healthy and motivated as possible with a comprehensive Private Health Plan, Pension, Perkbox, Life Insurance, flexible working practices and generous holidays."



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LEE SUTICH
VERASTAR

“The skills are out there if you understand what candidates want from a role. If you can offer them a bigger picture and a vision for their role within the business, showing them that in the long term they’ll have the opportunity to learn and develop and progress, then you’re on the right track. The package and commission opportunities will always be the bread and butter, and if you aren’t competitive, you’ll soon find yourself losing good people. But more and more we see candidates looking for roles where they feel they can make a difference and see the purpose of what they’re doing. Our mission is to make a difference for small business owners, so that gives them a sense of purpose. We’ve been looking for account manager roles in recent times and see skill requirements shifting away from the harder selling skills towards softer skills and relationship building.”



CRISSI WILLIAMS
ITP

“We all know that the skills gap is old news in our industry. Over the past 12 months we’ve had to re-think the way we recruit. Lack of industry experience amongst candidates is certainly an issue, but we’ve found that hiring based on attitude is becoming more important. Certainly, many apprentices we’ve recruited throughout the pandemic have had no industry experience at all. However, we’re seeing high retention rates among this cohort. Ultimately, it’s a candidate’s market and all employers will need to adapt. They need to look at transferrable skills as opposed to industry experience and consider how they will stay head of the competition when it comes to attracting their future workforce.”



AYSHEA ROBERTSON
ZEN

“Some of our roles at Zen require a certain skillset and these are more challenging to fill. If a candidate is the right fit culturally however, a lack of industry experience should not be overlooked as they can bring new perspectives. Having a solid D&I strategy and being flexible are essential in retaining and recruiting staff. We’ve evolved the wording of our recruitment ads, for example, to appeal to a wider audience that may not have thought of a career in tech. Employees are becoming more circumspect – ‘why should I work for you if you don’t let me share in the success of the business, if you’re not paying me appropriately, appreciating me, recognising me?’. Those channel partners that are ready to embrace these changes with a focus on people as a top priority, will find they have an engaged workforce and that will be an essential driver of success.”



IOAN MCRAE
MAINTEL

“Recruitment issues are not due to lack of skills in the main but are driven by a lack of candidate availability due to multiple similar roles on the market currently. It’s a very competitive market right now! The people we are bringing in are generally of high quality, they’re just harder to find and in greater demand. Our workforces are also becoming younger, especially as we recruit people to work on new technologies that we are bringing to market. Aside from competitive salaries, car allowances and variable commission or bonuses, then flexible working, private medical insurance and a decent pension scheme are successful in retaining and recruiting staff. PMI has become more important and seen a significant rise in candidate expectation since Covid, as has the ability to work from home. A great culture and social events are also key!”



KATIE GIBSON
FOCUS GROUP

“We are seeing fewer employees moving into vertical jobs as significant levels of uncertainty have led to people being risk averse. Length of service and reputation within their current company provides security against a redundancy wave. We’re experiencing recruitment issues in technology as a result. Our industry requires specific skills set, so competition is high for candidates with the right expertise. Salaries are increasing in a bid to secure those vital skills. On a more positive note, we’re witnessing more interest in the technology sector from younger generations and females in particular. As such, the level of available graduates and apprentices is a focus for the future. Flexibility is key. Candidates are shunning the traditional 9-5 structure and looking for work-life balance and autonomy. Social media is also more important than ever; building a positive brand presence to demonstrate to potential employees that you are the company for them.”



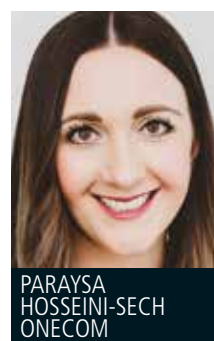
LAUREN MCMANUS
GAMMA

“Recruiting following the pandemic was always going to be a grey area. Nobody knew how quickly businesses would recover, or how soon positions could be filled. On top of that, there has been a power shift in favour of the job seeker. The ‘Great Resignation’ phenomenon has seen employees reconsidering their options and leaving roles for greener pastures. Pastures that embed wellbeing and benefits into their culture and at the forefront of their strategies. Applicants now demand the option for hybrid working – offering them flexibility and a better work/life balance – and why shouldn’t they? Flexible working is fast becoming the job seeker’s prerequisite. The onus is on us as businesses to fulfil these needs and consider our workforces a priority. That’s certainly our focus at Gamma. Catering to these very achievable needs is producing happier, loyal, and more efficient staff and in turn supporting growth.”



OLLIE BENN
NEOCI

“The demand for the right talent has never been higher, but there is not a shortage of skills or experience, the talent exists, it’s just more expensive. Employers have previously been used to a candidate rich market. It was easier to attract candidates that exactly match their job requirement. This is no longer the case. Businesses that made redundancies in 2020 do not want to let go of the staff they’ve retained and are prepared to fight for them. Employers have inadvertently created a candidate driven market. Some are prepared to offer generous salaries to entice the talent they need. Most don’t have deep enough pockets to compete, but their expectations remain the same. Candidates with the right skills are now able to almost dictate their worth, causing many a bidding war. There isn’t a shortage of talent, but more a shortage of willingness to pay for it.”



PARAYSA
HOSSEINI-SECH
ONECOM

“Vacancies are at an all-time high. While there’s plenty of opportunity, there are candidate shortages. And as demand for digital skillsets is increasing, employers are reevaluating. By recruiting across a range of ages, backgrounds and nationalities, employers benefit from fresh skills and a breadth of perspectives. Valuing diversity isn’t just the right thing to do, it’s the smart thing to do. Developing existing talent can deliver new skills. Help people to grow in their role and provide the training and support they need. Employers need to provide value to attract the best talent. Packages should address expectations around work life balance, flexible working and holiday allowances. Wellbeing is topical too, from both a physical and mental health perspective. Our advice to address the skills gap is to be agile; if the past two years have demonstrated anything, it’s the importance of being prepared to adapt to change.”

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Bailie's green lead



Katie McShera

LEEDS-based Bailie Group has appointed Katie McShera as Sustainability Lead. The move follows the company's Planet Mark sustainability accreditation. She joins the business following a 20 year career with debt management charity StepChange.

"As a business we're passionate about making a positive difference," said COO Philip Walter. "In becoming Planet Mark certified we've put our heads above the parapet, making firm environmental and social commitments and ensuring that we're accountable for seeing those through – an element that was particularly important to us."

McShera added: "Initially, my role involves supporting each of the group companies to co-ordinate their sustainability

efforts, providing support and advice as we drive our carbon reduction efforts during 2022. I'll be making sure that our progress – whether that's in terms of emissions or the delivery of social value – is tracked, so that we continuously improve." Bailie Group has pledged to reach net zero by 2050 and to halve emissions by 2030.

Also on the move...

HATS off to KSM Telecom's IT and Infrastructure Technician apprentice Bailey Odling-Thomas who has been appointed Operations Director. He joined the company 17 months ago and made an immediate impact, completing his apprenticeship in December 2021 with a



Bailey Odling-Thomas

Distinction, the same month he turned 20 years old. "Bailey is probably the youngest Ops Director I have experienced in my professional 20-plus year career in telecoms," stated MD Michael Thornton. "That's how much confidence I have in this young man. I urge everyone to explore the power of apprenticeships. There are so many diamonds out there if you look and work hard enough. You have to support them though, help them to grow and develop."

PURE IP's Microsoft Unified Communications capabilities have received a boost following the appointment of Tom Arbuthnot as Solutions Director. The move reflects Pure IP's



Tom Arbuthnot

intention to develop new service lines to complement its existing global voice services. Arbuthnot has been a Microsoft MVP (Most Valuable Professional) for over 10 years and joins Pure IP on a part-time basis. Managing Director Gary Forrest said: "The market is

evolving at pace and we owe it to our customers to continue to evolve with it. Tom will help us realise our ambitions. He brings a wealth of customer knowledge and experience that we intend to translate into new offerings to help our customers get the most out of their technology investments."

JAWAD Bhatti has taken control of Exertis' master data as IT Director, Data & Analytics. He is responsible for overseeing the integrity of data through maintaining business intelligence capabilities. Liz Greenwood, UK IT Director, commented: "Jawad will be instrumental in driving the data and analytics agenda across the business to enable more accurate reporting." Bhatti added: "I am looking forward to making data accessible in a clean, insight driven fashion."

PURE IP's focus on Microsoft Unified Communications has sharpened significantly with the appointment of Tom Arbuthnot as Solutions Director. Arbuthnot has been a Microsoft MVP (Most Valuable Professional) for over 10 years and he joins the company on a part-time basis. Pure IP Managing Director Gary Forrest said: "The market is evolving at pace and we owe it to our customers to continue to evolve with it. Tom will help us realise our ambitions. He brings a wealth of customer knowledge and experience."

Wealthall joins Inform Billing

FORMER 9 Group Partner Business Manager Debbie Wealthall has joined Inform Billing as Head of Sales. She brings 20 years combined comms and billing experience including stints at Union Street Technologies and a large resale business where she was Billing Manager.

"I am excited to dive back into billing where my true passion and expertise lies," enthused Wealthall. "My previous roles in sales, billing and supporting resellers have given me an understanding of what resellers need, meaning I can give valuable advice."

Ellie Allseybrook, Business Development Director at Inform Billing, added: "Debbie has a proven track record supporting resellers with billing. Over the past six months we have seen exceptional levels of demand and Debbie's appointment will enable us to maximise on this potential. Inform Billing has ambitious growth plans over the coming years and we are committed to investing in a strong team to support Debbie."



Debbie Wealthall

Key appointments beef up IntraLAN

TWO top level leadership changes at IntraLAN see Andy Duffen appointed as Financial Director and Gareth Morton promoted to Operations Director.

Duffen's career experience includes a stint as Vice President of Finance at eServGlobal, a mobile financial services provider, and four years

as Finance Director for the UK at Qlik, a business intelligence solution. Morton joined IntraLAN in September 2019 as a Senior Systems Engineer.

CEO Andy Horn commented: "Andy and Gareth add over 40 years of experience to IntraLAN's senior leadership, which is exciting for us as we enter the next phase of our company's growth. It's a thrilling time for the sector in the evolving technology market, supporting companies shifting to a new era of IT management and hybrid working models."



Andy Duffen

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