



Google Cloud chief on accelerating digital transformation p14

Zoom's Dion Smith: An architect of channel growth P16



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This month's movers and shakers



# Action urged in lead up to all-IP

**BT WHOLESALE** claims its strategic reinvention is reflective of a marketplace undergoing unprecedented change ahead of the all-IP era, demanding a far higher level of collaboration between supplier and channel partner.

### SPECIAL REPORT

BT Wholesale has launched a new set of initiatives, products and roadmaps geared towards forging more connected partnerships and supporting the industry's move to all-IP.

The company says the timing of these developments is significant as they come when the channel market requires greater collaboration, clarity and support ahead of the PSTN shutdown in 2025.

BT Wholesale's collaboration and VoIP platform is to be 'supercharged' with a new portal, and the launch of Teams Direct Connect was announced alongside greater investment in APIs and mix-and-match solutions for hybrid working.

BT Wholesale is also set to introduce a single order journey to help overcome number porting issues by late summer.

According to BT Wholesale Channel Sales Director Gavin Jones (pictured) a sweet spot

is the 14 million hosted cloud voice seats up for grabs ahead of the December 2025 PSTN switch off. "We are all facing into a future of services, applications and opportunity," he said.

Jones also stressed that Openreach is not wavering on its planned PSTN closure. "If you want to go where innovation and technology is going then don't anchor yourself in the past," he added. "We are 16 months away from stop-sell."

**See page 22 for the full report**



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## EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

MANY ICT providers in the channel face the possibility of being left behind, as do their customers, unless actionable considerations about the future are entertained now, ones that will ensure the channel meets the 2025 PSTN switch-off. The risk of losing credibility in the market, and losing customers to more switched

on rivals, exists despite the likes of Openreach and BT Wholesale pouring much effort into getting the message over. This seems odd. So when will the penny drop? For many, it will be when they realise they've dropped a clanger and got their self-defeating timing wrong.

Early birds always get the worm therefore stick-in-the-mud strategies wedded to near obsolete technology are no more than exercises in sticking your head in the sand. It's time to forget about old networks and traditional products, because to keep selling them would very soon be to do more harm than good. All the advice from those in the know is to be scrupulous in not escalating any risks to the future of partner businesses through inaction, and become a liability to end users.

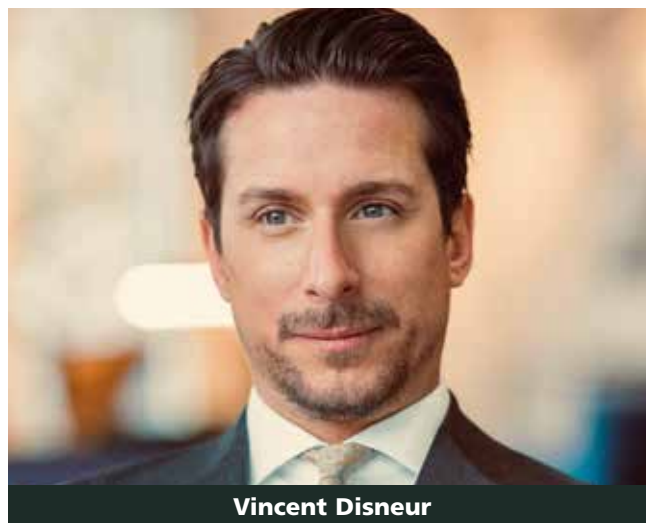
The objective – to switch the nation to all-IP – has got to be achieved according to the Openreach plan, and with this in mind it is clear to see that many upstream providers are becoming far more effective in their support of partners.

Yet swathes of resellers, probably and in part naturally, will take a tactical decision to delay the inevitable and sweat some assets – but this is tantamount to procrastinating over a matter that could test the comms channel like never before.

Perhaps current messaging around the significance of December 2025 needs to be given the megaphone, a message so loud and clear that only the sound of many pennies dropping could drown it out. Only then could the industry march in unison towards the shared all-IP goal.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

# Union Street invests £3m



Vincent Disneur

UNION Street is ploughing £3m into research and development this year in a bid to bring out new features including solutions for end user bill presentation and self-service, integrations with other BSS/OSS and automated functions.

The move builds on investments made over the past year into software solutions and infrastructure, including the Microsoft Azure environment and system security.

Union Street has also made changes to its development and quality assurance processes, and has increased the headcount across its product and development departments.

“These changes will be pivotal to leveraging our new investment to full effect and speed delivery of new features for our 950-plus partners,” stated MD Vincent Disneur.

“Effective billing solutions are critical for the channel and we have consulted with our partners to understand how their billing processes should ideally operate and what they'll need from us in the coming years.

“This information has helped us to devise a long-term development projection and we have recruited a skilled team, in addition to implementing new processes and procedures, to back it up.”

## NEWS ROUNDUP

REDCENTRIC has swung its attention onto acquisitions following the securement of a new funding facility. “We have broadened our relationships with NatWest and Barclays and welcomed Bank of Ireland and Silicon Valley Bank,” stated Redcentric CFO David Senior. “As Redcentric continues to progress on its growth trajectory, the ongoing support from global financial institutions is an endorsement of our plans and gives us the firepower to execute on our growth strategy.”

EQUITY Managed Services Group's plan to hit £10m revenue (currently £6m) by 2024 has taken a leap forward with the acquisition of Oxford-based First Line IT and First Line Telecom. The transaction strengthens Equity's presence in the Thames Valley and home counties region. The deal also boosts Equity's technical resource and data centre capabilities and brings the base of active clients to over 600. “While we are pursuing growth through our M&A efforts it is important that we build Equity's technical expertise and continue to grow our competencies,” said Equity Director Alex Hall. “The First Line deal allows us to meet these objectives.”

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NEWS ROUNDUP

INTEC Group's buy-and-build campaign continues at pace with the acquisition of IT services provider Astec Computing, it's 12 transaction since 2016 and fourth this year. The deal extends inTEC's reach into the south east, taking its office tally to ten sites in the UK and Ireland with more expansion plans this year. Hastings HQ'd Astec Computing has Microsoft Gold Partner accreditation and was founded in 1992.

THREE UK's launch into the business market will be supported by a mobile security solution from CWSI. Their partnership builds on Three Mobile Protect launched in Ireland in 2020, now extended to the UK. CWSI CEO Ronan Murphy said: "Given the scale of Three's ambition in the UK business market this has the potential to be a multi-million euro contract for CWSI."

BT WHOLESALE has launched WHC Teams Direct Connect for small business customers, enabling access to hosted PBX or hosted SIP trunking directly from within Teams. "Bringing Microsoft Teams into our WHC portfolio was a natural next step for our partners and their customers," said Gavin Jones, Channel Director at BT Wholesale. See page 22

## Babble's buy spree continues

BABBLE'S influence in the north west will be more strongly felt following its acquisition of Stockport and Ellesmere Port-based IT and telecoms solution provider Active.

The deal adds 500 customers in various sectors across the north of England and brings more expertise across UC, mobile and cyber.

Active CEO Mark Boyle remains as part of the combined organisation initially aiding the integration process.

The transaction strengthens Babble's overall regional strategy and builds on the 2021 acquisition of Concert and 2020 acquisition of Lake. Babble now has offices in Winsford, Ellesmere Port and Stockport.

"Mark will be helping us on our journey," said Babble CEO Matt Parker. "He has experience of business in the north and we are aligned on Babble's mission to help companies succeed in this region."

Babble has completed 17 UK acquisitions and it generated revenues of over £40m in 2021. The business now has more than 5,000 customers.

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# Rydal snares IT service biz

RYDAL Group has acquired West Midlands business Broken Stones Managed IT.

The financial details of the deal were not disclosed.

The transaction extends Peterborough-based Rydal's reach to new locations and in return Broken Stones' portfolio receives a boost from Rydal's service offerings.

Broken Stones will continue operating from its Lichfield offices with no changes.

Rydal Group MD Steffan Dancy said: "The acquisition is another step forward in Rydal's strategy to grow its footprint within the managed IT services market, which also includes the recent acquisition of Agenda IT.

"We're focused on growing our IT support talent to enable us to support the increased demand. Bringing Broken Stones into our group is a no brainer both in terms of location and resource."

Former Broken Stones CEO Chris Blunt (who is still working within the group) added: "This acquisition will present better opportunities for our staff and our customers, with more resource available to allow Broken Stones and Rydal to support customers better."



Steffan Dancy

Rydal Group was founded in 2008 by Dancy, operating from a home-based location delivering technology and business communication solutions to small businesses in the Peterborough area.

NEWS ROUNDUP

BT HAS trialed a new hyper-sensitive quantum radio receiver to boost next-gen 5G and IoT networks. The technology uses 'excited atoms' to deliver over 100x greater sensitivity than traditional receivers. It could in future form the basis of ultra-sensitive 5G receivers for use in very low power passive mobile networks. Researchers at BT Labs in Martlesham are now working to miniaturise the equipment and find the optimum RF modulation and signal processing for potential use in future generations of radio networks. Howard Watson, CTO, BT, said: "Our programme has huge potential to boost the performance of our next generation EE network."

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# Daisy seizes comms firm



Dave McGinn

DAISY Communications' influence within the telematics space will be more strongly felt following its acquisition of Warrington headquartered Communicate Better, a managed tech provider of IT, mobile, telephony and telematics.

Daisy Communications CEO Dave McGinn commented: "This is a promising partnership to add to our portfolio, increasing our footprint in telephony products, enhancing our Microsoft relationship and accruing telematic products."

Communicate Better CEO Wayne Cartwright comment-

ed: "I've been at the helm of Communicate Better for over 12 years and we've come a long way.

"Now is the right time for me to step aside and hand the reins over to Daisy Communications' capable hands."

The deal follows Daisy's acquisitions of XLN and Premier Choice Telecom this year.

Daisy Communications now has circa 200,000 customers, revenues of over £200m and 850-plus employees.

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# Vidicode aids Retell customers

VIDICODE UK has stepped in to support former Retell customers and partners following the call recording manufacturer's winding up.

Vidicode UK MD Everton Stuart has acquired the IP, assets and goodwill of his former employer and redeployed Retell staff.

"Our vision is to transition customers from Retell's Sense call recording system to the Vidicode Apresa with its compliance and compatibility benefits," said Stuart. "Vidicode UK's solutions will help manage the regulatory requirements of PCI, FCA and GDPR."

"However, we appreciate that some customers will want to stick with their current system, so we will offer technical and administrative support through our team of former Retell employees."

Apresa includes screen recording, compatibility with more systems, extension side recording on 3CX and options for on-premise, cloud or hosted call recording.

# Fournet acquires to strengthen network and security portfolio

FOURNET'S networking and security portfolio has expanded following its acquisition of IT infrastructure company C>Ways. The deal enables Palatine-backed FourNet to provide security across its whole technology stack.

"There has been an acceleration of convergence in all aspects of IT and communications," stated FourNet CEO Richard Pennington.

"Organisations now require an underlying network with security controls that provide the assurance required to operate across multiple locations.



Richard Pennington

"This is a key area of growth and will ensure the security of the vast number of users now working from home."

This is the first of several acquisitions that will enable

FourNet to offer such security offerings to its customers.

C>Ways was formed by Nick and Andrea Jackson. It has 24 employees, a Scarborough HQ and an office in London.



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## It's NOT all about the money



Darrol Stevens and Ollie Benn

There are currently more job vacancies than unemployed people in the UK for the first time since records began. With over 1.3 million job openings and unemployment at its lowest for almost 50 years, employee retention and attraction has never been more important.

Salaries have failed to keep up with the rise in the cost-of-living, but they have increased, nonetheless. At neoci, we have seen a significant rise in salaries across the telecoms industry over the past 12 months. Hiring people in the current climate is not only more difficult, but also more expensive.

**"I can't offer the candidate the salary they want as it's more than anyone in the existing team"**

We hear this all the time. It's a big issue for many telcos who are currently hiring when candidate salary expectations are higher than they are paying their existing employees.

The logical answer to this is to give your existing team a pay rise! But it's not that easy. Giving everyone a sudden pay increase is a costly business. However, if you are not paying people the market rate, you are likely to lose them to your competitors who are willing to pay more. Also, if your employees discover you are

hiring new people on more money than them, this will lead to resentment, and they will walk away! It's a tricky thing to get right.

From our experience at neoci, through speaking with candidates and clients, the focus needs to be on more than just money. Company culture, core values, personal development, flexible working, employee wellbeing and diversity & inclusion are just some of the key reasons a candidate will want to work for an employer in 2022. It is definitely time for every business to consider their offering to both existing and future employees in order to retain and attract the best talent. Gone are the days when people should feel lucky to have a job. If you want to build a successful business, you need the right people to get involved. You need to be competitive to attract them and to keep them there.

There is no doubt that money is a key factor in why people take a job and why they stay. But simply throwing money at it won't solve the problem. You need to work just as hard to attract and retain your employees as you do your customers.

Neoci are specialists in recruiting into tech and telco, for further details visit [www.neoci.co.uk](http://www.neoci.co.uk)

# CityFibre reaffirms partner criticality

CITYFIBRE'S challenger status in the race to fibre-up the UK's business community remains underpinned by channel partnerships, reaffirmed Chief Executive Greg Mesch.

Speaking at the company's first Executive Summit staged at the Nobu Portman Square Hotel in London last month, Mesch told carrier and national partner leaders that without their support CityFibre could not meet its ambitious targets to deliver fibre to 285 cities and towns across the UK.

Quizzed by Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergeant, Mesch said: "Without you, our partners, we fail – it's a simple as that."

The event concluded with networking drinks and an evening dinner at which guest speaker and broadcaster Gabby Logan drew a comparison to the diversity and inclusion challenges she faced in the media world, to those working hard to overcome challenges in the telecommunications industry.

"The event focused on peer-to-peer C-Level engagement and the feedback we've had has been extremely positive," commented Andrew Wilson, Head of Wholesale. "Events



Greg Mesch underscores key role of partners

like this, that provide valuable knowledge and bring together industry leaders, have been sorely missed in recent times. It's something we will continue to do this year and beyond."



EIGHTEEN top performing Pragma resellers joined Ericsson-LG's exclusive UK service provider on a trip to Marbella following their success in selling Ericsson-LG iPECS UCaaS technologies. Pragma CFO Dean Mayer said: "Marbella was the perfect destination to recognise the outstanding growth of our best performing reseller partners. It was great to celebrate their successes with them and see the phenomenal achievements our partners have achieved in person."

## SCC bags Visavvi

SCC's UC business has received a boost following its acquisition of AV firm Visavvi.

SCC's dedicated UC operation (called SCC AVS) was formed in 2018 after the merger of its AV business with avsnnet.

SCC AVS MD Graham Fry commented: "This acquisition is a milestone moment for SCC AVS, with organic growth fuelled by customers on a transformation journey requiring digital workplace solutions that enable anytime, anywhere collaboration in real time.

"Visavvi enables SCC AVS to focus on accelerating its growth strategy by adding scale, capability and a wider geographical reach in the UK."

SCC CEO James Rigby added: "Visavvi strengthens our capability in education with its specialism in large space AV. Visavvi customers will benefit from SCC's expertise in voice and collaboration, supporting the digital workplace."

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### NEWS ROUNDUP

**FIDELITY Group has achieved ISO 9001:2015 certification, which is an internationally recognised standard that ensures products and services are delivered through an effective quality management system. Transformation Director Ian McNamara commented: "The benefits of introducing a Quality Management System into the company are wide-ranging and Fidelity Group will focus on continual improvement and quality objectives for all employees."**

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## Partnerships are key to leveraging assets and full fibre success

by Steve Mackervoy, Head of Sales, NextGenAccess

If the world was simple when it comes to building telecoms infrastructure, we would just build a network, customers would ask us to connect them to it and then they would pay us for the services over a long period of time, thereby assuring our investors of a return on the capital employed.

That was the thinking at the start of the millennium, and it clearly didn't work, with many operators ending up with Chapter 11 protection and the like. It also led to multiple networks being financed and built literally next to each other, with them all competing for the same finite set of customers.

The world has changed and nowadays we are all faced with several economic realities:

- Primarily, the first customer on the bus isn't going to pay for the bus, so even if we are building an asset for another operator the asset needs to be leveraged by finding other customers for it.
- Secondly, it takes time (and usually longer than we first thought) to sell whatever we are selling, whether that be FTTP to Mrs Miggins or Data Centre-to-Data Centre connectivity to a partner or a carrier.
- And thirdly, most of us have investors and investors who are usually impatient – so we all need to leverage the asset quickly.

Therefore, partnerships are the answer! Let's explore why:

- Having multiple partners all engaged in trying to sell the asset at the same time will bring in more customers quicker.
- Partnerships also give us assets to sell in areas where we haven't even built yet.
- A concentrated sales effort means that the end-user is



"The world has changed and nowadays we are all faced with several economic realities"

Steve Mackervoy

much more likely to receive the message relevant to them.

- An indirect model such as this may mean lower margins on a percentage basis, but it will surely increase the overall return and the key element is that it will happen quicker.
- It will speed up the rate of return thereby making your FD and your investors very happy.
- It will speed up the deployment of full fibre, thereby delighting Mrs Miggins.

And finally, it will speed up getting your hands on more of the investor's capital, which in turn speeds up the rollout and so the cycle goes on...

# Take business to a new level

**The margin making priorities of ICT resellers will take centre stage at this year's Margin in Comms-as-a-Service summit (MiCaaS – June 23rd 2022, Forest of Arden Marriott Hotel) where delegates will engage directly with new business opportunities residing in UCaaS and CCaaS environments.**



Bringing margin making opportunities to life

The MiCaaS agenda offers a deep dive into these key profit centres and also functions as an educational programme enabling delegates to approach sales growth with confidence. The conference content is then taken forward into an afternoon of meetings and networking where attendees build further on the insights gained during the morning sessions.

The conference agenda is as follows:

### Harnessing the UCaaS market boom

UCaaS adoption has been catalysed by Covid-19 which saw leadership endorsement of technology investment reach a new high. In this session, we explore how ICT resellers can thrive on competitive differentiation in the burgeoning UCaaS space.

### Scoping the full CCaaS opportunity

Businesses are placing far greater value on the customer experience which is driving demand for CCaaS solutions from all organisations – no matter their size. In this session we

put a spotlight on the true scope of the contact centre market and how resellers can address cross-sector demand for more meaningful customer interactions.

### Build value through secure payment solutions

Resellers that empower all functions of a contact centre will be the most successful, and putting a sharper focus on all aspects of the service offering is critical – including payment solutions. In this session we explore how secure payment solutions will enable you to build even greater value and trust with your customers.

### Take your business to new heights

World famous ski jumper Eddie 'The Eagle' Edwards (AKA Michael Edwards) shot to fame during the winter Olympics of Calgary in 1988 where he became a national and global sporting hero, symbolic of meeting immense challenges with a 'can-do' mindset. In his Special Keynote session Eddie will share insights into

his journey (reflected in the 2016 biographical film Eddie the Eagle) and show how a determination to be better, and overcome challenges, can help you take your business to the next level.

Comms Dealer's Margin series of events have a proven record of providing a productive and rewarding environment for reseller principals to meet and discuss key issues and explore new profit opportunities.

### Who should attend?

Places at MiCaaS are offered to MD/CEO/CTO level delegates of small to medium sized comms/ICT reseller businesses. To register please visit [www.margin-in-caas.com](http://www.margin-in-caas.com)



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# Fit for a modern world

**Fitness for purpose should be an unnegotiable customer requirement of resellers and service providers, and Enreach's incoming Head of International Carrier Sales, Iain Sinnott, is robust in supporting the critical balance between customer demands and the right technology fit to meet them.**

**N**o channel organisation can be regarded as immune from the pressures of market changes. And the only way forward for resellers is out of their traditional comfort zones, according to Sinnott. "The world has changed, and the industry needs to change too," he stated. "We need to rethink pre-pandemic models and look at how we can collectively thrive going forward. We must work together to deliver the right technology to end user customers and have a more results-focused approach that will ensure higher ARPU and lower churn – all challenges that existing players know too much about."

For Sinnott, unfitness for purpose is glaring in many instances. "We need to get away from silos, over-focusing on voice and even over-fixating on meeting tools – the multiple forms of contact we all use today," he added. "We need to be focused on the people and the processes within the end client to deliver better productivity and great customer and colleague experiences."

In taking control of these requirements channel organisations can become a model for the rest of the sector. In this context, says Sinnott, his prior roles stand him in good stead in his



Iain Sinnott

**We need to be focused on the people and the processes within the end client to deliver better productivity and great customer and colleague experiences**

new role. "My experience is helpful in seeing beyond the technology and into the end customers' desired outcomes," he said. "The focus needs to be on what customers need and will use, solving real-world problems, not just selling technology."

Sinnott has a long history within the UK reseller market,

spanning over three decades supporting general and vertical sales strategies in the IP and mobile sectors. He spent the last nine years promoting and selling cloud service management platforms. "I have a realistic understanding of the operational and support challenges that go hand-in-hand with the delivery of

even the best constructed UC&C propositions," he said. "When I first looked at the Enreach portfolio I was impressed by the simplicity of how its propositions are constructed, providing a balance between choice and practical consumption, meaning partners can customise to match the operational nature of their target markets."

#### Listening is key

Sinnott is now responsible for finding carriers and service providers across Northern Europe to partner with and bring technology benefits to businesses of all sizes. "It's a big job but a brilliant opportunity, and my first task is to listen to these players and understand where they see the opportunity and the challenges," he added. "The spirit of what we are doing is best summed up by the group's vision of bringing together communications, productivity and network solutions into one seamless environment, including CRMs, ERPs and contact centre features and marketing automation."

"This overcomes a world of multiple but siloed types of contact with inconsistent connectivity and user experiences, and mobile is isolated. It also gives users better control over their availability, how they manage their business lives and their personal

identities – physical and digital barriers disappear."

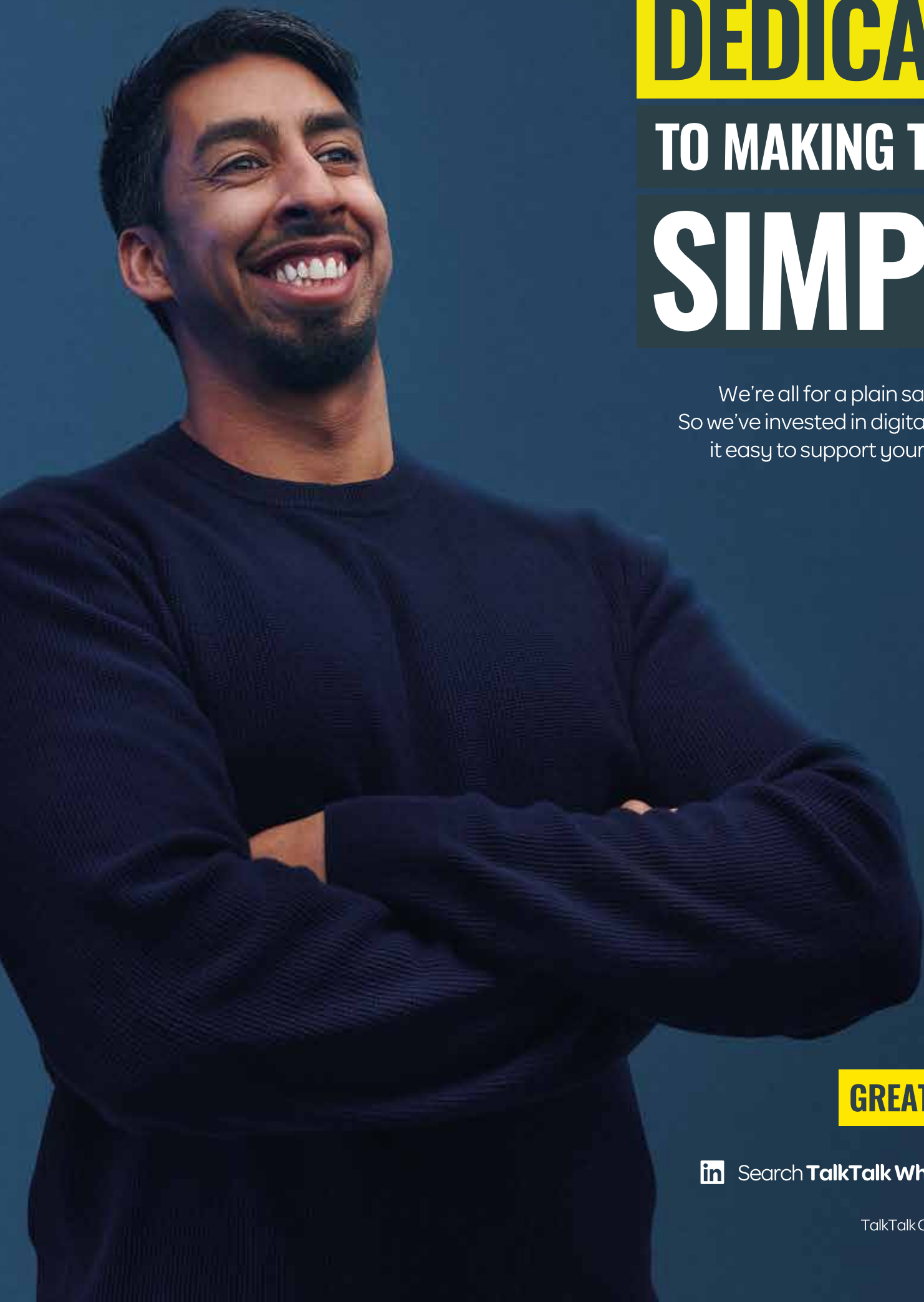
Customer experience tools are a primary focus for 2022/3 and Sinnott believes that delivering these tools effectively to the SMB market is a space in which resellers can increase revenues and decrease future churn. "There is a convenient rhetoric circulating that the smaller the business the less the advantage delivered by things like call queues, call-back queues and web chat," he stated. "That is untrue – what it actually recognises is that it is hard to deliver and support those tools economically. Here is a space in which Enreach can help channel players win. We provide multiple contact centre style features as standard, bringing the 'casual contact' centre within reach of any size organisation."

Sinnott says the emergence of the micro market as an eCommerce opportunity will be of great interest to those who can construct packages, provision and support them with minimal human interaction. And according to Sinnott, Enreach will be a strong player in all three tiers of supply – platform, SaaS wholesale and direct to enterprise. "With white label and bespoke package creation there is no channel conflict," he added. "Indeed, the lessons

**Continued on page 12**

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**Continued from page 10** from direct and indirect across many international markets will ensure that innovation is driven by customer need and process change requirements from the real world, rather than from a hypothetical one."

Breaking this down into examples of what that means in practice to the channel, Enreach's contact solutions cascade into multiple opportunities. "Mobile-first is a major emphasis for us," noted Sinnott. "The core device in our personal lives is the mobile, so let's turn the mobile into the device and control portal of choice for business communications systems. Mobile devices can become the launchpad for fully integrated voice, collaboration, meeting, customer experience and much more. The delivery of effective CX tools to the SMB sector, especially for those operating in the B2C world, will create the

value that allows reseller ARPU to rise. Plus, the way we have integrated the 'casual contact centre' into the core soft clients makes that a simple 'persona' based package structure."

**Primary opportunity**

Becoming the trusted advisor for the new world of comms and integrated technologies – with silo-less contact solutions at the heart – is resellers' biggest opportunity, believes Sinnott. "There has been a massive shift from voice first to the triple focus of voice, meeting and collaboration, and the CX," he added. "The crossover with IT is obvious so players from both sides must re-align to be advocates of the best blend of services."

We are clearly at a turning point – and the danger comes from being unresponsive to the demands of the new market. "The destiny of resellers and SIs is very much in their hands,

but they need to act today," added Sinnott. "Their value lies in being trusted advisors, so it worries me that so many want to over-simplify the proposition and focus just on core PBX replacement packages. The sales process, when done well, allows a reseller to investigate the working practices of their customers and bring in the smartest technology tools to deliver productivity benefits and the greatest ROI.

"So resellers need to invest in sales craft and cement their importance to the customer. We need to talk in human terms that engage business clients, dropping the industry's use of 'X'aaS which the real world doesn't truly get. Our task is to deliver a converged contact experience, achieved through a blend of some spectacular technology options. If you commoditise your product you may be painting yourself out of the picture, and be unfit for purpose."

**Just a minute with Iain Sinnott...**

**Role model:** Sir Ken Robinson: He saw the world as it is and looked to design education to achieve the highest results for every individual.

**Your biggest fear?** Losing my enthusiasm for the work I do. However, I don't think there is much chance of this happening any time soon.

**Best advice you have been given?** Don't apply for an advertised job. Approach the organisation you want to work for and help design the best role to exploit your skills.

**What talent do you wish you had:** To sing in tune.

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I am dyslexic but thankful for the compensatory skills it forced me to evolve, and the empathy for difference that it installed in me. I consider it to be a major net benefit.

**Name one thing you could not do without in your job:** Time to think the challenges through. If many of us aimed to achieve 20 per cent less our results would be 50 per cent better.

**One example of something you have overcome:** My inferiority complex which was based on my academic results, caused mainly by then undiagnosed dyslexia.

**Three ideal dinner guests:** Sir Nicholas Winton, the organiser-in-chief of the wartime kinder trains and the most heroic yet modest man I have come across. Sir Ludwig Guttmann, creator of the Para Olympics who broke down prejudice against physical difference. And Nelson Mandela because he stuck to his principles and did the right thing even when it was the hard thing.

**What possession could you not live without?** My jetboil.

**Top tip for resellers:** Plan change, invest in learning and partner with suppliers that are excited by your ambition and committed to supporting it.

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A man in a blue V-neck shirt is looking down at a tablet computer. He has a slight smile. The background is blurred, showing other people in a room. Overlaid on the image are several bright green, glowing light trails that curve across the scene, suggesting motion or data flow. The overall lighting is dim, with the green light trails providing a strong contrast.

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# Taking a cloud lead

**Cloud services continue to accelerate business transformation and as each day passes the role of channel partners in driving this revolution becomes ever more critical, according to Google Cloud UK&I Managing Director Helen Kelisky.**

**F**or anyone working in cloud leadership the most gripping trend today is the acceleration of cloud adoption. "The market has been through at least three iterations since the start of my career, with priorities expanding out from saving money and increasing the speed of delivery, to unlocking the value of data and driving more timely decision making," said Kelisky. "In today's market, customers are looking to deploy cloud in new and innovative ways. To do this, we are strengthening our partner ecosystem with plans to more than double our spend in support of partners over the next few years."

Last year, Google Cloud's partner ecosystem in the UK played a key role in meeting the demands of household name brands including HSBC, Vodafone and Ford. "We saw increased uptake across all industries and have no plans to slow down in 2022 and beyond," added Kelisky. "As companies across the UK continue to navigate their digital transformation journey, the number one

priority at Google Cloud is to support them every step of the way. Large corporations, SMEs, digital natives, and more, are increasingly turning to cloud technologies to overhaul and advance their operations. Meeting the specific needs of each and every customer is a core part of our mission."

But ensuring high levels of service fit for a vast customer base with a variety of requirements is no easy task. "The tech channel is a vital part of this process," added Kelisky. "Throughout the surge in cloud deployments we have relied on our partners – resellers, ISVs or system integrators – to support custom implementations and ensure customer value."

Kelisky says that during the last two years the IT channel has seen levels of interest like never before. In response, providers have upped their game in all things service and solutions, increasing choice for customers and competition among themselves. "Customers today have the luxury of endless choice and providers



Helen Kelisky

must keep up with the new challenges of pace, breadth and players in the market to avoid being left on the shelf," she added.

#### Specialising market

Customers across sensitive industries like financial services and healthcare, along with advanced industries such as manufacturing and telecommunications, are accelerating their cloud adoption by the day, forcing the market to become more sophisticated and specialist in response. "Solution providers and channel partners will continue to respond to the market and hone their specialisms," added Kelisky. "They will develop products and services able to address customer needs by industry, sub-sector and size, and continue to drive digital transformation on a global scale."

Google Cloud serves customers in more than

200 countries across industries from government to gaming, and while the market becomes more sophisticated the overall Google Cloud proposition remains simple, according to Kelisky. "It focuses on four key categories – Data Cloud, Open Infrastructure Cloud, Trusted Cloud and Collaboration Cloud," she stated. "All areas include multi-cloud infrastructure, cyber security products and a secure communication and collaboration platform in Google Workspace."

One way that channel partners can navigate this new environment is to stand out from the crowd and offer a point of difference from competitors. "Whether it be a commitment to driving organisations' Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) agenda or offering industry specific expertise and solutions, partners must be known for

something and affirm their place in the ever growing marketplace," added Kelisky.

It is against this backdrop that she took up her role as Managing Director of Google Cloud UK&I in February this year. Kelisky spent the last 10 years of her 30 year tech career specialising in cloud business leadership and experienced first hand the capabilities of cloud to drive business and societal transformation. "In the last year, digital transformation and cloud adoption has seen an unprecedented uptake with Google Cloud alone experiencing 80 per cent growth in total deal volume for its platform," she stated. "This period of fast-paced and transformative change in the tech space makes it a particularly exciting time. Given my professional background, joining Google Cloud was a natural next step."

After studying Business Studies at university Kelisky wanted to pursue a career that would keep her engaged, and tech's fast-paced nature and ongoing stream of innovations and ideas fitted the bill. Therefore entering the world of tech was a 'no-brainer' for her. "I knew I'd never be bored, and I was right! Throughout my career I have watched the industry transform in unimaginable ways and tried to grasp each opportunity to learn new skills, as well as finding fresh interests along the way," she stated. "This desire to learn hasn't lessened over the years and continues to influence my decisions. You can always find opportunities to learn if you have a growth mindset, and I constantly apply this in my role at Google Cloud." ■



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# Dion Smith: Architect of

**Zoom's Head of EMEA Channel Dion Smith is a master channel builder, and spurred by the pandemic-driven seismic shift to hybrid working he's planning for an upsurge in partner-led revenue growth.**

**S**mith joined Zoom in January this year, moving from AWS where he was Head of Strategic Partnerships. His appointment marks a new phase in a career that began in the early 90s when Smith worked for Hewlett-Packard, where one particular interaction made a lasting impression. "I was fortunate enough to meet Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard at a town hall, and this moment has stayed with me as one of the most significant conversations in my career," stated Smith. "It taught me that change is good, transformation is key, and you have to love your customers. Since then I have forged a 25 year career working and building channel ecosystems globally for some of the world's largest blue chip companies, operating with and contributing to some of the best cultures out there in the industry.

"I'm a builder at heart, so have always been passionate about bringing the right people together to support client goals and outcomes. One of the most rewarding

aspects of my job is working with partners to open up new routes to markets, regions and countries – which is a key part of Zoom's channel strategy."

Because Smith has spent a career building channels, when the opportunity arose to create a successful partner ecosystem at Zoom he 'jumped at the chance'. "Being a Zoom user myself and having sold Zoom in the past I was aware of its journey and the maturity of the platform," he said. "When I met several of its executives and learned more about Zoom's culture and its aspirations to mature the channels across all industries in EMEA, I realised it was the perfect fit for me."

Zoom was established in San Francisco in 2011 by Eric Yuan, CEO, who wanted to create the world's first video-led UCaaS offering. The business has grown to over 6,000 employees, it has a global footprint and a valuation of more than \$35 billion. As we all know, the Covid-19 pandemic



Dion Smith

**I'm a builder at heart, so I have always been passionate about bringing the right people together to support client goals and outcomes**

made Zoom a household name overnight. "This was a huge turning point for the company and meant a great deal of time was invested in ensuring the platform was prepared to support its growing customer base," added Smith.

**Hybrid working**

"The pandemic forced the majority of organisations to embrace a hybrid approach to their workforce. This involved reassessing working patterns which proved a challenge for those

who believed that being productive meant being in an office. But over the past two years hybrid working has become the norm for millions of people around the world. It's here to stay and is ingrained in how businesses operate. Zoom was poised to support dispersed workforces and will continue to do so as we put the worst behind us and enter the post-pandemic world."

With offices reopening over the course of the year, organisations have been

getting to grips with the complexities and intricacies of the required changes. "While the exact structure of hybrid work is being worked out, the majority of the workforce will divide their time between office premises and remote locations, meaning businesses will have to offer the option for employees to access work from anywhere at any time in the virtual space," noted Smith. "Taking the time to understand the client journey and what they hope to get out of their new ways of working will open up many



# channel growth

opportunities for resellers and SIs that focus on outcomes in a consultative way.”

As we have seen, demand for Zoom these last two years has been significant, which meant it had to change how it worked with partners. “We needed to invest further and spend more time enabling our partners’ sales and technical teams while building out their competencies across our platform,” added Smith. “In turn, this has encouraged a wider ecosystem through customer demand to engage with Zoom. We are spending a significant amount of time in partner advisory counsels listening and learning, to then tweak areas of our operations to deliver continued ease of doing business.”

## Intelligence

AI is becoming increasingly core to Zoom’s platform, noted Smith, with Zoom IQ its latest release enabling users to close sales faster, forecast more accurately, understand their sales motions better, improve their team’s presentation skills and automate more work. Zoom also recently published an overview of its security momentum over the past six months including the third party certifications and attestations that are an integral part of its security posture, as they give customers visibility into its security programme and control environment.

“Cybersecurity remains the most in demand technology right now,” observed Smith. “The threat landscape is always evolving but it has become more diverse as a result of the pandemic with more bad actors exploiting

network vulnerabilities. This has also created a surge in the need for network visibility as businesses understand the need for complete oversight of all the data within their network. A recent study found that 27 per cent of partners expect network visibility to be a new area of growth this year, up from 10 per cent in 2020. As a result, it’s very much on my radar right now and I’m looking forward to seeing how companies answer this increasing demand and how it will impact selling in the channel.”

Smith sees opportunities across all markets, countries, verticals and industries, not least because the European UCaaS market continues to grow at 8.7 per cent CAGR. And as more organisations realise the value of a hybrid workforce Smith forecasts broader opportunities across these markets. “Our platform innovation continues to grow in EMEA markets with Zoom Phone and Zoom IQ being our latest additions,” he commented. “Later this year we will extend into call centres which will open up further markets and addressable customers.”

Smith’s vision for the UK Zoom channel is ambitious but realistic. He is hoping that in four years time 80 per cent of the company’s revenues within EMEA will be partner-led. “We are making significant investments into our channel, from people to programmes, to automation to training and enablement,” he commented. “We’re being deliberate in partnering with companies that are reciprocating the investments we make by investing their teams into learning about our platform.” ■

## Just a minute with Dion Smith...

**Best advice you have been given?** The harder you try, the luckier you get.

**What talent do you wish you had:** To fly.

**One example of something you have overcome:** When I was 17 I broke my back and legs, and seriously injured other parts of my body. I was told I’d never walk again but I was determined to overcome my injuries. Now, I can even run.

**If you weren’t in ICT what would you be doing?**

Travelling and exploring new places, stopping off at a few vineyards and gastro pubs.

**Your main strength and what could you work on?**

My greatest strength is determination: I love complex challenges and will overcome them no matter what. But I must always remind myself that I have one mouth and two ears.

**Three ideal dinner guests:** My Mum, Dad and sister: Time is precious so enjoy as much as you can with your family.

**Name one thing you could not do without in your job:**

My passport. I’m lucky I get to travel in my job, so my passport is essential.

**What do you fear most?** Open water.

**How do you relax when not working?** Spending time with my family and travelling across the UK to watch my sons play football.

If there is any time left over – golf, cars and motorbikes.

**How would you like to be remembered?** As someone who always gave more than they took.

**Top tip for resellers:**

Enablement: Building out your expertise and focusing on the vendor’s messaging and technology provides the greatest differentiation and value when supporting clients.

## Cloud Communications Should Work Towards Carbon Neutrality

Everyone is aware of climate change and the steps we can take on a small scale to help make a difference, but organisations are the key to seeing dramatic changes in emissions that we create around the world. In 2022 the cloud communications industry is greatly aware of the impact data centres have on the environment. However, we also understand that cloud computing is significantly more energy-efficient than having on-premise infrastructure.

and evaluate its carbon emissions.

Evolve IP has done that very thing, working with ClimatePartner our partner in climate action to calculate our Corporate Carbon Footprint (CCF). From this we understand the emissions we create so we can work to reduce where we can and offset where necessary.

Evolve IP EMEA is now Certified Carbon Neutral with the plan to be globally certified by the end of



“Evolve IP understands its environmental impact and is taking voluntary steps to become accountable for its carbon emissions.”

Paul Harrison  
Managing Director EMEA - Evolve IP

As post-pandemic life is beginning to resume worldwide, what has remained is people changing how they work. Cloud Communication Providers like Evolve IP help make this possible for businesses of any scale. Allowing their teams and their customers to work in the office, at home, in co-working spaces – literally around the world without any interference. Evolve IP’s technology enables people to travel and consume less which we see as a positive step toward creating positive sustainable habits.

If Evolve IP is supporting the ‘new normal’ through the technology that we provide, it made sense to look inward and see how as an organisation we can help reduce our own carbon emissions as a collective. We think the cloud communications industry should take steps to become accountable

summer 2022. Evolve IP took on this project in hopes that others would follow and to also help our partners in reducing their carbon footprint in the process.

The carbon offset projects we have been certified to international standards and were selected as they reflect our business values. We hope our partners and customers will see this as a great step and we encourage them to do the same. Tech has enabled people to collaborate in an eco-friendlier manner and those technologies should put the work in place to offset and reduce emissions where possible for everyone’s future.

Find out more about Evolve IP’s Carbon Neutral Project  
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# Meeting CX challenges

**There are important customer experience challenges on the business agenda right now and cloud-based contact centre solutions are key to meeting ever rising demand for service excellence, says Janice Rapp, VP Product Marketing, 8x8.**

**B**usinesses are placing far greater value on the customer experience, creating ever growing demand for effective contact centre solutions. "The way customers interact with businesses has fundamentally changed over the past two years," said Rapp. "Customers want excellent service using their channel of choice, while contact centre agents need the right tools and the ability to work from anywhere. As a result, the demand for a seamless, integrated customer and employee cloud communications solution, including contact centre, has been significant."

No single segment of the market is displaying more demand than the other as the need for contact centre technology and solutions continues to be driven by customers' ever-increasing sales, service and support expectations. "Regardless of market segment, organisations of all sizes need to connect customers with the right agent or representative to deliver the best possible

customer experience," noted Rapp. "Whether or not an individual business operates a formal contact centre they will be judged on the consistency and quality of the experience. People know what best-in-class experiences look like and as such, regardless of size, they will not waste their time with businesses that do not deliver."

For the channel, an integrated UCaaS and CCaaS solution presents a major market opportunity to help clients of all sizes meet and exceed customer expectations, believes Rapp. "That is the beauty of XCaaS – clients can decide how they want to approach customer experience and design a solution to address use cases ranging from formal contact centre to informal customer servants and everything in between," she added.

"Communication is experience, so our entire organisation is focused on the concept of XCaaS and composed experiences. This means the delivery of the right communication tools and applications needed to



Janice Rapp

support the job at hand. It's not about a job title, it's about having the right tools at the right time to get the job done. This has far reaching implications for not only the contact centre, but for any customer-facing role within an organisation."

## Customer experience

Some argue that the contact centre market is becoming machine led, with AI and self-serve soon to be de facto. So which elements of the 'mechanised', or AI-driven contact centre app stack are gaining traction and how do they raise the customer experience to the next level? "Ultimately, AI and self-service will become the norm for interactions well beyond routine inquiries and engagement," commented Rapp. "However, today's contact centre leaders have realised that this vision of the future requires significant time and investment. I see

today's leaders narrowing their focus and seeking out ways to address specific moments in the customer journey. They realise that they must train and tune these solutions to optimise their investments, and they will want to seek out a platform that is open and can help them integrate their existing solutions for maximum ROI.

In terms of traction, I see Intelligent IVR and Virtual Customer Agents most widely deployed. Having said that, we should all remember that research continues to validate voice as the channel of choice for most customers when self-service avenues fail."

The primary contact centre trends influencing 8x8's approach to the market and its strategic priorities has roots in the way companies faced the challenges brought on by the pandemic. "In

addition to new ways of working, we all witnessed the delivery of new sales, service and support models designed to keep buyers safe and engaged at a distance," commented Rapp. "Obviously, self-service, automation and AI became key elements in delivering those experiences."

Against this backdrop 8x8 will continue to build on the recent delivery of its Agent Workspace, which through intelligence provides additional agent assist capabilities in real-time. Platform-wide (XCaaS) reporting and analytics is also a high priority since that is the lifeblood of both formal contact centres as well as informal, customer-facing business units. "We will double down on our self-service and digital-first offerings," added Rapp. "Our native Virtual Agent has achieved significant traction in the UK public sector market in particular so we are focused on working with these customers to help them optimise and advance their operations."

These developments reflect shifts in where customer value is moving to, which requires the channel to respond to capture that value. "Customer value is moving off legacy on-premises solutions and the channel can secure that value by helping organisations move to the cloud with an integrated customer and employee experience platform," commented Rapp. "The channel should focus on working with cloud vendors with the right platform, technology and support while allowing them to align to their preferred business model." ■

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# UCaaS comes of age

**For many businesses a UCaaS solution will deliver critical functionality far beyond their current comms estate, which in today's world of digital transformation represents a major opportunity for resellers, according to Gamma's Channel Sales Director Andrew Smethurst.**



Andrew Smethurst

growth and popularity in the market," added Smethurst. "Partners are perfectly positioned to support deployment and provide the technical expertise and customer service that customers require."

He also noted that consumers are also driving changes in the UCaaS market, with digital channels becoming the preferred means of communication for many people, as 79 per cent say they prefer to use webchat in order to get a swift response from a brand.

**T**he pandemic forced many businesses to adopt collaboration and communication solutions that enable employees to work away from the office, but now is the time to turn those tactical quick fixes into long-term strategic deployments. "The way we work has changed forever, along with the way we consume services," said Smethurst. "Our expectations of what constitutes a good enough customer experience rose to new highs. Digital experiences went from being a nice-to-have to a must-have."

On top of these pandemic-driven shifts one of the UK's biggest technological changes to date is now fully underway – the 2025 PSTN switch off. "While it might seem a while away, plenty of locations have already reached stop-sell status, with Salisbury and Mildenhall reaching end of life later this year," added Smethurst. "For channel partners, the changes revolving around employees, experiences and technology could

prove to be the greatest opportunities that the UCaaS market has ever seen."

According to Smethurst, with the PSTN switch off underway there is only one choice moving forward for business communications – cloud-based services. "The number of analogue-based phone lines is in rapid decline and it will necessarily have to reach zero by 2025," he added. "There's good and bad news in those numbers – there are still thousands of businesses that need to move to IP services, but that number will only grow smaller over the next few years. Now it's time to act. Now the opportunity is at its peak."

The best way to take advantage of this shift is to plan ahead, believes Smethurst. So partners should begin to understand the financial and technical impact, for themselves and their customers, of the switch from legacy services and create a plan that includes the many up-selling opportunities that come

with IP services. "Choosing a provider that can deliver all the components of that migration will be fundamental," he stated. "It's not just about the VoIP solution, but also the underlying connectivity or additional options, such as mobile data, that could differentiate their business in a very competitive market. The opportunity is now and it's never been greater – but only for those that start planning ahead and understand the implications of these changes."

#### Rising adoption

The move to cloud-based solutions isn't news – the pandemic has made sure of that – but the PSTN switch off will continue to accelerate the adoption of UCaaS. If anything, because people also demand it. "Eighty five per cent of homeworkers demand a hybrid working approach from their employers," added Smethurst.

"Simply put, home offices are here to stay. Channel partners have an opportunity

to help their customers secure such a future and ensure their employees' happiness and wellbeing.

"Businesses will be looking for providers that can help them move from a tactical approach to UCaaS solutions to a long-term strategic one. Gone is the time of makeshift, sticking plaster solutions – it's time for businesses to sort out their tech stack and understand how to better ensure success. Channel partners should act as advisors for their existing customer base to support them through that journey, but also to educate potential customers on the importance of a sound collaboration strategy for their employees."

It's impossible to ignore Microsoft's influence in this area, as Microsoft Teams users have grown massively over the past two years, and this won't stop anytime soon. "Creating a truly unified experience through the enablement of voice within Teams will be key for partners to truly reap the benefit of Microsoft's







"For the bigger brands, adapting to this change won't be an issue," added Smethurst. "In the SME market, things are slightly more complicated. Customer interaction solutions, or contact centres, have notoriously always been a little too expensive and complicated for some smaller businesses. Yet, it doesn't take away from the fact that every business now needs such a solution – with quite some urgency too. The alternative is simply losing customers.

"Thankfully, a lot of those much-needed features that would make for a better customer experience, such as digital channels, are now trickling down to more cost-effective solutions – Horizon Contact is a clear example of that. The SME market is largely unserved when it comes to these solutions. A lot of small businesses won't even realise they need such a solution, but it's clear they would hugely benefit from it. This is where partners have a real chance to maximise their margins and add true value to new and existing customers." ■

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# A postcard from BT Wholesale

The 2025 PSTN switch off is a watershed moment for the comms industry and long-held business tactics simply won't see partners through the transition, according to speakers at last month's BT Wholesale Partner Plus Live event (19th May, BT Tower) who outlined a better way to help partners move into the all-IP era with confidence. A dominant theme throughout the conference was 'working together', an approach that underpins all aspects of BT Wholesale's evolving strategy, including a major rebranding exercise, structural improvements, product, service and support elements.

Resellers cannot expect to escape change, and doing nothing won't solve anything. So the answer must be to face the future on all fronts in partnership. Indeed, empowering partners and forming strategic collaborations that support business growth is a priority for the channel. To that end, BT Wholesale has reinvented itself based on more connected partnerships that it says will naturally lead to better partner experiences and a brighter sustainable future, while new channel programmes aim to bring supplier and partners close together.

It emerged during the conference that partner proximity is a developing aspect of BT Wholesale's evolving approach to the channel, bringing partners closer to propositions and services rather than old style products. Meanwhile, a shift in marketing material puts white labelled collateral of all kinds directly into the hands of resellers – all part of ensuring that partners are fit for the all-IP journey, which Gavin Jones, Channel Sales Director of BT Wholesale,

says is a big opportunity – but only for partners who take a lead rather than follow behind. "We are all facing into a future of services, applications and opportunity," he said, also citing big advances made by BT in developing quantum networks.

A stand out opportunity is the 14 million hosted cloud voice seats up for grabs ahead of the December 2025 PSTN switch off. But Jones stressed two things here – that the clock is ticking and Openreach is not wavering on its planned PSTN shutdown. Both compelling reasons to act now.

Bruce Welland, Head of Marketing Strategy, had some big news for delegates: EE is to be the main consumer brand, and BT is now the primary business brand, underlined by the official catchwords 'BT means business'. And in the spirit of closer proximity, Welland discussed how BT Wholesale will assume the role of a guide for partners to help them navigate industry changes and challenges, and realise opportunities. Key aspects of



Gavin Jones

## We are all facing into a future of services, applications and opportunity

his thinking on this include the removal of complexity from partners' business lives by bringing BT's experience closer to them, and this change, says Welland, is reflected in the 'BT means business' message and the new digital marketing hub

which provides social media guidance and services.

### Marketing resources

According to Christopher Wellbelove, who is at the vanguard of partner marketing support, a survey of marketing challenges

showed that 78 per cent of businesses suffer from a marketing skills shortage: Enter BT's white label marketing resources, which offer an 'in-a-box' service including sales templates and tools, with new assets added regularly to help

# Wholesale's Partner Plus Live

partners create leads and generate more revenue from existing customer bases, which were the top two priorities identified in a poll of Partner Plus Live delegates.

Gavin Murphy, Head of Propositions, BT Wholesale, also put a spotlight on making the complex simple, couched in the context of challenges that have arisen over the past two years – such as the pandemic, Brexit, rising costs, war in Europe, skills shortages etc – all of which could make business planning more difficult. Against this backdrop Murphy said it is key to keep an eye on the future and BT Wholesale is developing its data connectivity and professional services portfolios to feed into growth areas such as broadband access and WAN, technical services, voice and collaboration, IoT, mobile, security and supporting FTTP.

## Supercharged portal

In more news, BT Wholesale's collaboration and VoIP platform is being 'supercharged' with a new portal, and Murphy announced the much anticipated launch of Teams Direct Connect alongside greater investment in APIs, and mix and match solutions for hybrid working supported by the Partner Hub which offers learning materials. He also noted that come the end of the summer BT Wholesale will introduce a single order journey that will help to overcome number porting issues. "All-IP is three years away," he said. "The opportunity is here and now and we are enabling partners to take advantage of this."

Sarah Tomlinson, Propositions Specialist, is equally clear

headed in her assessment of the times. "2025 will be here before you know it," she told delegates, also underlining the criticality of network quality in terms of security, resilience and performance. She reliably informed delegates that BT has over 3,000 security specialists and conducts 24/7 network monitoring which protects the business from a stonking circa 6,500 cyber

## There is a bow wave of demand for digital transformation. We need to make it easier for partners and put our people closer to them

attacks per day. It is therefore not surprising that BT's end-to-end security posture is trusted by critical users such as the Government.

Network build and capacity is also key to the success of broadband and Ethernet connectivity, and Tomlinson flagged up that BT will be bringing out a 1GB Electrical Interface that will enable quicker installs across Ethernet and DIA – and a full roadmap of APIs is in train.

Propositions Specialist Wing Yee Lo wasted no time in focusing delegates' minds on how much needs to happen between now and the 2025 switch off. She urged partners to wake up customers now – and to help manage the transition to all-IP she outlined a raft of professional services including surveys and portfolio analysis, solution design, set up and migration as well as managed decommissioning – all made possible by over 2,900 engineers positioned across the UK.

Carla Barrow, Senior Sales Manager, put her own viewpoint on working together more closely with partners, indicating that BT Wholesale now operates out of bases across the UK, thereby offering a wider geographical footprint which is reinforced by more positive engagement through partner programmes. She urged delegates to make the most of BT's experts

and resources, and called on partners to provide honest feedback to help BT Wholesale tailor its various roadmaps, because, she says, 'working together better' is a sure-fire route to growth.

Duncan Hawkes, Senior Sales Specialist Manager, shared deep insights into the nature and wider impacts of 'specialism' to show the broad extent of what's available to partners who tap into this resource. It's quite a simple formula, in that specialists create

differentiation and a better customer experience. That's because experts bring innovation and thought leadership to all engagements. Therefore BT is investing significantly in a variety of specialist functions.

## Hot demand for digital

According to Hawkes, these services are more time-appropriate than ever before: The business landscape

is changing, pressure is mounting on traditional economic models, and the UK suffers from a productivity issue, not to mention the

impacts of the pandemic and 2025. "There is a bow wave of demand for digital transformation," he said. "We need to make it easier for partners and put our people closer to them."

This will in part be achieved via the evolution of the specialist's role, as well as innovative propositions and new ways to derive value from BT's specialist functions, which includes the formation of a single dedicated all-IP team, meaning that experts are

no longer working in silos. Plans are also in place for the Partner Hub to facilitate quicker end-to-end journeys, enabling partners to order multiple products seamlessly. Far simpler integrations via APIs are also promised.

All of BT Wholesale's developments and roadmaps converge on the major priorities facing the channel today, chief of which is the switch off of the 40 year old mineral-based PSTN network. Jones could not have been more frank in his advice to partners, that the shift to all-IP is inevitable and that there is no avoiding that fact. "If you want to go where innovation and technology is going then don't anchor yourself in the past," he said. "We are 16 months away from stop-sell."

To drive home the critical point that partners need to get on track with all-IP and cross the 2025 finishing line ahead of the pack, the conference concluded with 1990 European Championships gold medal winner Kriss Akabusi MBE who, with high energy, provided key insights that emphasised how working more closely in partnership can empower you to win. ■



Kriss Akabusi MBE

# Issues that matter most

**Colt CEO Keri Gilder on modern leadership, the need to build strong alliance ecosystems, technology priorities, how the pandemic set back diversity and inclusion by years, and why pioneering female Boston Marathon runners inspire her most.**

**A**ccording to Gilder, the comms sector is in a period of reinvention and the Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically catalysed the change, creating a new requirement for business ecosystems to accelerate digital transformation. Here, she addresses some key industry, leadership and cultural questions, spells out what needs to happen in the comms sector, and shares insights into Colt's strategy to create sustainable change for the better.

## **Strategically, what did you learn from lockdown?**

During the pandemic we saw how vital agile, on-demand, high bandwidth connectivity is, and how key it is that we provide the connectivity requirements for a broader ecosystem of partners, be those cloud, global content providers or enterprises. This focus on the wider ecosystem, and telecom's role as a universal connector, opened our eyes to some of the areas where the industry could be working together better on creating connections, both physically and from a relationship perspective, that really matter.

We now need to focus on partnerships and Colt's role in the ecosystem, because without the technological ecosystem, true transformation won't



**Keri Gilder**

## **We now need to focus on partnerships and Colt's role in the ecosystem, because without the technological ecosystem, true transformation won't be possible**

be possible. Enterprise requirements are continuing to be more complex and we need to join forces to deliver value greater than the sum of our parts. Cooperation, collaboration and co-creation with our partners is fundamental to

unlocking and amplifying our joint value and, importantly, providing the best of our industry to end customers.

### **How do you define modern leadership?**

When I think of leadership, I think of it as the ability to

serve others. It's a privilege to be in these positions and it's a privilege to have the opportunity to lead employees, to develop them and to drive their success. I took on the role of CEO right at the start of the pandemic and the main takeaway for

me in terms of leadership has been that it is all about listening. This is a critical skill that some of us take for granted, and that some of us don't do actively.

Since leading Colt, I've recognised how important it is to actively listen, and to make sure that I'm hearing what's happening within the organisation, within our customers, within our partners, and then being able to take that information, analyse it, and drive action against it. More than ever before, leadership is about building trust in your employees through transparency and creating the shared purpose of the business. Leaders are more visible, communicative, authentic and empathetic. Not only are you looking after the company from a strategic and financial point of view, but the role of the leader is also to inspire and build a business that looks after its employees just as well as it does its customers.

### **How has the pandemic impacted diversity and inclusion?**

I have always been a champion of inclusion and diversity, and during the pandemic employee wellbeing and building an open and inclusive culture was my priority. It's amazing to see how our employees

**Continued on page 26**



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**Keri Gilder**

**Continued from page 24**  
 now have a heightened willingness to look after each other. Colt has always been a welcoming and supportive place, and the pandemic has only strengthened that sense of community and openness. Unfortunately, the pandemic has dealt a big blow to the work that's being done in diversity, equity and inclusion, and the world has gone backwards instead of forwards. Just in terms of gender equality across the world, it will now take us 137 years to reach our most basic target. A target that was only 90 years pre-pandemic.

I call it a crisis, because in the telco industry we will have a talent crisis if we don't take DE&I seriously. If you want innovation, you have to think seriously about DE&I and we are way behind where we need to be. For women in particular, we need to find a way to get them back into the workplace. It's also about creating an inclusive environment where diverse talent will be able to thrive and where they will want to stay. Never has DE&I been so important for individuals, businesses and our industry globally.

**What are your other key priorities?**

Partnerships and collaboration with the ecosystem is a priority for

Colt. Collaboration can play a big part in how we create value for our customers and for our own business. As an industry, we need to find our place back in the value chain, and working with our partners to collaborate, co-create and unlock joint value is going to be central to that.

Automation is also critical going forwards. Here, too, I think we have a serious problem around attracting and retaining the right talent, especially on the software side. We're facing a retirement cliff and losing out to other industries that are asking for the same digital skills that we need for this kind of innovation. Much of my work with TM Forum as Chair of the Inclusion and Diversity Council is looking at how we can fix this, because at the moment

our ability to attract talent is very limited. Again, we need to think collaboratively around talent, sharing resources and building programmes that will attract more of the diverse talent that the industry needs.

**How is Colt harnessing new technologies?**

Emerging technologies are having a major effect on the market and it's vital that we each make the most of the opportunities they offer our businesses. Internally at Colt, we know that automation, Machine Learning (ML) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) can bring value to so many areas of our business. When it comes to our IQ Network, we're looking to ML and AI to build networks that can reroute to avoid traffic-heavy areas and self-heal, and bundling our connectivity with emerging

technologies to position us as an enabler of digital services. AI and ML can also improve the customer experience by predicting trends and specifics for customers, so we're one step ahead of them.

**Where have you most recently found inspiration?**

Early in May this year I visited Boston for our board meeting, a week after the Boston Marathon had taken place. This year's marathon was a special event as it marked 50 years since women officially entered the race and celebrations focused on recognising the amazing women who made it happen. I read about these women and couldn't help but to be inspired.

First, there was Bobbi Gibb, the first woman to ever run the race in 1966. Bobbi

hid in some bushes near the start, as she was not allowed to enter officially, jumping into the crowd of male runners. She finished the race and proved a woman could compete, but her run was unauthorised, her time not recorded.

Then Katherine Switzer, who in 1967 was the first female Boston marathoner to score a bib and the first woman anywhere in the world ever to have officially run a full marathon. She did this by registering using only her initials K. V. Switzer and keeping her gender a secret. She completed the course but, after that, the Amateur Athletic Union banned women from competing in long distance running until 1972.

I find these women inspirational. They were pioneers, broke the mould and changed the world. They had to break the rules of their 'industry'. They had to take risks. They had to believe in themselves when no one else did. They had to show the world a different way of thinking. It made me think that that's exactly what Colt and our industry needs to do. Be bold and willing to stand up for what we believe in. Willing to do something different. Willing to take a risk to change the way the industry works. ■

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# A man who's got the cha

**Making life easier for resellers was built into NTA's DNA from day one – and at the same time as unlocking and simplifying market opportunities company owner Paul White also follows a policy of guarding the interests of resellers in all areas.**

**N**TA began its commercial life in November 2001, spun out from White's other company called Sure Office Systems, a traditional telephone system reseller. "I always fancied owning a telephone system which could route telephone calls from a customer's telephone system and handsets," stated White. "The first avenue was to look at a Digitalk switch which connected to BT's SS7 connections. I then found a Softswitch that at the time used this newish thing called VoIP. We ordered and installed the SS7 into a company that promised they could do the conversion to SIP but sadly they let us down. This was when BT was introducing IP exchange and to my understanding we were one of the first to connect and are still connected to this day."

Switching from being a reseller to a wholesale provider was a 'bold and interesting move', explained White. "I realised that my needs and issues as a

reseller were shared among all the resellers I met," he said. "The biggest issue was that the support after a product had been sold was poor compared to pre-sales support. I knew that addressing this would be our foundation and we became a more engineering led business than a sales oriented one. The focus on becoming a full-on wholesale provider has grown slowly but surely during the past 10 years."

Since its inception NTA has grown considerably with staff numbers rising from two to 26, employed mainly in support, development and backend operations. The business is currently recruiting across multiple departments for sales, support and back office people following a strong performance during the pandemic. "March 2020 was the best month we'd ever had," added White. "It was almost like the 2025 PSTN shutdown had been suddenly brought forward. There was massive demand for remote working and home office solutions. This allowed us to push forward



Paul White

## We are trying to protect resellers and allow them to focus on the real priorities such as the PSTN switch off

many solutions within our pipeline such as the MobeX desktop softphone."

### New perspective

Seeing the world change over the last couple of years and knowing that anything can happen in an instant within a business has changed White's perspective. "Giving employees the ability to work from home and taking the stress out of travelling to the office each day is making a huge difference to peoples' lives," he added. "That's why remote working is now key for companies worldwide."

White expects strong growth in all aspects of the business, particularly the UC product which enabled people to work from home. "The transfer to home working has impacted working behaviour," said White. "Video has become an essential form of communication and is the norm. This paired with newer product releases such as our Landline Adaptor allows us to encourage resellers to branch into the residential market sooner rather than later. We are working on products to make both

resellers and users' lives as easy as possible. This comes from the Landline Adaptor, but also further development into our portal and features. This is more about giving resellers independence to make changes and work around their business. If we don't give them the tools to succeed then what kind of provider would we be?"

As we have seen Covid-19 accelerated White's development plans for products such as simple residential adaptors and UC applications without the

# nnel's back

need for integrations. One of NTA's biggest development projects is around its mobile and desktop UC products. The company is also finalising its new hardware ordering system, training academy and knowledge base for resellers, all streaming from a new portal. Another priority is the development of residential solutions and products, such as the Landline Adaptor released this month. "We are developing products with the residential end user in mind as many are unfamiliar with VoIP," said White. "Making that transition as simple and understandable

## We are working on products to make both resellers and users' lives as easy as possible

as possible helps the end user and the reseller."

Part of NTA's portal development aims to protect resellers from the uplift in charges for making calls out displaying incorrect numbers or international numbers. "As the mobile operators are not making enough money on inbound calls they have been allowed via Ofcom to apply surcharges to calls if they come from international destinations," noted White. "Ultimately, this is yet another blow for us and resellers. Another industry cock up and a load of extra work for carriers. We are trying to protect resellers and allow them to focus on the real priorities such as the PSTN switch off."

Another challenge White sees at the moment is trying to

explain to a customer that they are paying more for less service. "It amazes me how we can give the same product a new five letter acronym and charge more for it," he explained. "SoGEA is that example. It's dressed up like it's cheaper as you don't need an analogue line to run the service over but if you want to keep your number or have a service for making calls then you still need to pay extra."

### Clarity of vision

Seeing things for what they are characterises many of White's market

observations, and his clear sightedness should be a guide for all resellers in today's challenging marketplace.

"Customer ownership is vital to a reseller," he commented.

"Without it they

are vulnerable and reliant on any supplier they are involved with. One poor decision made by the provider or a sell-out and they are no longer in control of their own customers. So be in control and look after customers through support and good advice. This will pay off tenfold."

Having resellers' backs comes naturally to White and he also expressed concern about IT firms moving organisations over to Microsoft 365.

"I'm not saying it's a bad business decision," he stated. "However, who will have the control of the customer in the end? We have already seen Microsoft buy a voice company to tack on to its services. What if it decides to offer 365 clients full monthly support for just £1 extra a user? That's all it can take." ■

### Just a minute with Paul White...

**Role model:** My Dad. He gave great calm advice and a little bit of the old school service, which I believe is important.

**Your biggest fear?** Letting people down.

**Best advice you have been given?** Never do someone a bad deal.

**What talent do you wish you had:** Not so much a talent but I wish I wasn't colour blind and could spell better.

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I'm Dyslexic

**Your main strength and what could you work on?**

My strength is coming up with new ideas, but getting most of them fulfilled is my weakness.

**Three ideal dinner guests:** My Dad (who sadly isn't here anymore), Richard Branson and Micky Flanagan.

**One example of something you have overcome:** Standing in front of a crowd to speak. It's more a case of overcoming every time I do it.

**The biggest risk you've taken?** Starting my own voice switch network. The responsibility was high and there were low points, but they make you stronger.

**If you weren't in comms what would you be doing?** I'd probably have worked with my Dad who had a packaging company.

**How do you relax when not working?** A trip away or cut the grass. I can't sit still so you'll never catch me reading a book.

**How would you like to be remembered?** As someone who never did a bad deal with anyone.

**Top tip for resellers:** Be honest and go with your gut instinct. Keep your name at the forefront of the customer's mind, not the upstream provider.

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Some comms and contact centre deployments require the seemingly impossible. The devil's in the detail – and it's always ready to bite you in the behind – especially when migrating complex configurations from old to new.

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Tamsin Deutrom-Yue

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# Assessing 5G viability

As 5G coverage becomes more widespread and the reliability of 5G equipment improves by the day, is now the time for businesses to leverage the fifth generation mobile network? We asked Cloudcell Technologies' Managing Director Kevin Boyle and Technical Director Steve Bryant.



Kevin Boyle



Steve Bryant

**W**hen the 5G infrastructure roll out began at the tail end of May 2019 it became clear that accessibility and performance were an issue. "At the initial launch, 5G attracted momentum and generated commercial interest, but it was largely only being offered in urban areas which excluded it as an option for many businesses," stated Boyle. "A second issue was the quality of the supporting equipment. There were a number of 5G consumer routers available but through extensive testing we found they didn't provide the level of functionality required to support a business grade service."

At the time, 5G promised to deliver a peak download speed of 1Gbps. However, when conducting its tests in areas such as London, Southampton, Bristol and Bath, Cloudcell experienced inconsistent and unreliable performances ranging from 80-400Mbps. "We decided at the time that the equipment

and coverage wasn't reliable enough to start deploying to our customers," added Boyle.

However, it's a different story today as 5G performance and availability has greatly improved. Currently, 5G is available with one or more MNO in over 100 UK towns and cities. "Following upgrades and improvements to 5G equipment we found that 5G performance is now much more stable," commented Bryant. "Testing of new business grade routers and antennas at the back end of 2021 produced great results – a significant uplift in performance which gave us greater confidence that 5G was on its way to becoming a viable business solution. Further testing this year has reinforced this assessment."

While 5G availability is still predominantly in urban locations it has become more accessible in some less populated areas too, like the edges of towns and cities. "Such is our confidence in 5G now that we have begun

deploying 5G solutions to our customers," added Bryant. "While there are still some growing pains they are providing far better results and more stable performance than a year ago. That said, it is certainly not ready for the masses,

## For some businesses and individuals a 5G connection is a viable option

but for some businesses and individuals a 5G connection is a viable option and work is continuing to expand its availability to less populated and more rural areas."

### 4G considerations

Even as 5G infrastructure and equipment has been finding its feet, developments in 4G technology have meant that for many, the service still represents a better solution. "Although the 5G service has come on leaps and bounds, in many locations 4G (LTE) and 4G+ (LTE-A) will still deliver better performance than 5G," said Bryant. "With

4G+ now widely available across the UK the service is still a key part of the country's connectivity infrastructure."

Boyle noted that upgrades to the 4G network and equipment have given improved performance

almost across the board, and, at the moment, it is available in a far greater number of locations than 5G. "These improvements will also likely continue due to the UK Government's Shared Rural Network programme, as well as continued investment from manufacturers and networks," he added. "There's no time pressure to switch to the 5G network anytime soon, so 4G will be providing a stable service for millions across the UK for a long time yet."

Whether a 4G or 5G option is taken will depend

on customer needs, and perhaps most importantly, location. "After an unsteady launch 5G services are now more readily available and providing reliable connections," reaffirmed Boyle. "If you're in a city or town and are looking for a reliable broadband connection 5G could certainly be an option. Beyond the spheres of city centres and other urban areas 5G may not be the best choice."

Bryant reiterated that developments in 4G LTE equipment and coverage have resulted in a significantly improved performance. Therefore, for customers considering a broadband option in a residential, suburban or even rural area, 4G LTE may likely provide a faster and more stable connection than 5G currently provides. "Ultimately, we believe it will be a case-by-case decision," he added. "For our customers we'll be considering their requirements and location and identifying the best solution for them." ■

# KCOM chief prioritises channel partnerships

Tim Shaw was appointed KCOM CEO in April 2022, bringing a unique appreciation of the challenges and opportunities facing the reseller channel. He now plans to strengthen partner relationships to help the channel leverage the burgeoning fibre opportunity.

**Comms Dealer quizzed Shaw on his immediate priorities and discovered what impact his appointment will have on KCOM's channel proposition.**

**CD: Why did you take the CEO role and what are your immediate priorities?**

TS: KCOM is a great business, and it is a privilege to lead the company in its next chapter. KCOM started on its fibre journey over ten years ago and we have not stopped expanding since. Our priorities are to extend our network to reach more towns and make the shift to become a digitally led organisation.

**CD: How will your previous experience aid you in your new role?**

TS: The time I spent in BT Wholesale gave me a real appreciation of the challenges and opportunities facing the reseller channel. In my previous role in KCOM I was leading our digital transformation programme which will transform our whole business and enables our partners to connect directly to us.

**CD: What message does your appointment send to the channel?**

TS: It sends the message that the KCOM Group and our shareholders are serious about driving broadband growth using all our

partners. The central tenet of my strategy will be to develop strong partnerships in the channel, which will provide opportunities for resellers themselves and KCOM Wholesale.

**CD: Please summarise your channel proposition, target markets and growth areas?**

TS: Our proposition is giving the channel access to broadband and ethernet services across our entire footprint – currently over 300k homes and business and growing. We are expanding in market towns and large villages and aim to pass 97% of all properties in any area we develop. In terms of development, it will be around giving the channel a fibre proposition with a full digital experience.

**CD: What factors are influencing KCOM's market approach, wholesale portfolio development and partner engagement?**

TS: Our product development is designed to underpin what we believe the channel's customers will require i.e., the assurance of outstanding fibre products supported by KCOM's network and

engineering capability with system integration.

**CD: What are the main strands of KCOM's channel growth and support strategy and how will this evolve?**

TS: We want to change the perception that we are just a 'Hull-based' company! We also want to make it as easy as possible for the channel to be able to consume and resell our services. This means digitised onboarding and full portal-based access for ordering. This allows their end users to order services on the resellers' own portals.

**CD: How do you think the role of resellers/system integrators will evolve, and what strategies should they adopt to succeed in today's digital market?**

TS: System integrators will look to provide greater individualism and specialisation and aggregators will re-focus with greater attention on 'affiliation' and 'alliance' partnering models. Therefore, channel resellers need to think about what will differentiate them. This can be technology or vertical

driven or it could be focused on selective geographies and end-customer demographics. This is where we see our role in the future, supporting businesses who want to work with us in the geographical area we cover.

**CD: Where do you see KCOM in three-five years' time?**

TS: Our network will have passed more than 500k premises and strategic reseller partnerships will be selling the full spectrum of our fibre products and solutions. The customer journey will be fully automated end to end, and I expect us to be seen as a key pan-regional fibre network provider.

**CD: What do you think are the three biggest challenges facing the IT/comms channel right now and how can KCOM help meet them?**

- TS: Firstly, the PSTN migration. We are commencing a bespoke customer by customer engagement plan to support customers in finding alternatives and switching to fibre.
- Secondly, fibre take-



Tim Shaw

up. We have seen huge growth in fibre network build across the UK and the focus now is to drive take-up.

- Thirdly, there is a potential issue around the continued march of one or two dominant players that may limit competition and choice.

**CD: Where is customer value moving to and how does your strategy dovetail with these shifts?**

TS: End-customers are increasingly savvy about value, especially in considering grade of service versus price. We believe the ability for consumers to be able to make a choice in terms of balancing budget against grade of service and price is important, and this is certainly central in terms of how we're positioning ourselves in the market from a proposition and pricing perspective. ■

# Learn how to elevate CX with as-a-service business models

**Margin in Comms-as-a-Service (MiCaaS) is the 'must attend' event for channel organisations transitioning to new service-based models, offering voice, data and mobile resellers a range of valuable insights into how to establish or refine their managed services business models.**

**W**ith the unstoppable shift to the supply and consumption of ICT and comms services as a service, and against a backdrop of increasingly dispersed workforces the channel has experienced and reacted to seismic shifts in 2021; but the race is not over yet – join us at MiCaaS to understand how you can position your business effectively to avoid being left behind.

The transformation to digital and cloud technologies has meant that comms solutions and the networks and software platforms they sit on are now being delivered 'as a service' and in this challenging economic climate customers increasingly value comms being delivered within Opex finance models.

The big issue for resellers is understanding how to present 'Comms as a Service' within these new frameworks and ensure that customers remain, happy and 'sticky' and would never consider going elsewhere for the comms solutions they rely on. And with 60% of organisations moving to hybrid working practices, wrapping connectivity and cloud-based hardware into bundled solutions billed as a service must be the way forward for channel partners.

The need to provide a holistic Customer Experience (CX) has become a fundamental component of a reseller's armoury and has been intensified as the Covid-

19 pandemic and subsequent work from home directives have transformed living rooms into offices, classrooms, and gyms.

That's why the theme of Margin in CaaS 2022 will be: **'Elevating the customer experience in the new age of hybrid working'**

Over the course of the MiCaaS educational seminar, leading industry 'as a service' providers will discuss and debate a host of questions ICT resellers should consider to successfully garner long term, profitable customer relationships in the new 'work anywhere' environment.

Comms Dealer's Margin series of events have a proven record of providing a productive and rewarding environment for reseller principals to meet and discuss key issues and explore new profit opportunities.

In addition to commercially valuable conference sessions where you can hear from industry experts and guest speakers, MiCaaS will also provide a platform for attendees to engage privately in 1-to-1 sessions on demand with leading vendors and service providers expert at helping their partners grow revenues.

**MiCaaS conference places are offered on a complimentary basis to C-suite directors representing reseller businesses up to c.£2m turnover. One attendee place per organisation.**

## Eddie the Eagle joins topflight speaker line up

### MiCaaS conference keynotes



**09.50:** With deal activity continuing, Adam Zoldan, co-founder and director at Knight Corporate Finance - the channel's leading transaction specialist - will kick off the event by providing an overview of the M&A landscape, the facts and figures that make deals work along with insight into what is driving the unquenchable thirst for reseller acquisitions.



**10.05:** Your customers may not identify their business as a contact centre, but regardless of what they do, the internal and external benefits of utilising CCaaS technologies are enormous – if only they knew it! In his keynote session, Gamma's Head of New Business for Channel Mark Lomas will spotlight the true scope of contact centre benefits to help your customers build more meaningful experiences and interactions.



**10.30:** Resellers rarely play any part in the provision of payment technology which ensures clients meet the latest compliance requirements. In his keynote, Fusion Telecom and PayGuard managing director Adam Norsworthy will demonstrate how easy it is to process payments at low cost, in multiple modes and with scheduling tools which help clients pay more with less effort, whilst protecting them and their customers from fraud or data breach.



**11.20:** How are you articulating the benefits of UCaaS to your customers and what are the issues that are most important to end users? In his keynote session, Voiceflex Sales and Marketing Director Paul Taylor will share some of the drivers behind the Voiceflex UCaaS strategy and highlight the opportunities for partners to help customers delve more deeply into a UCaaS technology stack.



**12.10:** Ending the conference sessions on a high note, Eddie 'The Eagle' Edwards will explain how he overcome huge challenges to become a British global sporting and cultural hero. Eddie will share some of the hilarious and serious highs and lows of his journey but crucially the key takeaways to delivering successful outcomes!

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**Sean Dixon, Fidelity Energy**  
 "Fidelity Energy's platform allows your customers to review 25 plus pre-vetted suppliers and make informed buying decisions with our support and expertise. Now is the best time to add energy to your portfolio as it is a topical conversation to have. With an average deal value of £3,539 and upfront commission available, you can solve a customer problem while adding a new revenue stream."



**Romke Wijngaarden, Vanilla IP**  
 "MiCaaS gives us a great platform to discuss with delegates our evolving portfolio of Plug and Play Cloud Services including Microsoft Teams, Webex and Mobile PBX. As much as end user applications are the sexy side of our industry, how to deliver these real time application and services is where our powerful Cloud Management platform Uboss.com comes into its own. The launch for example of Uboss Sales Ledger highlights the required elements of any OSS/BSS to full delivery in our new rapidly developing Ecommerce world! We look forward to meeting up with friends old and new."



**Ellie Allseybrook, Inform Billing**  
 "We are excited to be back at Margin in Comms as a Service this year, which is always informative and one of our favourite events of the year. We will be available for meetings throughout the afternoon to talk about billing challenges and to advise on how to overcome them. We are also looking forward to sharing more about the exciting enhancements that are new to our award-winning billing platform."



**Don Moore, Channel Solutions Resource**  
 "Channel Solutions Resource (CSR) is the UK's most proficient legacy-to-UC/Cloud migration specialist. CSR enables partners to take on support for PBXs and then migrate to new platforms thus ensuring partners are in the prime position to help drive their customer's move to IP, be it SIP or Cloud. Come and talk to us at MiCaaS. We are easy to find – we are the ones with the bear!"



**Sean Vijars, NFON**  
 "We're excited to talk to resellers looking to supercharge their partner experience. Discover NFON's comprehensive business communications portfolio which includes UC, contact centre, recording, analytics, Teams integrations and SIP. As an NFON partner you can choose the model that's right for you - wholesale or commission. Come and talk to Paul and Sean from our new business team to hear more!"



**Ollie Benn, neoci**  
 "Neoci are delighted to be sponsoring Margin in Comms as a Service. By aligning ourselves to the telecoms industry, we bring our wealth of knowledge and access to our expanding network of candidates so that we are best positioned to be able to consistently deliver our recruitment services to the channel."



**Laura Maddocks, PromptVoice**  
 "Providing professional prompts, in-queue and on-hold audio recordings is as important as supplying the right telephony and UC infrastructure. At MiCaaS, come and talk to us about how PromptVoice completes your telephony proposition and transforms bespoke in-queue and on-hold audio into a key communication tool with high margin monthly recurring revenues."



**Lauren Knight, Union Street**  
 "We're really looking forward to attending this year's MiCaaS and to meeting old friends and new. As the event's hospitality sponsor, we also have a few fun surprises in store for the evening. And of course, should you have any billing requirements, we'll be only too happy to discuss these at your convenience."



**Adrian Barnard, StayPrivate**  
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# Spearheading an inclusive

**Gender diversity and inclusion is a critical component of BT's strategy and culture, and the company continues to show that there is no shortage of female talent. Enter Linda Ikwuagwu, Director of Wholesale Solutions at BT Wholesale, whose leadership credentials and achievements should be celebrated.**

**T**he male-heavy nature of the comms sector should not detract from its capacity to produce impressive female leaders such as Ikwuagwu, who is using her experiences to lead and develop the next phase of BT Wholesale's solution offering. Yet despite Ikwuagwu's pedigree in comms her career path could have been very different. She studied Law at the London School of Economics and would have likely pursued a legal career had it not been for her interest in business which led to a Masters in International Business & Management at the Alliance Manchester Business School. She then interviewed for a number of roles and 'stumbled' into the Vodafone Future Leaders graduate scheme.

"I was applying for business and law positions but I ultimately liked the idea of rotating across different teams at Vodafone," said Ikwuagwu. "During the

scheme I made tactical choices about where I wanted to spend my rotations and made sure I was exposed to management roles. In particular, as a Regional Support Manager, I was exposed to a host of skills such as people management, store management and how to hit KPIs. This early role helped me to progress quickly as a manager, then a leader, senior leader and now a director."

Ikwuagwu went on to head-up discussions on behalf of Vodafone during the Government's Shared Rural Network Initiative. Four mobile operators (EE, O2, Three and Vodafone) got together to discuss how they could establish a commercial construct to share infrastructure to address partial not spots. "I was the only female leading the negotiations in the room and it was a turning point for me as a leader," added Ikwuagwu. "I learned how



Linda Ikwuagwu

**I was the only female leading the negotiations in the room and it was a turning point for me as a leader. I learned how to play to my strengths and honed in on my skills as a commercially savvy and sound negotiator**

to play to my strengths and honed in on my skills as a commercially savvy and sound negotiator."

#### Digital leadership

Ikwuagwu also led the Digital Portfolio for Vodafone and was responsible for a considerable capex investment to launch new capabilities, solutions and customer experiences across 11 digital platforms. "There are a lot of synergies between that

role and my position today," she commented.

Before becoming Director of Wholesale Solutions, Ikwuagwu was Head of Access Partnerships at BT which included managing partnerships generally, but managing the Openreach partnership gave her an appreciation of the different requirements between BT's Wholesale channel and direct selling. "Success in my previous role hinged,

in part, on my ability to understand the wholesale channel and deliver access outcomes for them, from FTTP and SoGEA, to Ethernet and OSA," said Ikwuagwu. "Since taking on my new role I've been working closer with BT Wholesale Managing Director Alex Tempest and her leadership team to truly deliver what channel partners need. I'm working closely with propositions, product, digital and more to ensure we are bringing solutions to

# the work culture

market that drive the right customer experience."

The Wholesale Solutions arm functions in three main areas – delivering product portfolio enhancements, identifying new opportunities for converged solutions and optimising the customer experience for the wholesale channel. "We're creating a new level of strategic partnership," added Ikwuagwu. "It's about creating converged solutions that fix a pain point and provide incremental value.

"As an example, there's a huge amount we're doing in the run up to the

## There is no reason to gender stereotype certain behaviours

PSTN switch-off, and by listening to partners we can create solutions that get them prepared to tackle the shift to all IP and help educate their customers. Put simply, it's about solving pain points together to generate long-term value."

The multifaceted aspects of Ikwuagwu's new role reflect the many attributes that make up a good leader, like communication, energy, the ability to cut through noise and navigate complex situations. But for Ikwuagwu, trust is the foundation of everything. "To be a great leader you need to trust your team and they need to trust you," she added. "Mutual trust and respect are key because in business it's all about the journey and how you get there together. Fostering this environment means you will challenge each other to get to the best

outcomes, and that's how you progress and innovate."

Gender diversity and inclusion is also at the forefront of Ikwuagwu's thinking, and mentorship and diverse leadership is crucial, she believes. "Organisations must make sure that employees are exposed to leaders that represent them, so they have someone to look up to and learn from," she stated. "I've benefited hugely from mentorship and it's amazing to have someone in your corner who backs you even if you fail."

It would also be beneficial for female leaders in particular to undergo mindset training, believes Ikwuagwu. "A lot of the time, women don't know their brilliance,"

she added. "Training across the industry would be a wonderful first step. That said, to make any progress telecoms and channel organisations need to address pre-existing biases and gender related stereotypes. Deep-rooted unconscious biases mean we hold different people to differing standards. It's up to companies to really start to challenge these stereotypes and drive open conversations.

"For example, there is no reason to gender stereotype certain behaviours – such as women being empathetic and men being ambitious – because we are all people and we all have the ability to turn the dial up or down on any behaviour regardless of our gender. The channel needs to create a culture where we consciously challenge these assumptions and stereotypes." ■

### Just a minute with Linda Ikwuagwu...

**Role model:** A constant source of inspiration is my dad and some of the managers and leaders I have had throughout my career.

**Your biggest fear?** Spiders.

**Best advice you have been given?** Take opportunities as they arise. And always know what value you add, then work your angle.

**One example of something you have overcome:** Racism, prejudice and bias. That's not to say they don't still occur, but I have methods to overcome them when they arise.

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I am a Blackpool lass, but the accent doesn't always give that away. I am also a PADI qualified scuba diver.

**If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing?** Something in business, perhaps pure Tech, FinTech or starting up my own company.

**Who do you admire most in the channel?** Alex Tempest, BT's MD of Wholesale – a strong female leader with amazing passion and expertise in the wholesale market.

**The biggest risk you have taken?** Opting to study Law at university after having been primed for a career in medicine. I come from a medical family, both parents are doctors, and all three siblings are in a medical capacity.

**Name one thing you could not do without in your job:** Yorkshire tea bags – a proper brew.

**How would you like to be remembered?** As having impact, bringing people together, delivering change and a people person.

**Top tip for resellers:** The move to all-IP is inevitable and there is strategic value in getting ahead of that curve.

## comms dealer Digital Events



Comms Dealer's new online events are designed to offer a cost-effective route to market and a unique opportunity for sponsors to build their own reseller communities.

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## EBS thrives on energy market success

Northamptonshire-based Elite Business Systems (EBS) is a market leader within the telecommunications sector. It was established in 1985 and supplies a broad spectrum of products and services including mobile phones, data solutions, mobile Wi-Fi devices, hosted phone systems, SIP trunks, landlines, Internet connectivity, telephone systems, voice and data Sim cards and mobile phone accessories.

EBS recognises the importance of building long-term strategic partnerships with all of its customers. Mark Jennings, Commercial Director, explains how this played a part in attracting the company to the energy opportunity in partnership with Fidelity Energy: "Energy is a logical progression and an ideal product to offer our customers," he said. "We get a lot of business through recommendations or existing relationships. We recently got a deal from an existing customer that I first supplied a mobile phone to over 30 years ago.

"We also look after a lot of local businesses and helping them with their energy has built our relationships with them. They trust us and have come back to us when their energy is up for renewal. We are the first port of call when their business expands and they need energy as well as telecoms in their new premises."

Fidelity Energy has a whole suite of marketing materials and support, with regular market reports and webinars which cover the vital elements of the energy market. This enables EBS to overcome any objections from customers, which has been especially helpful with the current increase in costs for energy.

"Many people are aware costs are high at the moment, but not many understand all the elements that have impacted this increase," added Mark.

"All the team are helpful and we have a great working relationship with many of them. Our Business Development Manager, Clare Stratford, has always been incredibly supportive and regularly visits our offices to provide training and onsite support. All the support and information offered means we now have a better understanding of how the business energy market works and are confident when handling any initial objections from customers, which only helps to build their trust in us."

The key to any business is to generate a recurring revenue stream, which is what energy has added alongside enabling EBS to drive more profit and build a pipeline. "We now have an energy page on our website and energy is part of the initial conversations with customer rather than a later addition," said Mark. "We send regular mailers out as well as having energy footers on all of our billing runs. We are seeing our customers consistently renewing with us when they could go elsewhere."

Delivering an unrivalled and sustainable level of customer service at all times has always been a core EBS philosophy. "We are a small, family size business and this stance has allowed EBS to foster ongoing loyalty from both our customers and suppliers alike," commented Mark. "We are able to react quickly and be on hand for when any of our customers need us.

"Energy has gone hand in hand with our other utilities. With telecoms, we have regular contact with our customers if they need extra mobile or lines go down etc. This high level of customer service we provide means customers trust us, so when it comes to switching their energy they are happy to use us as a single point of contact for both their energy and telecoms needs."



*"Energy is a logical progression and an ideal product to offer our customers."*

# Strategic talk

## Maintel CEO Ioan MacRae shows strategic insight and displays leadership acumen in his planning.



**Ioan MacRae**

Last financial year Maintel grew its revenue by one per cent and EBITDA by nine per cent (on a like-for-like basis on FY20) after the sale of its document solutions business to Corona Corporate Solutions in April 2021. The main revenue growth came from the Technology and Professional services divisions following the launch and customer contract wins on the Cisco SD-WAN portfolio. Further growth was seen in Maintel's public and private contracted cloud seats with a 30 per cent increase to around 150,000 seats.

"Revenue growth this year will be challenging in light of the hardware supply issues around chips, which is a key component for our SD-WAN project deployments," said MacRae. "The Maintel team continue to contract new SD-WAN solutions to ensure our customers are on the supply orders, but we envisage much of the hardware supply issues to remain until the very latter part of this year.

"We work closely with our manufacturers' revised timescales and have launched a number of initiatives to our customers that are non-hardware dependant with the aim of bridging any revenue gaps. In terms of headcount, we expect a marginal increase towards the end of FY22 as we

upskill our workforce and prepare for 2023."

Maintel is investing in its people, not only for their wellbeing but on development and career opportunities within the group. "The pandemic has ensured our internal communication to staff has been improved, not only on regularity but also around the content of the messaging and key topics that the team wanted updates on," noted MacRae. "We have also focused on team wellbeing as this was a major concern during the pandemic with nearly everyone working remotely and the pressures that this can bring on staff wellbeing and mental health. Further to this, we established our Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) team last year and will be looking to continually enhance and further our ESG strategy as part of our responsibility for a sustainable future."

### Trends to watch

The key trends that interest MacRae most right now include cyber security, 5G, IoT, CPaaS and the wider integration between on premise and cloud-based solutions. Maintel also continues to invest in its own IP capability (Callmedia CX Now CCaaS, ICON Portal and CPaaS integrations), and has expanded its portfolio of solutions and services

over the past two years. "We are looking to expand our cyber security capability, our Microsoft solutions and integration offerings, expand our multi-cloud portfolio and build out our IoT and 5G services," added MacRae. "This will enhance our existing managed services around our UCaaS, CCaaS, LAN and Wifi offering."

According to MacRae, today's leadership priorities are understanding customers while supporting and investing in your teams. "I enjoy spending time with our customers and key vendors to ensure they understand our key plans," he added. "It is also important that the team knows that I am here and readily available to support them. I find this time, especially with customers, absolutely critical to understanding their organisation and future requirements.

"We must ensure we understand where the customer is – as a business, where they plan to go, and how and in what timescales as well as their pain points. We can then best advise them on how technology can support their business objectives. It is about truly understanding our customers and aligning our portfolio of solutions and services." ■



# CHANNEL CHAMPIONS

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# Taking diversity and incl

Our expert panel of diversity champions are positive about the progress made on inclusion and equality – but it is also clear that there is more to do and last month's Channel Forecast insight session put the spotlight on a number of ways to advance this critical agenda.

**A**fter years of discussion and debate, it's time to focus on the practical realities of successful D&I endeavours and the challenges that remain, so last month's Comms Dealer Channel Forecast session aimed to showcase shining examples of D&I leaders who shared their insights and strategies. "If we're not role models ourselves how do we expect other people to get involved," stated Ruth Kennedy, Chief Sales Officer, TalkTalk Wholesale Services, who is part of TalkTalk's neurodiversity 'family' and heavily involved in the company's D&I strategy. "It should be about shared experiences no matter where you sit within the organisation."

According to Bridget Woods, Principal, Wholesale Commercial and Propositions Planning at BT, the pandemic has revealed many social discrepancies and brought the issues of diversity and inclusion to the forefront in terms of society and the workplace. "Progress is too slow and the stats speak for themselves," she said. "Only eight women are CEOs in the FTSE 100, no women of colour, and women only hold 14 per cent of executive directorships. We have a long way to go and it won't be fixed in the next few years."

Pangea is a relatively small company of 30 people but has 11 different nationalities and almost 40 per cent of the workforce is female, whereas the industry standard is



**Ruth Kennedy**

We've introduced new policies to help women going through menopause and pregnancy loss. We've also introduced masked CVs in the recruitment process.



**Bridget Woods**

**There are bigger more holistic changes that need to happen. You can't just rely on mentoring or career development schemes to get the results that companies are looking for.**

around 19 per cent. "This is helping to make us successful," commented Jo Ryan, Business Development Director, Pangea. "The D&I enhancing structure was in place at Pangea from the company's inception and seen as integral to success. One of my main reasons for joining Pangea was the culture and the people I'd be working with. It wasn't about the salary, it was more around moving into a family where everyone is different."

Kate Brunning, Director of People, Virtual1, believes that for D&I to be successful the culture must 'absolutely start with leadership'. "It's difficult for people to act on the great things they'd

see working for a company with a strong D&I culture as important. "It's not just about the salary and the package, people want to know about company values and D&I features heavily," he observed. "In a job market where company values and culture are more important than ever, it's companies that embrace D&I that will attract the best talent. Staff retention is also important. Any employer that is seen to take D&I seriously is demonstrating that they care about their people. This matters now more than ever and can be a deal breaker for a candidate when they are accepting a job offer. We've seen that happening."

To help address unconscious bias and push his D&I strategy forward Benn is considering masking CVs. "Unconscious bias has

like to do if the leadership is not interested," she noted. "Virtual1 has had an inclusive leader from the start. That said, we still have work to

**You need policies that ensure those who face more barriers day-to-day in the workplace are able to be helped more**

do. But we don't want to introduce tick box exercises, we must ensure that there is context behind what we are trying to achieve."

Ollie Benn, co-founder and Director of telco recruitment company Neoci, pointed out that people in general

always been a huge issue, especially in recruitment," he added. "One thing people always talk about is culture fit – if someone doesn't fit the mould they are usually rejected. That's basically hiring people in their own image which doesn't add anything to

# Inclusion to the next level

the company. We should be focusing on culture-add, looking at what a person could bring to the business and add to the culture."

Virtual1 follows a policy of challenging its hiring managers to ensure they see the differences in people as a culture-add. "It's taken a lot of effort to break the 'I'm going to hire someone like me' approach," said Brunning. "We've moved out of that. It's about challenging hiring managers around their decisions in order to break down unconscious bias."

Woods underlined that D&I needs to be prioritised in the same way as any strategic objective. It's not just about having a D&I stream, it's about integrating inclusion across the entire business. "For me that means having D&I targets in place, updating policies and procedures, and being self-critical about any issues," she stated. "Sometimes people are too focused on the benefits of mentoring and career development schemes, but there are bigger more holistic changes

that need to happen. You can't just rely on mentoring to get the results that companies are looking for."

What's also critical to success is ensuring an intersectional view of gathered D&I data, noted Woods. "You need policies that ensure those who face more barriers day-to-day in the workplace are able to be helped more," she added. "It's important to provide safe listening spaces. We conducted a D&I campaign, called We Are Different Together, which was useful in helping other people understand cultural differences and peoples' own experiences. As we develop D&I things won't always be right first time so you need to be open and provide safe listening spaces where senior leaders and colleagues can listen to any issues that may prevent people feeling that they don't belong in the workplace. These are valuable and give insight into what we can change – and peoples' own stories brings D&I to life more."

People want to work for an organisation where they



**Kate Brunning**

**We don't want to introduce tick box exercises, we must ensure that there is context behind what we are trying to achieve.**

can truly be themselves, and if that's the case they'll be a better employee, noted Kennedy. "You can feel this in the culture which naturally flows into the brand as a great place to work," she added. "People should not have to ask for D&I or unconscious bias courses. It's about getting to a level of maturity where strategies and policies make sure it's available to everyone. For example, we've introduced new policies to help women going through menopause

and pregnancy loss. We've also introduced masked CVs in the recruitment process."

Companies not embracing D&I can leave people feeling alienated and uncomfortable, so Brunning also advocates open dialogue as being key to addressing issues such as feelings of alienation. "It's about people understanding that we are all on a learning curve," she explained. "Listening to people and adapting helps everyone on their learning journey." ■

**Bites from the table...**

Addressing unconscious bias is not just about looking at job descriptions to make sure they are inclusive and use gender neutral language. It's also important to talk about unconscious bias not only in recruitment but in the workplace.

**Bridget Woods, Principal, Wholesale Commercial and Propositions Planning at BT**

When we talk about D&I we also talk about neurodiversity, families and wellbeing. We have six different employee networks with monthly meetings and quarterly catch-ups. We have also made strides around LGBTQ2, taken on five autistic people and put them through an apprenticeship.

**Ruth Kennedy, Chief Sales Officer, TalkTalk Wholesale Services**

Studies show that D&I can lead to greater and higher performance, but the intent has to be genuine otherwise there will be a poorer outcome overall.

**Kate Brunning, Director of People, Virtual1**

Many people have not experienced inequality or prejudice and struggle to understand its negative impact. This slows down progress. It will take many years of education before we get to a place where things are fair and more inclusive.

**Ollie Benn, co-founder and Director, telco recruitment company Neoci**

Leadership sets the tone and employees want to be included. We've become custodians of the culture and every time someone walks through the door they feel included.

**Jo Ryan, Business Development Director, Pangea**



**Ollie Benn**

**In a job market where company values and culture are more important than ever, it's companies that embrace D&I that will attract the best talent.**



**Jo Ryan**

**One of my reasons for joining Pangea was the culture and the people I'd be working with. It wasn't about the salary, it was more around moving into a family where everyone is different.**



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# Is the channel back to its fun

It's broadly accepted that philanthropic business models work. They make companies look beyond meeting their KPIs and generating profit to build more generous, positive workplace environments.

Employees feel proud to be part of a team that is making a real difference to the lives of those in need and are more likely to view the company in a good light as a result.

According to studies, workplace volunteering makes millennial employees twice as likely to rate their corporate culture as very positive. Fostering a productive and happy office culture also improves a company's chances of retaining its current workforce and attracting new employees.

And to outsiders, particularly prospective customers, corporate giving, is good for an organisation's reputation. The Charities Aid Foundation found that 51% of British adults are more likely to buy a product or use a service if a company donated to charitable causes.

Regrettably, the Covid-19 pandemic had a profound impact on the charity sector, with over 90% of charities reporting to the UK Charity Commission that they had experienced negative effects. 60% saw a loss of income and 32% said they experienced a shortage of volunteers.

With restrictions now lifted, there is an opportunity for the industry to return to its CSR initiatives and help buoy the charity sector with a fresh stream of fundraising. We were therefore keen to hear whether channel organisations have put the brakes on charity initiatives or have become even more generous in these challenging times.



TIM MERCER  
VAPOUR

"As a team, we've really embraced the power of the collective in all our fundraising endeavours, setting out a roadmap of sponsored activities to support our nominated charity of the year. During the pandemic, our packed agenda saw everything from raffles and car park car washing to raise funds for CLIC Sargent – offering specialist cancer care for young people – but we were able to ramp up the action tenfold after lockdown. For our current charity, Borne – supporting premature birth – we've had the opportunity to embark on a host of exciting events, including a golf day, digital transformation workshops, and even stepping into the ring at a boxing event. We're keen to maintain pace to smash our £23,000 target and delve into ideas that are even bigger and better. Because our charity resonates with so many people, it's important that our work does it the justice it deserves."



ROGER HARRY  
CIRCLE

"At Circle, we have a consistent dedication to great causes. This year we have sponsored Tenovus Cancer with a step challenge. We have recently partnered with Ecologi to support the crisis around climate change by planting 50 trees per new managed support customer. Despite the lockdowns and remote working we managed to help several great causes. This included our "Full Circle for Ty Hafan challenge" where we raised £4,000 for the refurbishment of their hospice, multiple beach cleans across Cardiff, and a 20km walk for Cancer Research UK, plus campaigns to raise awareness around other charities we have the pleasure of working with. We aim to continue the work we do throughout 2022 and beyond. We have many exciting projects coming up, including sponsoring Cardiff Blues in their cycle to France, and several other projects to support our community, the environment, diversity, and inclusivity."



ANTHONY HARCOTBE  
GAMMA

"To celebrate our upcoming 20th anniversary, we launched our Gamma Charity Forum at the start of the year. The Forum plans and coordinates charitable activities across all our offices. Lockdown undoubtedly made supporting charities more difficult, but we are keen for 2022 to be a bumper year for Gamma's contribution to charity, both financially and physically. Gamma operates a 'match funding' programme to 'Give Something Back' to Gamma people who do great (and sometimes exhausting!) challenges for charity. Gamma also supports charities centrally, such as our donation earlier in the year to UNHCR's Ukraine appeal. Gamma has a significant budget for charitable activity, with 2022 seeing the highest amount yet allocated to us for supporting good causes. As Chair of the Forum, and a great personal believer in charitable activity of all types, I believe Gamma has never been better placed to support charities through 2022 and beyond!"



MARK POLLITT  
DIGICOMM 360

"Digicomm has always been committed to giving back to the local community through charity fundraising and support, raising thousands of pounds over the years. We currently support Lagan's Foundation, Rivington Gardens and recently become Platinum Patrons of Bolton Hospice. Over lockdown, we ensured that our company charities were geared up for remote working by advising and in some cases installing hosted telephony and IT systems. We continued to plug them on social media and ensured our fundraising activities were outdoors and therefore less likely to be cancelled. This included bike rides; sponsorship of an outdoor festival and a charity skydive. We're proud to have raised over £5,000 in the last financial year. We aim to smash this figure in 2022, however our focus is to increase our staff engagement - asking the team to nominate charities and looking for fundraising activities that everyone can participate in."



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# Fundraising best? You bet it is!



AIDAN PIPER  
WELCOMM

"Far from limiting our efforts, the lockdown restrictions inspired Welcomm to increase our charitable commitments. From urgent fundraising support for Leicestershire charity LOROS Hospice, to donating tablet devices to Combat Stress to keep veterans connected, I am proud of how our teams have stepped up to support our charity partners at a time when their finances were hugely impacted. During lockdowns in March 2021, we used our in-house expertise to host a live-streamed virtual 'Bake Off'; an event which helped us raise over £12,000 in much-needed funds to help LOROS Hospice continue to provide their vital palliative care services. This year, we're continuing to support our charity partners whilst also getting more involved with local initiatives in Market Harborough and Leicestershire. With reducing our carbon footprint, a big focus for the business in 2022 and beyond, our teams have been regularly completing voluntary litter picks and community clean-ups."



PAUL STEVENSON  
ONE CONNECTIVITY

"Over the past two years we've seen first-hand the effect that Covid-19 has had on mental health. We've always tried to support local causes here at OC but after realising just how huge mental health is as an issue in our country, we decided to take a different approach. That's why this year we've launched our GetTalking campaign in aid of suicide prevention charity, The Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM). As well as donating to the charity, we're hoping to start a conversation on this theme with businesses in our area as well as the technology sector at large. Our aim for this year is to continue raising money for CALM, as well as using social media to share the advice and insights from local and business leaders on how businesses can support staff's mental health."



CHRIS GOODMAN  
FOCUS GROUP

"During the lockdowns we engaged in community work with local hospitals, schools, food banks and community outreach groups, including the provision of over 5,000 meals to NHS staff at Worthing General Hospital. Lockdown restrictions galvanised Focus Group's charitable activity and this resulted in the creation of 'Focus Foundation' - a registered charity and the philanthropic arm of our business. The Foundation's work includes supporting socially and economically underprivileged young people, together with funding a range of mental health projects. We have already issued grants of over £35,000 that will change the lives of over 2,800 people. In 2021, our charity and community fundraising reached £81,443, but our target for the next year is £500,000 as we build the scope and reach of the Foundation across our offices UK-wide. Lockdowns tested us but ultimately strengthened our communities and we look forward to continuing to support those less fortunate in the years to come."



SHELLEY KEMP  
FOURNET

"As part of FourNet's ESG strategy, we are committed to supporting charities and volunteering. We encourage our people to 'give something back', an ambition measured in our annual staff survey, and we give employees two days paid annual leave to work with charities. Over the last six months we partnered with Easyfundraising to boost our charitable giving, and organised volunteering opportunities with food and environmental causes. The Ace Grace Foundation, founded by FourNet employee John Jones, in memory of his daughter, is our Charity of the Year. Because of limitations on activities during the pandemic, we've supported Ace Grace for three years. In future, employees will nominate the charities FourNet will support. We also plan to engage with customers and the causes important to them. We intend to do significantly more on the charitable front, both with employees and customers."



BERNIE MCPHILLIPS  
PANGEA

"Lockdown presented the perfect opportunity to push on and do more charitable work. During lockdown, we kept 102,000 school kids connected to their education and although that was a commercial, government-funded project, it sparked a desire to further close the digital divide. A connected world is a better world. Computer Aid is a charity that shares that belief. Providing internet access to digitally excluded families, we've supported them with donations and consultations on how to make the most out of their funds. Lockdown put a spotlight on mental health too, so Mind's work in providing crucial mental health support hit close to home. We donated to them and have kept it up since. Our target now is to continue supporting more diverse charities, chosen by our team and partners, by donating and consulting. It's important that we support charities that are close to our team members' hearts."



LISA HEWITT  
VIRTUAL1

"Knowing that throughout the pandemic charity fundraising was going to be significantly impacted due to the economic uncertainty, we knew we needed to explore other ways we could contribute to Charities and Community Interest Companies alike. Whilst continuing to support our Charity partners Restless Development, we worked with The Diversity Trust, Mind and Mental Health Associates through fundraising, social events, training and well-being initiatives. By doing this, we were able to contribute to a wider range of social aims that were at the heart of people and is something we will continue to expand on further in 2022 and beyond."

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***"In 2021, our fundraising reached £81,443, but our target for the next year is £500,000 as we build the scope and reach of the Foundation."***

**CHRIS GOODMAN, FOUNDER & DIRECTOR, FOCUS GROUP**



Back in lockdown Focus Group supported food packages for NHS workers alongside Shoreham MP Tim Loughton, which led to the creation of 'Focus Foundation' - a registered charity and the philanthropic arm of the business.



**ELAINE SYME  
KUBENET**

"As a Glasgow based company, KubeNet has always aimed to give back to our local community through various sponsorships and charity partnerships. When restrictions prevented us from having an active role in the community, we introduced a billing round up for Mary's Meals – a global movement of people who run school meal programmes in some of the poorest communities in the world. We've been asking our customers to donate each month by rounding up their payment to the nearest pound and are delighted to see such a positive response from our customers to this initiative. Now that restrictions have lifted our team is eager to get back into the community to raise awareness for the causes we support. We're also proud to be the headline sponsor for this year's Action for Children Sports Dinner, which will raise vital funds for thousands of families living in poverty in the UK."



**ELLIE ALLSEYBROOK  
INFORM BILLING**

"As a smaller business of just under 40 people, rather than picking one charity to support for the year we have always tried to support many causes personal and close to members of our team. As well as raising much needed funds for worthwhile causes, our objective is to utilise charity work to enrich team spirit, add some fun to the working day and to put our people at the heart of everything we do. And as we grow this is becoming increasingly important. We have enjoyed various charity days during the past year, involving remote colleagues alongside those in the office. Finally, after being delayed twice during the pandemic, this summer a team from Inform Billing will be hiking 26.7 miles through the Peak District in aid of Macmillan cancer support."



**DARREN LAKE  
PURE CLOUD  
SOLUTIONS**

"Pure Cloud Solutions will continue to support small Tamworth based charity Help Us Help Others throughout 2022/2023 as they help local people and organisations who have been missed or let down by the system. As the charity raises money via events, fundraising during lockdown was pretty much non-existent, however, both myself and Darren are climbing the Matterhorn in August in a bid to raise £30,000 for Help Us Help Others that will go into the pot to help those that need it most in the local area. We will also be looking to re-start our annual football tournament in 2023 after 3 years off due to the various restrictions. This event, which has helped raise over £15k over just two tournaments is held in memory of Anne-Marie Purslow who sadly, in 2018, lost her battle to an extremely rare form of cancer that affects just six people in the UK."



**HAYLEY DUCKMANTON  
DWS**

"As a group of businesses, we at Digital Wholesale Solutions, Giacom and Union Street Technologies are always finding ways to support charities both in the local community and nationwide. Following the easing of the lockdown restrictions our team have been able to take full advantage of the volunteering day off we offer them. Many team members choose to use their day supporting charities within their local communities or internal fundraising initiatives, such as the Climb Mount Snowdon Charity Challenge that took place in May. At the beginning of the year, our team are given the chance to nominate our chosen charity, and this year Cancer Research UK was chosen as it's a charity very close to lots of people's hearts. From our Climb Mount Snowdon Charity Challenge alone, we have managed to raise £19,700 for CRUK, which is an incredible achievement for us and something we are very proud of."



**PARYSA HOSSEINI-SECH  
9 GROUP**

"9 Group supports two nominated charities, YoungMinds and XLP. YoungMinds is the UK's leading charity fighting for children and young people's mental health and XLP focuses on young people living in areas that experience high levels of anti-social behaviour and gang violence, struggling with issues such as family breakdown, unemployment, and educational failure. During the lockdown, we pivoted towards a virtual approach. This included hosting fundraising events such as Office Olympics over Microsoft Teams, setting challenges to do at home or outside to encourage people to stay active, alongside numerous interactive games and quizzes. Onecom also provided devices and connectivity to XLP to distribute out in support of challenging home learning environments. Post lockdown, we have retained some of the virtual activities as well as planning events in person for team and relationship building. In 2022, we aim to reach an ambitious fundraising target of £25,000."



**SOHINI RAITHATHA  
REDSQUID**

"Charity and our overall CSR profile have been at the core of RedSquid for almost ten years now, but this is something that has been further enhanced in the last couple of years. While we had been doing big fundraising campaigns, our focus changed during lockdowns. Instead, we focused more on the individuals and helped where we could. So, despite restrictions, we were able to donate laptops to young adults who didn't have the equipment to study from home, books to children to end illiteracy and finally, we donated 45 Christmas dinners to our local homeless shelter, and 85 Christmas presents through another charity. Last year we reached record fundraising levels, and also became a carbon neutral organisation, which we will continue to be. This year we are partnering with Watford Women's Centre, which we will support with fundraising and assist with other projects where we have extra skills in house."



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# Channel leaders lay down path to growth via XaaS

With rising demand for revenue-based consumption models the Everything-as-a-Service (XaaS) market is proving to be one of the most exciting areas to be working in.

Here are some of the soundbites and highlights that emerged over the course of the event.

**Hamish Taylor, Business Leader:  
Get into the heads of your customers**

In a lively and stimulating keynote session, award winning CEO Hamish Taylor, who has masterminded customer experience improvements for the likes of British Airways, Sainsbury's Bank, Procter & Gamble and Eurostar, stressed the importance of customer centricity in the everything as a service world.



Now a broadcaster and sought-after speaker, Taylor told delegates: "It is crucial to be closer to your customer than anyone else and remember that data is not the same as insight. You must know what is going on in their head, and they must understand what value you are bringing to their organisation."

Taylor also noted the importance of placing the customer promise at the heart of everything, bringing fresh thinking through looking at influences outside your environment and winning the engagement battle by making it easy for customers to take the first step.

**Seamus Lennon, Threatlocker:  
Zero trust is crucial to beating the cyber crooks**

Zero trust is key to combating growing threats from gangs, sophisticated criminal organisations and nation states, according to Seamus Lennon, Solutions Engineer at Threatlocker.



While software has become a key part of our daily lives, 20,000 common vulnerabilities and exposures were identified last year alone in popular applications, with web attacks set to rise 10% in 2022.

Lennon stated: "To contain this threat, zero trust is key, giving applications the least privileges needed to run services and thus reducing the threat vector. Education

is also a key tool as businesses may still suffer at a human level. Service providers should help clients understand the threats that may damage their businesses."

PLATINUM SPONSORS: Gamma, ITGlue, Kaseya, pax8, splashtop, THREATLOCKER

GOLD SPONSORS: CONNECTWISE, datto, SOPHOS, XELION

## Mark Lomas, Gamma: Time to reap the rewards from CCaaS, UCaaS and collaboration

The pandemic has stimulated a wave of change, bringing UCaaS opportunities forward and changing buyer behaviour overnight, asserted Mark Lomas, Head of New Business, Channel, at Gamma.

“There has never been a better time for channel partners to diversify their portfolio and adding the full unified communication stack is a must,” he said. “Doing this will increase revenues, increase the products your customers buy and protect them from the competition.”

Lomas underlined the three industry



trends that will provide opportunities for resellers to leverage UCaaS opportunities to their customer base, namely the PSTN switch off, ongoing hybrid working and the growth of the contact centre within the SME market.

## Phylip Morgan, Pax8: The Trusted Advisor explosion and Convergence 3.0



He said: “Around £5.5 trillion of wealth stockpiles by the boomer generation is starting to land in the pockets of an entrepreneurial, digitally transformed generation who are looking to outsource everything. This is going to create an explosion of ‘Trusted Advisors’. And it will collide with the rise of the cloud and eventually lead to Convergence 3.0.”

Morgan questioned whether business leaders will be ready for the next big shock as MSPs are joined by accountants, marketing agencies and HR companies in sharing an organisation’s IT budget.

The next big shock for UK businesses is building like a tsunami, warned Phylip Morgan, Chief Channel Officer at Pax8.

## Daniel Coughlan, DWS: This is a once in a generation opportunity for channel businesses

SMBs will spend £10bn on technology this year as full fibre, the PSTN switch off, 5G and cloud adoption create a once-in-a-generation opportunity for business transformation, forecasted Daniel Coughlan, Head of Marketing at DWS.

Security is the number one buying criteria for SMBs after 49% suffered an attack last year. Connectivity is also a priority as broadband speeds are a massive barrier to growth for many small businesses.

Coughlan said: “SMBs are not confident buyers and currently only



8% are happy with the service they are receiving. The channel is best placed to solve this. The winning channel businesses will be those that upskill, diversify, build recurring revenue streams, and create more loyal customers.”

## Alex Ford, IT Glue: Reliable data oils the wheels of better customer service



“Having information scattered across programmes will stop your business scaling and waste key resources. Many new clients that you onboard will have left their previous MSP dissatisfied with their service.

“Having a strong documentation culture, which proves the invaluable work you are doing and ensures readily accessible and secure data, builds trust and ensures you do not fall foul of the same fate.

“Data is the new oil and can make a lot of money as it is complete, accurate, reliable and secure,” added Ford.

Data is king, but IT workers are spending on average 30% of their day looking for the correct information to ensure they are best serving clients, stressed Alex Ford, VP of Sales EMEA at IT Glue.

“MSPs must mature their data handling processes,” he stated.

### XAAS SUMMIT PANEL SESSIONS

## Charting a route to Security-as-a-Service revenues

The rise of Security-as-a-Service offerings presents an opportunity for IT and comms resellers to better protect their clients while capitalising on healthy recurring revenue opportunities, according to Greg Jones, Business Development Director EMEA, DATTO.

“If an SMB you work with is hit by a cyber-attack, they will call you even if you do not offer security,” says. “So why not ensure you can answer this call with a solution?”

According to Seamus Lennon, THREATLOCKER, SMBs are crying



out for partners to shake them out of a ‘we are too small’ mindset. He said: “Many SMBs are still viewing security like car insurance and won’t appreciate its importance until they become a victim.”

“MSPs can unlock massive opportunities just by having conversations with SMBs about their security and helping them understand how the growing threat landscape could affect them

personally,” added Tim Swainson, Channel Account Executive, SOPHOS.

Leigh Cockell, Security Sales Engineer, CONNECTWISE, reiterated that this is an opportunity still in its infancy and there is plenty of time for resellers to get involved and grow a sophisticated offering.

“The cybersecurity threat is not yet at its peak, and likewise neither is the opportunity,” he said.

“Whilst it may feel like a risk, the bigger risk lies in not having a security offering.”

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## XAAS SUMMIT PANEL SESSIONS

### Romain Paugam, Splashtop: Remote solution stack is key to meeting changing customer demands

With hybrid working here to stay post-covid, having the right remote support stack is the key to supporting clients, said Romain Paugam, Sales Executive at Splashtop.

When the first wave of the pandemic hit, 82% of IT leaders worked longer hours to support scattered workforces and 35% said that the hybrid working trend was making their jobs harder. Fast forward to 2022 and 42% think their job is more enjoyable because their organisation has the right tech stack in place.

“Four remote support trends



are leading 2022. The flexibility to prepare for change and adapt rapidly, improving customer experience, increasing trust in security and implementing a sustainable model,” added Paugam.

### Marwin Marcussen, Kaseya: Securing endpoints is number one priority for defence in depth

With convicted cyber criminals facing very lenient sentences and insurance companies limiting liabilities, Marwin Marcussen, Sales Engineering Manager EMEA at Kaseya, shared the importance of leveraging a good endpoint management solution.

“Remote workforces have become a significant vulnerability for companies and securing endpoints is now the number one challenge around security,” he said. “A good, automated endpoint solution will play a critical role in protecting your business from malware, phishing, ransomware, and other cyberattacks on the network or cloud.”



Marcussen reinforced the importance of a defence in depth approach, ensuring your company has the skillsets in place to respond to any challenge, as well as the ability to sell this as a service to your customer base.

### Camille Mendler, Channel Analyst: Change your thinking and reap rewards of golden period

Newly empowered and innovative enterprises are looking to disrupt the curve of tech adoption and the channel must change its thinking if it wants to make the most of this golden period of opportunities, said Omdia Chief Analyst Camille Mendler in her keynote speech.

“Your clients may have become more innovative than you,” she said. “They are looking for resellers to be their equal partners and work through co-innovation. Most enterprises, big and small are limiting the number of companies they engage with.”



“Instead of thinking of yourselves as a provider of comms and IT, look at all the areas that are digitising and get more creative in how you can move into processes. XaaS is a main meal, but do not forget the trimmings.”

### Pushing the boundaries of innovation-led growth opportunities

As comms and IT resellers look to increase their operational efficiency, energise teams, and deliver a better offering to clients, their focus should move to the rapidly growing SME market.



“Economic challenges have driven a requirement for SMEs to evolve their business to compete,” said Alex Ford, IT GLUE. “Who is better placed to provide that innovation than the MSP?”

“Every SME is a tech company now,” added Phylip Morgan, PAX8. “Likewise, everyone in our ecosystem is in the game of managed services. It is not about what acronym you use, but what you can offer SMEs to help make their business more efficient.”

Cloud adoption has never been higher in SMEs and according to

Marwin Marcussen, KASEYA, the opportunities will come to you.

“Cloud plays an enormous part in our conversation with end-users as they now understand its importance. We don’t have to pitch cloud solutions as SMEs simply demand it,” he said.

Romain Paugam, SPLASHTOP, added: “The pandemic saw many UK organisations transition to full cloud and the role of the MSP is to enable these newly digital MSPs, via emerging innovative technologies, to go out and grab larger opportunities.”

### Profiting from the full spectrum of UCaaS solutions

The cloud comms evolution is gathering pace, catalysed by the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent rise of home working.

“We are starting to see more and more IT partners join our ranks and break through the perceived barriers of selling cloud communications,” said Matt Worboys, Channel Business Development Director, GAMMA. “The move to all-IP solutions is playing into the hands of IT companies and allowing them to unlock a host of new revenue opportunities.”

A key question at this time is how to drive more margin into UCaaS sales and make the most of these opportunities. Daniel Coughlan, DWS, noted the wealth of opportunity that lies in the contact centre SME space “The way we communicate with businesses has changed and now all organisations need an omnichannel

approach. This is no different for SMEs, however they are struggling to find the solutions that are accessible to them at this price point.”

In conclusion, Dave Reynolds, Managing Director, XELION, highlighted the immense market share that is currently available in the SME market due to the upcoming switch off.

“The market needs educating with a focus on the benefits all-IP can bring them. This will lead to conversations that will be positive for both parties,” he said.



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# Daisy names CEO



Neil Thompson

DAISY Group's CFO Neil Thompson has taken the CEO role nearly a year after joining the business. Thompson has spent the last 12 months working with founder and Chairman Matthew Riley, leading a strategic review that will underpin Daisy's next phase of growth. Prior to Daisy, Thompson was Group CFO at Manchester Airport Group. Riley said: "Neil has a wealth of experience across listed and

private funded businesses, driving strong growth and shareholder value." Thompson added "It's an exciting time for the technology sector and there are significant growth opportunities. I'm looking forward to leading the team as we take Daisy to the next level."

## Also on the move...

FORMER Softcat MD Colin Brown has joined Content+Cloud as Non-Executive Director, bringing more than two decades of senior leadership experience. During his eight year stint at Softcat, Brown was part of the leadership team that brought the organisation to its IPO, resulting in Softcat's listing on the FTSE 250. In a prior role he drove the adoption of Microsoft technology as General Manager of UK services for Microsoft, an appointment that followed a spell as CEO of Computacentre Germany. Content+Cloud CEO Peter Sweetbaum said: "Colin's experience of leadership positions, at arguably the most successful technology businesses today, will be a fantastic addition to Content+Cloud's ambitious growth plans."



Colin Brown

**FIDELITY'S marketing function will be spearheaded by incoming Group Head of Marketing Greg Sellars, bringing 15 years experience working in marketing, mainly in the ICT and telecoms industries. Prior to joining Fidelity, Sellars headed up marketing and channel for a carrier telecoms company based in South Africa. "I look forward to my new journey with Fidelity Group," he said.**

**VAPOUR'S engineering team has been boosted by the addition of cloud voice UC engineer Graeme McCabe who joins having worked on Avaya systems for the last five years. Jordan Stephenson also joins the business as Senior Cloud and Network Engineer, moving from Contrac IT where he was Network Lead. CEO Tim Mercer commented: "This is a promising time for the company as we scale to meet the demands of our customers and the ever-growing cloud market. Our new hires will be an asset to our technical team." Two graduate sales recruits are also set to join Vapour.**

TWO key appointments made by Pangea see David Mitchell join the IoT firm as Business Development Director and Emma



David Mitchell

Pazgrat as Head of Partner Channel. Mitchell stated: "IoT is huge. 5G and connectivity is everywhere and it's only going to keep growing, especially with industry shake ups like the PSTN switch-off." Pazgrat added: "The speed that IoT and mobile connectivity are advancing is exciting. There's so much opportunity." Sales Director Bernie McPhillips commented: "David and Emma are phenomenal additions to the team and they'll help take us to the next level."



Emma Pazgrat

# Ex-Advanced MD joins Core

FORMER Advanced 365 Managing Director Neil Cross has joined Core Technology Systems as Non-Executive Chairman.

Cross was also Managing Director of Chorus Software for 22 years, transitioning the business through a number of acquisitions; and he served on the board of Computer Software Group for five years following its acquisition of Chorus. Cross went on to take the role of Business Systems Group Managing Director in 2009 following its acquisition by Advanced Computer Software Group earlier that year.

Core CEO Conor Callanan stated: "Neil will help us to achieve our goals of accelerated growth, both strategic and organic, as well as leverage his experience in sustainable growth through strategic investment. Neil will help us to think differently and innovate faster."

Cross added: "I am selective about who I choose to work with, and I genuinely believe in the potential at Core."



Neil Cross

# Hay poised to aid Akixi growth plan

ALASTAIR Hay has joined Axiom Equity-backed call reporting and analytics firm Akixi as CFO. He was previously CFO and Chief Corporate Development Officer, and a founder member of Pharmanovia credited with playing a role in scaling the business from a single product in a single market to 25 products in 140 markets, generating over 300 million euros in sales. Prior to this he was a Managing Director in FTI Consulting's Corporate Finance practice.

Akixi CEO Craig Decker said: "Alastair brings a background in managing and enabling business growth. He will no doubt be instrumental as we drive forward with our global growth strategy." Jonathan Organ, Investor at Axiom Equity, added: "Alastair brings a wealth of experience supporting scaling businesses which will prove invaluable to Craig and Akixi as the business continues to grow."



Alastair Hay

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