



How CityFibre champions diversity and inclusion p22

TelcoSwitch gears up for another supercharged year p42



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This month's movers and shakers



Daisy in £210m XLN acquisition

DAISY Group has added over 100,000 small businesses to its base following a £210m (10x EBITDA) deal to acquire small business comms provider XLN, which provides business broadband, phones and card payments.

SPECIAL REPORT

This division of Daisy now boasts in excess of 200,000 customers with combined revenues of over £200m. And the transaction brings a significant IP upgrade opportunity ahead of the PSTN switch off as well as cross sell benefits both ways.

Daisy Chairman Matthew Riley (pictured) stated: "With so much investment across the UK to improve the fibre infrastructure, Daisy is now well

positioned to help unlock the enhanced speed, reliability and security that customers want in their offices and shops.

"There is also a vast opportunity in the creation of jobs as we need more staff to help deliver that service."

Christian Nellesmann, founder and Exec Chairman of XLN, added: "We have been successful in our support of small businesses since our launch in 2002.

"We felt the time was right to hand over the reins to Daisy

which has a track record of investing in and enhancing the businesses it acquires."

The deal sees Nellesmann and XLN CEO Neil Conaghan leave the business.

Philip Carse, Analyst at Megabyte.com, noted: "Daisy continues to reinvent itself with this deal, its most expensive to date versus the £180m paid for Alternative Networks and Phoenix IT, re-establishing itself as one of the largest UK SME comms resellers." >p4



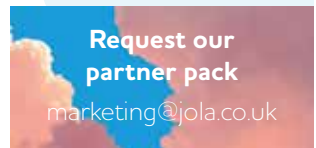
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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

WHATEVER you think of Boris Johnson, and not withstanding the ongoing controversy that snaps at his heels, he is a figure of resilience. On taking over the reins on 24th July 2019 he was faced with the Brexit bear pit that characterised parliament

at the time, and secured a major election win to push the UK's departure from the European Union through. It was a gruelling process.

Just when it was time to draw breath and get full-focused on his agenda for the UK, the world was hit by the once in a century (or more) pandemic. On the eve of that battle being won, Russia invades Ukraine and creates the biggest threat to pan-European peace in decades. Johnson has, perhaps, shown the strongest leadership among all global leaders in rallying the world against this horrific attack.

His feet have barely touched the ground, and even his sternest critics cannot deny the depth of his ability to show resilience when it's needed most. For a man not short of critics, nobody has, as far as can be told, criticised his lack of leadership credentials in this current crisis. The UK was first and loudest in its condemnation of recent events and there will be no let-up through the 'normalisation' of events over time.

In the comms sector, total commitment to business transformation is the order of the day, and many channel partners not yet aligned with the demands of the 2025 PSTN switch off may need to dig deep and find their own resilience and commitment to change in times of business challenge and transformation. Which, in the context of the above, makes this particular leadership challenge a walk in the park.

To help resellers move forward with confidence, our first Channel Forecast Insight Session of 2022 provides a guiding light along the pathway to all IP (see page 28).

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Nimans sold to AV distie

AV DISTRIBUTOR Midwich is to acquire Nimans and its subsidiaries from Nycomm for £27.5m in a bid to bolster its comms and UC play.

Manchester-based Nimans was founded in 1981 and trades with over 2,500 telephony, IT and retail customers and employs over 200 staff.

In its latest audited financial statements for the year ended 31st December 2020 Nimans generated revenues of £114.3m and profit before tax of £5.8m. Net assets (excluding net cash balances) were £11.4m.

Completion is expected in the first half of 2022.

Midwich Group MD Stephen Fenby stated: "Nimans' traditional telecoms market has experienced significant change, bringing new revenue opportunities which the company has developed strongly in areas such as UC, video conferencing, security and networking.

"Nimans brings opportunities in terms of skills in new product and technology areas, service offerings to the trade, a large new customer base and new vendor relationships."

The deal will be funded from Midwich's existing facilities and is expected to be earnings



Stephen Fenby

enhancing in the year to 31st December 2022.

The aggregate consideration of £27.5m will be paid in cash.

The initial consideration of £16.5m payable upon completion of the acquisition will be followed by two fixed installments of £5.5m each after 12 and 24 months respectively.

Fenby commented: "We have known the Nimans team for many years and I know that partnering with Midwich was a big decision for the owners.

"We are delighted that they chose Midwich to continue the legacy of the company's founder Julian Niman."

Richard Carter, Nimans Sales Director, said: "When we met with Midwich the cultural fit was evident from the outset and the product fit is fantastic."

NEWS ROUNDUP

CHESSE' small business customer proposition has been significantly boosted by the acquisition of The Telephone Number Company (TTNC). As well as providing telephone numbers TTNC offers call management packages, cloud numbers, VoIP services, SIP trunks, call tracking and bespoke telephone answering services. Chess CEO David Pollock said: "Small business owners are time poor so need a knowledgeable and efficient technology partner. The addition of The Telephone Number Company will strengthen our capability to deliver end-to-end services to our small business customers."

MANAGED IT Services Group (MITSG) is to kick off a buy a build campaign following a £10m investment from Boost&Co. The Manchester-based company had already bagged Nexbridge, telephone conference call provider Whypay and IT solutions provider Charles Street Solutions. MITSG CFO Mark Allen commented: "With this support from Boost&Co we are in a great position to build on our existing acquisition strategy, enhancing the proposition of the group and accelerating growth."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

IN A BID to accelerate growth of its UK software services business SCC has acquired Civica's Licensing and Cloud Software Lifecycle (LCSL) operation. The deal includes Civica's LCSL team and its customer and partner relationships, and bolsters SCC's software licensing and software asset management (SAM) businesses. SCC CEO James Rigby said: "LCSL services are critical to delivering control of software assets and cloud deployments." Civica CEO Wayne Story added: "As the pace of public sector digitalisation continues to accelerate our investment in innovative software will ensure we capitalise on these opportunities."

JOLA staff have been handed the opportunity to invest in an EMI share scheme which CEO Andrew Dickinson says could produce six figure pay outs for loyal and high performing employees. "We ran a similar scheme at Griffin and it was successful," he said. "Each member of the team has a part to play in the growth of the company. They have individual KPIs and we hold monthly meetings so every member of the team can see where we are against the growth target we are all working towards."

inTEC nets Microsoft specialist

NEWCASTLE-based IT managed services provider Opal IT has been acquired by Gold Microsoft Partner inTEC Group, its 11th acquisition since 2016 and third this year.

The deal extends inTEC's geographical reach into the north east and means it now has office sites in nine locations in the UK and Ireland.

Opal IT was established in 2008 and has a particular focus on Microsoft technologies. The company operates mainly in the private sector and its large corporate clients include Tesco Bank. It also has a presence in the education sector.

inTEC CEO Simon Howitt commented: "The Opal IT team brings additional skills and value and together we will establish a stronger position."

Opal IT MD Andy Metcalfe added: "With our shared values, vision and ethos, this partnership will deliver long-term stability for the business and continue growth and expansion of our operations."



Simon Howitt

Daisy builds on XLN buy

Continued from page one
ACCORDING to Carse the deal at a stroke significantly boosts Daisy's position as one of the leading SME telecoms providers in the UK, and particularly the SoHo/micro-SME element.

And the acquisition comes at time when UK businesses need to prepare for the analogue switch off in 2025, meaning that Daisy has bolted on a big opportunity to capitalise on the high volume small business market in need of an all IP upgrade.

Cracking this segment comes down to an education piece and Daisy says it is primed to help businesses understand the benefits of IP comms and make the transition, and it will be employing more sales and service teams to add support.

"This is not a bad time to be getting its SME/SoHo ducks in a row given major opportunities triggered by the PSTN switch-off and FTTP, as well as IoT/m2m and 5G on the mobile side," added Carse.

"It gives Daisy the ability to cross sell mobile services to the XLN customer base, and XLN's credit card processing services in the opposite direction.

"While XLN's year to March 2021 £20.7m EBITDA

on £65.5m revenues represents a decent uplift against Daisy Group's £73m on revenues of £417m, it represents a far more significant circa two-thirds uplift for Daisy's SMB business, which will now adopt XLN as the SoHo/micro SME brand with significant cross sell opportunities and further consolidation ambitions."

Daisy Communications CEO Dave McGinn commented: "I've always admired XLN's championing of small businesses.

"We will work closely with the XLN team to capitalise on our shared portfolio."

NEWS ROUNDUP

ITVET's green credentials have been ratified by ISO 14001 certification, awarded by the British Standards Institute (BSI). The designation recognises the Bishop's Stortford tech company's implementation of sustainable technology solutions and eco-friendly working practices. As part of this commitment the head office has been retrofitted with IoT sensors and data monitoring features to create an energy efficient smart building. CEO Richard Fountain said: "We have a number of new initiatives in the pipeline. We also offer these services to our clients and suppliers." The new accreditation follows ISO 9001, ISO 27001 and ISO 22031 certification.

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Akixi boosted by investment

CRAWLEY-based Akixi's international expansion and product development ambitions have received a boost following investment from Axiom Equity and True North Advisory and the instatement of a new CEO.

True North Advisory's partners include Mike Tessler and Scott Hoffpauir, the founders and former management team of BroadSoft.

Craig Decker, who previously led BroadSoft in EMEA and subsequently led the Cisco Worldwide Cloud and Hosted Group following Cisco's \$2bn acquisition of BroadSoft in 2018, joins Akixi as CEO.

Decker stated: "Akixi has seen impressive growth over recent years and I will be leading the team to implement the company's growth strategy as we embark on the next chapter."

The call analytics and software provider was founded in 2008. Co-founder Bart Delgado added: "The resources of Axiom and True North provide the rocket fuel that will see Akixi into the future, as we extend our



Craig Decker

analytics solutions deeper into international markets."

Ed Fraser, founder of Axiom Equity, stated: "Our partnership with Craig Decker and the True North team will help Akixi unlock some exciting new growth opportunities."

Akixi has partnerships with over 600 B2B telecoms and IT providers, delivering its services to more than 7,000 customer sites worldwide.

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

NEWS ROUNDUP

VERSION 1 has acquired service design and digital transformation specialist Evoco, its 13th transaction. Evoco is credited with delivering £8m savings across 52 projects for 18 UK public sector customers. The full Evoco team will remain with the business following the merger. The deal follows the acquisition of Belfast-based Neueda.

COVID-19 enforced work from home technology and practices have boosted productivity beyond pre-pandemic outputs, confirmed an ONS report conducted in late 2021. EPOS Sales Director Jane Craven said: "There are many changes being made within businesses to promote productivity, but a core one has been business leaders investing in the right technology solutions to enable easier and more intuitive use of virtual communications and collaboration tools. For instance, a report we published last year revealed that 71% of financial organisations are investing in new audio equipment to facilitate this."

Pangea attributes partner rise to intelligent solutions

PANGEA capped a run of 2021 successes by signing its 400th channel partner at the end of the year.

"We're helping partners move beyond the game of undercutting to help their customers overcome real business challenges and reach tangible outcomes," commented Pangea MD Dan Cunliffe. "Outcomes based on using intelligent mobile data and value added services like static IPs and mobile content filtering."

Also in 2021 Pangea connected 200,000 endpoints across every sector; established a pres-



Dan Cunliffe

ence in its fifth data centre; upgraded its IoT support system with faster response times, new tools, easier reporting, and a smoother experience overall; and joined forces with Daisy

Communications. "Our partner count is growing faster than ever and it's down to intelligent mobile data helping them win deals and boost their revenue," added Cunliffe.

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5 Marketing trends that will shape the telco industry in 2022

2022 looks to be another exciting year for the telecommunications industry, with new innovations continually being developed for UCaaS propositions and seamless enablement of the working environment that it provides.

Offering the latest services in your product portfolio enhances the development efforts that are gaining traction, such as lead generation tools, database management, social selling, video content, and much more. For marketers looking to adopt the latest growing trends in sales and marketing, here are our top 5 that we would recommend for your next marketing strategy.

1. Sales & Marketing Collaboration:

Not so long ago, your best way of creating new sales leads was by cold calling. It was time consuming, gruelling and often not done by a salesperson. Fast forward to 2022, everyone has the ability to have a substantial audience right at their fingertips with little cost involved through social media. Today, successful salespeople reach out to their own prospects, promote themselves, and continually build their audience on social media platforms like LinkedIn. A greater understanding of these marketing concepts will secure the leads they need to lock in more deals.

2. Social Selling:

You might be thinking, 'this is more of a sales trend', but social selling has changed the type of content that marketing teams produce. Content marketing has seen an increase of 187% since 2020, meaning people love expanding their knowledge through a white paper, infographic, video or an article like this. Your sales teams will thank you for the extra content they can leverage when talking to people on their social channels.

3. Automated Processes:

Enhancing customer experience is driven by automating processes. It doesn't always require lots of costs, just triggering an email response from a prompt on your website still improves a customer's journey. Streamlining each engagement step for your customers will further develop their trust in your company. Those who invest in the way their customers interact with them will win.

4. Data-Driven Marketing:

From crayons to calculators, marketers are more driven by data than ever, forever consumed in digital analytics determining their next piece of content thanks to everything being digital. Whether it's for a blog post, a new product release or a new campaign idea, the material will be determined through the data reported on from platforms like Google Analytics, Hubspot or Hootsuite. Because of platforms like these examples, marketers better understand their customers' needs more than ever before.



Alex Green, Marketing Lead at Pragma

5. Engaged through video:

There's no denying that video content has taken the social media world by storm. In 2020 alone, the number of videos uploaded increased by 80% to the year before. The impressive stats speak for themselves, and it's something you definitely shouldn't ignore for your 2022 marketing plans. The biggest driver for video is short-form content. With the popularity of platforms like TikTok and YouTube shorts increasing enormously over the last year, short-form video content has increased by over 140% on 2020. Now we're not saying to go out there and start making company-style TikToks but creating shorter and snappier variants of video content is a great way to keep your audience engaged, regardless of what platform you're pushing it out on.

At Pragma, we get a kick out of going the extra mile to support our resellers whatever the challenges, trends and opportunities in the market. We would love to learn more about your business and how we can play a role in growing your business in 2022 and beyond.

Visit www.wearepragma.co.uk to get in touch.

CX reshaped by AI powered analytics

GRANULAR analytics powered by AI will soon become more prevalent in building a better customer experience, according to Telcoswitch CEO Russell Lux.

The popularity of AI-driven chatbots has grown significantly with younger consumers particularly fond of interacting with companies in this way, but Lux believes AI's transformative potential is bigger.

"The next step is to make better use of AI in communications analytics to help raise the customer experience to the next level," he said.

"The past two years have prompted organisations to invest more into AI-based analytics than ever before.

"Companies that continue embracing this trend are the ones that will prosper."

Lux also pointed out the ability to transcribe speech into text as an example of how to bridge call recordings and data analysis driven by AI.

"Having the capability to spot keywords, phrase patterns and even voice tonality helps build a comprehensive view of customer sentiments and the quality of their interactions," he added. "Capturing both sides



Russell Lux

of a conversation using voice recognition software used to be difficult, but the technology is now capable of separating caller from agent, thereby enabling more granular analysis and allowing the true potential of AI to come to the fore.

"By layering screen and video capture into the mix, the organisation can harness all of this data to build a full profile of interactions between different customers and audiences."

Lux believes that the outlook for businesses in 2022 is far more positive than the last two years, and that it is time to elevate analytics to the top of the agenda. "It's time for leaders to figure out the best ways to unleash the full promise of AI and build a more complete, rounded experience for customers," he said. **See page 42**

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

SMBs call for ISPs to provide more transparency over SLAs

THE performance and service support for Internet connections used by SMBs is largely a mystery to them, according to research commissioned by Spitfire Network Services.

A survey of over 400 UK SMBs showed that 80% of them want their ISPs to be more transparent about SLAs.

Businesses were also surveyed on whether or not knowing the SLAs for an Internet

connection would help them choose the right product in the purchasing process. Over three quarters (79%) of SMBs said that it would.

"There are a myriad of choices for Internet connectivity these days," commented Dominic Norton, Sales Director, Spitfire Network Services.

"SLAs are key in helping businesses to understand what they are buying and then make

the right decision. What's clear from the survey is that SMBs want both performance and service level agreements to be openly discussed and visible from the very beginning.

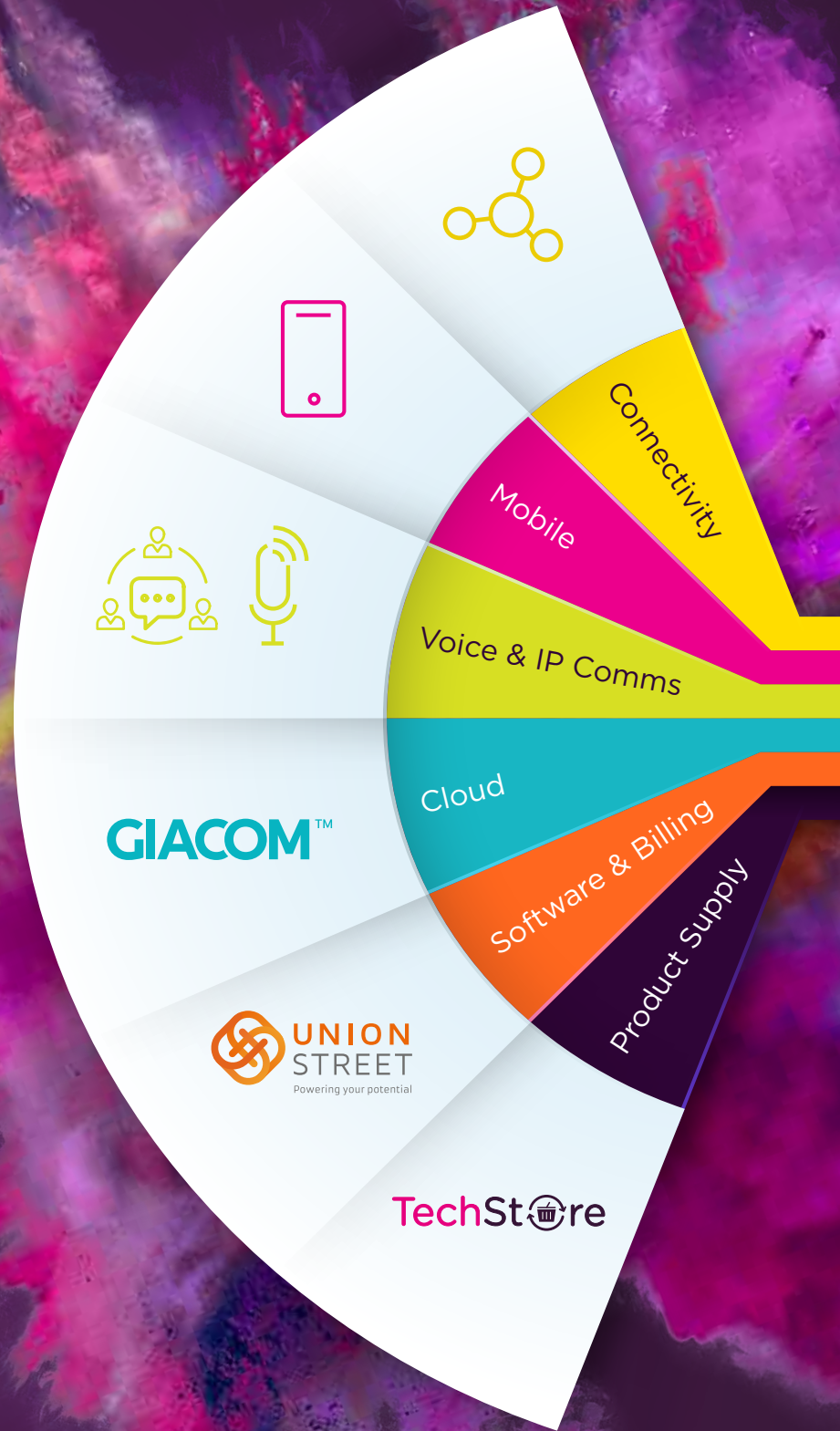
"We wouldn't buy any other product or service without being made aware of the guarantees or refund policy.

"So why should ISPs not be fully transparent with customers about Internet connections?"

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The part Mobile Data plays in

We interviewed the Jola Exec Team to get their view on the size of the opportunity and why resellers need to choose a mobile data aggregator to support customers through the transition.

What's the market opportunity?

"According to Statista, there are over 29.3m PSTN lines and over 4.2m ISDN lines in the UK. Every residential customer with a PSTN line will need to move to an alternative solution to continue making calls on a landline and accessing the internet. Every business in the UK will need to review their internal communications and replace both PSTN and ISDN lines.

When reviewing fixed line connectivity options, your customers may find that they can get faster speeds more cost-effectively using 4G/5G routers and a data SIM card. They won't need to wait long for services to be installed or go live. They can usually have a plug-and-play solution delivered and live the next working day.

There are millions of PSTN lines that won't be able to use a SoGEA or FTTP type replacement due to costs, incompatibility or logistical challenges. Mobile data will be a requirement for customers replacing PSTN lines for lift emergency calling, alarm signalling, telecare and many other applications." Cherie Howlett, CMO.

What's the technical solution?

"Jola has two Toolkits for resellers, the PSTN Replacement Toolkit and the ISDN Replacement Toolkit.

The PSTN Replacement Toolkit contains a choice of connectivity (Fixed Line, Mobile, Leased Line), voice over GSM or voice over SIP. It also includes cellular or SIP gateway hardware, options for either porting existing numbers or adding new UK numbers.

The ISDN Replacement Toolkit comprises SIP Trunks (including bundled inclusive calls or unbundled



Cherie Howlett

wholesale pricing), resilient SIP trunk options (resilient server side and/or client side), and flexible inbound and outbound routing. UK, international and non-geographic number porting is provided via portal or API. We are even expert at managing porting for Microsoft Teams Direct.

Everything is managed through our fully-automated portal, SIP Manager, and our Toolkits are all Jola partners need when quoting to replace existing PSTN or ISDN solutions." Adrian Sunderland, CTO.

What's the proposition and how easy is it to sell?

"Typically customers are paying around £9 pcm for a phone line. SOGEA is almost double the monthly price and comes with installation charges of around £200. With LTE you will need to buy a router for around £100 but a 500MB MultiNet SIM is less than £2 pcm. Add in a SIP overlay for £2.50 pcm and the cost saving over a 36-month term is significant. Your customers are saving



Adrian Sunderland

money and hassle, with a solution that is easy to sell, provision, manage and bill.

Case Studies

Intruder alarm monitoring

Our partner has a customer with 13,000 PSTN lines used to monitor intruder alarms and fire alarms in properties, both commercial and residential, all over the UK. We suggested a Dual SIM Robustel Router with dual MultiNet SIMs for resilience and a 500MB aggregated pool of data to be shared across all sites. We added a Private APN to the solution to ensure secure remote access to each device. The solution we provided met the security standards required and by sending pre-configured routers to site we were able to ensure a smooth set up process for engineers, a great margin for our partner and reduced costs for the end-customer. The end customer saved around £90,000 in monthly rentals and nearly £2m in set-up charges. Jola included some software customisation to make the Robustel



Lee Broxson

routers 100% plug-and-play and the partner took a £1.2m pa contract at an average margin of 40%.

Taxi Freephone and Info Call Points

There are a significant number of phone boxes in hospitals, supermarkets and hotels allowing you to book a taxi or receive information for free. Each one of these call points will need to be upgraded as they will no longer work after the PSTN Switch-off. We had a partner who won a deal to upgrade 650 analogue call points in hospitals, hotels and hospitality venues. The biggest challenge they faced was the high upfront costs of replacing the hardware. We provided Robustel routers with an Analogue Telephone Adaptors (ATA) SIP Overlay service and calls over IP. The customer opted for MultiNet SIMs with pooled data to be shared across all sites. The partner won a £600,000 annual contract and the end customer saved over £13,000 a month and nearly £200,000 in CAPEX" Lee Broxson, CSO.

in the PSTN/ISDN Switch-off

How easy is it to provision, support and bill?

"Our solutions are really easy to provision, support and bill. We have two fully automated, white label management portals, SIP Manager™ and Mobile Manager®, so partners have complete control over every element of their customers' network. We connect in real-time with suppliers, and partners' own portals, via APIs and we even include a Tariff Tool® to price data SIM options in seconds. We take very few calls about SIP or Mobile. Each portal has its own reporting and monitoring and we train our partners to manage estates directly for end users without needing to pick up the phone to us. We run monthly webinars and have developed an extensive Knowledgebase online, with helpful user guides, hints and tips. We control our own gateways and number ranges, so we manage the porting for our partners



Rob Stevens

covering PSTN, IP and mobile networks." Rob Stevens, COO.

What sort of margins can resellers expect?

"Resellers can expect healthy margins from these solutions and still win the deal, as 4G is significantly more cost-effective than SoGEA. Our solutions provide resellers with high recurring revenue and recurring margins without the need for large CAPEX or OPEX investment. Recurring revenue businesses are more attractive to investors, especially when they can demonstrate high growth and low recurring costs. EBITDA multiples are currently significantly higher than for fixed lines, so you're



Ronnie Smith

increasing your Enterprise Value as well as saving your customers money." Ronnie Smith, CFO.

What should partners look for in a mobile data supplier?

Choose an aggregator

"Jola is a multi-award-winning MVNO and mobile data aggregator, which means we offer services from all the major UK networks and hundreds of networks globally. We sell a wide range of options, including Fixed IP and Private APN, and we are a well-established, channel-only company. On average, we launch two new products and product extensions every month, so you will always have a differentiated offering to resist being commoditised. We have our own IP addresses and number ranges, and our superfast HA network runs over Cloudflare, the world's #1 DDoS protection company.

Choose an automated management portal

We give you complete control over your global SIM estate with Mobile Manager®, which has been developed over eight years into an award-winning, market leading portal. Should you wish, your



Andrew Dickinson

customers can also have access to our white-label portal so they can see directly how much data they are using in each device and make decisions accordingly. We help you uncover opportunities and win them, with solutions end users just cannot buy from anyone else. Our objective is to help you reduce churn, increase ARPU and improve the overall value of your business.

Make sure you can bill and support solutions easily

We work with partners to help them overcome the traditional pitfalls in billing and support, to ensure your customers remain happy with the solution they have bought from you, and continue to buy from you.

Conclusion

There is high demand for mobile data from UK SMEs and yet still only around 20% of resellers have productised M2M/IoT. It is an easy product to sell, provision, support and bill, and sites can be up and producing revenue in days rather than months. We have partners who have doubled the value of their businesses, increased their ARPU and reduced churn by adding mobile data to their portfolio." Andrew Dickinson, CEO.



For more information go to: www.jola.co.uk
or call: 0115 822 5000 or email: sales@jola.co.uk



NEWS ROUNDUP

JOLA'S SIP and PSTN replacement services have been bolstered following its acquisition of Zapappi. The deal includes Zapappi's network, SIP management platform and suite of porting tools. "We've worked closely with Jola for a number of years," said Zapappi CEO Ben Merrills. "Its 1,000-plus partners are prospects for Zapappi products and our technology completes the Jola portfolio."

A CONTRACT that could see £150m spent over 15 years to transform north Lanarkshire's digital infrastructure and connectivity has been won by Commsworld. Councillor Kenneth Duffy said: "The potential impact of this cannot be underestimated in delivering a GVA of around £1.3bn over 15 years."

FIDELITY Group has achieved a BSI quality kitemark within six months following record levels of investment into its Anvil billing system. Transformation Director Ian McNamara says the entire company got behind the drive to achieve the accolade. "To attain the certification in under six months from a standing start was a massive achievement which involved the buy-in of all employees," he said.

Barrall hails two decades



Team Telecoms World celebrates 20 years

KENT-based telecoms solutions provider Telecoms World acknowledged 20 years in business with a staff party to celebrate its continued growth and success in the numbers game.

The inbound call solutions specialist now has 2.95 million numbers in its network and provides numbers for anti-drugs campaign Talk to Frank, several NHS divisions, Transport for London and even provided the 'Who you gonna call?' number for the latest Ghostbusters film.

The company also offers thousands of numbers for charities and non-profit organisations such as Cancer Research UK and Dementia UK.

This can include bespoke location-based call routing to identify the caller's location and lead them to the right place; and freephone and easy to remember and promote numbers ensuring instant access to available options are also offered.

"We are one of the few telecoms companies with a five-star rating on Trustpilot and we've garnered over 1,000 five-star reviews," said MD Neil Barrall.

"Our focus remains the same today as it did in 2002, to support businesses with simple and cost-effective solutions."

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

Fidelity in rugby club team up

FIDELITY Group has teamed up with Leicester Tigers to help the Premiership rugby giants launch a telecoms business.

Tigers Telecoms is offering business customers exclusive offers and tariffs on all telecom services in partnership with Fidelity, along with raising funding for the Leicester Tigers Foundation which makes a positive difference to thousands of individuals and groups.

"We have a strong foundation in the Leicester area via local company RDC Communications which we acquired four years ago," said Marketing Manager Niki Foote.

"We extended the relationship it had with the Tigers to get Tiger Telecoms off the ground. Our team are on standby to provide complimentary telecoms health checks for the local business community. Every company signing for Tiger Telecoms will receive two complimentary tickets to the Clubhouse Lounge to watch a home game which is a great bonus."



Niki Foote

Swedish investor buys ETB

DUMFRIESSHIRE-based reseller of refurbished servers, storage and network kit ETB Technologies has been majority acquired by Swedish investment company Röko.

"We have built ETB into a multi-million-pound business and a major employer in the south of Scotland," said ETB Technologies MD Nick Stapleton, who remains in his role.

"As we have grown, this has attracted more customers internationally with 40% of our customers based in the EU.

"While ETB has previously attracted investor interest, it was a must for me that any partner would support our growth while allowing us to retain our culture and independence.

"Bringing Röko on board will not only add to the company's financial strength, it will also support our growth internationally while allowing us to continue operations as they currently exist."

Tomas Billing, founder and Chairman at Röko, and Anders Nordby, investment manager for Norway and the UK at Röko will join the ETB Technologies board. There will be no other structural or operational changes to the business.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

CYBERSECURITY services provider Caretower has been acquired by Integrity360 creating a £70m-plus revenue entity. The financials of the deal were not disclosed.

Caretower began its commercial life in 1998 and generated sales of circa £28m in 2021. It operates from offices in London and Sofia, Bulgaria. The transaction marks the next phase of Integrity360's pan-European expansion plan. Commenting on the deal, Ian Brown, Executive Chairman at Integrity360, said: "The enhanced group is now clearly positioned as a leading independent cybersecurity services specialist throughout the UK and Ireland. With over 300 employees including 200 cybersecurity engineers, analysts, consultants and specialists the group provides a one-stop-shop for business organisations for all their cybersecurity needs."

Intelligent mobile data to open up IoT possibilities

THE Internet of Things is misunderstood and represents a far bigger opportunity for the channel than resellers realise, according to Daisy Partner Business Director Julien Parven.

He believes the big margin maker that sits in IoT solutions is intelligent mobile data.

"IoT has been around for some time, associated with the ability to connect 'things', but with such a broad scope it has always been difficult for many to comprehend its application," he commented.

"People assume IoT is just a means of transferring small packets of switched data. As a result, its place within the channel has always been confusing and unclear, with partners assuming that simple packet-switched data transfer is low



Julien Parven

cost, low value and therefore of little consideration.

"Intelligent mobile data goes a long way to crystallise things and dispel these misconceptions by productising the broad IoT spectrum and delivering an application layer which, with the interpretation of the data, creates solutions."

Some of the applications Parven believes resellers should be exploring include smart waste bins that tell refuse operators when they're full; livestock monitors that inform farmers if animals are grazing in the right places, have not strayed into other fields or have not moved, which could indicate

they are in distress; intelligent vending machines that tell retail units when their products need replenishing, thereby eradicating wasted visits; and vehicle safety solutions that advise businesses if fleet vehicles are on track for deliveries, are avoiding traffic jams, finding parking places and driving safely.

"Data allowances vary dependent upon the application and can be flexed at will, across multiple carriers and territories," added Parven.

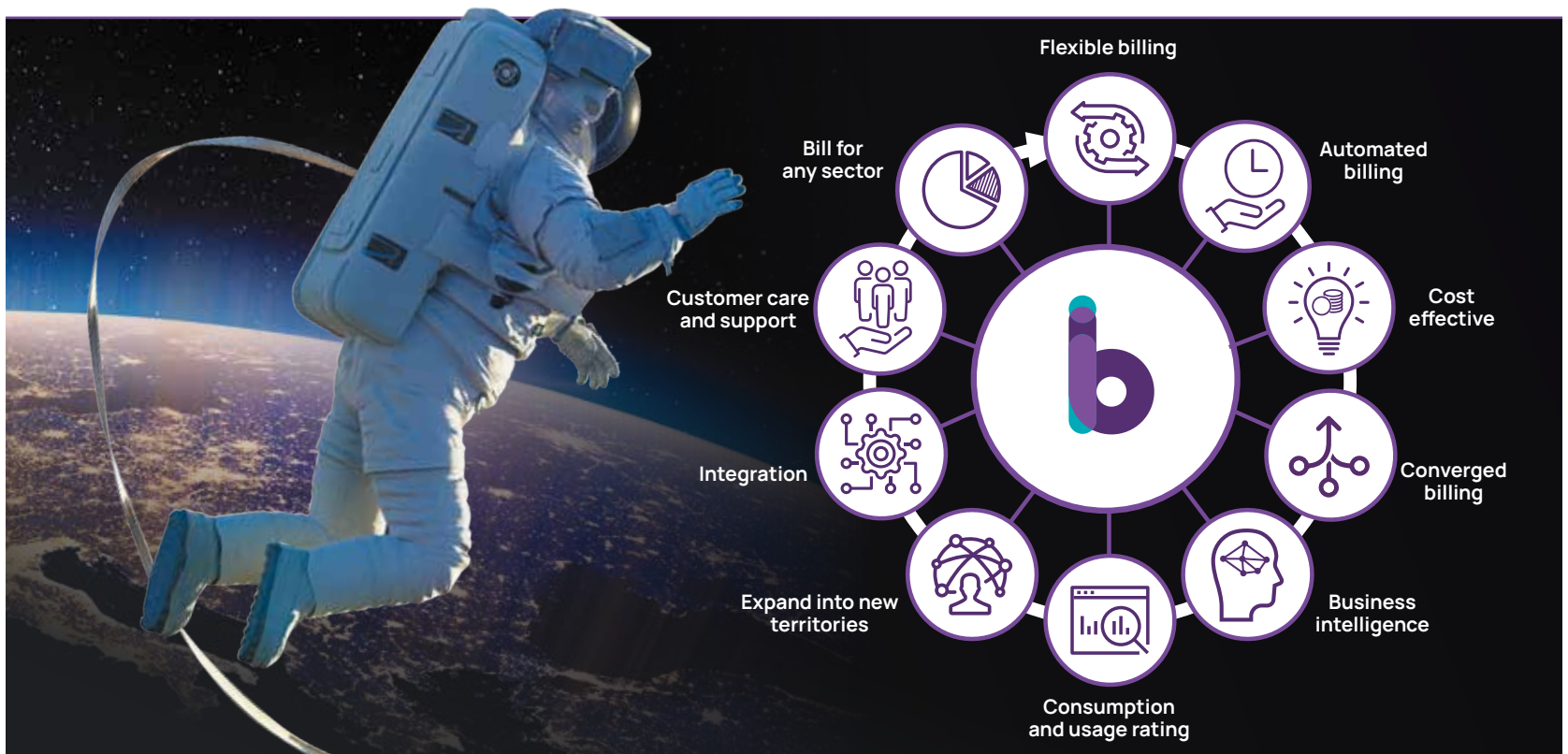
"It's time for resellers to open their eyes to the myriad of services supported once this simple data transfer is transformed with the introduction of intelligence," he added.

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Should you ask their current salary?



Darrol Stevens and Ollie Benn

Recently, a client of neoci told us that they do not wish to know the current salary of any candidates we send to them.

Their reason? Diversity and Inclusion.

It was a refreshing thing to hear. It's unusual for a company to say this, but it really shouldn't be.

Their stance is that it doesn't matter what salary someone is currently earning, what matters to them is whether they believe the candidate has the relevant skills and experience for their vacancy. If the candidate is the right fit, then they will pay them what they think they're worth.

This approach to hiring is in stark contrast to what we are used to. Most employers and recruiters want to know a candidate's current salary and their salary expectations. This very much dictates the offer they receive. Most employers are happy to offer an increased salary, but usually only around 10%.

This can cause an issue for anyone who is being underpaid in their current role. Once an interviewer discovers what their current salary is, they will usually align their offer to it. It makes business

sense of course! Employee salaries are usually the most expensive cost to any business.

A company will always seize the opportunity to reduce their costs. What it does though, is stifle people's earning potential and they can be stuck on a low salary for a long time, which, let's face it, is unfair and will potentially affect their loyalty and longevity in the role.

The fact that our client is taking diversity & inclusion so seriously when hiring is highly admirable. But how many other employers have this in mind when they hire?

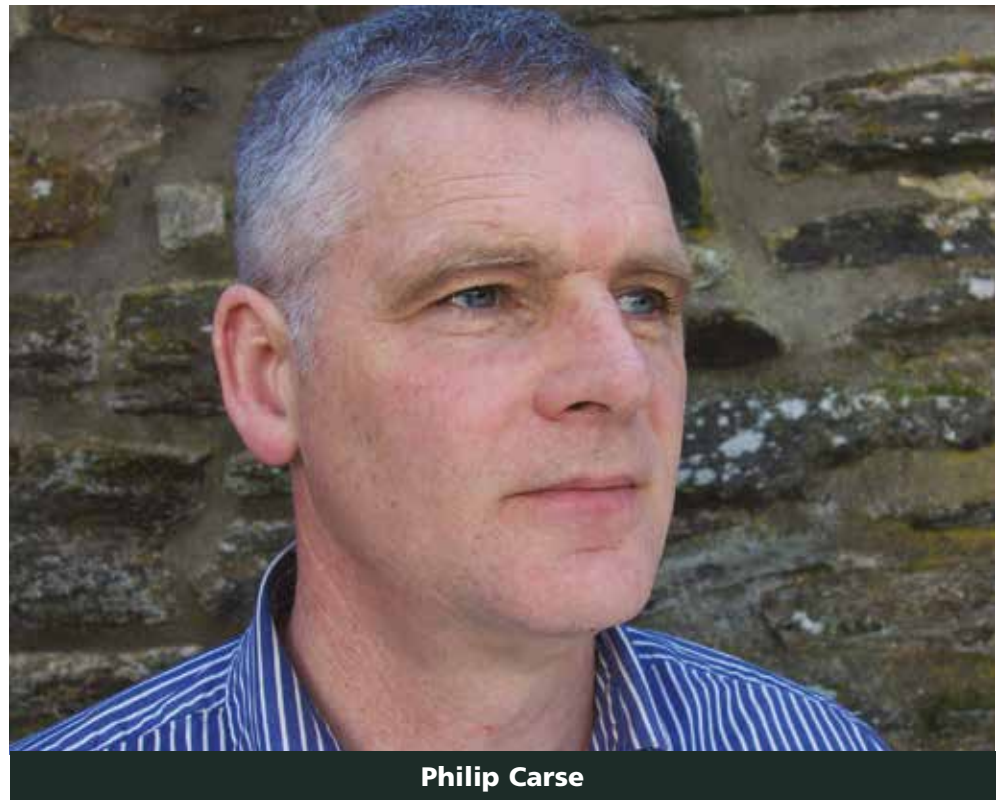
Diversity & inclusion is of course a much wider subject than just pay, but when something so important is being restricted because of your current circumstance, something needs to change.

At neoci, we believe that paying people what they are worth, or what their job is worth is key. This is especially the case in a market where candidates are in the driving seat and being competitive with the salary & package your offer is now more important than ever.

Neoci are specialists in recruiting into tech and telco, for further details visit www.neoci.co.uk

Spotlight on telcos

The FTTP land grab is gathering momentum while Covid-19 factors deliver a mixed picture for telcos amid a dipping M&A landscape, writes Philip Carse, Analyst at Megabuyte.com.



Philip Carse

Recent results, while still resilient, show continued modest pandemic impacts

FTTP continues to dominate UK telecoms headlines with an estimated £850m raised in debt and equity by altnets through the fourth quarter of 2021, and £284 million so far in 2022, with the significant industry spend also driving trading and M&A in telecoms support services. However, few altnets have yet to prove they can convert premises passed to paying customers. General trading continued to be impacted by the pandemic and associated supply chain and skill shortages,

but some players continue to knock the ball out of the park. Finally, M&A and private equity investments have slowed, but with some interesting examples.

FTTP land grab

The FTTP land grab continues to attract new players/ investors and upgraded funding/targets by existing players. We estimate a total of circa £410 million committed to new builds/ first sizeable funding rounds in the fourth quarter for Broadway (£145 million, Downing LLP, rural Wales

and Scotland), Netomnia (£123 million, various), Digital Infrastructure (£100m from Basalt) and MS3 (estimated £40-50 million from Asterion, Hull focus). This was supplemented with follow-on rounds totalling £440 million for LightSpeed (£60 million from Sequoia), toob (£87.5 million, also from Sequoia), Airband (£100 million debt) and Gigaclear (£190 million debt).

Meanwhile, so far in 2022, new builds have attracted another £184 million for Borderlink (£164 million from

ends in comms

Gresham, Scottish Borders) and Lothian Broadband (£20 million from SNIB), while there was a top up for Truespeed (£100m from Aviva). Meanwhile, Community Fibre more than doubled its premises target to 2.2 million homes in London by the end of 2024 compared to a total premise target (including businesses) of one million premises by 2023 previously. At the latest count, there are 51 FTTP players targeting 73.5

Despite the pandemic, some telecoms companies achieve strong organic growth

million UK premises, versus 32m actual premises, led by BT (25 million), Virgin Media O2 (17.5 million), CityFibre (eight million) and Hyperoptic (five million).

But not yet customer grab

While FTTP altnets are attracting funding and building out networks, few are yet proving their ability to convert premises passed to paying customers. For example, G.Network's accounts to March 2021 revealed just 3,477 paying customers, or a two per cent penetration of its 180,000 premises passed, and Netomnia revealed 4,000 customers versus 75,000 premises passed currently. Voneus' accounts to March 2021 show £1.1 million revenues versus £4.5 million gross fixed asset value at the start of the year, and Airband (to December 2021) £2.1 million versus £21.7 million. Longer established rural builder Gigaclear at December 2020 had customer penetration of 25 per cent of ready for service premises (36,000

versus 146,000), but it had £14.1 million revenues on £258 million of gross assets, so still barely more than a five per cent asset turnover. The challenge of both building networks and signing customers is starting to lead to some throwing in the towel. The latest example is Swish Fibre rescuing People's Fibre.

Support services boost

Heavy spending on FTTP (and also 4G and 5G)

networks is unsurprisingly proving lucrative for many support services businesses, highlighted nicely by owner managed Light Source (accounts to March 2021 showing EBITDA up 38 per cent to £3.1 million on revenues up 79 per cent to £48.5 million, with 24 per cent revenue growth guided for this year). It is also driving strategic M&A, the most recent example being telent's acquisition of Harlequin Group, bringing mobile and fixed line site acquisition, town and country planning, community relations, estates management, valuation, technical surveys, civil and electrical design and site build services. We estimate £10 million revenues versus telent's £472 million.

Pandemic still impacting trading

Recent results, while still resilient, show continued modest pandemic impacts, whether due to partial lockdowns/restrictions, supply chain issues or skills shortages. For example, BT reduced its year to March

2022 revenue growth guidance from 'broadly flat' to down circa two per cent though maintained EBITDA guidance (£7.5-7.7 billion versus £7.487 billion last year) due to cost control.

Slowing M&A and PE activity

The start of the fourth quarter saw considerable M&A activity by PE and debt funded resellers, including bolt-ons by the usual suspects Wavenet, Croft, Onecom, Focus, Babble, Telaplant and Arrow, but the only similar deals recorded in December 2021 or January 2022 were by Onecom and Southern Comms. However, there have been some significant deals, including connectivity focused FluidOne/SAS (50 per cent revenue uplift), while two of the aforementioned resellers did chunky deals – Wavenet/Excell – one third EBITDA uplift; and Arrow/Circle – one quarter EBITDA uplift.

Meanwhile, telcos continue to be sellers rather than buyers of data centre assets, with Liberty Global/DigitalBridge/DRT-backed AtlasEdge buying 12 data centres from telco COLT (estimated £280 million value) and Antin-backed Pulsant buying M247's Manchester data centre (estimated £4 million), both to support edge computing strategies. Finally, a recent slump in M&A volumes is matched by muted direct private equity activity (as opposed to M&A via portfolio companies). Indeed, the one significant deal involved a PE exit, with management of Southern Comms buying out Livingbridge's minority stake with debt from Ares (estimated £355m/13x run rate EBITDA).

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A challenger set on winning

Hyperoptic has entered acceleration and scale up mode, and with a fresh set of priorities Managing Director for Infrastructure Lisa Neale is firmly in the connectivity race and relishes the challenge.

In November 2021 Neale was appointed by Hyperoptic as Managing Director – Infrastructure to ensure it achieves its network roll out ambitions. Neale’s prior experience includes several leadership roles at Openreach, including most recently the Director of Fibre Build in UK East, and Director of Fibre and Network Delivery in UK West. “I was looking for my next challenge in the wider fibre infrastructure space,” stated Neale. “We are in a race to build – to get there first and finish first and then attract customers onto the network. I will be able to add a lot of value from consolidating everything I have learnt through my career.”

Neale’s current priorities include getting her division set up to lead the race. “It functions well but I want it supercharged to scale,” she said. “This means meeting all the right people to get all the right information. It’s crucial to listen before making any decisions, and it’s critical to ensure we have the right external partners and internal team all bought-in to support what we need to achieve. Ultimately, we will become a predictable delivery machine.”

For the last ten years Hyperoptic has been at the forefront of the shift to Gigabit Britain and claims to be the first ISP to trial a 10Gb residential connection. The business



Lisa Neale

We are in a race to build – to get there first and finish first and then attract customers onto the network

was founded by Dana Tobak in 2011 with her business partner, Boris Ivanovic. Before Hyperoptic, they started and managed Be Broadband in 2005/6 prior to its acquisition by O2. Be launched ADSL 2+ in the UK and offered Annex M for an increased upload speed. “But they knew that

copper-based technologies would never truly deliver the speeds that people would need in future,” commented Neale. “They could see the huge market opportunity for superior, faster and consistent connectivity and always had a full fibre company in mind for their next venture.

“It seems incredible that back in the Be Broadband days they were frequently asked why anyone would ever need 24Mbps. Look at the market now and how things have moved on. No one ever questions why anyone would need 1Gb services. Instead, with so many devices and

great services to use them on, the most frequent question they receive is ‘when are you coming to our area?’”

Historically, the broadband market in the UK was crowded but mainly by suppliers offering the same products and services,

Winning the race

according to Neale. "UK consumers were starved for choice," she added. "And the phrase 'superfast fibre broadband' is misleading. In many cases the fibre stops at the cabinet at the end of the street. The actual connection into the home is delivered over copper which means that users rarely get the advertised speeds – and the performance is subject to distance."

Speed matters

Hyperoptic's approach is FTTP infrastructure gigabit-capable broadband with average speeds of up to 900Mbps. Its services are delivered via its own dedicated fibre network, which means, says Neale, that customers can always connect to the Internet at the speeds advertised. "HD movies can be downloaded in less than one minute and 4K content can be downloaded in minutes," she said. "The biggest macro trend is the global, and UK's, increasing need for fast and reliable connectivity. The infrastructure needs to keep up with demand."

Hyperoptic employs over 1,500 staff and turnover for the year ended 31st December 2020 was £51.7 million (2019: £39.2 million), up 32 per cent (2019: 46 per cent). This represents revenue from subscribers in new homes passed as well as an increase in penetration in the existing network. Its services are available across 57 UK towns and cities.

"The objective is to build smart and deliver shareholder value by ensuring we are building out our network where there is strong demand and we can sell services," explained Neale. "A key challenge the whole

market is facing is access to skilled resources, from direct labour to third parties. Fixing this will require lowering the barriers to entry – from both a personnel and technology perspective, and also enabling the roles to be as flexible as possible."

Another key part of Neales' role involves collaborating with the senior team on new innovative tools and techniques that will help fast track the roll out schedules. "Two technologies are currently interesting me," she said. "The shift to ribbonised fibre: As the fibre is already split it's helping to speed up our delivery of feeder networks. I'm also impressed with new connectorised technologies. Because it's basically plug-and-play it requires much less interventions."

Many successful woman in ICT have met challenges on their career path because of their gender, but Neale didn't even think about her gender until women in tech became a topic about ten years ago. "I certainly have never felt discriminated against because of my gender," she said. "In fact, the only challenge I can think of is that there is often a lack of female toilets in telephone exchanges!

"However, I do fully appreciate that I have been lucky. I've heard some horror stories from other women in the comms sector and I recognise that I need to represent and be the change I want to see, which means using my voice to help others. That means making our industry attractive and reflective of the populous that we serve, across all groups such as gender, class and neurodiversity." ■

Just a minute with Lisa Neale...

Role models: I'm a Leicester City FC fan so I would have to say Claudio Ranieri as he led us to our first ever league title in 2015-16, despite us being favourites for relegation. He's a legend!

Your biggest fear? Pigeons.

Best advice you have been given? Always be yourself. When you leave the front door don't put on a different face.

In hindsight: I wouldn't have gone to university if apprenticeships were as good as they are now. It's a valuable career pathway that deserves investment and respect from industry.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I play the trumpet. I studied Computer Science and Music at university because I couldn't choose!

Name three ideal dinner guests: Claudio Ranieri, my absolute hero; Roisin Murphy, I love her music; and Albert Einstein.

The biggest risk you have taken: I like to take a risk. Throughout my career I have never chosen the comfortable path and taken jobs that help me challenge and develop myself.

How would you like to be remembered? As someone who is people centric, compassionate and thoughtful.

What possession could you not live without? My phone – it has my photos!

Lessons learnt: I learned something from every role and boss I had. It's important to always think positively and only regret the things you haven't done.

How do you relax? As a mum to a 16 month old toddler relaxation has left my vocabulary! In those rare instances I enjoy getting lost in a good novel.

Flexibility and why it is the most important component of cloud communications

For the inaugural discussion in Evolve IP's new series, Collaboration Lab, we will be discussing flexibility. Flexible communication should be a priority when a business is providing a communications strategy to their customers, team members, or service providers.

It is paramount that the systems you choose for your customer has the

IP support this using Webex and MS Teams solutions.

Collaboration tools should speak to, and work with, one another. These tools should give you the option to add and remove what you need, enabling you to offer the right service to your Customer.

Unified communications can no longer be an out of the box offering. This is



"Evolve IP understands businesses need flexibility in order to meet customer expectations. As a global collaborations provider, we've built an ecosystem that supports this."

Paul Harrison, Managing Director EMEA - Evolve IP

flexibility to adapt to their business' unique customer service needs. This is where Evolve IP's white-label solution shines. We build our solutions with the end-user in mind.

Why is flexibility important?

As a vendor, Evolve IP, remains ahead of the tide when it comes to providing innovative technologies that your customer needs. Expectations are high within the cloud communications industry and businesses are expected to offer increasingly better systems for users.

However, the last thing you want is for flexibility to become overly complicated. Sometimes, defining the best solution fit for your customers' business means saying no. But, when you do, you should have the knowledge to say why certain solutions are not an option. Having a vendor and technical team to support you will always make that journey easier.

How collaboration providers should support flexibility

Collaboration systems should allow you to offer your customers a wide range of options, including, Analytics, Reporting, App Integrations, Call Recording, Contact Center, Omnichannel, Voice and Video. Evolve

something that Evolve IP stands by. Your business should be able to offer your customers simple, secure, and reliable solutions – using only the elements the customer needs.

Flexibility in the hybrid work environment

Never has flexibility been such a hot topic of conversation. Staff want the flexibility to work where they want, employers need to put in place flexible technologies and systems, customers need flexibility with how they communicate, and businesses want flexibility with what, and how, they use their cloud communication services.

The post-pandemic work environment has evolved and it's integral that global collaboration providers evolve too. Evolve IP is designed to advance today's hybrid workplace and help make the future of work better for everyone.

We hope you enjoyed the first instalment of Evolve IP's Communication Lab. We look forward to sharing more insights with you in future editions.

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Keeping one step ahead

To stay abreast of developments in the fast moving billing sector product plans and roadmaps need to be evolving continuously. Here, PRD Technologies Managing Director Simon Adams shares insights into where his strategic vision and focus lies in the months and years ahead.



Simon Adams

Adams predicts big changes in the comms channel billing world over the coming years, due to the rapid diversification within the channel and the need to respond with smarter billing and business intelligence. "Complex product innovations that help comms resellers stay ahead must be supported by their billing platform," he stated. "Automations and integrations will rapidly become a necessity to handle these growing complexities and challenges. Our main focus over the next year will be to automate all data and billing processes where possible, alongside further API integration developments."

PRD's API capabilities already enable integrations to many third party systems including NetSuite, ConnectWise, GoCardless, MS Dynamics and leading accounting and banking systems. "This enables us to gather data from multiple systems to our single converged automated

platform," stated Adams. "We will also be developing more business intelligence in the form of insightful data analysis and reporting. We see this as crucial for customers to quickly identify what is and isn't working and modify their business strategy accordingly."

Based on current enquiries, fibre broadband is also one of PRD's biggest opportunities. "These projects tend to have high volume invoice requirements along with API integrations to reduce or eliminate manual data exchange between systems and the risks of human error," said Adams. "We are currently working on several new fibre broadband billing projects."

The UC and cloud comms markets are also growing at a rapid rate, noted Adams, and at the request of one of its existing customers, Westcoast Cloud, PRD developed a bespoke solution for its 700 strong VAR network to address the complexities of VAR data processing and

billing within one converged system. "Working in conjunction with Westcoast Cloud this will be one of our other key target markets over the coming year, to roll this technology out to its VAR network and the

Automations and integrations will rapidly become a necessity to handle growing complexities and challenges

wider distributor/VAR sector. Other markets on our radar include Fintech, subscription services, gaming, SaaS and DaaS. One of our corporate technology customers already uses Intelligent Billing to process and onwards bill DaaS data to IT distributors."

Diversification

Adams noted that more telecoms providers and resellers are diversifying into new markets, especially cloud services such as Azure consumables and licenses. "As a result, we have developed a cloud services

version of Intelligent Billing which can be implemented as either a converged telecoms platform or a separate platform," he added. "One of our key target markets over the next 12 months will be businesses expanding

into the CSP space reselling cloud consumption MS licenses and subscriptions. We're also seeing increased requirements for multi-currency and multi-lingual billing from globalising UK-based telecoms providers. Intelligent Billing supports multiple group or multi-company and departmental billing across multiple regions, with local taxations and compliance rules, all of which can be managed from a single portal."







PRD is expanding quickly in the UK and the number of

global overseas customers are also rising. "Our onboarding and migration process will be more streamlined," added Adams. "We have this down to a few days for many installations, but we want to make sure it is quick and pain-free for all new customers, irrelevant of the complexity or customisation of their requirements."

PRD currently processes nearly five billion transactions per month and Adams fully expects this to carry on growing – and growth will of course reflect where customer value is moving to, creating opportunities for billing providers to help resellers capture that value. "Billing providers need to provide accurate, real-time, automated data processing, billing, invoicing, data analysis and reporting from a single user friendly converged platform to help resellers capture and assess end customer value and market performance," said Adams. "Simplification through evolving functionality is key." ■

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Breaking the mould

Unacceptable sexism did not stop Rebecca Leeming from becoming Managing Director of 360Coms. Here, she provides insights into how women in ICT can get to the top whatever barriers are placed in their way.

If anyone in our industry needs an example of how to rise above misogyny, Leeming is the woman to call. When asked if she has experienced any sort of discrimination in the past her answer is shocking and unequivocal. "One hundred per cent yes," she stated. "On numerous occasions I have been asked some derogatory questions on how I got a directorship such as – did you sleep your way to the top? Were you wearing a short skirt when you got appointed? They're just a couple of the printable ones."

Resilience has been bred into Leeming through necessity. She admits her upbringing was tough and challenging, but she was always determined to get the education she needed to get into business. "I had a humble upbringing," she added. "My parents got divorced when I was very young, and I lived with my mum and brother in a small village outside Cambridge. I did not get the chance to go to university, but I did attend college where I studied business and professional management. While at

college I started my first part-time job as a trainee negotiator for an estate agent. I moved away from the estate agency business and started working for a local IT company, ISC. A few years later, I felt I needed a change to further my career and joined the customer relations team at a vehicle telematics company called Cybit where I developed my skill set and knowledge."

Life took an unexpected turn for Leeming in 2011 when she fell pregnant and, not long after, Cybit merged with Leeds-based Masternaut, and her role was made redundant. Even more unexpected was the arrival of twin girls Darcy and Faye but, after some time out, Leeming was soon back on the job hunt with the support of her family.

"A friend of mine was working at 360Coms and they had a position opening up for maternity cover for the office manager," added Leeming. "I decided to apply, got the job and started in the April of 2015. This helped me gain confidence and gave me back my drive and determination to



Rebecca Leeming

build a career and give the girls the best life I could.

"They were three years old by then and with the help of grandparents I only had to send them to nursery school three days week. It was hard financially. As most parents know, nursery schools are not cheap, but I knew it was only for a brief period. It was also

partner Steve. Leeming admits she never thought she would come to lead the company and endured some male prejudice on her journey to the boardroom.

Male dominated

"Telecoms is male dominated, and I did come up against a few issues with salesmen along the way, not accepting

I just want everyone to be treated as equals and get a fair chance at a career in any field they choose

emotionally tough, but again I knew that in the long term it was best for my family."

Eight years on, Leeming is sitting in the MD's chair at 360coms in Unity House at the Compass Point Business Park in St.Ives, Cambridgeshire, planning a 10 per cent company growth strategy and looking forward to marrying her

I was their senior," she said. "They would constantly ignore my request and go straight to the then MD and owner of the business, Clive Ansell. He always supported me and backed every decision I made. He does not stand for misogynistic behaviour."

Leeming says her standards are high and she relies on her ability to step back, listen and

guide staff while keeping a keen eye on their welfare. "I have introduced company-wide incentives to ensure everyone in the business is rewarded for success, not just the sales teams," she commented. "Along with this, we will have three or four team events a year to bring everyone together. This is much needed now we have hybrid working."

So, does she still think men put up obstacles to women reaching the top and need to open their minds to the qualities women can bring to the workplace? "Absolutely," she emphasised. "Nine times out of ten the main question is around family! Having children is looked upon as negative when in fact by having children and a career you become far more multi-functional.

"By 8am I have unloaded the dishwasher, done one load of washing, given the children breakfast, showered, checked emails and by 8:40am I've dropped the children off at school. Then it's off to the office, generally making business calls on the way. I am usually in the office by 9am ready to start the day with a nice cup of tea! Can anyone really see this as an obstacle or a reason not to employ a female?"

"This demonstrates multi-tasking, organisation and prioritisation – all fantastic skills to bring to any position. I don't think women are better than men. I just want everyone to be treated as equals and get a fair chance at a career in any field they choose. If you have the skill set and are hard working, and you are the best fit for the role, you'll get the position regardless of gender." ■



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CityFibre champions diverse

Lip service and mere cultural mood music will do nothing to advance the spread of greater diversity and inclusion (D&I) in the channel. What we need are real world examples of inspirational D&I champions. Enter CityFibre's D&I Lead Julie Richard who has D&I at the top of her agenda.



Julie Richard

the relevant business owner. For example, diverse hiring is owned by the Head of Recruitment who works closely with the D&I lead. The four established employee networks have appointed employee chairs and senior sponsors who consider their own specific pillar as well as working closely together and with the lead to ensure a holistic approach across the multiple diversity strands. This structure works well but is constantly reviewed and continues to evolve.

We also support all of our managers in driving equity by providing a wide range of policies, frameworks and guidance, all of which are accessible via our Intranet and through mandated management development covering the employee lifecycle. Following the impact of the pandemic, we supported managers by increasing visibility of our Inclusion Networks, wellbeing events and MHFAs.

Comms Dealer always seeks to champion shining examples that reveal the real human and business benefits of greater equality, diversity and inclusion in business and beyond. Why? Because industry research and discussion alone will not solve the channel's diversity and inclusion deficit. It needs a real-world leadership and cultural stimulus, and CityFibre has ingrained this prerequisite into its very identity...

What is your diversity and inclusion strategy, its goals and objectives?

Our long range D&I strategy forms one of the pillars of our organisational goals and can loosely be split into three main objectives – to increase diversity, embed D&I across all company activity and enhance, promote and celebrate our inclusive culture. Championed by our Chief Operating Officer, Simon Holden, it has the backing of our leadership team and investors as well

as each of our Inclusion Networks having a dedicated senior sponsor. While our core objectives remain the same, the underlying focus and targets expand and update year-on-year.

Our workplace is inclusive of all individuals but we recognise there is always more to do. In 2022 we plan to continue our focus on diverse hiring, refresh and relaunch a suite of inclusion training, and increase awareness of intersectionality because every individual sits across multiple diversity strands. For example, a group of females would also vary in age, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation, with all of these factors playing a part in who they are.

In what ways have you quantified the positive impact of a more diverse and inclusive workforce?

We capture a wide range of data to monitor our progress. This includes everything from employee gender split by job level and division,

For us it is win-win. We are empowering society, building a diverse employee base and creating a truly inclusive workplace

flexible working requests and acceptances, employee turnover, gender pay gap, through to hiring activity from initial application through to interviews and offer. We also measure participation and scores from our employee engagement survey both as a collective and when split by diversity demographics. Furthermore, we encourage employees to share their stories and experiences through our internal blogs which have proven popular with all staff. We are already seeing the success of these activities with employee satisfaction being 83 per cent favourable and data from our Applicant Tracking Software showing an increase in applications from under-

represented backgrounds and a subsequent increase in offers. Our inclusion networks, LGBT+, Disability & Carers, Gender and Cultural Inclusion continue to be well recognised with new members joining regularly. We also saw our achievements recognised externally through multiple charters and awards, not least being identified as a Times Top 50 employer for women 2021.

What is the leadership structure in terms of D&I within CityFibre and how does this work in practice?

The D&I strategy is owned by our COO and has a dedicated D&I Lead. Accountability for individual targets within the overall strategy sits with

We also implemented guidance around domestic abuse and enhanced our approach to flexible working hours and locations through agile working so that managers had a clear framework with which to set realistic employee expectations.

How are you redefining the long-established male orientated success role model in the ICT sector?

Our policies, processes and training options are designed to promote equity and flexible working is open to all with a number of directors working part-time. We also have several senior female role models including some well known channel faces such as Elsa Chen

iversity & inclusion

– Chief Customer Officer, Sarah Parsons – Director of Compliance, Sarah Malin – Director of Group Operations & PMO and many more. We also offer a variety of formal training and development opportunities to all including our ASPIRE programme for aspiring managers and Mentorloop, our mentoring programme.

CityFibre's recent engagement survey demonstrated the positive impact we are making. Our female employees returned favourability ratings showing that 88 per cent were fully comfortable being themselves at work, 83 per cent employee satisfaction and 80 per cent felt they had equal opportunities to succeed. Female leadership has also significantly increased in the last four years within the executive team from zero to 20 per cent, and senior management from 17 per cent to 26 per cent. We still have work to do but we are already making great strides.

How have your recruitment policies changed and in what ways are you recruiting for a more diverse workforce?

We have expanded our recruitment channels, developed a recruitment framework to mitigate bias and ensure diverse shortlists wherever possible. Our job adverts are gender neutral and include key information such as location agnostic and flexible working options to encourage diverse applicants and empower fair pay negotiations. We also upgraded our applicant tracking system to provide diversity tracking metrics and use analytics to monitor our progress. We also have a focus on

growing our own talent internally and addressing skills gaps by equipping managers with training and guidance to minimise bias.

Our permanent shift to flexible working over the last two years and the recognition that approximately 1,500 people were successfully onboarded remotely during the pandemic, along with our continued organisational growth, has created multiple opportunities to drive a diverse balance with recruitment being a key enabler. The impact of these activities has been evident through an increased number of applications from under-represented candidates and an increased mix of diverse backgrounds across the organisation.

How do you address unconscious bias?

All bias, including unconscious bias, is an issue across all industries. In our

industry there has been a historic lack of diversity which means it can be more evident. The way we are trying to address this is through ongoing training for all staff at all levels, strengthening frameworks and through providing clear and concise guidance and policies and continuous awareness and education through our various networks. There is no easy solution, but it's an education piece across all employees to keep it at the forefront of peoples' minds and make them more self-aware.

Do you pursue societal initiatives around D&I?

We work with our local communities within each of our build towns and cities. Given that we know digital exclusion for the poorer members of society is a real and growing issue and that our industry has an endemic gender imbalance and

Continued on page 24

D&I networks and me...

By Tony Stamper, Senior Programme Manager and Chair of the LGBT+ Network:

Through the LGBT+ network and despite the challenges with the pandemic and lockdowns in 2021, during Pride month we were able to organise a virtual Drag Queen Bingo social event where we invited other LGBT+ networks to join us. Sheila Simmonds was our host for the evening over Zoom and over 70 people joined the event. We had a short presentation from Sliding Doors which supports older LGBT+ people. During the pandemic Sliding Doors says it received an unprecedented high number of new referrals.



Tony Stamper

The event allowed us to not only collaborate with other networks and increase awareness of a great charity which we raised some money for through donations, but we also had some fun. Our D&I networks support us to be our true selves at work, broaden our contact base, give back to the community and encouraged us to do so with a smile on our faces. ■

"Pray to God but row away from the rocks"

Hunter S Thompson

With 2022 firmly underway, commercial risks seem higher than ever. Insurance premiums for Directors, Professional Indemnity & Cyber are through the roof. All whilst prices rise. Announcements popping up like mushrooms on a damp morn. We could all be forgiven for reviewing our own clients T & C's for the oft-forgotten annual price rise clauses.

CommsVision speaker and former Secretary of State DCMS Oliver Dowden CBE spoke in late 2021, saying that GDPR reforms were needed to bring an end to 'pointless bureaucracy' and 'box ticking'. Don't we all look forward to seeing progress in this matter, haven't we all had enough of 'cookie opt-ins'? However the shared reality is that whatever the promised reforms may be, we live in an age where an increasing Duty of Care is being placed upon business, rightly, to ensure that their clients' digital data and correspondence is secure. That's not going to change, is it?

How does this relate to us and our customers, to their businesses?

Firstly, let's do what we do well, solve clients' issues and make them aware of potential problems and be the first to do so.

Secondly, rather than raise

prices, add income (and margin) whilst providing a new solution.

Thirdly, showing Duty of Care is good business practice. On this last point, I have first-hand experience of litigation which has gone against the MSP & CSP because the supplier did not demonstrate sufficient Duty of Care. Both times I've ended up in court (as an expert witness not a defendant, please note!) I've lost on this crucial point. Demonstrating Duty of Care is not only good for business, it's a necessity.

We know that sending emails with personal, financial, KYC or privileged information to a private email is a GDPR breach. But more fundamentally, it puts individuals' information at risk of being compromised, failing the Duty of Care test.

As I wrote last month, I'm pleased that StayPrivate is helping provide a solution to this important problem. We all win by providing clients and their customers with solutions and by giving them the confidence that we are taking care of them and their customers. It is one of the best things about the channel.

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



Adrian Barnard

We live in an age where an increasing Duty of Care is being placed upon business, rightly, to ensure that their clients' digital data and correspondence is secure

Continued from page 23 increasing skills shortage, a significant part of our outreach activities include STEM, Girl Geek type initiatives and careers fairs. We also work with a number of charities that support young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, aiming to open up their opportunities either through our apprenticeship schemes or other programmes. We work with local schools and colleges to encourage the next generation of engineers, programmers and developers and hopefully inspire their career aspirations and encourage them to consider a future in telecoms. We are playing a significant part in creating an inclusive society.

Our support of various local events recently include Pride, Voices in the Shadows by Black Women in Tech and the Women's Engineering Society student conference, alongside our commitment to a number of charters covering race, gender disability and menopause. This provides benefits to the external communities we work with and our own employees. In 2022, we will continue to support similar activities while building on broader digital inclusion programmes. Our diversity and inclusion activity sits hand in hand with our corporate social responsibilities. For us it is win-win. We are empowering society, building a diverse employee base and creating a truly inclusive workplace.

Have you, or do you plan to, leverage technology to drive greater diversity and inclusion in your business? We've used our current HR Information Systems to capture the demographic make up of the organisation through self-declare options which generated a good response. This helps us to understand where we are compared to our external environment and industry benchmarks. We also use Glint, an anonymous

All bias, including unconscious bias, is an issue across all industries. In our industry there has been a historic lack of diversity which means it can be more evident. There is no easy solution, but it's an education piece across all employees to keep it at the forefront of peoples' minds

survey platform for our employee engagement surveys, onboarding and exit surveys to help us capture sentiment through multiple demographics. These enhanced analytics provide both qualitative and quantitative feedback and are essential to our ongoing evolution. Our recruitment technology allows us both to track and measure diversity of applicants at each stage of the recruitment process

as well as to understand where our adverts are being seen and leverage social media targeting.

How do you keep the D&I agenda culturally alive and relevant, especially as you grow and during these disruptive times?

The D&I agenda has to stay at the forefront of our company-wide strategy and objectives at all times. We opt for continuous education

Viewpoint...

AS A SINGLE parent of a disabled child I am proud to work for an organisation where I feel that I can be myself and that others understand that I may have additional challenges. With the focus on diversity and inclusion as well as mental health and wellbeing, I know that I have support from my workplace and colleagues so I am better able to balance multiple responsibilities without feeling judged or penalised.
CityFibre employee

and awareness through our networks, and it's almost always a topic of some sort on our monthly all hands calls, which also helps to demonstrate the directive is driven from the top and across all departments and job roles. We have a proactive team of volunteers that help to keep the various events, initiatives etc promoted across the business and engage our colleagues on a regular

cadence. Also, our D&I lead is responsible for continuous environmental scanning, identifying changes, suggestions and working with stakeholders to provide solutions. It's an ever evolving and growing agenda.

What first moves enabled you to stride out on your D&I journey? And what learnings can diversity novices take away from your experience?

A key initial stage is to develop a baseline gap analysis and use internal and external data insights to help identify your gaps. Senior industry knowledge can be helpful here to identify external factors that could also have an impact. It's also essential to have senior level sponsorship from the start to help drive the importance throughout the organisation and obtain employee adoption and participation. Then it's a case of keeping up the momentum and evolving and adapting based on employee feedback, for example, to ensure the initiatives are effective. ■

Celebrating and supporting LGBT+ staff

Chris Stening, CityFibre Group Transformation Director and Senior Sponsor of the LGBT+ Network

Participating in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index is a great way to galvanise people around a plan to improve specific areas where we need to support LGBT+ staff and stakeholders – but often the purpose of the network is much simpler than that. Visibility and celebration of LGBT+ issues is critical and sometimes just being there, normalising LGBT+ life and celebrating stories and events is all you need to create an environment where people can feel comfortable to be themselves and be out at work. Normalising LGBT+ relationships helps LGBT+ people and those who identify as straight



Chris Stening

to better understand our community and the fact that we are not that different.

One of the most rewarding moments of sponsoring the LGBT+ network so far

has been seeing the step change improvement in the happiness and engagement of the bisexual community within our employee engagement survey over the course of a year. Our

Bi community feel far more comfortable being out at work and I think that is in no small part down to the environment we have created.

This year we had an engaging Trans speaker with almost 10 per cent of our total workforce joining the session. It all goes towards creating the all-important environment where people can feel comfortable being themselves at work, and for me that is what LGBT+ networks are all about. And having fun of course. We look forward to celebrating Pride in many locations as we come out of lockdown. ■

Meeting rooms are back

Nuvias UC is on track to hit over £100m revenue this year, up from £62m in 2021. The company's considerable growth has been fuelled by its ongoing relationship with Poly, pivoted on new video conferencing opportunities for the channel as UK workforces return to their offices.

Comms Dealer quizzed CEO Jeremy Keefe on why investing in quality VC solutions should be a priority for ambitious, margin hungry resellers post Covid-19.

CD: How will the measured return to work accelerate demand for quality in-office video solutions?

JK: "The pandemic has shown that people can be productive when working from home, but that is increased when they have the right technology around them. A high percentage of the population do not have that ability – they are working from their bedroom or working from their kitchen table.

"Many people are getting fed up with this, as they don't have the ergonomic seats and desks, audio and camera technology - and they don't have the right screens at the right height. Put simply, they don't have the right technology to be able to do their job well.

"Over the last six months, this has driven companies to look at how they can bring people back to the office. Investment will be focused around creating an environment that entices employees back, offering far better



Jeremy Keefe

collaboration opportunities than they would receive from working at home."

CD: So, the office meeting room is returning?

JK: "Indeed, it is. In the first year of the pandemic, people were gearing up their workforce to be remote. This meant investing in decent cameras and decent audio equipment. For resellers and distributors this stifled growth as you need to sell lots of these units just to remain stationary in the market.

"What we are seeing now is the resurgence of the meeting room. I still go into small meeting rooms with a phone on the desk where

the company says – "just hit the speaker button" and naturally the quality of audio is poor. How do I then share content? How do I bring more people into that environment? How do we start video meetings?

"Investment is going into making these rooms fit for purpose. It's not a one size fits all for rooms today. Companies need to be geared up for employees who need a one-to-one chat, a one-to-many chat or a one-to-remote chat. Certainly, content sharing and better collaboration is going to be a big thing for these companies."

CD: What added value does

"It's a complete end to end solution. We've got technical people that can help up front in solution design. That's not just ergonomics - it's the software and the platform that sits in the middle."

Nuvias UC bring to the supply of Poly solutions?

JK: "It is a bold statement – but we just do things better. Nuvias goes the extra mile for our partners which I have witnessed from being on the vendor side. We are the Ronseal of the industry – we do what we say on the tin. We fill gaps partners have in their technical abilities to enhance the way they deliver solutions and in the voice marketplace we offer end-to-end provisioning services so that phones are ready to go and plug in as soon as they reach the end user site. On the video side we can provision the product before it leaves us and upgrade firmware to ensure the product is completely up to date before it leaves our office.

"It's a complete end to end solution. We've got technical people that can help up front in solution design. That's not just ergonomics - it's the software and the platform that sits in the middle. Whatever the challenge

may be, we've got the expertise to talk channel customers through an opportunity, large or small."

CD: Why has Nuvias UC's relationship with Poly been so successful and what benefits has it brought the channel?

JK: "We have had a relationship with Poly now for over nine years. In the genesis of our relationship, we helped Polycom drive its handset business into the UK. From this point we helped Polycom embed its product within multiple ITSPs. After the Plantronics merger, the focus was on bringing in distributors that would sell voice, headset, and video solutions – so we began to invest in these technologies.

"Now, we do a great job in supporting partners and providing a turnkey solution for our channel partners to take to market. It's working brilliantly, so much so that we've seen an explosion of orders in the video business, with revenues eight times up on last year!"

Bodsworth on strategy

We asked Inform Billing Managing Director Shaun Bodsworth to identify the challenges and opportunities he faces as the company seeks to capture a strategic advantage for itself and partners in this dynamic market.

It is becoming ever more clear that the billing sector is fast evolving and standing still is not an option. The good news is that Inform Billing has recognised these challenges and has committed investment and leadership focus to innovation led growth, creating the tools partners need to address a more complex market and unlock new revenue opportunities. "Our product development strategy will enable us to provide enhanced solutions, not only for the ICT sector as we know it, but also opening new opportunities both within the ICT sector and beyond," stated Bodsworth. "But the combination of the upward pressure on costs from rising salaries and inflation and the downwards pressure on pricing, along with the distinct shortage of skilled and unskilled workers, is likely to become one of the biggest challenges businesses across the channel have faced for many years."

Another key feature of the fast evolving billing landscape is that supply chains are

broadening and target markets are diversifying. "The roll out of full fibre will create opportunities for everyone in the channel, billing providers included," added Bodsworth. "The continuing transition to recurring revenues still plays a big part in generating opportunities for the channel and billing providers need to play their role in enabling resellers to capitalise on those revenue streams. At the same time, while call revenues are declining, other consumption or usage-based opportunities are evolving, again providing significant opportunities for the channel to utilise its expertise in monetising recurring and consumption based commercial models."

Bodsworth also expects to see a continued trend towards automation, with technological areas such as AI and IFTTT growing over the coming years. "These are key to how customer value is shifting and therefore it's imperative that resellers have the right capability from their billing provider to take advantage of these shifts as they happen," he said. "We are developing partnerships



Shaun Bodsworth

in diverse markets relevant to the subscription economy, opening up future opportunities for both Inform Billing and the channel."

Target markets

Inform Billing's customers span traditional telecoms, IT, mobile and IoT as well as utilities, waste management, banking and hospitality all using its software for billing. The business has grown circa 15 per cent year-on-year for 10 successive years and Bodsworth intends to double revenues during the next three to five years. "We continue to invest heavily in our product development and have some exciting plans for the second half of 2022," commented Bodsworth.

To better manage business growth Inform Billing has carried out a restructure, putting people first to

unlock new potential. "In the past we have had one team covering multiple responsibilities," added Bodsworth. "Now we have separated out several functions as we continued to grow, concentrating efforts in specific areas. A key element to our strategy is strengthening our senior management team along with other departments in the business.

"As well as promoting Ellie Allseybrook to Business Development Director in 2021 we recently brought in Debbie Wealthall as Head of Sales and promoted two existing team members to Head of Billing Operations and Services and Head of Technical Services. With these lead roles alone we have 60-plus years experience in ICT billing and all three have previously worked as

billing managers in resale businesses. We have also invested in our projects team as we take on more and larger customers. Now a team of five, they all manage complex projects such as data migrations for onboarding, consolidation and acquisition. We also now have a dedicated team of seven focused on providing an outsourced bureau service to 100-plus customers."

But strengthening the business through skilled and motivated people has not been without its challenges. "While we have an excellent team in place we still need more people as we grow and recruitment is proving to be one of the biggest obstacles to achieving our goals," explained Bodsworth. "There is much discussion around the skills gap and the 'great resignation' as people adapt to a post-pandemic way of life and the shortage of workers, particularly within software development."

It is true that software development and competition reside at the heart of the innovation agenda in many markets, including billing, but consolidation in the sector could dramatically reshape the competitive landscape, observed Bodsworth.

"History shows that competition drives innovation as well as commercial competitiveness and this is true in the billing sector," he commented. "It is paramount that resellers have genuine choice in all elements of their supply chain, even more so in the current climate and I hope to continue to see billing providers across the industry benefit from both new entrants and new offerings in the market." ■

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Identifying the factors e

In the first of Comms Dealer's 2022 Channel Forecast Insight Sessions our expert panel discusses the 2025 PSTN switch off and unravels the challenges and opportunities facing channel partners and their customers in today's environment of ongoing IP transformation.

As we approach 2025, channel players more than ever will play a particularly important role for businesses, representing a guiding light as they navigate the migration to all IP. In fact, 2022 should be a busy year with partners seeking to secure as much progress as possible ahead of the 2025 PSTN switch off. Advances made so far have led to an expectation that larger businesses and top end SMEs are aware of the change, however the impact of the switch off is largely unknown at the lower end, which could be the real story.

"It's the smallest businesses that might not yet be aware of the switch off and that's where the volume is," stated Andy Smethurst, Channel Sales Director, Gamma. "We need to do a lot more to educate customers on the

shut down and the options they have. In mid-market and SME there is a good saturation of touch points, and our partners are well versed in moving their larger customers away from legacy to newer technologies. But at the lower end there is a challenge with time, resource and the investment required all being factors of concern."

The pandemic has taught us that a well-run businesses should have a crisis plan, but nothing tests this lesson quite like their approach to 2025. "Assets are being sweat," stated Paul Harrison, Managing Director EMEA, Evolve IP. "Customers know the functionality of their PBX and think it can't be replicated in a hosted environment. Furthermore, it's a capex spend and they own the PBX. We work hard on showing the TCO model. It's about the education piece:



Andy Smethurst

Partners have a chance to disrupt the incumbent telcos where 80 per cent of the market still sits.

If you go from capex to opex, how does that scale? These are conversations you need to get around.

Last hunting ground

"We are strong in the hospitality vertical with 600 hotels around the world, some with four to five thousand rooms, and this has been the last hunting ground for PBX vendors. The property management systems in hotels are integrated and it's hard for a hosted solution to replicate that. We've taken those challenges on and delivered a solution fully. It's an area that has taken a lot of innovation. We're seeing less and less SIP trunking as more people want to move to the cloud."

The nation is recovering from the pandemic and also in a period of IP transition – both carry an element of uncertainty for many – but we do know what the future of business comms will certainly look like and that sweating assets is not an option. "It's about educating not just the lower end of SME but also ensuring that partners are fully versed in the preparations they need to put in place for that massive switch off," commented Sachin Vaish, Managing Director, Vaioni.

Covid-19 has also showed us that it's more important than ever for business leaders to be aware of, and prepare for, unplanned events. The 2025

switch off is firmly in the diary and clearly scheduled, therefore the more prepared resellers are to manage that transition the less likely they'll fall victim to the impacts of doing nothing. "We know that 2025 is the end date, but we don't want to leave it late and get into a mad panic because it will all fall down," said Dan Cunliffe, Managing Director, Pangea. "There won't be enough resources. But the way to get around that is using over the air services. For me, it's probably the biggest opportunity we've had in the last seven years, besides the IoT being enormous in terms of what you can connect. From a local perspective, 4G and 5G is getting better and better, devices are getting equally as strong and there is good medium to medium-high usage that fits these products. People will have more choice than ever to address this change."

The pandemic gave organisations the chance to rethink how they work and introduced them to the cloud, so why persist with pointless PSTN? "The pandemic has 100 per cent accelerated the move to digital," added Harrison. "Businesses are now looking for a longer term solution rather than the sticking plaster applied in March 2020. Companies are saying this is the new norm and asking how to adapt. Look



Paul Harrison

It's about the education piece: If you go from capex to opex, how does that scale? These are conversations you need to get around.

Choose a network that's Better By Design

CityFibre

Essential to 2025 success

at the PBX manufacturers – they are working with hosted providers.”

As we have seen, for many, 2025 is not a matter of if nor when – but how. “The challenge for partners is getting organised to address the 2025 event in their business, but the opportunity is far reaching,” added Smethurst. “Partners have a chance to disrupt the incumbent telcos where 80 per cent of the market still sits, and provide customers with services they need for the future while increasing their own margins. But the immediate challenge is the education piece and helping partners get the message out there.”

Post-Covid-19, building resilience has emerged as the beacon for businesses, so surely it's time to bin PSTN for good. “The opportunity started way back in 2002 when broadband killed dial up,” added Harrison. “For 20 years we've been selling the benefits of hosted telephony, the cloud, and doing away with the PBX and PSTN. According to Cavell,

it's taken 20 years for the UK market to get 35 per cent penetrated. It predicts that by 2025 the UK will be 70 per cent penetrated – so the opportunity is ahead if us, not behind us. And the pandemic has accelerated that. We're bracing ourselves for the next three to four years as people move away from PBX and PSTN. The opportunity is massive and people are getting on board with it.”

Transformation factor

Since the pandemic, businesses have been forced to transform, which has accelerated their thinking and amplified issues around resource and time. But being cloud-based and future proofed is a silver lining in all this, noted Vaish, who underlined the criticality of connectivity. “Different connectivity technologies and products will play a key role in underpinning IP services,” he said. “Partners need to educate their customers and talk strategy. Another big one is reliability. Although the PSTN network is archaic it was super reliable. As we move into the more complex



Sachin Vaish

It's about creating connectivity solutions that underpin the new technologies businesses will have to transition to.

IP world reliability will become the new challenge.”

Vaioni is building a fibre platform to give partners the maximum choice in FTTP and other Ethernet products. “That is ultimately what is going to drive the PSTN switch off,” added Vaish. “It's about creating connectivity solutions that underpin the new technologies businesses will have to transition to. They don't know what they need for every aspect of the transformation so the auditing aspect is crucial.

“As is cyber: Now, everything is on the Internet. So cyber is an area of focus for us. In all of this the biggest enabler is training and education, knowing the connectivity options, understanding the pros and cons of SoGEA versus FTTP for example. And understanding the security threats – all wrapped in a full turnkey solution.”

How comms providers respond to the requirement for IP transformation will likely determine their chances

of emerging stronger post-2025. And when faced with managing the transition to IP, immediate planning will help. “There is no need to panic yet, but it is important to start developing a plan that involves moving some customers now,” added Smethurst. “In doing that you begin to understand the size of the task for the business, and also understand the size of the opportunity.”

Getting the job done

Already well into the three year countdown to the 2025 switch off, getting the job done should be top of mind. For many comms providers this means keeping their focus on timing. “Three years sounds a long time but unequivocally the opportunity is now,” commented Smethurst. “Time is passing before our eyes and in 2023 we have the stop sell of WLR products. Exchanges are transitioning now. We have to educate people, but it's not a doomsday type education piece. It's a great thing for customers: Better scalability, flexibility, reliability,

all these wonderful things. That means you can have a positive conversation. The move to home working clearly proves the benefits of cloud-based solutions.”

Much coverage and commentary on 2025 has focused on fixed lines, yet there exists a myriad of other opportunities, noted Cunliffe. “We sell intelligent mobile connectivity and have never dealt with fixed products,” he stated. “For us it's a natural transition. Our partners are in this world and getting into a free PSTN audit. We have created templates and a step-by-step approach for partners to find out this information. We're about to launch a PSTN checker that aligns itself to the right product that we provide.

“Furthermore, loads of IoT and telemetry devices are connected to PSTN, so there is a huge opportunity. You could argue that it doesn't make sense to use any tech other than mobile or IoT technology. Many of the people we deal with are moving their corporate WAN to the home using a mobile service.”

A multi-faceted response will help partners and their customers emerge stronger and more resilient beyond 2025, with mobile technology bringing new potential.

“We are interested in the lower end of the market and don't know the full extent of the opportunity,” added Smethurst. “What percentage could move completely to a mobile solution? 5G has a big part to play. There is an unknown, but a huge opportunity around what will happen regarding a transition towards 5G. Why would they need a PSTN?” ■



Dan Cunliffe

Many of the people we deal with are moving their corporate WAN to the home using a mobile service.



Public sector demands Net Zero commitment

As chair of the Cabinet Office Industry Working Group, Adept Technology Group chairman Ian Fishwick advises the Government on how to get SME suppliers to commit to Carbon Net Zero by 2050. Here he explains the implications.

On World Environment Day, 5th June 2021, the UK Government became the first country in the world to formalise policies aimed at using the power of public sector spend to reduce carbon emissions. The public sector represents 35-53% of the total economy in developed nations. No points for guessing that the USA is lowest at 35%. Finland is the highest at 53% and the UK is 38%.

Unless governments can learn to buy goods and services in a more carbon-friendly way, it will be impossible to meet the world's climate change pledges and get to 'Carbon Net Zero'. Not surprisingly, several major countries are now watching with interest how the UK initiative pans out. Many new ideas are often reviewed or piloted by industry members of the SME Panel to give rapid feedback to the civil servants who are writing the policies.

It is an absolute pleasure to work with David Brambley-Crawshaw, as he is the man writing the Government Procurement Policies on Carbon Net Zero. To be able to talk directly with the man in charge is incredibly useful.

The new rules came into



Ian Fishwick

If a supplier wants to bid for a government contract worth over £5 million a year, it must show on its website a plan to get to Carbon Net Zero by 2050.

effect on 1st September 2021. It has been a tremendous start. By the end of January, Central Government contracts with a lifetime value of over £50 billion have been applied under the new rules.

As this represents only part of a year, it is useful to have a look back at how many small and medium sized businesses would have been affected by these rules if they had been in place for the

whole of last year (to March 2021). Last year 32.5% of contracts (in all sectors), representing over £5 million per annum, were awarded to SME's. This is hugely important to our channel.

So, what are these new rules?

If a supplier wants to bid for a Central Government contract worth over £5 million a year, it must show on its website a plan to get to Carbon Net Zero by 2050.

The £5 million threshold was chosen as this mirrors the Prompt Payment regulations.

The current measures do not compare one supplier with another; they simply want the company to have a Carbon Net Zero plan by 2050, prepared and presented in a standard format. At the end of this article is a link to the Government guidance and templates that you will need.

The Cabinet Office has embarked on a huge education and training exercise to improve the knowledge of industry on the new Carbon Net Zero Plan requirement. Over 40,000 emails have been sent to Government suppliers and over 50 presentations have been given to employer organisations such as the CBI and the Federation of Small Business.

As an example, one of the areas we will look at closely is frameworks. Government contracts are either tenders or a framework. A framework is where the winning suppliers being admitted onto the framework are then the only ones approved to receive tenders on that subject.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/procurement-policy-note-0621-taking-account-of-carbon-reduction-plans-in-the-procurement-of-major-government-contracts>

Big players are taking action

BT has announced the next phase of its Green Tech Innovation Platform, collaborating with scale-ups to develop de-carbon breakthroughs. Phase two will explore how advanced digital technologies such as IoT, Edge, Data, AI and 5G can help manufacturing customers transition to Net Zero. Energy business GenCell has teamed up with Aicox Soluciones to provide telecom providers, telecom tower management companies and other relevant businesses with solutions incorporating its alkaline fuel cells and hydrogen and ammonia-to-power technologies to generate reliable, emission-free power at costs lower than diesel. Atos has announced a global partnership with Circular Computing, the world's premium remanufacturer of carbon neutral laptops, to help clients reach sustainability goals.

Many frameworks include lots of small contracts and a smaller number of contracts over £5 million.

Should a smaller supplier, who will only ever bid for the smaller contracts, still need to have a Carbon Net Zero plan? And how can companies understand their carbon emissions as a starting point? These are the kind of details we need to review but there is little doubt that Carbon Net Zero plans will become increasingly important for public sector suppliers.

Action Takers

Carbon credentials are fast becoming the new currency

Focus Group has teamed up with cost, procurement and carbon solutions consultancy Auditel to help steer its fast-growing business through the often-confusing world of ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance).

to carbon neutrality. Working with their team to help define exactly how far the boundary of their own carbon footprint goes into resellers and channel partners, without double counting emissions, is another fascinating part of the project."



"Any partner that hasn't started to think about how they are going to be reporting their own credentials on carbon emissions in a year or two, will start losing deals."

"Simply put, we cannot ignore the issue," said Joline Thomas, Head of Channel (pictured).

"For many a year, businesses have traded and operated with one currency, that being the pound, the dollar or other currency note. Everything about the general success of an organisation has been judged and has been recognised through its balance sheet, and its P and L. Undoubtedly, there is another currency that's coming into the business world that we cannot ignore and that is the ESG measure, the carbon footprint, or however you want to phrase it.

"At Focus Group, we've seen personally how changes happening at government level are starting to move the measurement of carbon on to our balance sheet. Already, legislation on Streamline Energy and Carbon Reporting and ESOS means many companies in the ICT community are needing to audit and report on various emission factors. Even smaller ITC providers, who might be outside legislation today, are feeling the pressure as their own clients seek to validate the carbon credentials of their entire supply chain."

Focus and Auditel are working together to fully define Focus's own Carbon Footprint, develop a decarbonisation plan and potentially get Focus BSI PAS 2060 verified as Carbon Neutral.

Auditel's Carbon Solution Director, Robert Allison said: "It really is great to see the forward-thinking nature of Focus's approach

Thomas believes customers have historically sought quality, service and delivery and a negotiated price from their ICT provider but now there's a fifth element, namely the provider's environmental credentials.

"Any partner that hasn't started to think about how they are going to be reporting their own credentials on carbon emissions in a year or two, will start losing deals," she said.

And Allison believes it goes further: "A lot of the technology solutions the ITC industry bring are actually part of the solution in an increasingly decarbonised world. If a company is currently reporting 100 tonnes of emissions a year, it could well be that they are running a whole heap of in-office server racks that are chewing through power and they have a large amount of embedded carbon in them.

"The move to cloud-based services can make a massive reduction to a company's own carbon footprint. And we're beginning to see some of the online server-based services now starting to try and compete on their own carbon credentials, by saying they have a much more efficient server system with low emissions because their based in a colder country which requires less cooling. Or they say they're using alternative energy sources.

"In essence, they're starting not to compete on price, but on their carbon credentials," added Allison.

Action Leaders

Alan Shraga – Fidelity Group

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

We all have a part to play and coming together is the only solution. It's the science that makes you accountable. Some of the biggest advancements in technology over the past few years have come from trying to limit and come up with alternatives to humanity's CO2 dependency.



Alan Shraga

When did you decide to act?

Having been in the telecoms industry for over 30 years and effectively using IoT to adapt to many situations, you begin to understand the endless possibilities of what a sim can do. We were approached in 2019 by BuddyOhm to be a reseller of its energy management product and we instantly connected to the messaging behind the solution

How does BuddyOhm work?

The IoT class hardware connect cellularly to the internet through wireless sensors which are fitted next to power panels and meters. Buddy Ohm connects systems and people, allowing real-time data on your building's health to shape your decisions and strategies. It's Fidelity Group's mission to keep people connected and this was another product we could believe in. We need to change behaviour, and this can be done through reporting and compliance. You can't monitor or change what you don't know.

Why should businesses monitor their buildings?

We firmly believe we can reduce building consumption and gain real-time insights to save energy and money. BuddyOhm gives you the real time reports into understanding your building's consumption. Buildings are the foundation of our communities – we live, breathe, and work in them. Yet we don't often think about the systems required to make them function or how our actions impact those systems.

What benefits can it bring to a customer?

They will automatically receive monthly reports on their building's energy use and have access to historical reports as well. These reports get automatically dropped into an inbox at the top of the month. The monitoring system gives a detailed breakdown of resource usage, performance of key systems and environmental conditions. This provides a clear and up to the minute view of a building's health. Businesses can track performance, spot trends and identify issues before they become problems.

With energy prices skyrocketing and the need to act on climate change, surely this is a no brainer for resellers to sell on?

Absolutely. With energy prices soaring, BuddyOhm represents the perfect opportunity for resellers to show they are on top of situations that impact customers and deliver a solution. It's also a classic 'door opener' for ICT reseller sales teams. With customers around the world and a platform supporting over two million connected devices and services today, Buddy Digital Transformation Services can help resellers leverage new and disruptive technologies to drive innovation in their product, services and operations to increase revenues, improve efficiency and transform their business into an IoT leader.

www.fidelity-group.co.uk/building-management-system/

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With customers looking for integrated solutions across public, private and hybrid clouds, and wanting to add more services, more rapidly and more securely, channels are looking for solutions, advice and guidance on the new opportunities.

THAT'S WHY FORWARD THINKING RESELLER PRINCIPLES SHOULD ATTEND THE XAAS SUMMIT ON MAY 5TH 2022.

This totally new, fully live event is specifically aimed at channel businesses transitioning to service based solutions provision.

A joint initiative by Comms Dealer and IT Europa and staged in the heart of the City of London, this unique one-day confex will provide qualified resellers with a day of inspirational education and exceptional networking.

To secure your place, register now at www.xaas-summit.com

To exhibit or sponsor contact Simon Turton sturton@bpl-business.com 07759 731 134

With digital transformation accelerated by the Covid crisis 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.

New opportunities are opening in areas such as Workspace as a Service, including applications, SaaS, Desktop as a Service, hosted applications (unified communication applications), Security as a Service and others. For channels the opportunities lie in system integration, consulting services and managed services.

Creating a new impact

FluidOne CEO Russell Horton discusses how the broad effects of the Covid-19 pandemic prompted him to revise his strategic approach and create a bigger impact.

Over the past two years FluidOne has grown 100 per cent with three more acquisitions under its belt, and transformed from a network aggregator into a connected cloud solutions provider. It now has 240 staff, 200 channel partners and 1,100 direct clients. "For organic sales, flat is the new growth during the Covid-19 pandemic," stated Horton. "However, thanks to acquisitions we've doubled in size to £60 million. Although the pandemic's effect on our market, customers and connectivity has flattened our organic growth, it's pushed us to adapt and accelerate other areas of our plan and given us some real clarity as to what we want to achieve and how we plan to get there."

Before the pandemic FluidOne was heavily focused on connectivity, including mobile. Its strategy was to acquire skills in over-the-top services to give joined-up solutions from end user to the application, which Horton calls the connected cloud. "The pandemic made our customers review or pause their office activity, but they needed urgent help getting their home workers up and running," he added. "This showed that

having combined services for UC, CC, IT over the top of connectivity and with a cyber security wrap is what customers require. It also gives us multiple routes to win business. The pandemic made me wish we'd moved faster: We would have gained many more opportunities in 2020 if we'd had the wider connected cloud products already in place."

Digital transformation has been driving change for several years, noted Horton, so leaders need to be able to embrace change, set a clear vision and goals that staff and customers buy into, and ensure they work with the right people to support them in delivering their vision. "Make sure you have a strong team around you with each person more knowledgeable in their area than you, who buy into the vision and are passionate about it," added Horton. "Together, you will cope with all changes and outperform the rest of the market."

For Horton, self-development is an ongoing process. He learns from networking and reading business books. "One book I've read this year was Good to Great by Jim Collins," he said. "Given our scale and my long-term vision to 2030, the book has



Russell Horton

influenced my approach and plans for my senior team. As for networking, an old friend and colleague has been in the SaaS market for several years now, and his career growth has been phenomenal. Hearing from him about his approach to

that bring in the required skills and experience, and we're also ramping up two key areas of opportunity that we've been investing in – cyber security and flexible space," said Horton. "Another area of change and opportunity is, as long-term

The pandemic made me wish we'd moved faster: We would have gained many more opportunities in 2020 with the wider connected cloud products already in place

sales and customer pitches has inspired me, and I've been passing on his key lessons to our sales and marketing leaders."

Priorities

Another major priority is bringing FluidOne's connected cloud solutions to customers, and increasing its services and wallet share per customer or partner. "We plan to build this out by acquiring quality businesses

leases expire, that we'll see a big change in the proportion of office space that's used as a flexible space rather than leased for the long-term.

"Business home worker services aren't yet mature. Because of the rush caused by Covid-19, the market to create combined office-in-a-box solutions for different personas of home workers will become a major growth area, particularly for jobs

such as home working call centre agents. The fact that our clients were forced to accelerate their digital transformation has provided a massive opportunity for our industry."

Despite the opportunity, there are challenges, noted Horton. "On the connectivity front, the carriers are being more aggressive on price and everyone in the market is defending their bases," he added. "It's key to add value to the channel and not rely on it as a commodity sell. In terms of opportunities, we're finding that the ability to have wider conversations, thanks to the connected cloud solutions set, is allowing us to engage at a higher level with our customers and become more of a strategic partner to channel resellers. This allows many more touch points to become the potential first sale from which to land and expand."

With IT services moving to the public cloud, such as Azure, the skills to migrate and repurpose servers and then manage them and O365 are becoming more commonplace, observed Horton. "I can see this area for IT managed service providers becoming more commoditised, so looking at how to add value to that stack, to differentiate and increase margin opportunity, is a growing market," he added. "Automation, big data, AI and how to leverage all of these to bring value to the customer over their Azure estate is an area we're looking into. More immediately I see an explosion in the need for cyber security, especially when it comes to the Microsoft cloud stack." ■

KubeNet has its finger on the pulse of change

In the digital transformation era, any comms provider worth its salt is fully embracing the delivery of quality solutions as a fully managed service and KubeNet is confident it can take its reseller partners on that profitable journey.

The Glasgow based company has fulfilled its long-term objective to become a leading provider of future proof, best in class technology solutions and now expertly manages the comms and security infrastructures of some of the world's leading private and public sector organisations including a global managed service for Microsoft Teams Direct routing.

The key to its ongoing success is pivoted on a deep understanding of how onerous it can be for organisations, whether large or small, to keep up with technological changes and the need to consistently evolve comms infrastructures, especially in the wake of the Covid 19 pandemic.

"Internal IT departments are no longer equipped to keep pace with advancing business technology requirements," asserts Kube Networks Director Julie Inglis.

"The past two years have seen rapid growth of technological advancements far beyond traditional IT capabilities. Business now demands that your IT systems and infrastructure are fully supported and agile - but with other business priorities. We understand that it can be difficult to strike the balance."

KubeNet believes it has the agility and technical nous to help partners build and



Julie Inglis

"The past two years have seen rapid growth of technological advancements far beyond traditional IT capabilities"

manage complex comms deployments that will repel competition and meet the transitional needs of customers. It has already kicked off 2022 with two infrastructure and IT managed service wins in Glasgow and Newcastle.

"Put simply, we take the hassle out of infrastructure," emphasizes Inglis. "The expert methodology we apply to our managed services has seen us respond quicker and smarter than our competitors to the evolving needs of our customers; something that has seen us onboard three new major managed services contracts during the pandemic."

The key to KubeNet's

importance of our strategic partners in our recent managed services successes.

"Fundamentally we're investing to ensure they can continue to have a rich partnership with KubeNet. That's crucial to us."

These resources build upon a meticulously crafted managed service framework that has already positioned KubeNet ahead of the competition, centred on sound strategic planning, flexibility and the functionality of its own Next Generation Network.

"Because we own and operate our own network, scalability, security and resilience of our infrastructure is guaranteed, leaving our customers secure in the knowledge that their business needs are in safe hands," says Inglis.

"Our managed service offering continues to be a strategic priority. We already have a wealth of experience in delivering IT and infrastructure professional services to companies within the SME and public sectors. Now, we're driven to continue building our reputation as a trusted managed service provider, delivering hassle-free, highly competitive products and services. Essentially, making businesses' worlds turn quicker!"

"Our flexible approach means that we understand

our customers' needs on a more personal level. Our agility allows us to deliver innovative and future-ready services that will grow with our customers' businesses. We make our customers' worlds smaller and more cost effective by managing and proactively monitoring their entire infrastructure."

As new technology impacts every part of people's lives and businesses, KubeNet always has an eye sharply focused on the future which Inglis believes is crucial to the company and its partners' success

"As we continue to grow, we're ensuring that our managed services offering is future-ready. We're making use of the latest technology and delivering the highest quality across the board. All of this without losing what makes KubeNet unique - our excellent team of people who deliver exceptional, tailored customer service.

"As internal IT departments become increasingly more reactive and outdated, the benefit of adopting a managed services provider has never been clearer. KubeNet stands apart from our competitors by being an agile and flexible trusted partner to our managed services customers. We listen, we understand, we deliver," concludes Inglis.

For more information go to: www.kubenet.net

Evolve IP ramps up

Evolve IP's UK and EU growth ambitions have been boosted by the effective alignment of key strategies, pulling together the threads of operational teamwork, skills and capabilities, fresh talent, culture, cloud technology and an unwavering will to win, according to Managing Director EMEA Paul Harrison.



Paul Harrison

Harrison was previously CEO of thevoicefactory (tvf) which was acquired by US cloud business Evolve IP in 2018. The deal followed tvf's success at partnering with vertical-specific resellers and developing products to target particular markets. The company's US expansion move put it under the noses of potential acquirers keen to buy into its expertise and market position in the UK. And the subsequent Evolve IP deal met Harrison's aspirations and provided a platform for European expansion. Evolve IP itself has been running for 14 years and has offices in the UK, Netherlands and the US. "Evolve IP has been through some vigorous changes, aligning services across EMEA and working more in unison with the US," stated Harrison.

"The EU and UK teams have joined together and we are working as an EMEA focused business. My role as Managing Director of EMEA

is to align our common goals as a team, streamline our technical solutions and provide partners with what they need to deliver a service. We are connecting better as a global organisation and listening to each other, gaining from our team skill set, and using this to grow and better understand our customers and the solutions we roll out."

Evolve IP has over 500,000 global users. The UK operation grew 16 per cent in 2021, and 2022 projections are for 20 per cent growth globally. "It is an ambitious target but the work we have been putting in over the past 12 months means that we are prepared for growth and ready to take on partners," added Harrison.

Evolve IP recently collaborated with The Cavell Group to gain insights into the cloud communication market and where the industry is moving to over the next five years. "This insight has cemented our approach to growth

and how we are developing as an organisation," added Harrison. "We have proven that we can support healthcare, hospitality, automotive industries and many more. We create

secure cloud-based solution, fine tuned for the hybrid workforce and delivered as a service. "Today, the office is no longer just a physical place – it is a collection of people who need to work

My role as Managing Director of EMEA is to align our common goals as a team, streamline our technical solutions and provide partners with what they need to deliver a service

purpose built solutions to solve problems and enhance communication strategies. We will continue to work with key partners to grow and develop our suite of solutions."

Bespoke solutions

Evolve IP partners with IT professionals to bring together their essential productivity and communication tools into a

together from wherever they are," observed Harrison. "So, no matter how locations, tools and partners shift over time, you have a solution that makes the future of work better for everyone."

Covid has been a big driver in the move to the cloud and businesses will mainly revert to hybrid working, keeping a remote element to their workforce, believes Harrison.

He also says that MS Teams will have an impact on pricing, and that the next five years will see a refocus of on-premise vendors moving to cloud models. "Cloud is on the agenda," he stated. "According to The Cavell Group report we worked on there is 13.5 million cloud communication seats still available. This is great news for us and shows that there is more growth ahead than there is behind us."

To help consolidate its position in the global cloud communications industry Evolve IP partnered with Cisco as an early adopter of Webex. "Globally we are working together to deliver the best service we can to the businesses and customers we support," added Harrison. "In EMEA we are at the forefront with Webex and continue to drive the innovation of integrations, portals and single sign-on technology.

"The resellers we work with are increasing in size and their demands are different to SMEs. Globally we cover any business' communication needs, and we are looking to roll out services from the US and vice versa. Our services are available internationally and hosted via carrier-grade voice."

Harrison sees 'remarkable things for Evolve IP' following the work that has been done over the last 12 months. "The team is working together better with skills sharing and great new talent joining us," he stated. "Evolve IP will become a more recognised global brand, a vendor that is easy to do business with and can provide partners with the systems and solutions they need for their customers." ■

Cloudcell Technologies partners with Ice Comms to “transform customer’s lives”

Since the pandemic began, the number of people working from home has skyrocketed, which for many has brought challenges of slow, unreliable and unsecure internet connectivity, resulting in organisations unable to work effectively, or even able to reach their own customers! With those living and running businesses in rural areas being particularly worst hit.

It's become clear that reliable broadband is essential for businesses to survive, and as a trusted leader, Cloudcell Technologies recognises that every organisation should have access to secure, reliable and readily available internet. In fact, since their highly skilled engineers

productivity, communication and collaboration.

Superior broadband
Cloudcell Technologies' experienced team is committed to supporting collaborative partnerships with resellers; helping them retain customers by providing a superior broadband

if a lease line is delayed.

Cloudcell supports a vast range of customers and Cloudcell EQ is well suited to rural or residential homeowners, rural businesses and business parks facing connectivity issues. Plus for TV broadcasters, care homes, veterinary and healthcare practices, bars and vendors at festivals or pop up events, as well as transport, including vans, fleets, ships and docklands. One of Cloudcell's core roles is providing internet to construction sites.

Partnership with market leader, Ice Comms

After seeing their ad in Comms Dealer, market leader Ice Comms, approached Cloudcell as they were

Comms across 9 sites, plus supporting them at big events, including the NEC Care Home Exhibition. After working well together for nearly a year, the business is still growing, the strong solutions are performing well and their customers are saving money.

Ice Comms' Sales Director, Simon Bade said; "We have seen great success with this offering, with clients in a variety of sectors, such as rural farms to kitchen showrooms. When we receive feedback stating this solution has transformed their lives, it really shows how powerful this can be as a business tool.

"It was clear that the solution really helps us

advice and provide feedback quickly on viable options for our end users. The knowledge and confidence that they have in their products is very reassuring when allowing this to form part of our everyday offerings and portfolio.

"We are very pleased to be working closely with Cloudcell to provide our clients with cellular connectivity solutions and see this partnership growing significantly over the coming year."

Benefits of being a reseller

Cloudcell EQ is essential for providing fast, reliable broadband. By becoming a reseller of the Cloudcell EQ platform, you are able to drive a recurring revenue stream through the provision of broadband services. As well as close business and generate revenue without any dependency on the uncertain lead times of traditional broadband providers.

Resellers are able to set end-user pricing, providing them with the flexibility to bundle broadband services with an existing portfolio, or give a cross sell opportunity. Being able to offer a superior broadband solution will retain customers. ■

With Cloudcell EQ, a hybrid broadband and 4G solution, Cloudcell provides fast cost-effective reliable broadband to businesses in the hardest to reach areas.

can provide installation and connection in under 48 hours, they are rapidly becoming the UK's favourite business broadband supplier!

Introducing Cloudcell EQ

Throughout the pandemic Cloudcell has worked hard to successfully support businesses of all sizes. With Cloudcell EQ, a hybrid broadband and 4G solution, Cloudcell provides fast cost-effective reliable broadband to businesses in the hardest to reach areas. It's a fully managed SDWAN based connectivity platform, that supports the growing dependency on cloud based services for employee

solution, win new business by delivering fast reliable broadband (without the lead times of traditional broadband providers), as well as driving resellers incremental revenue.

Ideal solution

Cloudcell EQ is ideal for resellers including: WISPS and IT, Telecoms and tech companies and works best when fixed or standard broadband isn't available, or if the ECCs (excess construction charges) are too expensive. But can also provide excellent disaster recovery, if a line is in there but goes down - or reliable interim broadband,

keen to bring in innovative tech for their customers.

After initial meetings, Cloudcell provided full training and support, and began working with Ice

support our clients both in the short term, and interestingly for us as a long-term alternative to under the ground lease line options. "The team at Cloudcell are on hand to offer support,

"We have seen great success with this offering, with clients in a variety of sectors, such as rural farms to kitchen showrooms."

Simon Blade, Sales Director, Ice Comms

Breaking free from the co

UK businesses, including comms providers, are being squeezed more than ever and as costs continue to rise the focus on billing solutions as a key method of achieving necessary savings has intensified, according to Union Street Technologies CFO Kevin O'Brien.

Among the most notable cost increases is the energy crisis which is placing significant strain on businesses up and down the country, with fears that this could be the breaking point for many. "Stored gas supplies have been considerably reduced following an extremely cold winter in Europe in 2020," said O'Brien. "This, combined with economic disruption from Russia and increased demand from Asia, in particular China, has resulted in unprecedented cost increases."

At the same time, Microsoft and Amazon are introducing significant increases onto the cost of cloud services, noted O'Brien. "Microsoft has announced a 15 per cent rise from March 2022 with an additional penalty for paying monthly, with similar increases announced by Amazon," he added. "The cost of labour is also rising. From April, employee and employer National Insurance contributions will increase by 1.25 per cent and 1.5 per cent respectively to tackle massive backlogs in the NHS and historic underfunding of the social care sector. Software developers and other technical roles are in high demand following the pandemic's technology drive, further exacerbating a technology skills gap that already exists in the UK."



Kevin O'Brien

Channel businesses are forced to walk a tightrope between balancing rising costs with winning and retaining customers' business in a price sensitive market

The rise in the cost of living is certain to have a knock-on impact on pay pressure, believes O'Brien. "Due to the various cost pressures and supply chain issues in the national and global economies, UK inflation rates are set to hit a 30 year high, reaching seven per cent which is significantly above the Bank of England's projections of two per cent," he explained. "Employees will, quite understandably, be seeking larger annual increases than at any time in

the last two decades to keep them in step with inflation and rising household bills.

"The obvious solution is for channel businesses to raise prices in turn, passing these costs onto their customers. However, this course of action may not be practical or desirable for all channel businesses. Communications services are becoming increasingly regulated and recent changes by Ofcom have made it easier than ever for customers to switch

providers. With the influx of the aforementioned costs, channel businesses are forced to walk a tightrope between balancing rising costs with winning and retaining customers' business in a price sensitive market."

Opportunities

But the news isn't all bad. O'Brien says the channel is presented with a wealth of opportunities thanks to massive infrastructure investments, rapidly evolving behaviours of business buyers

and the technology drive prompted by the pandemic. "The key to monetising these and other emerging opportunities while ensuring a worthwhile profit is to adopt effective billing strategies that ensure every customer and every service is as profitable as possible," he stated.

O'Brien also highlighted a number of billing and buying strategies resellers can deploy (if they're not doing so already) to boost the

Cost hike squeeze

profitability of their customer base. "Mobile data is an area that can often yield cost savings," he added. "The market offers great deals for unlimited data and customers often request it, but less than two per cent of users actually need unlimited data bundles.

"Continue to sell customers unlimited data plans if that's what they want, but by using your billing platform to provision them

supplier charges with what is being billed to customers without a billing platform to automate this process.

"Over time, increasing amounts of revenue can slip through the cracks. Consolidating billing for all services into the billing platform makes it far easier to ensure nothing is missed. It also means one bill for all services for the customer and makes it far easier to assess

carrier always gets it right can be a costly mistake."

According to O'Brien, there's countless more ways in which the billing process can be tweaked to maximise margins, but implementing these changes can be easier said than done. Optimising profits can be an expensive exercise in terms of time and resource, requiring a high degree of expertise. To help its partners address these issues Union Street Technologies has launched its ProfitaBILLity Service which is designed to support partners by boosting profits and driving down costs in their supply chains.

"A fundamental of good business is generating margins, not just sales, and when considering all the factors that have contributed to the big squeeze this has never been more important for the channel than it is today," stated O'Brien. "Finance teams need to understand this and be proactive when it comes to driving profits from existing revenue streams, while simultaneously providing meaningful analytics to ensure the business maintains good profit levels with healthy cash generation."

This can be approached in two ways, noted O'Brien. "The first option is to build a team with all the required financial, technological and industry skill sets to manage this in-house," he said. "The second and likely more cost-effective option is to leverage the billing software and the expertise of the company that supplies it to assist you – not just with boosting profits today, but also with accelerating sustainable growth in the future." ■

The key to monetising emerging opportunities while ensuring a worthwhile profit is to adopt effective billing strategies that ensure every customer and every service is as profitable as possible

onto shared or minimal data bundles from your suppliers you could increase mobile margin considerably. Occasionally customers will use an unexpected amount of data, but this risk can be mitigated by loading and rating call detail records (CDRs) as soon as they're available so you can identify unexpected activity early."

Consolidating all billing into a single system is also a key way to spot and stop revenue leakage. "We find that many resellers use their billing platform to manage rateable charges but use accounting software to bill fixed recurring charges," said O'Brien. "This method is often intended as a cost saving exercise but, ironically, it's usually a false economy. As a customer base grows it becomes hard to reconcile

the overall profitability of each customer account."

Robust protocols are key Implementing robust revenue assurance protocols before and after each bill run can make a big difference to the bottom line, noted O'Brien. "End customer rate tables should be regularly checked and updated," he said. "Import and process CDR or service detail records (SDRs) as soon as they are available, reconcile all charges and investigate any rejects (charges that are not automatically connected to a customer account) to ensure they're invoiced to the correct customer.

"Checks should also be performed to ensure that buy prices are in accordance with the tariff agreed with the carrier. Assuming the

Energy proves very timely for Talk Time

Talk Time UK, set up in 2009 by Gary and Adele Marzella, is a telecommunications specialist dealing with businesses throughout the UK. The company partnered with Fidelity Energy back in 2018 and their customers have been benefiting from the addition of energy ever since.

Gary Marzella, Head of Sales, said: "Since 2020 and even in the current climate, it is difficult running a business. We want to help and support our customers in anyway we can and by offering multiple solutions on top of telecoms means we can help alleviate different issues for them, which is such an added benefit.

"When the pandemic first hit, we were unable to do network upgrades which was a huge worry. All we could do was focus on energy, which was a God send. I have now passed on all my mobile business to other members of staff, and I am fully focused on the energy side which is a major part of our business from now on. I can't thank Fidelity enough for being there.

According to Marzella, support from the Fidelity Energy teams has been outstanding and there is always someone offering help at the other end of a phone.

"Joe Sudlow and Clare Stratford have been amazing with their knowledge and expertise. There is also a vast array of marketing materials available to white label as

well as help from the team to create bespoke literature. This allows us to keep our customers informed with current affairs and what is impacting their prices.

"We get continuous training on the products via webinars and recently had a refresh on using their custom-built portal with Clare. It is extremely simple to use, and all the integrations Fidelity have added make the process quick and efficient.

"When I speak to my clients, they all tell me the same thing; they are too busy running their business and don't have the time to act as quickly as they should. We have even built a section on our web site so customers can call and ask about energy and how we can help them. However, I have been more proactive in reaching out to them directly. As a result, I have now completed more energy deals than ever before and more importantly taken customer trust to another level.

"Our energy division has grown substantially over the last three years. I have achieved this by contacting the customer first via email, following this up with a call, getting them to send their bills in and work the magic from there. In the current climate where energy prices are at record highs, energy has helped to solidify our relationship with clients past just telecoms," concluded Marzella.



Gary Marzella, Head of Sales, Talk Time

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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



Terry O'Brien

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 makes this an event to remember.

"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. I can't wait," he added.

To enter go to www.channel-champions.com

Event sponsors already lined up for Channel Champions are CityFibre, Evolve IP, Gamma, NFON, Virtual1 and Voiceflex.



Paul Taylor, Sales Director at Voiceflex, commented: "The last two years has been a truly tough time for people in channel businesses across the UK, who have responded magnificently to the challenges presented to them by delivering outstanding products, services and solutions. We are therefore absolutely delighted to be sponsoring Channel Champions, an event that recognises the hard work, dedication, and commitment they have shown. We look forward to this fantastic opportunity to say thank you and celebrate the achievements of our valued teams. We wish everyone the very best of luck and see you in July."

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Lux in expansion mode

After registering significant growth in revenues, staff numbers and channel partners – and having passed the 100,000 user milestone amid intensifying demand for digital and omnichannel solutions, this all points to another supercharged year for TelcoSwitch, according to CEO Russell Lux.

Covid-19 will continue to serve as a catalyst for TelcoSwitch's activity in 2022

and thereafter as it seeks to capitalise on trends such as the growing requirement for omnichannel solutions, which are sparking demand for new services. The pandemic is also driving strategic changes across the channel and has prompted business leaders such as Lux to reassess their approaches. "Strategically, one of the biggest things I learned during Covid-19 was not to be afraid to go in the opposite direction to everyone else," stated Lux.

"When the economy slowed down it would have been an easy decision to go carefully, reduce costs and play it safe. Instead, we took the decision to push the business. It was a great opportunity for us to recruit some excellent talent in many different areas of the company, and I'm glad we did because finding good people is a lot more challenging right now. Had we not taken the decisions

we did at the time, I know we wouldn't be in as strong a position as we are now."

According to Lux, the challenges and opportunities faced by business leaders today are different to the ones of yesterday, but tomorrow's will be different again. "In the traditional sense people often view leadership as something reserved for someone who runs a team or a business, but I don't see it that way," said Lux. "Leadership is about looking out for the people you work alongside as much as the people who work for you. Those are qualities we seek out in anyone looking to join TelcoSwitch.

"Everyone in our business is encouraged to put their hand up, question something they think is wrong or something they think we could do better and support the people around them. That's leadership at TelcoSwitch, it's that mentality that's got us here, and it'll take us where we want to go."



Russell Lux

The past two years have seen significant growth across the entire TelcoSwitch organisation and Lux is

new challenges around onboarding people, getting them up to speed and ensuring their wellness in

To us, omnichannel is to UC what VoIP was to ISDN

seeking to optimise and build on the progress made. "We've seen a lot more businesses join our community of channel partners which translates to changes everywhere else," he added. "Unsurprisingly, more partners equal more services sold, so we needed to recruit heavily to keep up with demand across sales, support, customer success, DevOps, finance and so on.

"There's not one department where we haven't regularly welcomed new colleagues over the last 24 months. Obviously that's introduced

scenarios where so much of this happened remotely. It's a similar story with acquisitions, where we've welcomed other businesses to TelcoSwitch in a majority remote fashion."

Portfolio development

Last year TelcoSwitch also placed an emphasis on adding new products and services into the partner portfolio and bolstering its support and marketing services. "The response from existing partners, long-term partners and newcomers has been excellent and we'll work to continue our efforts this year," confirmed Lux. "I can't

give much away, but we're currently building out some new partner services that we'll be announcing in Q2."

TelcoSwitch is heavily invested in omnichannel and the depth of channels customers use to interact with the companies they buy from. "We're bullish on where we see the trend going," commented Lux. "We know voice and UC are the staple diets of teams communicating with one another and their customers, but integrating social media and other digital channels, along with integrations with other platforms, is the next level. To us, omnichannel is to UC what VoIP was to ISDN."

TelcoSwitch's growth throughout the pandemic has been well publicised. It made the top 25 of the Sunday Times Tech Track 100 in its final 2020 publication, doubled its channel partner base in 2021 and hit 100,000 users in Q1 of that year. "Sometimes people forget most of our growth has been organic and we've had to push hard across sales, marketing, customer success and more to keep that momentum," noted Lux.

"If in 2019 you'd asked me if you could not only run a business 100 per cent remote, but grow it, complete funding rounds, acquire other businesses and triple headcount, I'd have said no. Yet we have, and that's all happened because we've got great people who work with us, and great partners that trust us. It's pushed the boundaries on what I thought was possible, and I think all of us have experienced that in some form throughout the last couple of years." ■

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Sales and marketing working



Photo: Yan Krukov

Sales and marketing are traditionally two distinctive approaches to the same end – yet all too often operate in silos.

Marketing is strategy and lead generation; sales is the implementation of that strategy. So, it is vital for businesses to close this loop to create an approach which supports up-sell and cross-sell opportunities as well as new business development.

The ultimate aim must be to make everyone's life easier, therefore weekly meetings are advised at which targets can be set for both departments.

There are many other ways to make sure missions are aligned which have been articulated by our contributors this month, when asked how they ensure their Sales and Marketing teams are joined up and pulling together in the same direction.

CANDICE CUNLIFFE
F6

"The relationship between sales and marketing often ends once leads are handed over. Over 25% of businesses describe their sales and marketing teams as misaligned, and 43% of teams lack accurate shared data on target prospects. Here's how you align your sales and marketing teams: Set joint sales and marketing targets, starting with your overarching goal and working backwards; ensure sales and marketing work together to define your ideal customer, which will drive better leads and deliver more conversions; invest in a CRM that joins up your sales and marketing, and supports both up-sell and cross-sell opportunities; automate sales and marketing tasks. You'll see a 14.5% increase in sales productivity, a 12.2% reduction in marketing overheads, and more leads and conversions. Make this your priority. Because when sales and marketing are aligned, you'll enjoy shorter sales cycles, lower market entry costs, lower cost of sales, and more revenue."

CRAIG HERRETT
PROVU

"In 2021 we developed an Operational Committee (OpCo) to empower our teams to implement changes. Both our Sales Manager and Marketing Manager are part of this. As an initial kick off they sit together and discuss the targets and objectives for the year. They then work closely to identify the opportunities which will support them in achieving their targets. This enables them to develop the sales and marketing strategies side-by-side. As members of the OpCo, they also work with other members to review sales analytics and develop our strategy alongside the wider company. For us, this works really well and welcomes some great ideas which are sometimes a little left field!"

BERNIE MCPHILLIPS
PANGEA

"It can be tricky in the channel, where you need to balance your messaging between what partners and end-users both need. Talking directly to customers, sales teams often learn key knowledge about the market; but that knowledge doesn't always make it back to the marketing teams. Knowledge sharing and integrated workflows are key. Marketing needs to know who the sales team's ideal customers are. Sales needs to know what the marketing team's campaign plans look like, what collateral they can take to partners, and so on. It's like football. If sales is your striker, marketing is your creative midfielder; you need both working together to score any goals. We do celebrate wins together and give credit where it's due. As the ones who strike the deals, sales historically get the glory; but often, these deals begin with marketing successes like webinar views, website visits, collateral downloads and so on."

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SUSIE WARDELL
EVOKE TELECOM

"In every progressive business, sales and marketing work together to deliver a program that creates awareness, interest, desire and generates action. However, to achieve a silo free, joined-up sales and marketing function, alignment must come from the top. With a business lead responsible for both functions, performance comes through a channel with a single joined up strategy supported by an open feedback mechanism. The road to sales success always begins with marketing, who must provide and maintain a compelling product portfolio. The winning combination is that irresistible blend of problem-solving core solutions and services, supported by complementary products that enhance customer experience. This in turn provides those up-sell and cross-sell opportunities that enable sales and other business areas to regularly engage in added value conversations with customers and prospects alike. This we find delivers not only customer success stories, but also the very best type of new business lead - referrals!"



BRITT MEGAHEY
BARCLAY
COMMUNICATIONS

"Often, a disjointed process between sales and marketing teams comes about from which metrics are determined important by both parties. Traditionally, sales teams are focused on closing deals, whereas marketers tend to have their own metrics for tracking success. The solution is developing well-defined objectives and a mutually understood strategy to deliver results. Providing a holistic view of data enables us to align our sales and marketing teams. Creating personalised content that solves problems, helps to educate and nurture leads before they are fed into the sales pipeline. These then become high-converting 'Sales Qualified Leads'. Ensuring both teams are reactive is also essential. Marketing is often a case of trial and error; finding a mix that works for your target market. Having an open line of communication between the sales and marketing teams allows for strategy changes to be made, helping to successfully achieve our objectives."



LAUREN MCMANUS
GAMMA

"At Gamma our two favourite sayings are 'feel connected' and 'work smarter, together'. They won't sound groundbreaking, but these obvious sentiments are so often lost in business practice. A marketer generates a lead. A salesperson picks it up and pursues conversion. Sadly, this transfer stage can be where the conversation between departments starts and ends. Do your marketers know which assets their sales colleagues are most likely to use? Do sales relay customer pain points to inform future campaigns? What frictions or bad data are clogging up the sales funnel? Communication breakdowns can foster a lack of accountability. The solution is relationship management. Clear processes and feedback channels ensure all departments are pulling in the same direction, leading to shorter sales cycles and increased marketing revenue. This era of hybrid working may have pulled teams further apart geographically, but the modern workforce can be as collaborative as it is remote."



ANTONY BLACK
WAVENET

"Harmonising and bringing sales and marketing teams and the respective approaches together can come with challenges. Wavenet Wholesale takes a holistic approach that results in dynamic and adaptable processes and people. We achieve this through the following: emotions – both sales and marketing colleagues have each other's back, they have built great professional relationships, and recognise and celebrate each other's successes and achievements; processes – clear, repeatable processes ensure that everyone understands expectations and the impact their actions have on the wider team; communication – a continual feedback loop provides both teams with information on what is performing well and what needs to be improved. First-hand knowledge from the sales team complements the marketing team's evidential data that outlines what content and information are responded to. We mirror this approach with partners, ensuring we support, educate and equip them, ultimately working as a collective towards the same goal."



IAN ROWAN
WILDIX UK

"Marketing creates leads before the sales process can even start, but they occupy two complementing spheres with major overlap; without interest there would be no one to sell to! We start alignment by deciding what the sales targets are for each year. Then, marketing activities are built around generating the revenue and partner numbers we want to establish in the sales pipeline. Based on conversion ratios, we understand exactly how many leads are required to be generated by the marketing team. Both teams must employ the same ideology, communicating the same message from interest to proposal. We use a concept called 'ValueSelling' whereby our marketing messages focus on the value of the opportunity, as does our sales process. As a result, we're all working towards a common goal. However, marketing activities must have clearly defined goals, letting us put a value towards each activity and show a positive ROI."



SHAHRAM
BAGHERZADEH
LOOP VOICE AND DATA

"Aligning sales and marketing needs to start with the alignment of planning and goals. We make sure our sales plan and marketing plan align and support one another, for more effective use of budget. It is also important to configure your sales pipeline stages in your CRM to work well with the lead nurturing that happens in your marketing automation system. Preferably it's all in one system and your teams can see what is relevant to their roles. Agree on lead scoring and lead metrics, that way every lead and opportunity is followed up, at the right time. No lead goes cold, cross-sell and up-sell possibilities are identified, and more opportunities are won. A focus on customer experience management, with an active asking and listening function across sales and marketing is characteristic of a perfect sales and marketing function, ensuring you are always understanding current customer needs and meeting them."

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Lynch in CRO role



Brendan Lynch

FORMER Redcentric exec Brendan Lynch has joined FluidOne as Chief Revenue Officer, reporting to CEO Russell Horton. Lynch spent most of his 28 years in the comms industry managing sales and marketing teams across the UK, Europe and India.

His previous roles include VP of Sales Europe (Wholesale) at Reliance Globalcom; Director, Business and Partner Markets at Virgin Media Business; and most recently Group Sales and Marketing Director at Redcentric.

Horton said: "We wanted to attract someone who demonstrates the necessary knowledge and tenacity for us to achieve our vision. There is much in the pipeline for FluidOne

that Brendan's experience and attitude will greatly complement in his role as CRO."

Lynch added: "As an all-encompassing connected cloud solutions provider FluidOne has a fantastic opportunity to deliver products and solutions that UK businesses want and need."

Also on the move...

DAVID Howson has stepped down as Six Degrees Chairperson making way for Darren Norfolk. Howson held the role since April 2021. Norfolk joined the Six Degrees board as a Non-Executive Director in December 2020. "The market opportunity available

to us is significant, and I believe we are in a strong position to differentiate ourselves around cyber security, cloud and professional services," he stated. CEO Simon Crawley-Trice added: "Having a Chairperson with in excess of 15 years experience within the managed services arena, who has deep market awareness and has gone through many transformations, will be invaluable to Six Degrees."



Darren Norfolk

INFORM Billing's customer support and projects teams will be overseen by Matt Bodsworth following his promotion to the role of Billing Operations Manager. He joined Inform Billing in 2016 and undertook a four year apprenticeship degree while working within the business, qualifying with a first



Matt Bodsworth

class Business Management degree and a Prince2 Practitioner qualification. He went on to become a product expert managing the largest and most complex customer onboarding projects. Anna Calladine, Head of Billing Operations

and Services, said: "During his time at Inform Billing Matt has become well respected with customers and colleagues. As well as taking a role in technical pre-sales, Matt has a reputation for providing excellent customer support and successfully managing complex data migration projects."

DIGITAL transformation whizz Michael Brodigan has rocked up at Boxxe as Public Sector Sales Director. "Over the last few years we have seen the way technology has helped the public sector to not only improve lives but save lives and make a difference to everyone in challenging times," he said. "In this industry we can help the Government make the country a safer place to live, improve public services and increase engagement with citizens on a level that has never been possible before."

IoT SOLUTIONS and services provider North has appointed Stuart Hall as CFO. He has a track record of scaling high growth tech firms and joins from Sandcastle Care where he played a key role in its merger with Aspris. Hall is a qualified accountant and began his career with EY before moving into the tech sector where he held senior finance roles at Daisy and Damovo. North CEO Glen Williams said: "Stuart's wealth of experience within technology businesses will equip him well for this role."

TalkTalk names product leader

A NEW group product practice rolled out across TalkTalk Group's consumer, wholesale and B2B business units will be spearheaded by incoming General Manager of Group Product Susie Buckridge.

Her prior experience includes leading YouView, the digital television platform owned by TalkTalk, BT, BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 since February 2019. Prior to that she was Director of Product & Business Development through launch and YouView's evolution to a cloud-based TV platform.

Previous postings include stints at the BBC where she was Head of Product Strategy, and spells at Capgemini, Ernst & Young and Deloitte.

TalkTalk CEO Tristia Harrison said: "Susie is a strong product innovator with deep experience in software delivery and bringing simple, frictionless products to market."



Susie Buckridge

Fernando secures key Glide position

MAX Fernando has joined Glide Group as Head of Regulation & Compliance. He will lead the implementation of a number of upcoming regulatory telecommunications initiatives such as the Telecoms

Security Bill, One Touch Switching and Project Gigabit. Glide Group CEO Tim Pilcher commented: "Max's appointment marks a significant step in working with regulators, Government and industry to ensure that future initiatives achieve their goals for altnets."

While Regulatory Manager at BT Fernando was responsible for several areas of regulatory negotiations including open communications and Broadband Universal Service Obligation (USO). He was also recently appointed Chair of the Independent Networks Cooperative Association (INCA) Standards Committee. Fernando's prior experience also includes a spell at Ofcom. "It's one of the most interesting times to be working in an altNet, especially from a regulatory perspective," he stated.



Max Fernando

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