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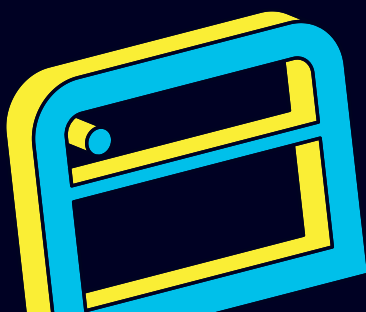
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# Hunt on for new Gamma kingpin

**GAMMA Chief Executive Officer Andrew Taylor (pictured) stepped down on July 4th after four years in the role, his decision driven by personal reasons and a preference for taking up non-executive positions.**

**SPECIAL REPORT**

Following his exit Taylor will however maintain links with Gamma in an advisory capacity until July 2023 when his notice period expires.

Gamma's Deputy Chief Executive Officer Andrew Belshaw stepped up as Interim CEO on Taylor's departure.

Belshaw joined Gamma in 2007 and served as Chief Financial Officer since the firm's IPO in 2014.

He was recently promoted as Deputy CEO to strengthen and broaden the scope and capacity of Gamma's management team.

Alongside Belshaw's appointment Gamma also brought in Bill Castell as Group Chief Financial Officer.

During his tenure Taylor has been credited with progressing Gamma's overall growth and strategic development through strong organic growth, targeted product development and strategic acquisitions that broadened

Gamma's technology and product capabilities.

Gamma also expanded into new geographical regions to support long-term profitability.

Chairman Richard Last commented: "Andrew has played a key role in shaping Gamma's plans for future growth and leaves the business in an excellent position."

Taylor added: "Driven by a desire to spend more time with my family, now is a natural time for me to move on."

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## EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

WHAT'S in a name? New job titles are a good and reliable indicator of change – and the channel has witnessed a steady increase in the appointment of top level leaders to advance the cause of all-embracing diversity and inclusion, ESG,

LGBTQIA+ and the wider social and environmental agenda.

During my tenure as Editor of this magazine the press releases we receive around new appointments have for a long time been traditional and without marked change. In recent times we saw a rise in the appointment of leaders for more human aspects of the workplace in the form of 'people-focused' roles – as mentioned, diversity and inclusion, wellbeing, for example. These posts indicate greater awareness around important considerations that in the past have been overlooked as a leadership priority. These specific job roles reflect a change in attitude and priorities that reflect wider trends.

Now, board level leaders tasked with a specific objective to drive sustainability and net zero ambitions are being appointed. Their focus is purely to drive forward the decarbonisation agenda. And experience tells me that the channel will witness a significant rise in demand for purely environmental focused expertise – which, for those early movers, will certainly translate into a competitive advantage.

This is a fundamental strategic change that should be a top leadership priority among all businesses no matter their size. Therefore demand for people skilled in developing green initiatives and achieving decarbonisation targets will be in mega-high demand, exacerbating the existing skills shortage.

To help gauge where the channel sits right now on the green agenda Comms Dealer produced, in association with Zen Internet, a channel readiness research report (see page 32), which provides a clear picture of where the channel is regarding green matters, and where it needs to be.

**Stuart Gilroy, Editor**

# Top gong for Mesch days after big deal



**Cally Beaton, Greg Mesch and TalkTalk Wholesale Services CSO Ruth Kennedy**

CONGRATS to pioneering and ambitious CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch who won the Services to Digital Britain award during the inaugural UK Fibre Awards (London Marriott Hotel Grosvenor Square, June 9th).

The accolade came just days after CityFibre completed a mammoth £4.9bn debt raise, hailed as one of Europe's largest ever full fibre financings.

The deal fully finances CityFibre's eight million home roll out – a third of the UK market by 2025 – as well as enabling upweighted participa-

tion in BDUK's Project Gigabit rural programme. The financing follows £1.125bn in equity investments that CityFibre has closed in the last ten months.

"With our roll out now fully financed, backed by so many financial institutions, we have emerged as a strong national challenger," said Mesch.

"But CityFibre's aim is not simply to challenge. It's to unleash the transformative economic potential of full fibre to help level up the UK. We have never been more confident that we will succeed."

The UK Fibre Awards, staged by BPL Business Media (publisher of Comms Dealer and FibreProvider.net), was hosted by podcaster, writer and comedian Cally Beaton.

On collecting the Services to Digital Britain award Mesch said: "It's great to finally have a fibre awards after I have spent so many years trying to convince the Government that you actually needed fibre in the country. The importance of our industry should not be overlooked. It's truly necessary."

**Awards Special Report - p30**

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NEWS ROUNDUP

IT DISTRIBUTOR DataSolutions has doubled turnover in what the UK and Ireland-based firm hails as a record year, hitting its 2021-2022 revenue target of £83m.

DataSolutions attributes this growth in the main to its portfolio of security solutions. Its cybersecurity and hybrid multi-cloud divisions have witnessed growth of 43% over the last 12 months. Demand for hybrid working solutions has also contributed. DataSolutions MD Michael O'Hara said: "It's been a huge year for the business in terms of growth and we are now on the cusp of hitting £85m."

COMMUNICATE'S buy and build strategy continues with the acquisition of B2B comms firm Zencom Telecommunications, its third transaction. The deal was funded by a £1.5m investment from BOOST&Co. Communicate Chief Executive Officer Tony Snaith commented: "The Zencom acquisition is a natural fit and will enable us to bring our expertise to bear in the provision of our full service offering." Chris Mears, Principal at BOOST&Co, added: "This acquisition will broaden the offering and client base, while facilitating the next part of the growth journey."

## Chandler acquired by Intercity

BIRMINGHAM-based IT service provider Intercity has acquired Northampton comms firm Chandler Communications.

Intercity CEO Andrew Jackson commented: "Having seen how this well managed business has grown over the last 30 years, and the care the team put into building long-term partnerships with customers, we recognised the synergies between our two organisations."

"Chandler is a great fit for Intercity and this deal is an important step in our long-term plan to grow through careful and considered acquisitions."

Chandler was established in 1986 by Perry and Jo Chandler. Today the family run business has over 350 customers across the UK.

Perry Chandler added: "After thoroughly enjoying the past 36 years, and for personal reasons, it's time to hand over the reins."

"I looked for a company that holds the same values as I do and found this in Intercity. It's fantastic to see two family owned Midlands businesses coming together."

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# TelcoSwitch adds funder

TELCOSWITCH'S M&A campaign has entered a new phase following investment from private equity fund Queen's Park Equity (QPE).

According to TelcoSwitch CEO and founder Russell Lux the cash boost will also broaden its channel-focused product suite, increase headcount and help surpass 400,000 active users by the end of 2024.

The latest investment follows the acquisitions of OneVoice, PBX Hosting and SureVoIP during the last 18 months.

"In under six years we've grown a successful channel business that continues to challenge the status quo," said Lux. "The team at QPE share our energy and enthusiasm and we have its long-term support in accelerating our strategy."

Nick Manning, who is part of QPE's investment team, commented: "We are supporting TelcoSwitch to build on the growth the team has achieved in recent years. The underlying technology and strength of the management team has positioned TelcoSwitch to continue its growth story."

TelcoSwitch's executive management structure remains unchanged following the invest-



Russell Lux

ment, while QPE Managing Partner Jonny Kay and Manning join the board of directors.

TelcoSwitch has 140,000 users in 65 countries. It featured in the Sunday Times Tech Track 100 and the FT 1000: Europe's Fastest Growing Companies.

NEWS ROUNDUP

A NEW release from PromptVoice is deigned to optimise channel opportunities around IVR prompts, in-queue and on-hold audio. The latest upgrade brings new APIs that enable integration with billing platforms including Union Street and Inform Billing. Other APIs allow resellers to integrate PromptVoice with their telephony portfolio. Partners can also implement audio recordings directly from PromptVoice's platform. CEO Anthony Buxton stated: "This development is aimed at enhancing the user experience and helping channel partners grow their subscriber bases with little or no interaction from their sales and marketing teams."

## comms dealer

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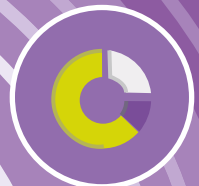
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## A powerful choice of billing partner

# Ultima buys security firm



Scott Dodds

THE security practices of Apse Capital owned Ultima Business Solutions have been boosted by the addition of The AntiSocial Engineer, a company that helps organisations protect against cyber attacks through social engineering and penetration testing assessments, along with online security training and auditing services.

Ultima CEO Scott Dodds said: "This acquisition strengthens our security expertise and will help us protect our clients' digital revenue and reputation round-the-clock. The AntiSocial Engineer is innovative in its approach to testing client vul-

nerabilities, helping them fix issues and educating them about a better way of operating."

Richard De Vere, founder of The AntiSocial Engineer, commented: "The acquisition will enable us to serve our clients better and our continued growth will be nurtured by Ultima's experience in business.

"We can bring the lessons learnt through our testing and simulations to a wider global audience and ensure Ultima's clients are benefiting from increased resilience."

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## NEWS ROUNDUP

BELFAST-based Barclay Communications is set to welcome the first intake of a new telecom engineer apprenticeship scheme which includes working towards a City & Guilds Level 3 qualification in ICT Systems and Principles. "The goal of the scheme is to give school leavers an opportunity to earn and learn in one of the fastest growing sectors," said Barclay Communications founder and MD Britt Megahey. "Our goal behind this launch is to invest in the youth of Northern Ireland by giving them a job that includes learning a dedicated skill with training and development as they go through college." The launch follows strong demand for cloud telephony systems since BT announced its intentions to switch off all traditional ISDN and PSTN lines by December 2025.

CWCS's managed hosting portfolio has been augmented with cloud comms services following its acquisition of Stripe 21. CWCS CEO Karl Mendez said: "This acquisition was a natural progression as we look to expand and offer more services."

# Onecom's Vodafone link up extended to channel partners

ONECOM'S circa 450 partner channel – which was bolted on when the business acquired 9 Group in March 2021 – now has access to a wider product set following the expansion of an existing £500m-plus partnership between the Hants-based comms provider and Vodafone.

The offering includes wholesale and distribution mobile airtime, SIP and SD-WAN connectivity, IoT and 5G, plus FTTP and SoGEA services.

"Following investment from LDC in 2019 the Onecom M&A strategy has been executed to build our geographic reach,



Martin Flick

enhance capability and open new routes to market through numerous acquisitions," stated Onecom CEO Martin Flick.

"The purchase of 9 Group provided access to an established partner channel which

complements our direct customer offering. It makes sense to extend our relationship with Vodafone to those partners."

Nick Gliddon, Business Director, Vodafone UK, added: "Bringing the energy, alignment, mobile pedigree and experience we have developed to Onecom channel partners extends our reach and penetration at a critical time as we head towards the 2025 switch off."

Onecom boasts more than 100,000 customers and manages in excess of 800,000 mobile, hosted telephony and connectivity end points.

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## The Hiring Dilemma



Darrol Stevens and Ollie Benn

At neoci, we are seeing a real dilemma for businesses across the ICT sector.

There has been a huge increase in salary expectations over the past 12-18 months, with businesses struggling to play catch up, and it has often led to companies going head-to-head in a 'price war' to secure the talent they need. The increase in pay couldn't have come too soon for many, particularly with the dramatic rise in inflation this year. But the rise in the cost of staff has put pressure on many businesses.

### How will this affect the way companies hire?

With the increase in salary costs, it's prudent to adapt the hiring strategy of your business.

There are two key choices to consider when hiring;

- Do you hire experienced people who will be able to hit the ground running, having instant impact? This is more costly than it's ever been before, how do you attract them to join your business, do they demand a higher salary?
- Or, can you afford the time to take on less experienced or entry level people and train them? This is much less costly for a business, but it certainly comes with a high element of risk. On one hand, you could be

moulding your own future business leaders. On the other hand, they might leave during the training process, or worse, after you've invested a great deal of time and money into them.

At neoci, we've decided to hire a mix of the two options. We have hired people without recruitment or telecoms experience, as well as now adding an experience person to the team. This has worked out well for us so far, but every business is different, and business critical roles often cannot wait for the training process to happen. This is where things can get quite costly, but does it have to? Planning ahead can alleviate the pressures caused by gaps in your business, but some things are almost impossible to plan for.

There are obvious advantages and disadvantages to hiring people with or without industry experience. It's very much a cost vs impact scenario. It really is a case of identifying the most appropriate direction for your business. Agility is key in the current market, and at a time where inflation is affecting nearly every aspect of a telco business, now is not the time to lose focus on what is most important....people.

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

# IT firms join forces to aid environment

THE Techies Go Green initiative, launched a year ago by distributor DataSolutions, has notched up 200 signatories including Softcat, Version 1, Sapphire and ColorTokens.

Techies Go Green is a movement of IT and tech-oriented companies committed to decarbonising their businesses.

DataSolutions MD Michael O'Hara stated: "We're on track to become carbon neutral this year and we have extended these sustainability efforts beyond our four walls to impart the knowledge we have developed to other channel businesses through Techies Go Green.

"It's my firm belief that until companies take reducing their carbon emissions seriously and act on it, it won't happen. As I have, leaders need to realise that business and sustainability are not mutually exclusive, but mutually beneficial."

DataSolutions has reduced its Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions as measured by the Location Based Method by 33%, and reduced its Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions as measured by the Market Based Method by 75%.

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Michael O'Hara

The company moved from a gas burning heating system to an Efficient Heat Pump solu-

tion, switched to LED lights throughout the office environment, and moved to a verifiable green electricity supplier. It also assists staff working from home to move to green energy providers where possible.

DataSolutions has also installed solar panels which provide renewable electricity every day and meets 18% of the company's needs.

The company is aiming to reduce its business air travel by 50% per year.



FOUR key market trends dominated the agenda at last month's ISPA Annual Business Model Summit Review... market consolidation, gigabit-capable full fibre deployment, asset protection and the next steps on exploring the future of in-home fibre. Voneus CEO Steve Leighton (pictured left), who co-hosted the event, stated: "We set out to discuss the impacts – negative and positive – associated with the rapid development of the market we operate in. It was fascinating to be in the room with some of the great minds in our sector and to hear their thoughts on how the market will develop as the UK surges towards increased levels of gigabit capable connectivity."

## Focus goes green

FOCUS Group's upcoming six month audit of its Green House Gas (GHG) emissions will include the challenging task of tackling Scope 3 emissions (the supply chain).

The audit will form the basis of a carbon footprint report produced to the GHG protocol, Corporate Accounting and Reporting Standard. Focus's bid to become carbon neutral follows a link up with carbon solutions provider Auditel.

"We recognise that our day-to-day operational activities and

those of our customers have some impact on the environment," said Focus co-founder and Director Ralph Gilbert.

"By partnering with Auditel we are making a clear statement of intent to reduce our own carbon footprint in a credible, meaningful and measured way.

"As a group we have already done much to try and minimise our impact on the planet. We now have a framework to recognise that work. The next stage will see us start to manage what we have measured." See p22

### NEWS ROUNDUP

PLAN.COM has launched a second mobile network on its connectivity platform through an MVNO agreement with BT Wholesale. The deal provides access to EE's 4G and 5G network including VoLTE and VoWiFi functionality. plan.com Chief Executive and co-founder Dan Craddock commented: "With two UK mobile networks now on our my.plan platform channel partners and customers will benefit from an improved suite of products, services and functionality."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

A STRUCTURAL revamp at Virgin Media Business Wholesale has created a new operating model with a dedicated team to underpin partner support – from pre-sales to end-of-service. The team is expected to be fully operational in early 2023. Aaron Briant, who is Head of Wholesale Operations, Virgin Media O2 Business, commented: “The way the wholesale connectivity channel does business is becoming less transactional and more consultative, and partners across the industry are facing more bespoke requests from their customer base. Our dedicated team is here to challenge our partner relationships throughout the entire lifecycle, ensuring we create the right environment and support model.”

HOVE headquartered technology finance provider Lease Group has achieved carbon neutral status, certified by external organisation Carbon Neutral Business. “Carbon neutrality was firmly on our roadmap for 2022,” commented James Phillips, Group MD. “We wanted to fully and accurately evidence to ourselves, our channel partners and our customers that we are committed to running a sustainable business.”

# Mode snares IT MSP Eacs

CONNECTION Capital-backed Mode Solutions has acquired Cambridgeshire-based IT MSP Eacs. The enlarged business now offers services across Managed IT, communications and document management.

Mode Solutions was established in 1995 and began life as a provider of document management solutions, diversifying in December 2019 through the acquisition of Nix Communications to incorporate UC and network services.

The Eacs deal strengthens Mode Solutions’ IT managed services capabilities and expands its geographic reach and scale to more than twice existing revenues.

The transaction adds a number of accreditations including Microsoft Gold competencies, Cyber Essentials Plus, Apple services, along with a 24/7 Network Operations Centre and Security Operations Centre.

Mode Solutions CEO Alex Tupman said: “An acquisition of this size and quality demonstrates our ambitions and evolution from our heritage, as well as delivering on our strategic objectives to offer a full trifecta of digital services to UK businesses from a single source.”



Alex Tupman

Mode now has three UK sites, a combined headcount of over 200 and a core customer base of almost 3,000.

Mark Snaith, Investment Director at Connection Capital, added: “Mode has transformed significantly since Connection Capital’s initial investment in 2018, and its latest acquisition is a statement of intent.”

Kevin Timms, Chairman and CEO of Eacs, noted: “With companies choosing to accelerate IT outsourcing and digital transformation programmes in the wake of Covid-19, a single source supplier will enhance the customer experience.”

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# Gamma simplifies shift to IP

A SOLUTION that eases the migration of single line legacy WLR services to all-IP has been rolled out by Gamma.

The product combines Gamma’s connectivity portfolio, number porting service and single line replacement solution.

“As of 2025, the PSTN will be switched off,” said Chris Wade, Chief Marketing and Product Officer. “This is a major step towards the country’s mass IP network migration.

“All businesses still dependent on legacy services for their day-to-day operations will need to migrate to all-IP services, many in the next year as Openreach continues to serve notice on exchanges.”

Gamma’s new springboard to all-IP (called Simple Swap and aimed at the micro business market of one to nine users) enables channel partners to facilitate migrations with light-touch digital provisioning through one dedicated portal.

“While 2025 might seem a while away, it’s critical to start preparing well ahead of the switch off date,” added Wade. “Empowering partners and customers to migrate smoothly has been one of our key areas of focus in the past few years.”

# Positive outlook for VARs

TECH channel business leaders have displayed high confidence in their future prospects, registering almost 80% on a scale that measures optimism.

The survey by Agilitas also highlighted that senior leaders are doubling down on ESG commitments with almost half of organisations measuring sustainability targets quarterly.

Confidence in the channel’s ability to form collaborative partnerships that balance profit with purpose was also high among channel leaders.

“The true value of success is no longer determined by financial gain alone, as many channel players seek to re-evaluate the way they do business to find the right balance between profits and purpose,” said Shaun Lynn, CEO, Agilitas.

“The vision to act with impact extends to all corners of the tech channel to build an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable future.”



Shaun Lynn

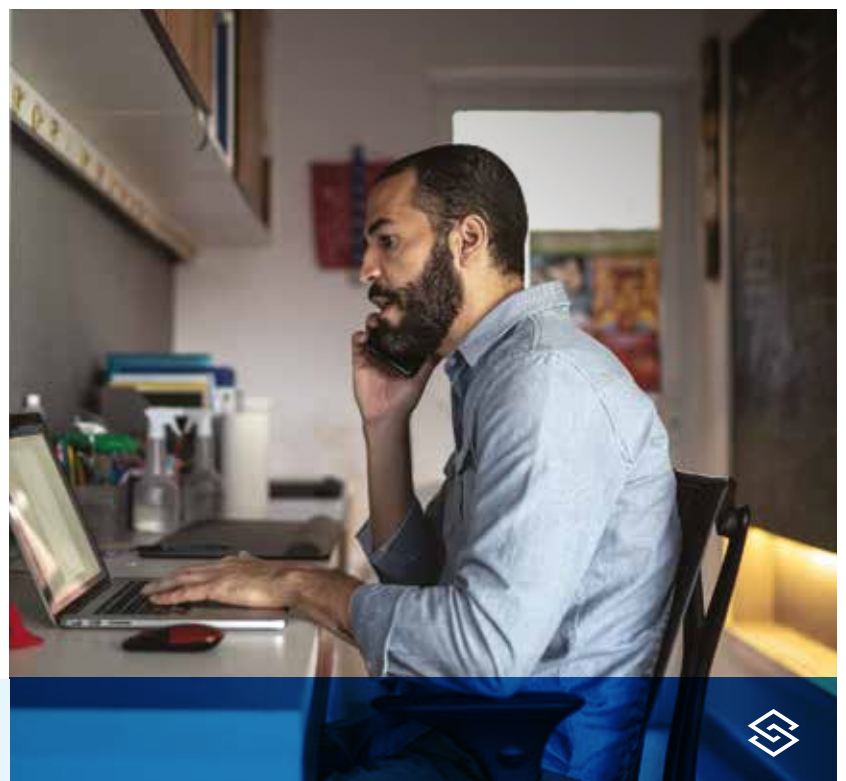


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## Staking a claim in the fibre goldrush is only half the battle

It wouldn't be an understatement to say that the Fibre wholesale industry has undergone something of a transformation in the last few years.

In analogous terms, it's been like watching a band you really like, playing to a handful of diehard fans down at the Dog and Duck for years only for them to suddenly catch their break and then everyone's clamouring for a ticket to their next Wembley show.

Suddenly everybody wants a piece of the action. And rightly so, Fibre helps make life better for everyone.

A huge part of this change in fortunes has been the rise of the Alt-Nets, vibrant young businesses fuelled by big investment and Government grants, all intent on helping to spread the joy of full fibre networks to every nook and cranny of the UK. It's been a full-on Klondike-style frenzy of digging and building as established incumbents and new disruptors alike eye up potential virgin areas for expansion, all staking their claims for new territories and prospects as they go.

This creation of a patchwork of networks across the UK is inevitably good for customers in the long term – competition is healthy and the benefits of having ultrafast downloads speeds delivered to your doorstep will long outweigh the disruption and complaints that always follow the trench diggers and cable layers.

But in the race to be first to stake our claims it's important not to run before we can walk. While speed is good it's not always everything. Just ask the hare and the tortoise.

KCOM's own deployment of fibre, initially in the Hull area over the past 10 years, and more recently across Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, has taught us the importance of having the key building blocks in place ready to deliver the best customer experience even before the diggers move in.



Mike Higginson  
KCOM Head of Wholesale Sales and Marketing

The whole team needs to be aligned from the beginning, from early demand stimulation to pre-sales promotion, order input, in-life support, network availability and capacity, engineering nous and robust provisioning processes.

The temptation is to be hostage to the 'speed to value' mantra – build, market, sell. However, this must be resisted! Full stress-tested end to end processes must be in place before the first order is taken.

Also, having a clear go-to-market strategy goes without saying – is it to retail or wholesale? Or both?

Do you sell into the consumer market or business? Or both? If you are going to retail, how will your brand land on the doorstep? – After all you'll be up against the big boys.

This is where the true value of the channel comes into its own. The UK Reseller channel is hugely diverse, with CPs offering their own unique interpretations of value differentiation to their particular customer segments, which is a blessing to a truly proactive wholesaler. However, the channel also demands quality and it is the reputation of the reseller partner's business that is on the line if the customer experience is sub-standard.

After all, that band may be playing at Wembley these days – but one duff gig and they could end up back on the club scene with the also-rans.

# New owner for BCN following ECI deal

BCN Group is entering a new phase of growth following investment from ECI Partners in a deal that saw Beech Tree Private Equity exit with 5.3x its investment in the fast-expanding Manchester-based business.

Beech Tree invested in BCN in 2018 since when the company increased circa £10m revenue to over £40m through organic growth and acquisitions.

"In this age of digital transformation there is a phenomenal opportunity for BCN to support clients to solve their IT challenges and achieve the best possible results from technology," commented BCN CEO Rob Davies. "We are partnering with ECI Partners to deliver on our organic growth potential and to continue delivering on our M&A strategy."

Mark Keeley, Partner at ECI, added: "The rising importance of IT, digital transformation and cloud adoption means that BCN is well positioned to expand its capability, geographical presence and customer offering organically and through M&A."

BCN Group provides managed IT services cover-



Rob Davies

ing private and public cloud (Microsoft Azure), Microsoft Modern Workplace solutions, application development, data analytics, security and connec-

tivity to more than 1,000 customers. The business employs over 220 people including 170-plus trained support staff and technical engineers.

EXPERIENCED channel sales exec Roan Pratt (pictured) has joined EnableX as Sales & Marketing Director. He was previously Sales Director at Enreach which he joined in early 2021, moving from Gamma where he was Head of Product Sales. His new remit is to work across the EnableX group of companies – Pragma, Techland and Candio.

"EnableX has ambitious growth plans across its three businesses," said Pratt. "It values the combination of being disruptive with a forward thinking partner community."

EnableX CEO Will Morey added: "Roan is a great fit for our business and understands the channel. Introducing a new Sales & Marketing Director gives the group a fresh perspective of customer insight that will support partner growth through ongoing developments of the Pragma, Techland and Candio propositions."



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## Intact acquires Blue Rock

HEMEL Hempstead-based provider of software and technology solutions to the merchant and distribution sector Intact has acquired software house Blue Rock Systems.

The Southampton business has been reselling, implementing and supporting Intact ERP systems for over 16 years.

Its revenue grew 30% in 2021, returning double digit profit growth.

Intact's annual turnover, currently in the region of €17m, has grown over 500% in the



Justin Lawless

last ten years with more than 60% growth anticipated in the coming year.

The deal builds on the 2016 acquisition of Ramtac, another UK VAR partner. And according to Intact CEO Justin Lawless

the self-funded multi-million-pound acquisition of Blue Rock Systems will strengthen the firm's market share across target verticals and bolster its talent pool as it seeks to expand across Ireland, the UK and global markets.

"This important development adds to our customer base and involves a team of skilled individuals with software industry expertise, who will enhance customer service and support our growth plans," said Lawless.



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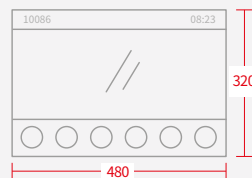
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Gate



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# Sector continues to exhibit

**This quarter's primary talking points boil down to resilient trading in the comms sector, corporate activity and a big question around FTTP roll outs, writes Philip Carse, Analyst at Megabuyte.com.**



Philip Carse

**T**he trio of themes explored in this update shed light on trading performances (continued resilience and broadly positive outlooks, but with equipment and staff headwinds and uncertainty); corporate activity (down in volume but up in strategic significance); and FTTP (continuing to attract new funding, but where are the customers?).

**Trading headwinds**

The pandemic related mission criticality of the telecoms sector that we identified in early-mid 2020 through public company updates and private company conversations has been

validated by accounts for December 2020, March 2021, June 2021 etc. For companies that qualify for the Megabuyte Scorecard (>£10m revenue, <£100m EBITDA), Telecoms Services achieved an average of 6.4% organic growth in the most recent published year, and a three year revenue growth CAGR of 12%, the latter highlighting the impact of M&A combined with 15% average EBITDA margins, 101% conversion of EBITDA to Operating cash flow, and 65% conversion to Free Cash Flow (netting off capex). Thus, outside of the major networks, the sector remains in growth mode, profitable and cash generative.

While the pandemic impact is much less worse than many would have predicted in March 2020, the recovery has also been less pronounced, impacted by a mix of continued lockdowns, slower project spend by larger companies, and equipment and skills shortages. Public companies such as BT, Maintel and AdEPT have flagged 1-2pp revenue growth impacts through 2021/early 2022 from supply chain impacts, while Work In Progress (WIP) regularly features in our company conversations.

If nothing else, hardware shortages have probably further spurred adoption

of cloud-based services, though not all impacts can be mitigated (for example, if LANs are being upgraded). The impacts are also less severe than for some of our IT Managed Services and Value Added Reseller companies.

In terms of current trading, some companies have flagged slight improvements as larger organisations resume projects, such as Gamma and Redcentric. For larger consumer-focused network players (BT, VMO2, Vodafone and TalkTalk), the revenue outlook is also being improved by significant high single/low double digit RPI-based price increases, though their cost bases are also rising given higher staff, energy and other costs. Overall, the EBITDA outlook for major players is flat to up in mid-single digits.

**Less but more strategic corporate activity**

The volume of Telecoms Services corporate activity has slowed, with 53 in the first half of 2022 versus 78 in the same period last year, though it should be borne in mind

that last year's first quarter represented both a catch up on deals impacted by the pandemic and a rush to sell ahead of potential budget capital gains tax changes. Nevertheless, there continues to be a steady stream of bolt-ons from private equity-backed consolidators (including Focus, Southern, Radius, FluidOne, FourNet and Babble) and debt funded owner managed consolidators (including Croft and InTec).

However, the smaller volume of deals has been more than compensated by their strategic importance, with significant acquisitions for Daisy (of XLN for £210m/10x EBITDA), FluidOne (of SAS, estimated £20m/10x, 50% revenue boost) and TalkTalk (of Virtual1 for an estimated £110m/14x trailing EBITDA). The Daisy/XLN deal represents consolidation at the micro-SME end of the market, and Daisy flagged further consolidation (quickly followed by Communicate Better), perhaps accompanied by broader corporate activity similar to its carve out last year of Digital



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# bit resilience

Wholesale Solutions, backed by Inflexion.

Daisy has also been in the news for restructuring its Allvotec indirect telecoms support services division in the light of poor trading as well as being asked by the administrators of Sungard to offer transition workplace recovery services to Sungard customers. Similarly, Redcentric is, at the time of writing, in line to buy some of Sungard's data centres/ colocation customers.

The TalkTalk/Virtual1 deal is strategically important for the wholesale channel, combining TalkTalk's extensive UK local loop unbundled network and partner channel with Virtual1's well automated partner platform. At the same time, TalkTalk was reported in the press to have appointed advisers following inbound interest, including from Vodafone and Sky.

Further consolidation of the UK mobile market has also moved a step closer with Ofcom saying it would judge a proposed move from four to three operators on the particular details. The obvious deal would be a merger of Vodafone (18% share of consumer subscribers) and Three UK (13%), given that BT and VMO2 each have 34-35% shares and also have substantial fixed line and pay TV operations.

While private equity remains very active in UK Telecoms Services through backing resellers, including those mentioned above, direct private equity investments continue to represent a trickle. The few examples so far this year include QPE/ TelcoSwitch and LDC/Aspire.

## More FTTP funding

FTTP continues to receive high levels of funding, including a very significant £4.9bn debt package for CityFibre, fully funding its eight million premises rollout, first time fund raises for Lothian, Border Link, Connect Fibre and Complete Technology Group, and follow on funding for Freedom Fibre, Fibrus, Netomnia, ITS and County Broadband.

Megabyte is now tracking 76 companies with a collective announced premises target of 78m, of which BT and VMO2 account for 43m premises and 74 altnets for the remainder, versus 32m existing UK premises. We expect this premises number to grow, especially as VMO2's owners Liberty Global and Telefonica are discussing with investors a potential 7m premises FTTP network with VMO2 as an anchor tenant.

Less spectacular has been progress on signing up customers by altnets. Broadly speaking, most altnets are in land grab mode, publicising their build plans and building in multiple locations to deter other altnets. Customer penetration rates (of premises passed) for relatively established operators range from less than 2% for G.Network to 20% for Gigaclear and 30% for Hyperoptic. The inevitable industry consolidation will be led by those who can both build networks cost effectively and sign up customers. While we see small distressed FTTP deals (e.g. Swish Fibre acquiring People's Fibre), we believe it will be another 18-24 months before we see meaningful altnet consolidation. ■

## ROUNDUP

**RECENTLY filed 4Com accounts to June 2021 showed significant Covid-19 impacts on its predominantly lease-financed hosted voice/HiHi model (in which multiyear revenues are booked in one go), with EBITDA halving to £7.0m on revenues down 12% at £85.6m. However, the business has since bounced back with expected fiscal 2022 EBITDA of £17m on £106m revenues and somewhat higher exit run rates. The acquisition of Midshires Business Systems adds £5.5m of highly recurring revenues, growing in double digits, but more importantly provides a test bed for a new HiHi sales model which, if successful, could presage substantial (£100m+) M&A.**

**AIM-listed conferencing-pivoting-to-business telephony player LoopUp has issued results for the year to December 2021, highlighting the stark difference between a short pandemic demand spike and the current product-market mismatch. Revenue fell 61% to £19.5m and adjusted EBITDA fell 92% to £1.2m, resulting in operating cash flow swinging from a £17.8m inflow to a £1.4m outflow.**

**CHESS' year to April 2021 accounts show EBITDA down 10% at £11.1m (excluding furlough proceeds of £971k) on revenues down 17% at £84.4m. However, Chess's O2 distribution business was sold just before the year end and Shaftesbury Systems in September 2020, both to Inflexion-backed DWS for a combined £9m. Excluding this, Chess entered fiscal 2022 at around £10m EBITDA on £77m revenue, since when it has acquired pentester Armadillo and business telecoms service provider TTNC.**



## WHAT IS 5G AND IS IT RIGHT FOR YOUR CUSTOMERS?

**5G IS CURRENTLY THE TALK OF THE TOWN, BUT WHAT ACTUALLY IS IT AND IS IT RIGHT FOR YOUR CUSTOMERS?**

### WHAT IS 5G?

Put simply, 5G is the latest generation of mobile data technology. Building on the previous generations, 5G:

- Is much faster with higher multi-Gbps peak data speeds
- Provides much lower latency
- Has dramatically improved reliability

### HOW FAST IS 5G?

It can vary, but 5G is designed to provide average speeds of around 150-200Mbps, with peak speeds reaching above a staggering 1Gbps.

### WHY IS EVERYONE EXCITED BY IT?

The range of speeds delivered by 5G have the potential to revolutionise every industry. According to Qualcomm, 22.8 million new jobs will be created and \$13.1 trillion of global economic output will be facilitated as a result of 5G. These are some serious numbers.

### BUT IS IT RIGHT FOR YOUR CUSTOMERS?

Despite its potential, 5G is not going to be right for everybody at the moment. To help identify if it's right for your customers you must consider:

- Is 5G supported in their area?
- What are your customer's requirements?

### IS 5G SUPPORTED IN THEIR AREA?

Currently, 5G is available with one or more MNO, in over 100 UK cities, but is still largely centred around metropolitan areas.

In a city or town, it could be an option, but rural areas are struggling with reliability and performance. Contact the Cloudcell team today to find out what coverage could be in your area.

### WHAT ARE YOUR CUSTOMER'S REQUIREMENTS?

This sounds obvious but 5G is not the magic connectivity bullet... yet. It's important to educate your customer that whilst 5G might be available in their location, it might not always give the most consistent connection. If reliability is critical, 5G might not be their best option.

### HOW CAN CLOUDCELL HELP?

At Cloudcell, we understand that there's not a 'one size fits all' solution when it comes to connectivity.

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# A postcard from the MiCa

**Last month's Margin in Comms as a Service (MiCaaS) symposium – 23rd June, Forest Of Arden Marriott – delivered insights into a sector progressing towards a services led sustainable future that is replete with opportunities.**



Delegates concentrate on long-term opportunities in delivering services

**T**he priorities illuminated during this year's MiCaaS event are reflective of an evolving comms ecosystem in which traditional approaches are no longer adequate. In response, the symposium showed how the move to services has become a measure of success and value. And in the context of business value and the various factors impacting growth, Knight co-founder and Director Adam Zoldan pointed to a bright outlook and a strong deal pipeline. This is good news for those businesses suffering from a Covid-19 hangover and experiencing a slow recovery, especially around project revenue and supply chain issues.

To set the scene, Zoldan cited a survey by BOOST&Co, tapping into the strategies of 500 CEOs and CFOs, among whom 70 per cent are seeking access to funding while 63 per cent have already accessed debt funding, indicating that a growth mindset is prevalent. The survey also showed that 18 per cent of respondents

believe that if their bank says 'no' to funding the door is closed. But other options are available providing organisations can show a history of profitability and have a credible plan and business model, noted Zoldan.

In more good news, deal volumes remain high despite a dip: Q4 activity saw 60 M&A deals versus 52 in Q1, but overall volumes were down 27 per cent year-on-year. That said, Zoldan noted that transaction activity remains 'reassuringly high'. Comms resellers are the 'hottest property', noted Zoldan. Followed by network and connectivity providers. In the IT space MSPs remain in demand. Expertise in transformation is especially sought after.

There exists however a spanner in the works: The National Security and Investment Act introduced in Q1 this year may become a consideration in certain circumstances where, for example, providers of services to the public sector may need to make a

notification under the Act which could hold things up.

Competition for the best buys is intensifying, with the top seven buyers accounting for 59 deals during the past year. Also of note is that companies with the greatest access to funding delivered the highest growth. But with funding comes a measure of risk linked to having to meet the business plan. Yet, says Zoldan, the rewards are significant.

One area not short of funding is the full fibre sector, and the FTTP campaign convoy continues to roll across UK territory where, in this market, value is placed more on premises passed than financial metrics. In all, circa 58 altnets combined plan to pass 80 million premises when there exists around 32 million, noted Zoldan, indicating a period of future consolidation in this market.

Zoldan's optimistic outlook was reflected in Gamma's Head of New Business for Channel Mark Lomas' exploration of the CCaaS

## The symposium showed how the move to services has become a measure of success and value

opportunity in the context of three big market events – the PSTN switch off in 2025, the stop-sell in 2023 and the rise of hybrid working – all of which play into the hands of the comms channel, more so for those partners that have a grasp of opportunities around contact centre solutions. In fact, Lomas has witnessed 'massive growth in SME contact centres' and noted that post-Covid the landscape has changed to prioritise the customer and employee experience. More surprising perhaps is that Lomas tipped the sub-10 extension marketplace as a major sweet spot. They need the benefits of a contact centre, he enthused. And small businesses are likely to have a legacy PBX, representing an opportunity to update their systems and reduce costs.

But too often, said Lomas, he hears businesses say

that they are not contact centres, and resellers may not see themselves as contact centre providers too, yet many customers have more than three communication channels and most see the customer experience as key to their success, with webchat, for example, playing an ever more prominent role. Historically, however, contact centres may seem to have been too expensive for smaller firms, but the cost could be as low as £15 per user. A CC solution may also be perceived as too complicated yet today they can be up and running in hours.

The remedy, according to Lomas, is to remove talk of contact centres from the conversation and focus more on solutions, digital channels and customer experience. To do so would surely strike a chord with the



# UcaaS symposium

many businesses looking to introduce webchat over the coming months because it is now universally accepted that CX is critical to success – and it is a fact that customers are willing to pay more for an improved service. Leveraging CX to win business is perhaps best approached from a verticalisation perspective, noted Lomas, pointing out that Gamma has various partner support mechanisms tailored for specific markets.

Just as resellers might unwittingly assume themselves not to be contact centre providers, they may also apply the same negative perception to the opportunities available to them in providing secure payment solutions. It's no surprise that businesses take payments, and they usually start with a conversation facilitated by the services provided by comms resellers. In his keynote address, Brian Hudson, Head of Partnerships, PayGuard, noted that there are over 500 million debit and credit card payments made over the phone every year and in the many cases where there is no PCI compliance there is a big risk of fraud and reputational damage. Nor is that all – there is a significant opening for channel partners to reduce the cost and efficiency of processing payments as well ensuring compliance.

The PayGuard solution provides different methods of taking payments in addition to cards – including simple one-off payments and refunds, direct debits, standing orders and bank transfers. It also facilitates MOTO to E-comm conversion – which in everyday language means overcoming a potential payment issue

regarding the buyer in real-time, thereby rescuing transactions that might have otherwise failed. Custom payment schedules can be set up while payment self-service and other automated services are available. The solution also caters for different currencies.

### Big paybacks

Hudson drew attention to a typical customer case study where the PayGuard solution generated client savings in excess of the cost of a new 70 seat contact centre solution, delivering a £34,000 cost reduction overall. The deal brought to PayGuard a 36 month contract worth circa £200,000 annual margin on £750,000 revenues per year. It's also interesting to know that the model is familiar to comms resellers, and Hudson estimates that within a reseller's customer base approximately 20 per cent to 30 per cent will take payments, with many more pushing payments out. No wonder he sees this as a major opportunity for resellers.

Generating revenues through services was also a key theme for Paul Taylor, Sales & Marketing Director, Voiceflex. He put forward strong arguments in favour of UCaaS, citing Gartner statistics that suggest by 2024 as many as 80 per cent of organisations will prioritise collaboration and meeting platforms over telephony when defining a UC portfolio strategy, up from 30 per cent in 2019.

Much of this big swing towards collaboration is of course attributed to Covid-19. A case in point is that in 2019 MS Teams users numbered circa 20 million. In

Q4 2021 that figure jumped to 250 million. Moreover, WhatsApp in 2021 registered 2.2 billion users. Both these platforms provide effective forms of group and single message communication and their trajectory will continue, with implications for the types of comms services businesses will deploy. According to Gartner, 77 per cent of users use real-time mobile messaging tools for quick and informal conversations related to work. And according to Taylor, an opportunity exists for resellers to deliver UCaaS solutions into a market gap that exists between the businesses that use MS Teams and those smaller ones that leverage WhatsApp.

Even better, an omnichannel approach will ensure more efficient communications, emphasised Taylor. For the customer, they get anywhere, anytime contact via several channels, a better customer experience and an easier customer journey. On the company side, advantages exist in having a unified solution that provides an overall picture, delivers access to better information, maximises resources, offers more granular insights and brings speedier ROI.

Returning to Zoldan's insightful analysis of the growth mindset that exists in many businesses today – and that expertise among ICT providers in transformation is in hot demand – it is clear for all to see that the channel faces a significant opportunity to capitalise on the markets discussed in this report, especially in the context of the 2025 PSTN switch off which can only act as another catalyst for long-term profitability. ■



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## NEWS ROUNDUP

CELLHIRE is set to expand its product and service offering following investment by PE firm LDC. The York-based business has partnerships with Vodafone, O2 and EE, and internationally has partnerships with more than 40 MNOs. Dan Smith, Partner and Head of Yorkshire at LDC, said: "We see scope to grow the business particularly as it develops its IoT offering."

A TOP performance by Charterhouse Group's Network Solutions team secured it the Extreme Networks UK&I Partner Of The Year 2022 award. The company is set to be the first UK Extreme partner to break \$10m in a single financial year with the vendor. "The partnership with Extreme has gone from strength to strength," said Tony Brar, Director. The firm's Microsoft Business Unit (Symity) was named Yealink's Global Partner of the Year 2022.

A BRAND refresh at Fidelity Group signals a pivot to XaaS, according to MD Alan Shraga. "Our new identity, Empowering XaaS, better represents what Fidelity is and what we bring to the market for customers and partners," he said. The strategy includes a website and logo redesign.

# Thompson in Stone names move to ANS green leader



Richard Thompson

ANS Group has reinforced plans to double EBITDA with the appointment of former TalkTalk exec Richard Thompson as Chief Revenue Officer.

He joins after a 20 year stint at TalkTalk where his roles included Director of Sales Operations, Marketing Director and Commercial Director, before becoming a Managing Director within TalkTalk Business.

The appointment is one of a number of hires across ANS Group's commercial and people divisions as it seeks to double EBITDA to £80m and revenue to £240m by the end of 2025.

"Having taken some time out to work out my next step the opportunity at ANS felt

like the perfect fit," enthused Thompson. "I love to be the challenger, disrupting markets and generating growth. That's what I saw in ANS.

"Hitting our targets depends on understanding what we're great at and making smart decisions, expanding our channels and continuing to invest in the best talent."

CEO Paul Shannon added: "Richard's knowledge and experience of maximising strategic partnerships and his track record in building high performing commercial teams will help turn up the dial on our growth."

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# Stone names green leader

STONE Group's carbon zero initiative will be spearheaded by incoming Head of Sustainability Sheryl Moore, who joins from the Kier Group where she developed and implemented a social sustainability strategy.

Her new remit is to lead the delivery of CSR, ESG and sustainability strategies and policy at Stone, ensuring their consideration throughout the business and in decision making. Stone aims to achieve the PAS 2060 accreditation by 2030.

CEO Simon Harbridge said: "Sheryl's experience in social



Sheryl Moore

impact development and measurement, along with broader sustainability initiatives, will consolidate the progress we have made on many fronts."

Moore added: "With a committed leadership team I have no doubt we will make rapid progress to achieve our goals."

# Candio-Inform link up

INFORM Billing partners now have access to Candio's white-label digital solutions following a strategic link up between the businesses.

Candio's self-service products are designed to help small and medium sized firms increase online visibility, which provides a boost to partners' monthly recurring revenue.

Inform Billing Business Development Director Ellie Allseybrook said: "Partnering with Candio enables our customers to grow their portfolio,

add value to their clients and build recurring revenues. Our partnership makes setting up, billing and deploying Candio services straightforward."

Candio Business Development Manager Tom Chedham commented: "Candio is a purpose built organisation that exists to help telecoms, IT and utility companies increase their recurring revenue. By leveraging their customers, Candio partners on average have been able to increase revenue by £10 per customer each month."

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# THE BILLING PEOPLE AWARDS 2022

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# Cloud leader talks strategy

**As more and more customers demand a single provider for voice and data services, ICT suppliers unable to deliver converged solutions will soon reach a point of maximum exposure to the propositions of more rounded rivals, warns Cloud Business CEO James Butler.**

**A**ccording to Butler, the key to future success resides in understanding the relevance of comms and IT solutions to customers, and being able to monitor, adapt and optimise that mix of products. "If we're not doing this our competitors will be," stated Butler. "Customers are the most open I've ever seen to buying services from a single supplier. If you don't offer both comms and IT you're not going to be in that decision. We have to get much closer to the customer than we ever did before. You have to be a trusted adviser in that space – and we're working with comms resellers to help them transform."

The new technology areas that have caught Butler's eye include Artificial Intelligence, especially its potential to help people manage mundane or manual tasks. Butler is also interested in 'super clever stuff' around protecting businesses through understanding how an attacker might try

to infiltrate organisations, learning those behaviours and reacting to them.

But despite the attractions of new technology, Butler is always guaranteed to revert to what he says is most important – a straightforward conversation with customers to understand how he can support them and create value. "We want to make sure we're part of their capacity to innovate and be successful," he added.

"Therefore we will always be looking out for new trends and the types of products we need in our portfolio to help customers achieve their goals. Those trends at the moment are security, AI, remote working and the use of video and voice as productivity tools, which has grown exponentially during the last two to three years. Automation will result in a big shift and we need to work out what our new place in the market will be. We will be more about managing that automation."



James Butler

**Customers are the most open I've ever seen to buying services from a single supplier. If you don't offer both comms and IT you're not going to be in that decision**

Butler's strategic vision was just as acute when he formed Cloud Business in 2009. The company specialises particularly in IT strategy, digital transformation, IT support, infrastructure and network and security. Its customers include ASOS, Tui and Everyman Cinemas. Growth has been organic and through the addition of good recurring revenue acquisitions – with innovation

in services also being a driver. "We don't stand still and continually evolve our services to help customers manage change, compete and grow," stated Butler.

**Wired for success**

Butler has always had a fascination with computers but was never a good programmer – his brain doesn't work that way. Nevertheless, aged 15 he

undertook work experience in a computer shop. "I tilted towards how computers can be used in practice and helped people by translating IT speak into normal language," he added.

Butler went on to join Microsoft in 2001, which was a much smaller business at the time with circa 500 UK employees. Just short of a decade later he established

# gic evolution

Cloud Business hoping to ride the wave of a new trend where organisations would buy services and technology as a subscription, rather than build and run it themselves. "I saw this big change coming and thankfully it happened," he stated. "It was never guaranteed to work out. I also managed to get the cloudbusiness.com domain name. It had been registered, but I bought it for £800."

The first big turning point, recalls Butler, was taking on his full-time employee. "Having someone to pay

## We have to get much closer to the customer than we ever did before. You have to be a trusted adviser in that space

and everything that goes with that was a big thing," he added. "And our first famous customer, in terms of a brand, was ASOS. That was what made it real for people... those who thought we were playing at having a go at a business and didn't really understand what we did. Implementing a new email system for ASOS was a real pivotal point. In 2012, Cloud Business was hailed as the best Microsoft cloud partner in the world."

But the main impact on the company was the move to hybrid working for staff and customers, catalysed by the pandemic. Cloud Business typically has 60 per cent of its staff working remotely on

any given day. "There's been a big shift in maintaining our culture and how we engage with customers," added Butler. "That's also led to many new opportunities: Remote working creates security concerns and device management issues. It also brings training opportunities around how to be exceptional on video calls."

### Opportunity

According to Butler, Cloud Business' biggest opportunity is to provide the 'everyday services as a service' – taking difficult to run services and providing them as an easy to consume high quality experience. "I also think we're playing more of a role around employee experience," he added. "If 90 per cent of the workforce is at home using their employer's technology day-to-day, that plays a role in their experience. And whether they stay with that

employer could rest on their experience. The job market is becoming much more competitive so we're going to be more involved in that employee consideration."

This high level of involvement is largely down to the impact on work patterns by Covid-19. For years Cloud Business pushed the message about work from anywhere and collaborative working but struggled to shift any collaboration tools. "The pandemic transformed everything overnight," said Butler. "Now, there's never been a better set of products for customers to buy. And there's never been the ability to deliver the services we can in such a cool way." ■

### Just a minute with James Butler...

**Role models:** Champions of customer experience – Richard Branson stands out. And Steven Bartlett – he has an amazing podcast and is an all round nice guy.

**Your biggest fear?** Not taking up as much opportunity as you can with your life. Regret is probably what I fear the most.

**Your main strength?** I like talking to people face-to-face, so being a people person is my strength.

**Three ideal dinner guests:** Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss, who came up with the idea of Facebook and asked Zuckerberg to build it for them. Zuckerberg blocked them out and was sued by the brothers (Olympic rowers) who put their pay-off into Bitcoin and both became billionaires. Also, Elon Musk and Anne Bowden, founder of Starling bank. She saw an opportunity where banks weren't delivering on customer experience.

**In hindsight:** I probably would have started Cloud Business two years earlier. And I would have concentrated on hiring a management team earlier.

**If you weren't in IT what would you be doing?** A property developer.

**How do you relax when not working?** I'm a big mountain biker and like getting out and about. I also enjoy tinkering with old cars.

**How would you like to be remembered?** As ambitious, nice, a good husband and dad.

**Industry bugbear:** Technology wrapped in complicated language. We need to work on that as an industry.

**Top tip for resellers:** Understand the relevance of what you provide to customers and constantly monitor, adapt and optimise that mix of products.

## Top supersonic cash factor – ow!

Contact centres, eh? More to the point – CCaaS. No longer the preserve of big-scale specialists, cloud tech opens the CC market up to more players. But who'll manage the project implementation, particularly the fiddly voice bits?

### Supersonic your contact centre opps

Did you know an anagram of "Choose Support to Win for CCaaS" is "Top supersonic cash factor – ow!" which, frankly, while it doesn't technically qualify among our catalogue of contact centre-related achievements, still makes us incredibly proud.

### Add CCaaS without upskilling

Did you also know that CCaaS is a gazillion-pound opportunity, particularly in the SME and mid-sized market? Don't let a shortage of skills stop you from selling it. From solution design to deployment, migration, support – Support to Win is always there to help you nail it, white-labeling our expertise so you can stick your brand on top.

### Support to Win = CCaaS

Just in case it wasn't clear. When you think contact centres (the operational challenges of deploying and supporting them), think Support to Win. Add it to your mental list or words associated with us. Hosted telephony, tick. UCaaS, tick. MS Teams, tick. Contact centre/CCaaS, tick, tick, tick. Experienced, professional, charming and fragrant too.

### Unique DNA platform

What's really smashing it in CCaaS is our DNA (Discover, Normalise, Automate) platform. It lets you significantly reduce project timelines for CCaaS implementations, especially when the customer is migrating from an existing solution. Config accuracy is assured and time-consuming manual processes are swept away,



right from presales to project planning, execution and ongoing estate management.

### CCaaS = Support to Win

Er...how else do we say this? Contact centres and Support to Win are joined at the hip. We go together like rhythm and blues, like strawberries and cream. Seamless, symbiotic, interdependent, but also classy.

### Bring us your CCaaS projects and wishlists

So where next? If you want to sell CCaaS but feel you can't, share your plans with us and we'll show you how to unlock revenues without risk. If you're landing CCaaS projects but don't have the operational bandwidth to deliver as you'd like, talk to us about smart sourcing CCaaS skills and project capabilities to accelerate order to cash.

### Wisp coconuts apart\*

There's a world of possibilities for your CCaaS future, made bigger by the choice of who you partner with. The choice of technology arguably matters less than how well the solution fits the customer requirement and how quickly and easily you can deploy projects without any post-implementation issues.

### Win a supersonic-style experience

Support to Win is offering complimentary tickets to the 2022 UK airshow of your choice. Find out more and enter the draw at <https://supporttowin.tv/enter>

\*That's an anagram of 'CCaaS Support to Win', by the way.

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# Net Zero now

There's no time to waste in getting serious about reducing emissions, writes Zen CEO Paul Stobart.



Paul Stobart

Every business is facing difficult headwinds right now – spiralling energy costs, wage inflation, recruitment and retention challenges, and much else besides. And the extremely unstable geopolitical backdrop is compounding matters. Given all the above, it would be easy to make climate change a lower priority.

But our experience is that customers will not allow us to duck this issue. We're seeing a growing number of enterprise clients asking for regular updates on where we're at with our carbon emission reduction plans. We've never had this level of interest before, but it is clearly becoming more and more the norm. And if we fall short of customer expectations regarding our response to climate change, then they may well take their business elsewhere.

The opposite is also true of course: If we exceed customer expectations on our plans and actions around emission reduction then we are likely to secure more of that customer's business for longer.

We all need to be proactive in taking action to reduce emissions. What's clear, though, as more and more of us measure our emissions, is how dependent we all are on other players in our supply chains doing their

bit to reduce emissions so we can reduce ours. Those familiar with the measurement regime will know that for many businesses Scopes 1 and 2 (emissions largely under one's own control) represent a small proportion of overall emissions. It's Scope 3 (our share of those emissions generated upstream and downstream of us in our supply chain) that make up the bulk of total emissions.

It follows that we can't do much to reduce our own emissions until the rest of our

## I have no doubt that if we work together we can absolutely do this

supply chain does the same. And this means that we need to work collaboratively, openly and transparently across our supply chain if we are to succeed. We need to share best practice, set out what has worked (and what hasn't), and publish our emission data so that everyone can benefit from what we are doing.

### Next stage

Right now, most of us are in what we might say is the 'easy' stage of emission measurement and target setting. The much more difficult stage lies ahead when customers will ask – 'we understand your medium and long-term targets for

emission reduction, but how are you actually doing against those targets?'

In our own industry, I would like to see us doing more, collaboratively on this hugely important initiative. We all have a role to play. It starts with measuring emissions and setting targets, but then we need to move on to sharing action plans, and experiences, good and bad. Wouldn't it be great

if all the work everyone in our supply chain was doing on climate change was logged at some central website, accessible to all?

Collaborating on this scale is not something we are used to doing. Our default position is to keep our data to ourselves. But in this instance, given the existential threat that climate change represents, we owe it to our people, our customers and society to adopt a different approach. I'm optimistic. I believe in the power of human ingenuity, and I have no doubt that if we work together we can absolutely do this.







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# Get ready for a supercharge

## Focus Group CEO Barney Taylor's strategic ambition can only lead to an escalation of the fast-growing company's UK expansion.

**T**aylor joined Focus Group in October 2021, moving from Ensono where he was Managing Director for Europe. He assumed the chief exec role at a time of significant growth for Focus Group, and he has a clear vision and strategy to build on the big advances already made by the West Sussex based business. While growth slowed in 2020 compared to prior years, 2021 saw overall growth of 48 per cent (16 per cent organic and 32 per cent M&A).

The company's voice and data business units saw circa 10 per cent CAGR in 2021, while the highest double-digit performance came across IT, cyber, mobile and enterprise (38 per cent). The first half of 2022 has seen the growth trend continue, with above expectation performance across the business.

"Our expectation is for this positive trading to continue into the second half of the year with the rate of growth in our core voice and data business slowing slightly, but stronger growth coming from bundled services that include our enterprise, cyber and IT business units," said Taylor. "We believe that voice, IT and connectivity will increasingly be sold as part of a wider technology bundle

over the coming years, not just as stand-alone services."

Focus Group's head count will also grow in 2022, but not at the rate seen in previous years due to new processes, the integration of acquired businesses and the adoption of new technology platforms such as ServiceNow. "We expect that organic growth will necessitate in-house headcount growth of circa five per cent," added Taylor.

Focus Group is becoming a broader technology provider to the SME market, and Taylor says the big opportunity is to monitor and move with the market and learn how to provide all essential technology to customers, including traditional voice, IT and connectivity services. "We have the ambition to continue strong organic and acquired growth, integrate all of our businesses into one Focus Group and consolidate our position as one of the leading MSPs to UK SMEs," stated Taylor.

### Strategic vision

To this end he has set a clear strategy and communicated it in-person to every employee within Focus Group across the UK. "We will continue to acquire carefully and integrate well, provide excellent customer service,



Barney Taylor

## We have the ambition to continue strong organic and acquired growth, integrate all of our businesses into one Focus Group and consolidate our position as one of the leading MSPs to UK SMEs

prepare the business for high growth and scale through people, technology, process, structure – and ensure that Focus Group listens to the market and stays ahead of trends, rather than follows them," he added. "Preparing Focus Group for scale and ensuring we stay ahead of the market are key aspects of my role. But most important of all is the need to lead by example, build on the strong

company culture and create a place that people love to work. If you build your people, then you build your business. This is ultimately how we will succeed and sustainably grow Focus Group long into the future." Focus Group is currently investing for scale and much of this investment is around technology and process improvement. "We are implementing ServiceNow

this year, launching a new self-serve customer portal and soon afterwards moving to a new enterprise-grade CRM platform," added Taylor. "As our revenues increase we do not intend that employee workloads increase at the same rate. So we need to adopt technology that will enable us to improve and automate the service we provide to our customers. It is an investment in time, money and resources, but I strongly believe this will give us the foundation for long-term success. This is about looking ahead to the business we aspire to be in six or eight years time."

Taylor is prioritising people-based decisions and the need to attract, develop and retain key talent. He has also started planning and budgeting for 2023 – and his priorities are to identify areas of 'explosive growth' in 2023; how best to invest in people and create opportunities for them; and how to leverage technology and streamline processes. This will be key to bringing the acquired businesses together as part of one Focus Group. "Continuing investment in people, technology and processes will be integral to this," he stated. "We have to find a way to enable our acquired businesses to thrive as we start to make them part of the Group at the right pace."

This year Focus Group decided to give more support to charitable causes through the Focus Foundation, and this will continue. "It is time we devoted more resource, effort and funds to those in more need right across the UK," added Taylor. "The Focus Foundation is becoming a significant part

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# ged Focus Group

of our post-Covid company culture, led by co-founder Chris Goodman."

## Leadership approach

The Covid-19 outbreak led to a remodelling of Taylor's leadership approach and prompted him to look at challenges and opportunities from a new angle. "Covid has absolutely changed the way that I choose to lead," he stated. "Work and personal lives have merged more than ever before and flexible working is to be truly encouraged. Work must be a place that you enjoy, with people that

particularly in a post-Covid environment. Covid has shown us all that some things are more important than just revenue and profit. I believe that if you run your business in the right way and pay attention to people and culture, then you will build long-term success. Strategy, vision, financial and operational governance remain essential, but your people will execute your success."

Taylor sees the current market environment and the financial uncertainty of the next 12-24 months as an opportunity

attractive," observed Taylor. "Technology will continue to be relied upon to streamline and improve service provision and operating costs in our customers, we just need to change the conversation to ensure we take advantage of the opportunities ahead.

"It is of course about providing an excellent service and a competitive price. But our customers will choose Focus Group if they see an organisation they like, that is easy to do business with, that promotes a culture and values they can relate to, offering a service through people that clearly enjoy their work and are putting the customers at the centre of all that they do."

The challenge, says Taylor, is to take a high performing business and prepare it for scale through people, process and new technology, while keeping the strong company culture at the heart of everything the company does. "I also want the market to know us, like us and see a business that is honest in the way it trades," he added. "If we get this right and listen to the market and our customers at the same time, it is going to be an exciting few years for Focus Group."

## If you build your people, then you build your business. This is ultimately how we will succeed and sustainably grow Focus Group long into the future

you want to work with, led by a management group that communicates regularly and transparently.

"All leaders must ensure they evolve their outlook and management style,

for MSPs like Focus Group, if approached in the right way. "Market data shows that over 90 per cent of UK SMEs will spend the same or more on technology over the next two years, and bundled services will become more



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"It's better to regret what you have done than what you haven't."

*Paul Arden*

From the lush, verdant, sun-drenched Forest of Arden (no relation to Paul) with CommsDealer for the 'new' Margin event, Margin in Comms-as-a-Service, I and a colleague met some old faces and many new, both in IT & ICT and many in good old-fashioned Comms, be that mobile or fixed or both. StayPrivate were sponsors and a thank you to those of you who gave us time & one of you who gave us a pointer to our PIN technology (you know who you are, big man).

Interesting to see that the panel speakers who are active in the trade were all of one mind when it comes to business & that is 'customers first' – working out what each of our firms do well, doing it better & growing existing customer spends were all key themes. New products were discussed but not so much as I would have thought, more of the evolution of certain products and how to upsell existing Comms services. That surprised me but then again, I would say that wouldn't !!

You, the resellers, spoke about adding value and growing revenue, and recognised that security was the key growth segment in SME ICT budgets. Device management, email security KYC and onboarding were

all mentioned. All great in principle, but as one reseller asked, how do I sell security & provision it if I do not have a techie helpdesk?

Well, we must all talk about helping end users stay safe. That is what we do at StayPrivate, protecting our own and our customer's businesses. Our channel resellers demonstrate Duty of Care, help their clients do the same, and protect their clients against the commonest and most costly security breaches, namely Malware, Ransomware and Phishing Attacks. If you do not know what we do, try it for yourself, provisioned in a few moments, safe solid UK technology protecting both your own business, Mr (or Ms) Reseller and that of your customer's. And with 50% margin plus benefits too.

Thanks to all at CommsDealer for last week's event & keeping the show on the road in the face of the RMT & a resurgence in positive Covid tests!

We will be releasing some videos on our LinkedIn page soon to highlight clients in business sectors such as estate agents, recruiters etc.

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*Adrian Barnard*

'customers first' – working out what each of our firms do well, doing it better & growing existing customer spends were all key themes.

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# 3G cut off opportunities

**As the 3G shutdown comes into view it's time to take advantage of significant mobile device upgrade opportunities that exist in customer bases, writes Steven Lowe, Product Director Mobile, Gamma.**

In December 2021, the UK Government and the UK's mobile network operators announced the intention to switch off the 2G and 3G networks by 2033. This step, dubbed 'sunsetting', aims to free up spectrum for the newest network generations, such as 4G, 5G and eventually 6G. The switch off aims to improve network efficiency, leveraging newer, more efficient technologies and increased spectrum allocations to support the ongoing exponential increase in mobile data usage at ever greater speeds.

This major industry shift provides a significant opportunity for the promotion of high quality voice services and faster speeds, and a reason to engage positively with business customers. We know that there are approximately 10.8 million business smartphone users in the UK, so there is a huge addressable market for the channel.

The 3G shutdown means that in order to continue using native mobile voice services, customers will require a VoLTE (Voice over

LTE) compatible device. The good news is that the vast majority of devices released over the past few years are VoLTE compatible. However, many business customers still have a residual base of non-VoLTE compatible devices within their estates. Customers relying on the 3G network or using 3G only enabled devices (including car navigation systems, M2M, CCTV or even Amazon Kindles) will also have no choice but to upgrade to a new device in order to stay connected.

While 2033 may seem a while away, other countries have already started switching off their 3G networks and UK MNOs won't be far behind. A&T shut down their 3G at the end of February 2022, with other American operators following up by the end of the year. In the UK, three out of the four MNOs have already announced earlier dates than the 2033 deadline. Vodafone and EE have stated they will switch off their 3G network by the end of 2023, and Three UK has announced it will do the same by the end of 2024. In this light, it's essential that



Steven Lowe

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

MNOs, MVNOs, resellers and dealers start working with customers as soon as possible to ensure that they have access to VoLTE compatible devices – that is 4G, and later, 5G compatible devices. Customers will have already started to notice degradations in 3G service relative to 4G and increasingly 5G as operators continue to expand and deepen their 4G and 5G coverage.

In addition, and in advance of the 3G network switch off, operators continue to re-farm spectrum from 3G to 4G as 4G demand continues

to grow. The Voice over LTE service also offers a much higher quality of voice service than the 3G experience. Employing the EVS (enhanced voice services) codec, operators are able to provide high quality, high definition voice via the VoLTE service.

#### New beginning

Just like any other change, this switch off won't come without its challenges, but it also presents new opportunities for partners and their customers. By migrating from 3G-only enabled devices to 4G and 5G enabled devices, customers will be able to

leverage the benefits of new generation networks, including faster download speeds, better voice quality and lower latency.

Partners should start engaging with customers to check whether 4G voice and 5G are available in their area and whether their devices are fit for purpose. Ofcom estimates that about four million active devices continue to rely on 2G and 3G, and about three per cent of the UK is only covered by 3G.

While this might be concerning to customers in those areas, MNOs are greatly investing in their 4G networks to increase coverage across the country. Moreover, the Shared Rural Network initiative promises to ensure that 95 per cent of the UK's geography is covered by all four networks by the end of 2025.

Choosing the right provider and service to offer to those customers needing to migrate will also be key. For example, Three UK, which powers Gamma Mobile, has invested £2 billion into its network and IT infrastructure to improve both 4G and 5G speeds and coverage across the UK. This means that Gamma Mobile has 99 per cent outdoor coverage and 98 per cent indoor coverage across the UK.

VoLTE with the enhanced voice services codec has been rolled out across the whole 4G network, so high quality voice is assured nationwide. The service also benefits from the fastest 5G (recognised by the Ookla speed test award) a game changer for customers choosing to move to a 5G-enabled device. ■



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# Securing the new world

**Intercity Managing Director of Cloud and Security Phil Bindley discusses how to build cyber security resilience into post-pandemic hybrid working strategies.**

**T**he answer to post-Covid-19 security challenges does not reside in traditional measures applied to pre-pandemic working habits, which were largely focused on a commute to fixed office locations with work completed on work-owned devices and secured by the organisation's network. The pandemic changed everything – and now the workplace is anywhere and everywhere. As we emerge from the impacts of Covid-19 more organisations are evaluating their ways of working and embracing a hybrid approach. According to Bindley, fewer people are asking how to facilitate the new way, and more are wanting to know about ramping up security and what they need to do differently.

“Furthermore, the cyber security skills shortage has increased the knowledge gap leaving many organisations at risk of a cyber security attack,” stated Bindley. “The key is for organisations to work collaboratively with third parties to ensure they get it right and protect the organisation and employees from cyber-attacks.”

Given that the pandemic has increased the danger level

appropriate action is required sooner rather than later. Especially in light of the UK Government's 2022 Cyber Security Breaches Survey which found that 39 per cent of businesses identified a cyber attack during the last 12 months. Phishing became the most common threat vector, affecting 83 per cent of businesses. “Working from home meant staff unwittingly made their organisation vulnerable to potential attacks through simple errors such as connecting to unsecured networks or downloading malware,” said Bindley.

#### Zero trust networks

Recognising that a cyber attack can come from anywhere, zero trust networks should be a key IT consideration, believes Bindley, emphasising that organisations must treat every user, even employees, as ‘hostile’ and a potential threat to the business. “Cybersecurity should first and foremost be treated as a business function,” he commented.

“In securing a mobile workforce, businesses should consider where corporate data is available on mobile devices. How are they protecting traffic



Phil Bindley

## In the context of hybrid working cyber security has become more about protecting people than protecting the infrastructure

going between providers? What do you do about protecting legacy data? How can you encapsulate data from devices and the cloud onto one?”

Bindley also pointed out that zero trust networks are easier to design, build, manage and architect. Using security brokers like Check Point – of which Intercity is a four star partner – is one way of ensuring secure traffic to and from endpoints. “Looking to the future, organisations should combine anti-malware, data loss protection, email filtering, protecting mobile endpoints, traffic to and from corporate centres, SaaS and cloud security needs,” said Bindley.

The rise of hybrid working will prompt more

organisations to consider moving their systems to a cloud-based architecture. “The move to a multi-cloud strategy is across the board and provides organisations with something to think about as the multi-cloud infrastructure is typically owned by a third party, which raises the question of ‘security of the cloud’ versus ‘security in the cloud’,” commented Bindley.

“Hyperscalers such as Azure, AWS and Google Cloud are responsible for securing the ‘of the cloud aspect’. But security ‘in the cloud’ is the responsibility of organisations – this is where we are seeing a shift. In the context of hybrid working cyber security has become more about protecting people than protecting the infrastructure.”

Conventional thinking dictated that organisations should have multiple vendors of firewall technology. However, Bindley believes that having seven or more different services to manage risk requires a bigger team of IT security engineers, which SMEs don't typically have the capacity for. “This can present businesses with high IT management costs, making further investment difficult to justify,” he added. “SMEs, in particular, should consolidate as much as possible, relying only on one or two security providers.”

Certain security providers are associated with high price tags, but to make themselves more appealing and affordable Bindley has noted a shift in their business models. “More providers are opting for pay monthly or per user models which help breakdown the costs and can make it easier to get sign-off on such investments from boards or business decision makers,” he observed. “IT departments should make the most of this.”

Such changes in business model, according to Bindley, demonstrate that security vendors are beginning to think more strategically and understand what the new world looks like. “It allows organisations to future proof,” he added. “Instead of creating the patchwork security solutions seen at the start of the pandemic, organisations are now thinking about a protection framework. Also, if you want to retire legacy applications or acquire new businesses, this forward looking holistic approach ensures a methodology is in place to protect both individual and business needs.”



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# Maximising the Golden Tri

## 2023-2025: Working together t



The then Minister for Implementation Oliver Dowden CBE opening 2018's Comms Vision Convention

**This year's gold standard Comms Vision Convention (Gleneagles Hotel, 2nd-4th November) will explore how the industry's Big Reset in late 2025 represents more than the PSTN switch off. It's about securing a resilient future amid an accelerating pace of change – and there is no turning back. So now it's time to accelerate momentum, take collective action, shape the channel's destiny and embrace a golden opportunity to drive unprecedented digital transformation as the UK nears the three-year countdown to all-IP.**

**T**he Golden Triennium (2023-2025) is a defining period for the comms channel and business development. This once-in-a-generation period will see opportunities intensify, new possibilities ignited and challenges brought into sharper focus. Therefore a key purpose of this year's Comms Vision Convention will be to explore how the channel can work

together more closely to remove roadblocks and maximise growth potential. The conference will also unravel five 'connected catalysts' reshaping the comms industry during the Golden Triennium and beyond; and bring into context non-financial drivers such as cultural innovation, leadership approaches and important sustainability considerations.

Understanding five key connected catalysts reshaping the communications sector will help us to identify the rise of 'connectedness' within the market's dynamics, which could also be reflected in an emerging trend for channel organisations to become more connected and work more closely together. Because, in many cases, no single company can 'do it all' in times of transformation.

#### Five 'connected catalysts'

1. 2025 – To what extent will 2025 and all-IP catalyse the comms channel's cyber security agenda?
2. 5G – How far will 5G catalyse innovation-led growth opportunities beyond supercharged mobility? Where will quantum networks fit in?
3. Supply chain transformation – Will potential collaboration

between competing providers also catalyse positive action on the channel's Scope 3 Net Zero requirements? And should they be jointly considered now?

4. Post-Covid-19 world dawns – To what degree is workplace flexibility catalysing new markets and new partnerships, in addition to activating a power shift to employees as the skills shortage deepens



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# Triennium opportunity to power the uptick

and workplace culture undergoes reinvention? Which applications, solutions and leadership approaches will be key to success?

5. Will the prospect of a connectivity price war catalyse closer collaboration between network competitors to protect value erosion? Will the geographical reach of siloed fibre providers be extended through collaboration with other altnets? How far could these examples of working closer together enhance partner and customer value opportunities?

## What is the new channel dynamic?

### Working together and building value through trust:

Channel organisations face many challenges and opportunities and may find solutions in unexpected places – like partnerships with rivals. Therefore Comms Vision 2022 will put a spotlight on the key challenges for supply chains, and the potential role of industry collaboration in securing success during the Golden Triennium and beyond. We will question whether the channel really can work together through a framework of collective responsibility in certain areas, and face challenges and opportunities from a more holistic angle to make something greater.

### Balancing complexity and simplification

#### Working together to create a less complex channel:

As we enter the Golden Triennium, more than ever,

a reseller's primary role is to remove complexity from the ICT requirements of end users, particularly the mid-market and beyond, at a time when comms and IT is becoming ever more complex. Is the channel supply chain geared up to effectively deliver the levels of simplification demanded by end users, and required by resellers at the coal face?

### Strategic leadership priorities in focus

Now is the time for change-makers to rethink strategy, and a key question for business leaders is – are you fully prepared to succeed in the Golden Triennium and beyond? Crucial to success is securing sources of competitive advantage,

## Channel organisations face many challenges and opportunities and may find solutions in unexpected places – like partnerships with rivals

people empowerment and how to push your team to the next level. Another top leadership priority is finding the best path to Net Zero, bringing greener partnerships into focus and exploring the broader role of business in solving some of society's biggest issues.

### Industry trends: Bright outlook despite uncertain times

Comms Vision will include a strategic review of the

communications sector megatrends supercharging the Golden Triennium, and focus on how to create the right blueprint for success. We will also look at current barriers to growth and how to identify and overcome tomorrow's challenges. This all reflects a vibrant sector facing a series of changes, not least the transition to all-IP and a shift to the next level of new products and services that change the dynamics of our fast moving industry.

### Harnessing innovation led customer experiences

Key actions around harnessing innovation include connecting with 5G opportunities during the Golden Triennium. But how far will 5G be a sector

game changer and create new value? And what next for solution innovation and quantum networks? How will intelligence and data help partners change the workplace and solution landscape? And how will CCaaS, UCaaS and AI keep pace with customer expectations? All of these key questions will be brought forward in the context of new consumer realities and connecting innovation with the customer experience.

### Seizing golden opportunities in the full fibre future

Accelerating and leveraging full fibre deployments in the Golden Triennium and beyond brings a unique opportunity to enable the digital future. But full fibre providers are tasked with striking a balance between their relative immaturity and driving growth. Despite the UK's future dependency on full fibre we find ourselves at the early stages of the revolution, and fibre providers are facing pressing challenges as well as opportunities.

Therefore Comms Vision will help to shape an understanding of how and why the full fibre ecosystem is developing, and how its continuing maturation could catalyse roll outs across the nation. We'll also ask if the sector is moving fast enough in the run up to 2025. And as it adjusts to meet market demands, to what extent will the impacts of its growing maturity reboot full fibre opportunities for channel partners, foster innovation and hypergrowth?

### Unleashing the power of cultural innovation

Companies are increasingly adopting breakthrough developments in their business models to tackle

perhaps the biggest challenge facing ICT businesses – human resources.

Furthermore, changing perspectives on the traditional working week along with the rise of employee owned organisations, for example, speak of a sector undergoing change. Such developments underscore the importance of cultural and strategic innovation, as cultural and workplace remodelling becomes an accepted route to future success. Therefore Comms Vision will explore the ingredients of innovation empowered leadership and culture as key to shaping strategies that attract and retain talent – and why this is a priority.

### Industry 5.0 meets CX

The rise of Industry 5.0, the new industrial revolution that is driving a more balanced relationship between technology and people, has brought a new perspective to contact centre solutions with automation and AI at their core. With AI entrenched as the next wave of the industrial revolution, to what extent will Industry 5.0 considerations shape the future of customer engagement, and strike a balance between automation, the human experience, staff wellbeing and a greater corporate purpose? ■

## It takes Vision to be a leader

Comms Vision (2nd-4th November 2022, Gleneagles Hotel) is the leading annual leadership forum for CEO, MD and CTO delegates making up the major league of the UK reseller community. Places are limited and by invitation: If you would like to join us this year, please register your interest to attend at [www.commsvision.com](http://www.commsvision.com)



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# Awards celebrate outstanding

The UK's leading fibre providers were recognised and celebrated during the inaugural UK Fibre Awards (London Marriott Hotel Grosvenor Square, June 9th), hosted by podcaster, writer and comedian Cally Beaton.

The high profile gold standard event (staged by BPL Business Media (publisher of Comms Dealer and FibreProvider.net) recognised achievements in everything from the best fibre related innovations to the blue ribbon Services to Digital Britain award. This showcase occasion (headline sponsored by CityFibre) was reflective of a thriving and successful sector displaying excellence and leadership across all award categories which were judged independently by industry experts including Simon Evans, Principal, Cartesian.

"All submissions were outstanding and it's amazing to see how much all nominees have achieved so far," he stated. "The awards not only provide an opportunity for the industry to jointly recognise and celebrate the significant contributions made by all providers, but it also sets a benchmark in which both

existing and new players can strive for or even exceed in coming years.

"It was excellent to see so many organisations, from all across the fibre delivery value chain, have representation at these awards and celebrate each other's success whether partners or competitors. I'm excited to see how the industry moves forward over the next year as fibre rollout accelerates."

The independent panel of judges also included Media Consultant at Channelstar, Simon Meredith; IT Writer and Commentator, Will Garside; and Head of Public Affairs at ISPA, Andrew Kernahan.

"The quality and sheer volume of entries for the Fibre Awards highlights the vibrancy of this fast growing industry," said Garside. "It's also clear that there is both healthy competition alongside



emerging partnerships that will ultimately benefit the UK's drive towards a digital first economy."

Kernahan added: "The breadth and quality of entrants at this year's Fibre Awards reflected the vibrancy and excitement we are seeing in the UK's broadband sector. As the market matures and rollout picks up pace, I'm sure there will be even more providers to showcase in the future."

BPL Business Media Editorial Director and awards co-ordinator Nigel Sergent enthused: "The fibre provider community is growing in size and stature and we were delighted to bring

together nearly 300 of its major players for a day of celebration and top class networking. Congratulations to all the companies that secured an award."

Special recognition went to CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch who scooped the Services to Digital Britain award. "It's great to finally have a fibre awards after I have spent so many years trying to convince the Government that you actually needed fibre in the country," stated Mesch. "The importance of our industry and how we can raise the UK's ability to compete around the world should not be overlooked. It's truly necessary. The country is 80 per cent service based

and the way to speed up a service-based economy is with the Internet."

FibreProvider.net was launched in January 2022 as a dedicated news and resource platform for UK fibre providers. At the time, CityFibre Head of Wholesale Andrew Wilson said: "Our community needs a noticeboard from which it can stay informed and a platform from which organisations can form strategic relationships. As the UK's largest independent full fibre platform and committed to working with the carrier, channel and contractor community, we're delighted to be involved with FibreProvider.net."



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# Leading fibre providers

2022 UK Fibre Awards winners...



**Services to Digital Britain Award - Greg Mesch, CEO, CityFibre**

Mesch founded CityFibre in 2011 and has since raised over £6 billion in capital, completed six acquisitions and is building fibre infrastructure across a third of the UK market.



**Best Fibre Marketing Award – Pure Broadband Internet**

Pure Broadband has won customers through a high impact marketing campaign that sold the benefits of full fibre broadband in a no-nonsense way, leading to Pure Broadband's biggest year of growth.



**Best Wholesale Fibre Provider – TalkTalk Wholesale Services**

TalkTalk Wholesale Services is finalising discussions with providers to create a platform for easy integration and is exploring strategic and innovative integrations to onboard any altnet efficiently.



**Best Fibre Innovation Award – Mills**

The F.I.G. is a special handheld cordless fibre installation gun, for delivering fibre drop cables from the cabinet to the premise over distances of up to 2,000 metres.



**Fibre Provider Investment Award – CityFibre**

CityFibre achieved the largest capital raise in UK full fibre history, securing £1.425 billion to support its build plan to reach 30 per cent of the UK by 2025.



**Best Fibre Rollout Supplier Award – Hawthorndon Developments**

Hawthorndon completed five challenging rural builds, providing FTTP to 337 homes in Goldhanger, Essex thanks to a culture of collaborative working and pragmatic project management.



**Best Rural Fibre Provider Award – Wessex Internet**

Wessex Internet builds fibre networks to rural communities where other providers are unwilling to go, increasing the total number of properties reached by its rural network by 40% since March 2021.



**Best Urban Fibre Provider Award – G.Network**

G.Network is upgrading London's broadband infrastructure by securing connections routes with councils and landlords in advance, and scaling its number of 'G.Networkers'.



**Rollout Challenge Buster Award – Wessex Internet**

Wessex Internet battled through challenging farmland conditions in winter to connect the rural hamlet of Lower Nyland and the Henstridge Airfield, providing critical communications for the Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance.



**Overall Fibre Provider of the Year - Giganet**

Giganet boasts £250 million funding, 400 per cent employee growth and a full fibre presence covering over eight million UK homes.



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# INSIGHTS: Channel reading



## This research paper charts and assesses the current state of net zero planning in the channel, revealing where we are now, and where we need to be.

The data which forms the basis of this research study was derived from extensive telephone interviews with 150 executives of channel organisations during March and April 2022 (ICT resellers, MSPs and ISPs of all sizes). The paper is based on nearly 4,000 statements and the distillation of these responses form what we believe to be the most thorough research into the current state of decarbonisation in the UK comms channel.

The intention of this paper is to determine a better understanding of how and if

channel firms are embedding sustainability measures into their strategies, assess their priorities and identify ways to accelerate progress. The study aims to encourage business leaders to pre-empt regulation, guard against sustainability and reputational risk and also put a green spotlight on the future value of their organisation.

### Background

Climate and sustainability is becoming a key driver of business strategy and big steps have been taken in relation to Environmental Law. In April 2022 Government rules came

into force that require over 1,300 of the largest UK-registered companies and financial institutions to disclose high quality climate-related financial information on a mandatory basis.

The move reflects recommendations from the Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD), an industry-led body that helps investors and companies to understand and clearly disclose their financial exposure to climate risk. The UK is the first G20 country to mandate TCFD-aligned climate disclosures across the economy and the legislation

includes many of the UK's largest traded companies, banks and insurers, as well as private companies with over 500 employees and £500 million in turnover.

Building on these initial steps the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) is planning to consult on wider measures for UK registered companies. Environment Secretary George Eustice said: "The Environment Act became law during the UK's hosting of the COP26 summit in Glasgow. It will deliver the most ambitious environmental programme of

any country on earth. We are setting an example for the rest of the world to follow."

It's time to accelerate and build momentum for net zero action. This will have an impact on all organisations as decarbonisation agendas will need to go mainstream. For the channel, navigating a route forward presents a number of challenges, and opportunities, linked to the task of identifying, managing and eliminating carbon across the supply chain. There is also a growing sense of the scale of the transformation and the critical question is – how do we move to a sustainable environmental footprint?

### Breaking the cycle of inconsistency

The survey results suggest that net zero success hinges on overcoming five interrelated roadblocks that feature prominently throughout this report.

1. A gap exists between stated net zero intentions and the leadership vision needed to drive the transformation.
2. There is a clear disconnect between the green intentions of organisations and their capacity to set out and monitor strategic KPIs and their targets.
3. There is dissonance between the inconsistencies identified by this report and the shared sense of strategic direction and urgency required to decarbonise the comms channel supply chain.
4. Net zero success needs challenging targets to be set but the inconsistencies show a lack of required commitment and clarity of focus.
5. In general, there is a gap between respondents' intent to grasp the real risks and opportunities they



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# Business sustainability report

face due to environmental concerns, and their current ability to do so.

## Categories defining net zero types

The following survey report refers to three categories of various carbon types and sources of emissions associated with a company/organisation:

- **Scope 1 emissions:**

Direct emissions from an organisation's operations and processes.

- **Scope 2 emissions:** Indirect emissions produced on an organisation's behalf, such as electricity or gas, and not created in its own operations.

- **Scope 3 emissions:**

Those that are beyond an organisation's immediate control, such as products and services purchased in the supply chain. These upstream and downstream considerations will be especially challenging.

## Leadership matters

As environmental priorities take a greater hold across society the increased pressure on organisations to address decarbonisation priorities is a challenge that is plain to see in our survey, yet there exists an optimistic outlook on achieving net zero success with 68 per cent of those we spoke to seeing the task of decarbonising the comms channel as monumental but achievable. For 16 per cent the process is straightforward, while over 10 per cent say the goal is unachievable.

This research report will proceed to test whether the optimism shown by 68 per cent of respondents is reflective of their overall capacity to deliver net zero in line with stated objectives.

Nearly 80 per cent think that carbon neutrality goals should be driven at CEO level, so leaders will need to quickly turn their thinking into action and identify strategies that best align with the current or future net zero requirements of their organisation. Twenty per cent of those surveyed said environmental initiatives should be led by people further down the chain of command. CEOs of these companies may need to reimagine their approach and factor a higher priority into their green strategy, and fully engage with those charged with leading decarbonisation at an early stage to avoid any roadblocks.

As organisations plan their futures, a primary focus will need to be on their carbon reduction strategies and who drives them. But while 80 per cent think sustainability measures should be led by the CEO, only 28 per cent of respondents have a dedicated person in their

business responsible for emission reduction, and nearly a quarter of these are not board level.

## Time to take environmental ownership

On the question of net zero assessments and target setting, 56 per cent of those we spoke to say the Government should be responsible for driving private sector net zero targets. Just 23 per cent believe that private businesses should catalyse their own environmentally responsible expansion agenda, while 17 per cent think that responsibility resides in the upstream and downstream value chain aspects of their business.

It is therefore not surprising that sustainability only fits with 39 per cent of organisations' current purpose and strategy, as 60 per cent of respondents are yet to formalise their own net zero targets. In part this could be down to the

20-plus per cent of those we spoke to believing that sustainability should be driven at a sub-chief executive level. It also indicates that the outlook and decision making choices of the majority of CEOs are yet to take account and ownership of the sustainability agenda.

This correlates with the 73 per cent of respondents thinking that responsibility for driving private sector net zero targets lies with the Government and wider supply chain, rather than their own leadership. It follows that these organisations lack an understanding of the strategic risks and opportunities they face arising from sustainability and net zero issues, which could lead to ill-informed decision making on these important matters.

Of the 39 per cent of businesses that have committed to a net zero target, 29 per cent expect

to achieve their sustainability objectives by 2030, seven per cent between 2030 and 2040, and three per cent after 2040. The majority were undecided, reflecting a dissonance between their sustainability intentions and practical strategy.

## Finding a net zero pathway

How respondents consider their net zero priorities varies somewhat, with 35 per cent of those not yet committed to a net zero target planning to do so and embed green initiatives this year. Nearly a quarter are likely to formalise a sustainability strategy after 2025. And 37 per cent between now and 2025. Yet only 54 per cent demonstrated an understanding of how to go about creating a positive impact. Forty four per cent do not know where to start nor how to identify their best way forward. The challenge and priority for these businesses is to find a net zero pathway and establish good practice strategies. To ignore this issue could affect their ability to compete with rivals who are more progressive and meticulous about their sustainability credentials.

A key driver of sustainability strategies among 19 per cent of respondents is to work within the standards and frameworks of a recognised body. For them, big steps can be taken in relation to net zero objectives by following a pre-existing formalised pathway. Twenty one per cent do not work within the standards and frameworks of a recognised body. The majority were undecided on this question, suggesting indecision and a lack of holistic top level leadership.

Continued on page 34



TSG Group wins Zen's Sustainability Award during its annual Partner Excellence Awards, December 2021.

**With no sustainability reporting it is impossible to assess performance and gauge progress, and it sends a signal that organisations may not be holding themselves accountable to their stated goals**



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**Continued from page 33**

On the question of roadblocks and challenges to carbon reduction success our respondents also cited balancing carbon emission priorities with revenue targets (22.5 per cent); the complexity of reporting and lack of a standard approach (15 per cent); a lack of top level leadership and vision (13 per cent); creating a net zero culture and staff buy-in (eight per cent); and the challenge of quantifying Scope 3 emissions (12 per cent). These all signify top areas of focus for the channel.

**Net zero: A question of definition**

There appears to be a lack of consensus on a clear definition of what net zero actually means, which is likely to become a significant talking point in the sustainability debate. For 22 per cent of those we spoke to net zero means 100 per cent direct carbon reduction, while 76 our cent see it as a combination of direct carbon reduction and offsetting. Scope 3 requirements in particular make sustainability an interconnected and industry-wide issue, yet there is no broad acceptance of the foundational premise, as individual understandings about the nature of net zero boil down to multidimensional semantics. Interestingly, offsetting did not feature highly among sustainability priorities.

**Priorities raise questions**

Organisations with established decarbonisation commitments favour three distinct priority focus areas and have embedded targets into strategies around travel (27 per cent), energy (26 per cent) and supply chain/ sustainable products (27 per cent). The remainder cited in very low numbers (not sufficient to cohere a distinct category) aspects such as recycling and offsetting, which you might have expected to feature more prominently.



**Figures show that it is critical for the comms channel to embed environmental sustainability into the supply chain with cross-industry collaboration and stakeholder engagement being the best way forward**

The survey results bring into question whether there is a lack of substance to support these targets: While positive green intentions are strongly expressed, our research suggests that many

organisations and their capacity to set out and monitor strategic KPIs and their targets. With no sustainability reporting it is impossible to assess performance and gauge progress, and it sends a signal that organisations may not be holding themselves accountable to their stated goals. This disconnect could also indicate a high level of lip service paid to sustainability targets, and brings into question just how far sustainability fits within most organisational strategies.

On the other hand, of the 150 channel organisations we reviewed, over 68 per cent consider the complexity of carbon emission reporting a challenge, which could be a significant roadblock holding them back from achieving their stated net zero objectives. There is a correlation between the number of businesses that find the complexity of carbon emission reporting a challenge, and the number that think the quality of their emission reduction reporting is not good enough (68.5

per cent and 65 per cent respectively). Encouragingly, a third of those we interviewed say their reporting is good enough.

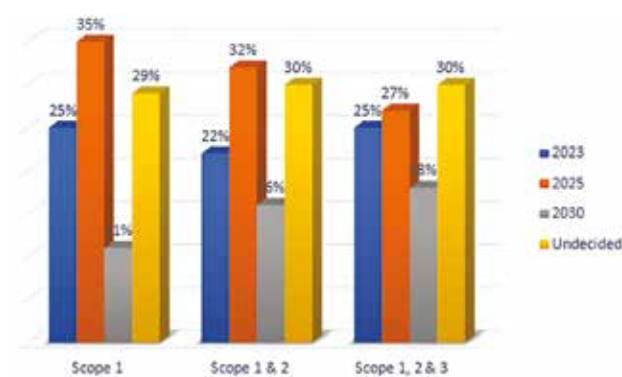
**Net zero investment versus cost factors**

This is a critical point as organisations will be required to submit a clear quantification of their environmental impacts and of the measures in place to reduce them in line with net zero targets. To this end half of our respondents are willing to sacrifice short-term profitability to address emission reduction, illustrating their commitment to their organisation's purpose and strategy. But just under half would not, meaning that cost is top of mind, which means they could potentially have a lesser impact on reducing carbon emissions, while lowering their guard against reputational risk over the longer term.

**Action takers leave non-starters behind**

An immediate route for channel businesses to start managing their environmental impact is to assess their Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions, which are in their control but just 13 per cent of respondents are able to estimate their impact in these categories. Three per cent have estimated their Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions. But 83 per cent are unsure where they stand on all three designations. These statistics suggest that, in the main, business leaders face mounting challenges in the sustainability era, revealing a disconnect between their net zero intentions and practical actions to bring about impactful outcomes. Unless confusion and inaction is overcome, their stasis could have a profound impact on their own long-term sustainability in a competitive and green-centric marketplace led by net zero action takers.

**Our assessment of when respondents think their emission targets will be addressed highlighted the following projections...**



decarbonisation strategies could be unfit for purpose, particularly considering the complexity of supply chain factors that must be taken into account.

**Overcoming reporting challenges**

Of those organisations already on their green journey just 26 per cent produce sustainability reports based on key

any kind of sustainability governance structure, which correlates with the fact that the vast majority of companies surveyed do not work within the standards and frameworks of a recognised body, nor any kind of home grown governance discipline.

In these instances there is a clear disconnect between the green intentions of

**Overcoming net zero inconsistency**

One of the most common themes emerging from this survey is inconsistency, and this particular thread ties into the question of when the comms industry will reach a tipping point, where emission reduction efforts become mainstream.

Since 68.5 per cent of respondents rate the task of decarbonising the channel as monumental but achievable, it is encouraging to see their relative optimism on when a tipping point may occur, even if nearly half project beyond 2025. On the flip side – that there is no overall consensus on this point is not surprising considering the lack of knowledge and understanding about how to effectively generate environmental benefits, which could be a barrier to progress.

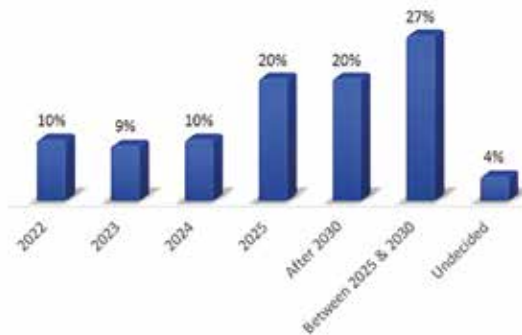
**Upstream and downstream impacts**

Over 64 per cent of those we talked to have considered the value chain aspects of their (Scope 3) carbon emissions, showing that they have an understanding of the wider upstream and downstream impacts on their sustainability strategy. So much so that over 20 per cent of them are likely to move away from channel partners that don't take sufficient action on carbon emission issues – and a slightly less

certain 44 per cent 'may' seek greener alternatives across the supply chain.

Despite 35 per cent of respondents saying they will stick with their channel partners no matter their green credentials, these figures show that it is critical for the comms channel to embed environmental sustainability into the supply chain with cross-industry collaboration and

**Our assessment of when net zero initiatives are likely to become mainstream produced the following results...**



stakeholder engagement being the best way forward.

But the challenge of minimising exposure to Scope 3 sustainability risks is perceived differently among our respondents. Eight per cent think it is impossible to assess and eliminate Scope 3 value chain emissions; 15 per cent say it is a monumental challenge; 38 per cent could not quantify the prospect (probably because they don't have a decision-worthy grasp of the task ahead); but 38 per cent believe that

hurdles can be overcome through collaboration.

In a significant development, over 40 per cent of respondents have experienced supplier partners paying more attention to their emission reduction strategies, which should be incentive enough to establish long-term plans that generate extensive environmental benefits. But chief among the primary

barriers to carbon reduction success is not knowing where to start, cited by 29 per cent of respondents.

**Customer demands enter the equation**

Overcoming sustainability challenges is brought into even sharper focus when customer demands become part of the equation, many of whom are seeking information about their ICT supplier's carbon emissions. Over 36 per cent of respondents have experienced customers

wanting to know details about their green credentials; and of the 63 per cent that had not been asked so far, two thirds of them expect to be under the green spotlight in the future.

But despite more than 33 per cent of respondents not expecting customers to request an outline of their green actions any time soon, the figures show that the industry is in a transition phase, and ICT suppliers hesitant to accept that environmental sustainability will become a key driver for end user investment and the customer experience (and PE/growth investment for that matter), are at a distinct disadvantage and will face an urgent challenge to their existing business model. For them it is time to reconsider their priorities, address material issues and identify sustainability opportunities.

**Why action on net zero is just the job**

Another critical development is that concise information on a potential employer's progress towards sustainability targets is being requested by job candidates. Nearly a fifth of our respondents had experienced candidates wanting to know about their green credentials. This represents a wider social trend that is driving the global environmental agenda, and it is certain that a growing number of

candidates (and existing staff) will want to work for a socially conscious organisation. It is safe to assume that channel businesses on the green back foot face a strategic risk rooted in aspects of recruitment and talent acquisition, impacting their ability to compete for new business and attract the right job candidates – which is particularly challenging in an industry suffering from an acute skills shortage.

This point alone demonstrates that organisations need a holistic and detailed understanding of their impacts on the environment, as well as a strategic plan to achieve net zero success. This is as much about future proofing businesses as it is the planet. Therefore it is time to accelerate the transformation. What more incentive do we need? ■

Zen CEO responds – page 36

**FIVE TIPS TO MAKE YOUR DECARBONISATION STRATEGY MORE EFFECTIVE...**

1. Ensure you understand what net zero truly means, what the climate crisis means for your business and communicate that with purpose.
2. Establish KPIs as part of your sustainability strategy and set realistic targets within a clear reporting and governance structure.
3. Fully consider the supply chain elements of your business and seek to collaborate with partners on meeting net zero goals.
4. Eliminate inconsistencies in your thinking and approach and take full ownership of your decarbonisation responsibilities.
5. Standing still is not an option, so pivot your organisation and prepare for change.



Zen team members care for the environment during a litter picking exercise in local parkland.



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# Realising Net Zero goals

**Zen Internet CEO Paul Stobart urges full transparency and industry-wide collaboration to achieve Net Zero success, and he shares insights into how Zen Internet is helping partners set and reach their environmental goals.**

**F**or Zen, the path to Net Zero is not a 'nice to have', it's an essential part of our business strategy. We're seeing an increasing number of clients asking us for regular updates on where we're at with our carbon emission reduction initiatives. We've never had this level of interest before, but it is clearly becoming more and more the norm.

Some of the findings from this research don't surprise. There is a lack of consensus on a clear definition of what Net Zero means, and 44 per cent of respondents don't even know where to start on their Net Zero journey. Some of the findings are more worrying. As an example, only 23 per cent of respondents believe that private businesses should put in place their own emission reduction plans. If we don't reduce carbon emissions by at least half within the next seven to ten years we run the risk of exacerbating the climate change crisis with unthinkable consequences. All businesses have a role to play here, regardless of size. As business people, we all need to take this issue very seriously.

There is a strong consumer and customer view that it is incumbent on suppliers to make sure their environmental policies are clear, and that they are actioned and measured. Any business that fails to do this runs an increasing risk of being alienated by customers. Climate change is relevant to everyone. What's more, there would appear to be a time limit on consumer patience: As an industry, we need to be seen to be delivering big improvements. Our customers are not going to forgive us for turning a blind eye to the existential threat represented by climate change.

Half the respondents to our survey appear willing to sacrifice a degree of short-term profitability to address emission reduction. But the challenges of doing so are very much apparent – 44 per cent of businesses don't know where to start, and 68 per cent consider the complexity of emission reporting a challenge.

There is no easy answer: It's a complex subject and the path to Net Zero will be arduous for everyone. Difficult choices will have



Paul Stobart

**We see it as our clear responsibility to share as much as possible so that together we can make real progress**

to be made at every turn. At Zen, we have made a start on our journey, and are ready and willing to impart our learnings (and share the mistakes we have made) so that we can help and support our channel partners. We see it as our clear responsibility to share as much as possible so that together we can make real progress.

#### Zen's ongoing journey

Back in 2019 we established an Environmental Steering Group to oversee all things environmental. Each year the group sets our environmental objectives and takes ownership to ensure these are met. This same group has now also taken ownership of delivering on our Net Zero commitments. We have set out a number of environment-related commitments that will help us achieve Net Zero by 2040. They include both near-term and long-term commitments

and follow the guidelines set out by the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) Net Zero standard.

The SBTi Net-Zero Standard was established in October 2021. It provides guidance, criteria and recommendations to support businesses on their Net Zero journey with a standardised and robust approach to set credible Net Zero targets. It has become an invaluable resource for Zen as we carve out our own path to Net Zero. It may not be fully relevant for every channel business, but it provides a useful guide to understanding target setting processes. I urge everyone to have a read as it will really help inform your thinking.

Right now, most of us are in what we might say is the 'easy' stage of emission measurement and target setting. The much more difficult stage lies ahead

when customers will ask, 'We understand your medium and long-term targets for emission reduction, but how are you actually doing against those targets?'. And we must all be careful not to indulge in green-washing. Everything we do needs to be auditable, and measurable. Two years ago, a nod to environmental policy on a website would have been enough to show you were doing something, but that doesn't fly any more. Today's consumer wants proof that you're doing something about this issue.

I have great faith in humanity's ingenuity and creativity. We will find ways and means to deal with this threat. But we will only succeed if we take responsibility, make the right choices and move into action mode, working together as an industry. We look forward to navigating this crucial journey together. ■



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# Reassessing recognition of channel teams post Covid-19

The pandemic has had an irreversible effect on many facets of the working world. As workforces were made to work from home, new metrics were needed to measure success and new methods were required for recognition.

To understand how recognition looks post-pandemic, we asked our expert contributors the following questions,

Is team/people recognition more important post-Covid?

How has the pandemic changed the way you recognise teams within your business?

What have been the most successful team/people recognition strategies/initiatives you have implemented?



HILARY OLIVER  
TOLLRING

"Creating a culture of responsibility and 'ownership' in every job role is critical to employee retention, coupled with performance reviews, open and honest communication and a clear career progression path. Recognition and praise are essential to well-being, carefully balanced with support to empower progression. Post-Covid we have all learnt to manage remote teams. One-to-one time, video usage, chat, MS Teams, and meetings have become vital components in leadership. Our team have a Friday virtual fun team call to meet as human beings, making up for lost in-person time. Our 'Celebrations' and twice-monthly company updates share positive news and recognition globally. I don't believe that recognition is any more important than it was pre-Covid, but we go about it differently to ensure it isn't overlooked, so leaders should prioritise it. Regardless of Covid, good people are always hard to find and keep. Recognition and appreciation will always be essential to retain people."



KENNETH ROSS  
KCOM

"Recognition has always been an integral part of managing a team, whether that's before, during or after the pandemic. While our initiatives for recognising teams have largely remained the same, the mechanisms for delivering them may have changed during Covid - with a need to be delivered online or remotely. Our most successful recognition scheme is a 'Stars' award where team members nominate colleagues for going above and beyond in helping or delivering a project. The recipient receives a voucher which they can spend at a wide range of retailers. This peer-to-peer recognition has been incredibly popular, not just for colleagues nominating people within their own teams but for those working with colleagues from other areas across the business. It's helped forge those relationships between colleagues who probably wouldn't interact with each other very often - especially when people have been working remotely and not seeing each other in person."



MANDY FAZELYNIA  
ZEST4

"The team we have built at Zest4 has always been our biggest asset and strength, and we've always made it a priority for everyone to know their importance within the business. During the pandemic we moved to hybrid working which meant that the whole team spent less time together, post-Covid we are scheduling more entire company events to celebrate success and bring the team back together more frequently. We recently hosted our annual Partner event at Chester Races, and we had our staff summer party on Friday 10th June. With our new hybrid working system, we can recognise the keen balance between home and work which is so important, now more than ever after so much time separated from loved ones. We work with a little and often approach, making sure that everyone is appreciated for the work they do throughout the year."



DARREN GARLAND  
PROVU

"Team and individual recognition has always been a part of the culture at ProVu, I would say this has not really changed post Covid. When someone does something over and above it's great to recognise it, especially in front of their peers and the company. It gives the individual much deserved recognition and helps to raise the bar on what people can achieve when they go the extra mile. As a result of Covid we have changed how we communicate this recognition. With our teams more spread out because of hybrid working, making sure the message gets out requires more thought and planning, but I believe it is time invested well."



CHRIS MORRISEY  
LILY COMMS

"Team recognition has become more important post-Covid, as many businesses have adopted a hybrid working model, meaning more needs to be done to engage employees. Following on from Covid-19, recruitment has become a big challenge for many businesses which has therefore demonstrated that showing value and recognition towards your workforce is key to staff retention. One of the biggest recognition schemes that we have implemented in our business is our annual holiday of a lifetime, which was postponed due to Covid. We had to look to new ways to reward our team whilst still trying to keep the same buzz and excitement that the holiday created, a lot of which were well received by our people. Now that we are moving out of the Covid era, we are pleased to have booked our next staff holiday to Iceland, bringing that recognition and motivation back to the company that is needed."



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**DIANE GREENLAND  
FOURNET**

“The return of colleagues to offices post Covid-19 has presented an opportunity for FourNet to rethink our employee experience and to strive to ensure our people are back with renewed motivation. We’re currently conducting a ‘Reward and Recognition Review’ to consider how best to improve our benefits and rewards package, so that our people get the best from FourNet. We saw throughout the coronavirus pandemic that our colleagues went above and beyond both for us, and for our customers. Many were able to shine in a way which demonstrated the huge value they bring to FourNet. That’s put a renewed focus on the importance of reward and recognition.

While our benefits and recognition reviews aren’t complete, it’s clear that when it comes to rewarding colleagues there is no ‘one size fits all’.”



**ROBERTA TERRANOVA  
WILDIX**

“Team recognition was vital even before Covid, but it’s now at the point where companies cannot ignore it. But too many get it wrong. Instead of large celebrations that focus on one or two individuals or team-building activities that may not even be accessible for all, it needs to be more integral. It’s about creating a culture of recognition up and down verticals, not about making noise for the sake of making noise. Previously, we had an informal recognition program that was inconsistent and didn’t resolve issues when they arose. Wildix implemented a new performance management initiative that formalises the process. Managers must recognize when staff are doing well, and it prevents them from simply ignoring issues. This process, implemented through BambooHR, makes recognition much easier. It’s that flow of recognition that’s so important to the way we operate, and it’ll be a great tool no matter how large we become.”

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**LISA HEWITT  
VIRTUAL1**

“The pandemic and the effects of hybrid working meant that culture, retention, and attracting staff became an even bigger priority for us. With regards to employee recognition, we reassessed how we could combat culture challenges and energise and motivate our employees, ensuring it remained relevant to our employees’ changing ways of working and needs. Following a pulse survey, we pivoted to new ways of communicating internally, acknowledging efforts, and rewarding exceptional performance. In addition to our structured recognition programmes, we now offer more informal rewards, give options of flexibility to those who prefer it and hold more team socials and events. Our priority was focussed on ensuring our employees remained connected to our strategy and their colleagues, as well ensuring they could experience a true sense of purpose and belonging.”

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**THEA TANNER  
BT WHOLESALE**

“Recognising the hard work of your team has always been vital. Post-Covid, it’s even more important. People have gone through potentially difficult times and supported the business during uncertainty. I’m passionate about investing quality time in individuals, which means listening carefully to people’s concerns and challenges. Trust is critical here. The result is a more engaged workforce that achieves better outcomes. As part of this, I take giving feedback extremely seriously. This ensures people understand the feedback, feel recognised for their work, and are empowered to make the necessary changes. In turn, I’m open about sharing experiences and ways of working. Different people need different leadership. Getting the best out of everyone requires a flexible approach. What’s more, having a personality is key, so people know they can be themselves. Overall, this strategy has enabled my team to take risks and have a winning mindset – we refuse to lose.”

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**KELLY CARVER  
DWS**

“At DWS team recognition has always been important to us but no more so than in a post-covid world. When everyone was working from home, we worked to adapt our approach to enable us to recognise any team members, no matter where they work or what role they are in. Since introducing hybrid working, we’ve continued to come up with inventive new ideas that are fully visible and inclusive across the company, offering both virtual and physical rewards that can be enjoyed by everyone. We recently introduced ‘Cheers to my Peers’ across our entire group of companies, including DWS, Giacom and Union Street. This encourages team members to nominate their peers for great work. We have a committee who pick the overall winner each month and we publish all nominations so that everyone can celebrate the nominees and show their appreciation for their colleagues.”

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**MARK PILLOW  
VOIP-UNLIMITED**

“I see no argument for why recognition is more important pre-or-post-covid. No matter the ‘challenges of the day’, leaders must show their teams their work is valued. The only thing the pandemic influenced was our inability to arrange work BBQ’s and Christmas balls! Considering voice is our speciality, we pay particular attention to ensuring sales teams are motivated to suggest all appropriate products, not just simple sells. Here, anyone is allowed to sell anything to anyone. We don’t believe in taking ‘a slice of the pie’ away from staff, so vendor commissions go directly to employees too. That means commission potential is the same for everyone, pushing salespeople out of comfort zones, and promoting constant learning. Obviously, we don’t want staff selling products they don’t know, so we relate training and development goals to rewards. Then staff can clearly see the benefits of understanding our full product range.”

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**KEVIN BOYLE  
CLOUDCELL**

“Recognising your team and their achievements is more important than ever. During the Covid-19 pandemic we were all focused on adapting and surviving, but it made us realise how important every function and team member was to keep the business running smoothly. Post pandemic, it’s been important to recognise what we overcame, not only to celebrate our collective and individual achievements, but to use it as a foundation for growth. Being nominated for two Channel Champions awards was a moment that really made us stop and reflect on what we’ve accomplished. To celebrate our success, the whole team is attending the Channel Champions awards dinner, as well as hoping to attend a Rugby World Cup event next year together in Europe. We’ve found that social events have worked well as rewards as they build on the team camaraderie and strengthen personal relationships.”

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**CHERIE HOWLETT  
JOLA**

“Good reward and recognition schemes can encourage the right culture to drive growth in any business. Companies with the right measures in place have found that generally, productivity and employee satisfaction have improved during Lockdown. Of course, we have all had to be mindful that mental well-being cannot be ignored. However, sales teams can fit in more calls, meetings, and webinars. Companies measuring not only call and ticket responses but also online statistics, such as the number of webinars completed, have seen an increase in activity, leading to a surge in orders. During lockdown, we couldn’t do our usual socials so we arranged Friday Teams calls where we invited comedians and musicians to come and entertain us online. We sent staff Jola merchandise and vouchers as tokens of our appreciation for hard work in a difficult time. However, the best reward and recognition strategy we implemented was our EMI Share Option Scheme.”

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# ITP appoints CEO



**Charlotte Goodwill**

CHARLOTTE Goodwill will focus her efforts on diversifying the digital workforce and being a voice for the industry in her new role as CEO of The Institute of Telecoms Professionals (ITP). Her appointment follows the passing of ITP CEO Crissi Williams in March this year. Goodwill joined the ITP in 2017 and previously held the role of Head of Apprenticeships. During her tenure the apprenticeship scheme grew by over 75 per cent. She also worked alongside Crissi to implement the ITP's Female First. Now, 36 per cent of engineers in ITP partner companies are women compared to 18 per cent industry-wide. Furthermore, Goodwill worked with Crissi to launch ITP's new initiative, #challengeperceptions, encouraging employers to hire based on personality and train the skills.

"I am pleased to be able to continue Crissi's good work and realise her vision for The ITP to be a voice for the industry and an advocate for apprenticeships and career development," said Goodwill. "It's thanks to the support and guidance gained from working closely with her over the past five years that I am taking up this new challenge. I am looking forward to pushing the agenda of increasing diversity in our industry, supporting our members and challenging perceptions around careers in IT and telecoms."

## Also on the move...

TRANSPARITY'S ambition to become 'the most respected Microsoft partner' has received a boost following the appointment of former Microsoft CMO Paul Bolt as MD. CEO David Jobbins stated: "Paul's industry experience will add significant value to the growth of



**Paul Bolt**

our business. More importantly, his cultural principles are in line with ours and will no doubt help us develop and grow our team." Bolt added: "I'm joining Transparency to help lead it through its next wave of growth. I have always been impressed by the team, what they are striving to achieve and the understanding that its culture is a differentiator." Transparency holds Microsoft Azure Expert MSP status, has 16 gold accreditations and ten advanced specialisations.

SIX Degrees' Lindsay Gallard has been promoted to the Chief People Officer (CPO) role. He was Interim People Director since January 2022 and joined the firm in 2018, serving in a number of positions including Executive Operations



**Lindsay Gallard**

Director. Prior to Six Degrees he held senior HR roles covering the UK and Europe, North America and Asia-Pacific. Gallard said: "It is the passion of our people that will ultimately deliver an outstanding experience

for our clients. This all comes from creating a truly inclusive environment where every individual can thrive." CEO Simon Crawley-Trice added: "The war for talent is intensifying and IT services will continue to be one of the most competitive industries. Commitment to our people will put us on the best footing to attract and retain the prime talent we need."

**FORMER Chairman of Phoenix IT Group Peter Bertram has joined Apple specialist Jigsaw24 as Chairman. He is currently the Chair of reprographics company Hobs Group and on the board of Science Group. Prior roles include Chairman of Manolete Partners, Zinc Media, Esteem Systems and senior roles at XMA, Cisco and Azlan. He was Chairman of Phoenix IT Group for more than 10 years until its sale in 2016. CEO Roger Whittle said: "An executive of Peter's experience and calibre joining the board reflects our ambitions. He will help us as we prepare for the next stage in the evolution of Jigsaw24."**

**FUSION IT Management has promoted James Robinson as CTO. He was previously IT Operations Manager and responsible for building the firm's cloud platform, evolving from a handful of servers to a large multi-redundant array of complex systems. "I look forward to making a positive difference to our technical operations, as well as driving forward our goals for the year ahead and beyond," enthused Robinson.**

# Fricker takes CRO position

CONNECT'S VP of Sales & Marketing Steven Fricker has moved to the newly created Chief Revenue Officer position. He joined the business in 2020, bringing 15 years experience leading sales operations in the technology industry.



**Steven Fricker**

His new remit includes providing insight and direction around Connect's existing and new revenue lines. Fricker stated: "There's a shared recognition here that the way to grow revenue is to keep evolving our offer in line with customer demand, and it's now my responsibility to ensure we do that."

CEO Adam Young added: "Steven's track record of sales success reflects his ability to continually understand customers' priorities. Over the last two years he's been applying those skills to support our outside investment board with insight into our existing and new revenue lines. We were unanimous in our decision to ask him to continue this work in a permanent role that combines his knowledge of the market and insight into future direction, with his understanding of customer priorities – all underpinned by the data that never lies – revenue figures."

# Hoile joins Tollring to lead sales push

ADOPTION of Tollring's analytics solutions in the channel now rests largely in the hands of incoming Head of Channel Sales Craig Hoile. He moved from Virgin Media O2 where he was Senior Channel Sales Manager for retail and e-tail partners.



**Craig Hoile**

Previous roles also include a stint at Microsoft as OEM Account Manager responsible for sales of Microsoft Windows client and server software. Prior to this he spent five years at Vodafone responsible for account relationships and the delivery of consumer sales targets of prepay and postpay products.

Hoile said: "By adopting some of the processes and procedures that were pivotal in my previous roles, I will help my team of account managers and our partners to identify areas for growth as well as opportunities to develop our share within the Microsoft ecosystem for Tollring products."

CEO Tony Martino added: "Craig has achieved outstanding results in the past across both consumer and B2B channels. His experience will be invaluable as we define our channel strategy across our expanding product portfolio."



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