



Ireland-based UCaaS challenger seeks global top spot p22

Andrew Harman talks up Annodata acquisition p30



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Push boost Virtual1

off the new year with a £10m investment in infrastructure and channel ambitions.

Following an introduction by BGF, Virtual1 is now a fully owned subsidiary of BGF. BGF has invested more than £1bn in UK small and mid-sized companies including Olive Communications and Maintel, both Virtual1 customers.

We are excited about embarking on the next phase of growth.” BGF investor and Virtual1 board member Chris Hodges added: “Virtual1 is led by a strong and ambitious leadership team and growing fast as it continues to capitalise on the increasing demands for cloud and connectivity solutions in the wholesale market.”

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This month's movers and shakers



£10m cash boost for rising Virtual1

LONDON-based Virtual1 has kicked off the new year with a £10m investment boost that will spur the firm's growing infrastructure and channel ambitions.

SPECIAL REPORT

The cloud and connectivity service provider secured the cash from BGF (Business Growth Fund) and will invest in additional network infrastructure that will underpin its longer-term growth plans.

Steve Scott, former COO of Bridgehouse Capital, will continue to be Virtual1's Non-Executive Chairman, and Phil Male (formerly Chief Strategy Officer at Cable&Wireless) will join the board as Non-Executive

Director following an introduction by BGF.

Virtual1 delivers cloud and connectivity services exclusively to the wholesale market and was founded in 2007 by CEO Tom O'Hagan (pictured).

The company featured in the Sunday Times Tech Track 100 for three consecutive years and generated revenue close to £18m in 2015/16.

O'Hagan commented: "The funding allows us to accelerate our expansion strategy while retaining control of the business.

We are excited about embarking on the next phase of growth."

BGF investor and Virtual1 board member Chris Hodges added: "Virtual1 is led by a strong and ambitious leadership team and growing fast as it continues to capitalise on the increasing demands for cloud and connectivity solutions in the wholesale market."

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

AT THIS time of year the air is usually thick with auspicators, forecasters full of hunches and surmisations. But few 'Predictions for 2017' nosedived into my mailbox last month. While it is habit for me not to take too much notice of these annual assertions,

ironically, in December they were conspicuous by their absence and that deserves a mention.

Have some analysts run out of ideas about how to turn well established and understood trends into amazing industry visions? Maybe, but in many ways there isn't too much to predict right now, with the dust settling on past excitements like 'digital transformation' and the hype over areas such as the cloud winding down to a calm standstill.

All the new stuff has almost become old hat, part of the furniture, an evolved state that suggests decent levels of market maturity. Therefore the industry should be congratulated for coming through its biggest transition largely unscathed. If that's really the case, maybe we don't fully realise that yet across the board. Perhaps we are entering a new more settled phase of industry development that nobody predicted.

Everyone can predict, it is open season, but predictions can be raw, unfettered by imagination and unreliable. Sector predictions can be no more than an intervention. They try to be disruptive to grab a headline. And industry players are not sandcastles in a tsunami of technological waves. The world of comms really won't be a different place in 2017.

So never mind predictions, the industry now offers certainties, the building blocks for sound business planning and long-term strategies. Not for years has there been a better time for business leaders to plan for the future with high levels of certainty and confidence, and exert some kind of control. If I'm right, I predict even less predictions next December. Happy New Year.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Peach boosted by Ian Brown link-up

INCOMING Peach Technologies Chairman Ian Brown says he is focused on intensifying the company's organic and acquisition strategy alongside CEO Darren Scott-Healey who aims to become a dominant force in the SME sector.

Scott-Healey says that Brown's considerable industry experience and leadership know-how will be pivotal in achieving their joint objectives.

"I have known Ian for some time and very much value his considerable business skills," he said. "I am confident about our ability to work together to develop Peach into one of the leading IT and telecoms providers for SMEs in the country."

Brown confirmed that there will be no reshaping of the business and said that following his appointment there will be a stronger emphasis on Peach's proven business plan.

"I am very much looking forward to partnering with Darren and his team at Peach as we seek to expand and develop the business through aggressive organic growth and making targeted acquisitions in the coming years," he stated.

Brown is a prominent and much lauded entrepreneur,



Ian Brown

investor, chairman and outstanding leader who has earned a solid reputation for innovating and growing businesses during his 30 year career in the technology, software, comms and IT services sectors.

He established Axell Wireless in 2007 and turned the company into a world leading manufacturer of wireless coverage and management solutions exporting products to over 150 countries and operating from a network of 16 worldwide offices. Axell was acquired by Cobham for £85m in 2013.

Prior to Axell, Brown was CEO of Redstone, a circa £100m LSE quoted telecoms services provider where he led the rescue and transformation of the group.

In 1995 he created Fastnet Group, a specialist network communications and IT solutions company that was sold in 2000 returning PE investors 10 x money. Brown is currently Executive Chairman of SecureData, a UK cyber security services and solutions provider backed by August Equity.

Whiteley-based Peach Technologies was formed in 2006 and provides cloud, IT, connectivity and telecoms services. It regularly features in the Sunday Times Tech Track and the Deloitte UK Technology Fast 50 league tables.

To mark its tenth anniversary Peach Technologies recently invested £2.5m in its new Whiteley HQ and kicked off a rebranding exercise (see p9).

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COMMENT: TECHNOLOGY TALK



Richard Carter

'I SPOKE to the future, and it listened' – so goes the Amazon Echo TV advertising campaign. Devices like the Echo and Google Home are set to revolutionise our personal and even working lives, where speech recognition-based systems become our own personal assistants and virtual friends. All of you will be familiar with Apple's Siri and Microsoft's Cortana on our smartphones, but these latest standalone devices take things to a whole new level.

They are still very much in their infancy but there's a plethora of tasks they can already perform, from switching on lighting, making diary reminders and shopping lists, to playing music, reading the news and ordering a cab or a Saturday night takeaway. It's going to take a little time to get used to interacting in this way. However, I do on occasions use speech-based recognition in my car as it's much safer and more legal than fiddling with buttons on the dash to call a contact or search for a radio station.

In Amazon's case you have to 'ask Alexa', and although there are many frustrating things 'she' still can't do, the potential is clearly great. There's even a smaller and cheaper 'sibling' called the Echo Dot that connects directly to speakers.

Augmented and virtual reality are also gaining traction along with IoT. Only time will tell what impact this has on our industry. But as BT used to say, 'it's good to talk'. We just never imagined it would be in this modern new way.

Richard Carter, Group Sales and Business Development Director, Nimans

• Blueface has gone into overdrive, launching a new platform into seven operating markets while revving up its channel proposition and setting out ambitions to be a global top ten player (see p22).

Solar heats up for Denwa acquisition

FAST expanding Solar Communications has bagged Burnley-based Denwa for an undisclosed price tag, its second big buy since swooping on Response Data Communications (RDC) in July last year.

Following the deal Canadian vendor Mitel has awarded Gold Solutions Partner status to the Solar Group, building on its Gold Cloud Solutions accreditation and strengthening its capabilities in the mid-market.

Solar Communications Chief Executive John Whitty commented: "We have spent the last 12 months focusing on an



John Whitty

investment plan, and Denwa is a proven service-focused business with a strong reputation in serving SMB and mid-market business customers."

Denwa's founder and MD Rob Scott will leave the business on completion of the transfer. He said: "The Denwa team spent the last 12 years building a strong company and service offering and have worked with some great customers. With Solar's portfolio and service culture the business will go from strength to strength."

Solar has offices in Salford, Chippenham and Harlow, and is on a mission to bolster its managed services offering.

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GreenCity set for fibre push

GREENCITY Solutions is to invest £1.5m into its home town Peterborough to get more local businesses connected to the Gigabit CityFibre network.

Rob Baldacci, GreenCity owner, said: "Since the launch of CityFibre's network in Peterborough we have connected more than 200 businesses. This investment also gives GreenCity an opportunity to open CityFibre's infrastructure up to more local resellers."

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Circulation 01635 588 869
ISSN 1366-5243

bpl. | A BPL Business Publication

BPL Limited
 3rd Floor, Armstrong House, 38 Market Square
 Uxbridge, Middlesex, UB8 1LH, UK.
 T: 01895 454542 F: 01895 454413

Subscriptions
 Subscription rates for 12 issues:
 UK, £65; Overseas: £80 (incl p&p)
 Back issues can be obtained:
 UK £6 (incl p&p), Overseas £10 each (incl p&p)
 For subscriptions please call 01635 588 869

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 Printed by Pensord Limited

Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations ABC total average circulation 16,118 (Jan-Dec 15, 12,577 print, 3,541 digital)

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Kyocera adds ICT specialism via Annodata



Hironao Katsukura

DOCUMENT solutions company Kyocera has snapped up Annodata in a move that extends its traditional portfolio into ICT services while bolstering its channel proposition.

Hironao Katsukura, MD of Kyocera Document Solutions UK, said: "The UK has been a major success story for Kyocera over the past seven years and this acquisition gives us a great platform to further grow throughout the region.

"Annodata is a well established and influential national player with similar ideals as our own, as well as having important vendors, technologies and a strong value adding culture."

Annodata will operate as a separate business entity to Kyocera Document Solutions UK with its own independent strategy and management team.

Co-founders Andrew and Tim Harman will continue to support the Annodata management team. "This marks an opportunity for our partners, customers and people as we become part of the global Kyocera family and continue the journey we started back in 1988," said Andrew Harman.

"With the significant resources and support of Kyocera Document Solutions UK we can remain committed to our principles, innovate new solutions and services tailored to rapidly changing market needs, and ensure we are well placed to meet customer demands."

Mick Heys, VP Printing Imaging and Document Solutions at IDC, added: "In the current market, imaging vendors need to extend their capabilities beyond managed print to incorporate ICT services.

"Such enhanced offerings will allow them and their channel partners to secure a stronger foothold in existing accounts and to win new business."

Kyocera Document Solutions UK will leverage Annodata to strengthen its channel partner programme. "The contribution of the channel in supporting our growth is crucial and our primary route to market," stated Katsukura. "This acquisition adds significant capabilities to our channel proposition."

See p30 for more on this story

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COMMENT: STRATEGIC TALK



Alex Tempest

EARLIER this year TalkTalk joined forces with Vodafone, Sky, the Federation of Communication Services and Three to launch a nationwide campaign to encourage businesses to have their say on the future of the UK's connectivity. We were encouraged by so many of our partners joining us as campaign members in the call for Ofcom to take radical steps

to Fix Britain's Internet. We have heard our partners and end customers voice their frustrations with Openreach too many times. So, when Ofcom announced a 10 week consultation on whether Openreach should be legally separated from the rest of BT Group the campaign to Fix Britain's Internet leapt into action.

Ofcom then announced that its negotiations with BT had come to nothing and it was pressing ahead with separation plans by referring the issue to the European Commission. While we would like Ofcom to go further still and push for full separation, we're pleased that the regulator has taken a significant step on the journey to a separate Openreach.

Only with full separation can we ensure that Openreach gets the investment it needs to deliver a world leading network for the UK's businesses. With full separation, Openreach could invest its profits into developing its infrastructure to the benefit of all of us working in the channel.

That said, it has been a privilege to campaign on behalf of our partner community and listen to their concerns. With the support of partners, the Fix Britain's Internet campaign gained a voice for UK businesses that Ofcom simply couldn't ignore. Going forward, we will continue to put pressure on Ofcom to create a more independent Openreach that works in the interest of everyone.

Alex Tempest, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

Mobile piece sold by Mitel



Rich McBee

MITEL'S big push into the mobile arena has ended with the divestiture of its mobile division for more than \$385m.

The deal includes a \$35m non-interest bearing promissory note and an equity interest in Sierra Private Investments, the company that has acquired the mobile arm.

Mitel said the move reflects a decision to refocus the company exclusively on the UCC market and cloud-based solutions.

"In a period of rapid change and massive technology transitions, scale and focus are key to driving growth and shareholder return," commented Rich McBee, CEO of Mitel. "This transaction will allow Mitel to achieve these goals.

"It also enables us to intensify our focus and capital in expanding our position in the

enterprise market as it prepares for the large scale digital transformation of premise-based systems to the cloud."

McBee also says that Mitel's shares are 'substantially undervalued' and he intends to implement a share buyback programme in conjunction with a full evaluation of the Ottawa-based firm's capital structure.

"We are working with our Board and financial advisors and will announce details in the near-term," he added.

The sale of the Mobile division is expected to close in the first quarter of 2017.

The cash proceeds from the sale will be used to pay down Mitel's credit facility and reduce its debt ratio.

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SHORT CALLS

Onecom has been awarded the Investors in People Silver accreditation following an assessment procedure. Onecom CEO Darren Ridge said: "Our success is built on our people, and this is why we place a heavy emphasis on staff training, mentoring and progression. To attain Silver status on our first assessment is a huge achievement for all of us."

South West Comms Group has been designated a Microsoft Gold partner, placing the firm among the top 80 UK Microsoft partners. The company is also working towards Silver Data Centre competency. Jon Whaley, Commercial Director, said: "This is a fantastic opportunity to grow our product set and further our relationship with Microsoft."

Mobile device adoption in the workplace is not yet mature, reckons Gartner. Although 80% of workers surveyed received one or more corporate issued devices, desktops are still the most popular corporate device among businesses with more than half of workers receiving corporate issued desktop PCs.

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UCcert picks up top gong



WILTSHIRE-based UCcert ended 2016 in style by winning the Fastest Growing Partner of the Year Award at the Channel Telecom Partner Awards held in Mayfair, London.

UCcert has built up a diverse customer base in the education, construction, public sector, retail, banking, manufacturing, gaming and hospitality sectors.

On receiving his award UCcert MD Darren O'Connor said: "Since our inception in 2008 we have worked hard to not only deliver a solid product, but to also have excellent customer satisfaction and this new award proves that hard work and focusing on client satisfaction really pays off."

Channel Telecom also presented achievement awards to its top reseller, dealer, supplier, data partner and IP voice partner, plus its fastest growing and best overall partner.

Clifford Norton, Channel Telecom MD, stated: "It was a fantastic evening where we had a chance to recognise and thank our partners for what has been a very successful year.

"Without them, our business would not thrive in the way it does and it's great to be able to give something back.

"Our sponsors BT Wholesale, Channel Utilities, Comms Dealer, Entanet, MyPhones, Union Street, Vaioni Wholesale,

Virtual1 and Voiceflex really helped this event come alive and we're extremely grateful for their support in making our ceremony as memorable as it was.

"The year ahead is looking to be bigger and better than ever as we're welcoming new partners every week, so it's safe to say that we're all excited about the future of Channel Telecom."

Picture shows Darren O'Conner (left) and Josh Igou (centre) from UCcert receiving their award from Channel Telecom MD Clifford Norton.

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



PEACH Technologies has relocated to 'wacky' new offices, a move that also marks the firm's tenth anniversary and coincides with a rebrand. The company's £2.5m Whiteley HQ, a 15,000 square foot working environment, features an oval jungle boardroom, library quiet zone, coffee shop meeting room, private working and 'chilled' working zones, and offers staff free breakfasts and fruit, along with Xboxes and pool tables housed in an American diner style kitchen. Pictured above: CEO Darren Scott-Healey opens the doors with the Mayor of Winchester.

Gamma's Academy launches

GAMMA partners are set to be better informed about the company's products and services following the launch of Gamma Academy, an online training hub with video tutorials, eLearning courses, knowledge-base content and guides.

The Academy is linked to the Gamma Portal meaning that it can identify (based on who has logged on and the products being specified) what training should be undertaken and at what level for individuals.

A search function helps users to find relevant training programmes and enables line managers to create learning plans for team members, view their activity and monitor progress.

Gamma's Head of Service Development Jo Shuttleworth commented: "The content is in bite-sized chunks with an integrated knowledge-base to help keep partners up to speed with our new portal and product developments, as well as provide a base layer of understanding for new starters or partners needing a refresh on their telecoms knowledge.

"We're keen to build on the already positive feedback we've had from partners."

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COMMENT: GOING FOR GROWTH



Pete Tomlinson

WHATEVER the mission, values and ways of working in your business, ultimately one thing everyone has in common is a desire for growth. Yet I recently saw some research that showed a third of companies in our sector are not achieving this fundamental objective

– or at least not organically. The reasons for this will be many and varied, but a lack of opportunity is not one of them. Our market continues to be incredibly exciting.

Of course, that overall picture may be more mixed at an individual product level. It's only right traditional voice continues to decline at pace and the adoption of basic Internet access services has hit a point of maturity. However, demand for UC&C and more advanced network connectivity services more than compensates. If we turn our attention to hosting, in the hybrid cloud market for IaaS and PaaS the picture gets even brighter.

I've been focusing on organic growth and in doing so discounting those showing impressive headline growth, while perhaps being flat or even going backwards underneath. I'm not saying there is anything inherently wrong with these 'build and buy' strategies, it's just that I believe a heavy dose of organic growth is healthy for any business.

It's also interesting to note that those struggling to grow the most are often the larger businesses; and while many have pockets of high performance, this isn't necessarily surprising as they struggle to pivot towards new opportunities and the ways of working needed to embrace them. Something I am sure many in the channel will happily capitalise on.

Using a sensible definition of the addressable market for most Comms Dealer readers, the overall opportunity for us is expected to grow at nine per cent CAGR between 2015 and 2020. If you're on track to beat this, congratulations. If you're not, maybe it's time to ask why not.

Pete Tomlinson, Director, KCOM

Big gun says raise the bar



Tom O'Hagan

TOM O'Hagan is calling on resellers to up their game in 2017 and become trusted advisors to British companies in danger of missing out on the digital revolution.

The Virtual1 CEO believes UK businesses are embroiled in a digital arms race where innovation, driving down costs and increasing speed to market are critical to success.

"This drive represents significant opportunities for the channel," he stated. "Investment propositions have not been easier with 'as-a-service' models removing capex objections.

"Those UK businesses that fail to innovate and invest will be left behind, and ICT resellers are ideally placed to become their trusted advisors."

O'Hagan also noted that Virtual1 is investing in its network and services models to ensure its partners have the

tools they need to capitalise on these opportunities.

"2017 is going to be a highly significant year for Virtual1 and our partners," he added.

"Over the last 12 months we have been working quietly to implement one of the UK's most advanced networks, fully software defined.

"We have automated provisioning and change management throughout, and in Q1 of 2017 we will start to open up this control to our partners, allowing them to implement configuration changes directly to their client's solutions.

"Our partners will truly become the masters of their own service experience."

O'Hagan is also adding MPLS ordering to Virtual1's 1Portal from February. "This will dramatically streamline the quote and order processes for our partners," he added.

Potterton exits CEO job at ITP

THE Institute of Telecommunications Professionals (ITP) CEO Ann Potterton has stepped down, making way for Crissi Williams who returns from maternity leave in January.

Lucy Woods, Chairman, said: "Ann's insight into the apprenticeship levy and her leadership skills have helped to identify the ITP's future direction.

"Crissi was instrumental in setting up ITP's apprenticeship scheme and her experience will be key in 2017 as the ITP works with telecoms companies to help them make the most of the levy to grow and develop their own talent."

In relation to her departure Potterton indicated a desire to fulfil teaching ambitions.

Woods added: "Crissi has worked alongside Ann for a number of years and is best placed to expand and improve the professional, career development and apprenticeship products and services that Ann set up and developed."



Crissi Williams



A VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM ALL AT SPARKS! AND THANK YOU FOR YOUR AMAZING SUPPORT IN 2016

During 2016, the comms industry has helped Comms Dealer raise thousands of pounds for the Sparks children's charity it has supported for over a decade. All of the events, campaigns and fundraising you have contributed to helps the children who need support most. In 2017 Sparks will formally partner with Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) Children's Charity, which will take funding for child health research to a new level, so we look forward to your continued support in 2017.



£19,000 was raised for Sparks at the Sir Trevor Brooking/Comms Dealer Golf Day in September

Comms Dealer Sales Executive Sophie Timms will be tackling the London Marathon for Sparks on April 23rd www.justgiving.com/Sophie-Timms

COMMENT: RESOLVED FOR 2017



Dave Dadds

RING out, ye bells! A New Year is upon us! Ofcom promises a new customer-centric Openreach. The Universal Service Obligation extends to broadband. Government itself commits to a full-fibre 5G-enabled future. Even the mobile networks are pressing on to meet their not-spot commitments. What can possibly go wrong? It's been a long time coming. In fact, it took a

referendum to accomplish it. But our industry is now, finally, getting to where it belongs in Government thinking, no longer just lumped in with the media luvvies at DCMS because someone thought telephones and mobiles naturally sit with broadcast TV and radio – but a vibrant, vital means of empowering trade, especially international trade. The kind of trade the UK is going to need as it makes its way into the post-Brexit world.

For the first time, too, Government is looking over the shoulders of the big boys and the corporate lobbyists, anxious to catch a glimpse of us agile, flexible, competitive CPs and SME sector suppliers. Suddenly, we're all being taken seriously. How do we begin to respond to that? December's FCS Board meeting spent a lot of time on this. As the voice of the channel, we're already building strong coalitions with other industry voices and feeding into three All-Party Parliamentary Groups. At the same time, we're delivering operational results on everything from Ethernet lead times to dial-through fraud.

To make sure nothing gets overlooked, why not make the time for a quarterly conference call with a proper agenda about what's going on and what we need to do about it? It could be anything from IPX to wholesale mobile, from wayleaves to fraud – the big issues that'll drive the policy work with Ofcom and the task-and-finish groups. Drop us a note to fcs@fcs.org.uk.

Dave Dadds, Chairman, FCS

Preservica backed by investment firm

OXFORDSHIRE-based technology business Preservica has secured £3m in growth funding from Mobeus Equity Partners.

The deal is expected to boost uptake of Preservica's digital preservation software which is used by over 100 large and small corporate and public sector organisations.

"Preservica has a strong vision and an impressive set of customers," stated Trevor Hope, Partner at Mobeus Equity Partners. "It has an ambitious growth plan and a product vision that is transforming how organisations protect and future-proof digital information."

"This is a disruptive offering, well matched to a vast and growing unmet market need."

Mike Quinn, Preservica's CEO, added: "The investment is a validation of the potential of the business and the growing demand for a digital preservation solution that enables organisations to protect the value of their vital digital information."

"The funding will allow us to expand our partnering programme and accelerate our product vision to make digital preservation a seamless and automated part of the digital information lifecycle."



Mike Quinn

Quinn said that the value of safeguarding digital information cuts across every sector and has wide ranging benefits.

HSBC, which recently celebrated its 150th anniversary, uses its repository of digital material to enhance the value of its brand and protect vital corporate records.

Other organisations such as TfL are using Preservica's platform to work with digital information that is key to maintaining its vast infrastructure, including escalators with an expected life-span of 50 years or more.

Healthcare is also looking to invest in digital preservation to access patient data for 75-plus years, while other organisations are seeking to protect intellectu-

al property and re-use research data and digital information for product innovation and competitive advantage.

"The cloud has an important role to play as more organisations adopt a 'cloud first' approach and leverage the cost-efficiencies and inherent durability of cloud storage for safeguarding digital information," stated Quinn.

"Preservica's digital preservation software is architected to take advantage of this, allowing organisations to run the software in the cloud or use a hybrid mix of cloud storage connected to an on-premise deployment."

The company's partnership with Amazon Web Services (AWS) will also be a key part of its expansion plans.

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Entanet CEO targets £36m



Elsa Chen

ENTANET is close to realising its growth target, reporting year-on-year revenue growth of over 12% to a forecasted £36m in its 20th year of operation.

The connectivity wholesaler continued to grow organically in 2016, a year that saw the launch of a new synergy partner portal, the creation of an apprenticeship scheme (see page 42), a quality management accreditation as well as netting four industry awards.

In February 2014 mid-market equity investor Mobeus Equity Partners made an initial £6m investment to support a £14m management buyout led by CEO Elsa Chen.

“The success of Entanet is wholly dependent on the success of our partners,” she said.

“We recognise that resellers need to have confidence, not only in the quality of the services that their suppliers deliver, but also that they understand what’s important in providing connectivity solutions.

“In 2017 we plan to launch several new products and initiatives to help partners differentiate themselves, enter new markets and win more business.

“The technology and the market is moving even faster now and this is an exciting time for resellers who can identify and capture opportunities.”



OPUS Telecoms has relocated to new offices in Reigate and closed its bases in Wimbledon and Sevenoaks. The central London and Hitchin sales offices remain operational. The consolidation enables Opus to host customer seminars and workshops and streamline collaboration between directors and staff. The board sees the move as a key step in Opus growing its turnover to £20m by 2020.

Opus MD Michael O’Donnell said: “The Opus group has grown considerably over the past few years and as our portfolio and size of customers grow it is important that we are in a position to continue to deliver the service our customers expect. The consolidation of our offices will enable us to do this.”

Opus was founded in 1992 and is a Mitel Gold Reseller partner, it holds two Gamma Platinum Partner accreditations and is a Microsoft Certified Partner.

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COMMENT: OFCOM'S BIG ISSUE



Vincent Disneur

THE announcement by Ofcom of its intention to legally separate Openreach within the BT Group sent shockwaves through the communications industry, firmly dividing the channel into those that welcomed it and those that felt it wouldn't be enough. Many industry stakeholders had called for the full structural separation of Openreach from the BT Group.

In its Strategic Review of Digital Communications, published February 2016, Ofcom itself had even described structural separation as 'the cleanest and most clear-cut long-term solution'. Legal separation could, therefore, be viewed as pragmatism on Ofcom's part. Structural separation would likely face a legal challenge from BT and there would be other complex legal and logistical issues that would have to be resolved, inevitably slowing down implementation.

Legal separation, however, has the potential to deliver meaningful reform of Openreach much more quickly and, in my experience, the timely solution is almost always the best one. Real change is needed now and if it will take years just to divide up the BT pension pot, any benefits that might be achieved by full structural separation will come too late for many resellers.

In reality, it will still take time for legal separation to change, but the successful execution of Ofcom's plan will counter many of the inequalities created by the current governance of Openreach and should deliver some clear benefits. As with all things, the devil will be in the detail. Union Street has written to Ofcom on behalf of our partners to note concerns around key points of its approach, suggesting how these could be strengthened and more clearly defined. A copy of this response can be viewed on Ofcom's website.

Vincent Disneur, Head of Sales, Union Street

Clearswift's sold to RUAG



Heath Davies

THEALE-based security software firm Clearswift has been sold to Swiss technology company RUAG.

Lyceum-backed Clearswift is expected to generate revenues of over £23m in its current financial year and has approximately 140 employees, along with global sales and distribution capabilities with a strong presence in Europe, the Americas and Asia-Pacific.

This exit represents another successful realisation for Lyceum in the software and

technology space and paves the way for more acquisitions in this sector.

Jeremy Hand, Lyceum Managing Partner, commented: "We continue to see a great opportunity in the cyber security market and we're looking to partner with more UK-based businesses across the space."

Heath Davies, Clearswift CEO, added: "Over the past five years Clearswift has entirely transformed its business, building new solutions and incorporating two technology add-ons.

"Going forward, it is exciting to be at the heart of the new RUAG Cyber Defence business unit. This acquisition allows Clearswift to continue on its current path with the additional critical mass to support ambitious growth plans."



Jeremy Hand

Distie hails ten years in Ireland

IT DISTRIBUTOR Westcoast has notched up 10 years of operation in Ireland following its acquisition of Clarity Ireland in 2006, the Irish distribution arm of Horizon Technology Group.

Dave Dunne, Director at Westcoast Ireland, commented: "Clarity is a well established brand in Irish distribution. However, over the last ten years Westcoast has moved things to a different level. We've had a decade of buoyancy."

Based in Dublin, Westcoast Ireland employs 22 people and is focused on areas such as CSP, HP Enterprise, HPI business and retail.

"Get yourselves ready for what's coming next with Westcoast Ireland," enthused Dunne. "We've got some exciting plans including working with new vendors, boosting our product portfolio, and moving further into potential growth areas such as retail."



Dave Dunne

Vodafone revs up remodelled programme

VODAFONE is aiming to secure a larger slice of the UC, cloud and enterprise mobile markets with a new ramped up channel programme.

The mobile giant, which brought fixed line voice and data services into its portfolio via the acquisition of Cable&Wireless, has delivered an unequivocal 'work with us' message to resellers frustrated by not being able to deliver joined up comms to enterprise customers.

The company has already accredited 100 partners in the

first phase of its new Vodafone Partner Programme which puts a spotlight on capability and the customer experience rather than volume. The programme promises upgraded training, market and technology expertise and, for the first time, certification across the Vodafone fixed, mobile, converged and cloud portfolio of technologies.

Vodafone says the move to highlight partner capabilities has been made to support customer requirements as businesses seek trusted expertise in



Nick Birtwistle

communications infrastructure and services to support smart working practices and digital transformation initiatives.

Nick Birtwistle, Director of Partners and Strategic Alliances at Vodafone UK, said: "The programme is a major factor in our growth as all new propositions coming into the channel will use the programme's capabilities and benefits for partners.

"We are continuing to invest in partner enablement tools such as systems and portals to help our partners serve their customers better and make it easy to work with Vodafone.

"The market is changing significantly and digital transfor-

mation is becoming ever more important with the adoption of cloud and the Internet of Things among other areas.

"Combined with customers requiring improved levels of support and looking for trusted partners, and the continuing shift to UC from siloed comms, the comms industry has a leading role to play and Vodafone is looking to lead that transformation through the channel."

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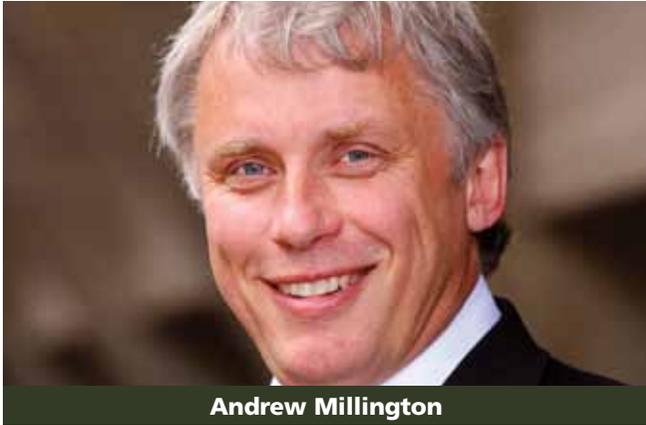
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Exclaimer in £23m boost

Zest4 unveils pre-Ethernet



Andrew Millington

MID-market private equity firm Livingbridge has invested £23m in Exclaimer, a provider of email signature software.

Exclaimer, based in Farnborough, was founded in 2000 by Andrew Millington, Gary Levell and Chris Crawshay.

It provides software to over 25,000 customers in 100-plus countries including blue chip firms such as the BBC, Audi, Sony and McDonalds.

The Group is an accredited Microsoft Gold partner and its products support the full range of Microsoft's email solutions including MS Office 365. Its software gives users flexibility and control over email signatures and disclaimers.

The investment will see the business invest in expanding

relationships with partners, add scale by broadening its suite of products and invest in infrastructure and customer services.

Millington, CEO, Exclaimer, said: "In the last 16 years we have taken a simple concept and turned it into a global success.

"The Livingbridge investment enable's us to add scale and firepower to our business while maintaining our entrepreneurial culture of innovation."

Matthew Caffrey, who is a Partner at Livingbridge, commented: "Our experience of working with high growth tech businesses, combined with Exclaimer's strong management team, means that the business is well placed to capture the opportunity that the expansion of MS Office 365 brings."

ZEST4 has added new pre-Ethernet and pop-up office solutions to its portfolio, a move that supports its M2M roll out.

"Pre-Ethernet solutions give partners the opportunity to provide reliable enterprise grade connectivity to customers whose businesses operate away from permanent premises or who offer a service that's based out on the road," said Anton Le Saux, Zest4's Head of M2M and IoT.

"Festivals, temporary retail outlets, kiosks, digital road signage and pop-up offices are just some of the business types that rely on technology but often struggle to stay connected."

Zest4 supplies a range of enterprise grade routers and mobile tariffs with 4G broadband connectivity and the ability to connect to any network.

Le Saux added: "One of the challenges resellers have is the networks wanting to tie customers into long-term contracts when they take out a new SIM.

"Zest4 now has the ability to offer SIMs with flexible data that means a customer can consume as much as they need when they need it and drop down to a bare minimum to ensure they have cover for failover."



Mandy Fazelynia

Mandy Fazelynia, Operations and Business Development Director, added: "We have experience of using enterprise grade routers during our recent office move and they were critical in ensuring we could operate as usual despite a long wait for our fixed line to be installed."

SHORT CALLS

Onecom has become one of just five Samsung Premium Partners. Darren Ridge, Onecom CEO, said: "This certification assures customers that their businesses will have access to the latest products and support when they choose Samsung devices through Onecom."

CMS Distribution has acquired a majority stake in Scandinavian distributor Newgen Distribution. Frank Salmon, CEO of CMS, said: "We want to become a significant player in continental Europe, opening up opportunities for our suppliers while offering the benefits of scale to our customers."

NYCOMM has added £14m annual revenues to its top line following its multi-million acquisition of the Pennine Group, taking its run rate to circa £100m and putting it on track to reach its next growth target of £150m. Nycomm Group, which includes distributor Nimans, will integrate Pennine's portfolio of solutions in two-way radio, telecoms, UC, hosted, IT services, hire, video, consumer and peripheral products, including analogue and IP handsets from Interquartz UK and Yealink UK. Bury-based Pennine Group has a headcount of 75-plus and was founded in 1978, beginning its commercial life as a repairer of radios. The firm's MD Andy Roberts has been appointed to the Nycomm board. Pictured: Andy Roberts with Julian Niman.



SHORT CALL

Jola has added UC-Business, Integrator and Auto Attendant as standard features on Premium Broadsoft seats, bringing its offering to 50-plus standard features with unlimited UK landline and UK mobile calls. Andrew Dickinson, MD, said: "Most end users want advanced hunt groups, multiple devices on a single licence, screen-pop and click-to-dial. And the stigma of automated attendant has gone away."

Intelligent analysis

LEEDS-based Simetric Telecom has added a call intelligence system to its flagship Mobile-X product following a partnership deal with Cogna.

Simetric MD Gavin Sweet commented: "There's so much data held in voice and text communications that businesses are missing out on.

"Adding Cogna to our Mobile-X service will enable our customers to record conversations across mobile, landline and SMS and analyse them on one global system."

The Cogna system enables businesses to intelligently investigate events, monitor communications and securely share the results with internal and external parties.

Cogna's Chief Operating Officer Ian Hook commented: "The cloud archive solution delivers not just traditional call recording requirements but also creates value to all users, mobile, fixed and social."

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

Equinix expands

EQUINIX is to acquire 24 data centre sites from Verizon in a \$3.6bn cash deal, strengthening its global platform and interconnection portfolio.

The acquired portfolio includes approximately 900 customers with a significant number of enterprise customers new to Equinix's platform, and it adds approximately 2.4 million gross square feet.

It brings Equinix's global footprint to 175 data centres in 43 markets and around 17 million gross square feet across

the Americas, Europe and Asia-Pacific markets.

Approximately 250 Verizon workers, primarily in the operations functions of the acquired data centres, are to become Equinix employees.

Steve Smith, President and CEO, Equinix, commented: "This opportunity extends Equinix's strategy to expand its global platform. It enables us to enhance cloud and network density to continue to attract enterprises, while expanding our presence in the Americas."

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UPS giant acquired by Platinum Equity | Elite snaps up cloud expert

INVESTMENT firm Platinum Equity has acquired Emerson Network Power in a \$4bn-plus deal that sees the appointment of Rob Johnson as CEO and the start of a campaign to rebrand as Vertiv.

The Ohio-based firm has more than 20,000 employees and over 25 manufacturing and assembly facilities worldwide.

Johnson moves from Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers where he was an operating partner. He also spent 10 years at American Power Conversion (APC) and was President and CEO when the company sold to Schneider Electric for \$6.1bn in 2007.

Bryan Kelln, Partner and President of Portfolio Operations at Platinum Equity, said:



Rob Johnson

“This is a transformational opportunity for the company and we believe Rob is the right leader to grow the business as we establish a culture focused on speed, innovation and customer service.”

In 1989 Johnson founded Systems Enhancement

Corporation (SEC), a company that created software and hardware solutions for the UPS industry. He sold the business to APC in 1997.

Commenting on the transition to new ownership Johnson said: “As an independent company, Vertiv will operate with great freedom to make strategy and investment decisions, move more quickly like a start-up and focus on solutions for our customers, including those in the growing cloud computing, mobile and IoT networks.”

In November 2013 Platinum Equity acquired a controlling stake in Emerson’s embedded computing and power business, which was rebranded as Artesyn Embedded Technologies.

ELITE’S acquisition of cloud specialist Tollon adds expertise in Citrix cloud hosting, physical server hosting, email services, domain name registration and Internet connectivity.

“Tollon is a dynamic company, one that has been led by technological innovation throughout the years,” said Matthew Rogers, Head of Marketing and Business Development at Elite.

“We will focus on offering customers a diverse portfolio of technology solutions over the next few months.”

David Simmons, MD, added: “One of the most important parts of any company acquisition is the staff. The Tollon team shares the same core values as Elite, and we have worked together on projects for the last few years.”



Matthew Rogers

He also pointed out that it will be business as usual for all Tollon customers under the Elite brand.

Elite plans to add more diverse product ranges to its portfolio such as KVM and the VMware cloud portfolio.

The firm will also redesign Tollon’s core network and implement a new cloud infrastructure estate across a number of data centres.

TeleWare in Siphon Networks link

TELEWARE’S partnering strategy continues apace following a link up with Siphon Networks, part of the Nuvias Group.

Initially, the partnership will focus on enhancements to TeleWare’s Microsoft capability, primarily Skype for Business.

Siphon was established in 2009 to support service providers with the launch of cloud tele-

phony services via an integrated and centralised platform, offering a full UC proposition.

Steve Harris, MD at Siphon, commented: “Working with TeleWare just makes sense for us. We’re of a similar mindset in terms of culture and our attitude towards collaboration.

“We’ve been discussing the possibility of a partnership since

June last year and it’s good to make it official. We will be able to provide what is essentially an end-to-end service and smooth the way for companies to implement genuine UC.”

Steve Haworth, CEO, TeleWare, commented: “This keeps the momentum going for our partnership programme which has taken off in 2016.”



A GOLF event staged by Invosys saw 30 customers descend on the Hellidon Lakes Golf and Spa Resort in Daventry. Winners of the team event were Cliff Norton, MD, Channel Telecom; Duncan McNally, Vodafone Sales Lead; and James Gill, co-founder of Switch Utilities. Peter Crooks, founder of Invosys, commented: We had a brilliant day and everyone enjoyed themselves.”

SHORT CALL

Excalibur Communications staff have raised over £2,000 for Wiltshire Air Ambulance and Threshold Housing Link by spending a night on the tarmac in the company’s car park. The 20 volunteers, including the entire senior management team, also braved the elements and the discomfort to raise awareness about the number of homeless people in the UK, which is estimated by Shelter to be more than 250,000.

Alert raised over DR risk

A DWINDLING pool of specialist business continuity providers – their former counterparts having been snapped up by larger acquirers – has put the DR requirements of UK plc at great risk, according to Peter Groucutt, MD at Databarracks.

“The ongoing acquisitions we’re seeing are causing long-term problems for the market,” he said. “Specialist disaster recovery and business continuity companies are being swallowed up by larger cloud providers and their services packaged as



Peter Groucutt

part of a wider offering, leaving many customers with a provider who is a jack-of-all-trades but master of none.”

“A specialist DR provider has the core task of getting a business back up and running as quickly as possible, and has the advantage of experience.

“Specialist DR providers will have performed thousands of recoveries and have highly skilled teams of experienced experts that can confidently and competently tackle the complex task of a restore with minimum disruption to a business.”

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SHORT CALL

CityFibre has kicked off the roll-out of dense full-fibre networks in business parks across its 40 city UK footprint to reach more than 500 business parks. The first parks to be upgraded are in the firm’s Gigabit City projects Coventry, Bristol and Peterborough. The networks will be available to ISPs and resellers on a wholesale basis. Pre-registration rates of over 60% have been recorded in many of the parks surveyed.

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PE deals overshadowed

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

While there were several private equity deals in the sector over the summer (such as Lyceum/Sabio, GCP/Arrow, Beech Tree/Wavenet), the more recent interesting corporate activity has involved M&A, particularly Daisy's agreed £185m/9.6x current EBITDA bid for Alternative Networks and Metronet's £48m/8x acquisition of M247. While these are trade deals, both buyers are PE backed and have used debt funding for a major part of their deals.

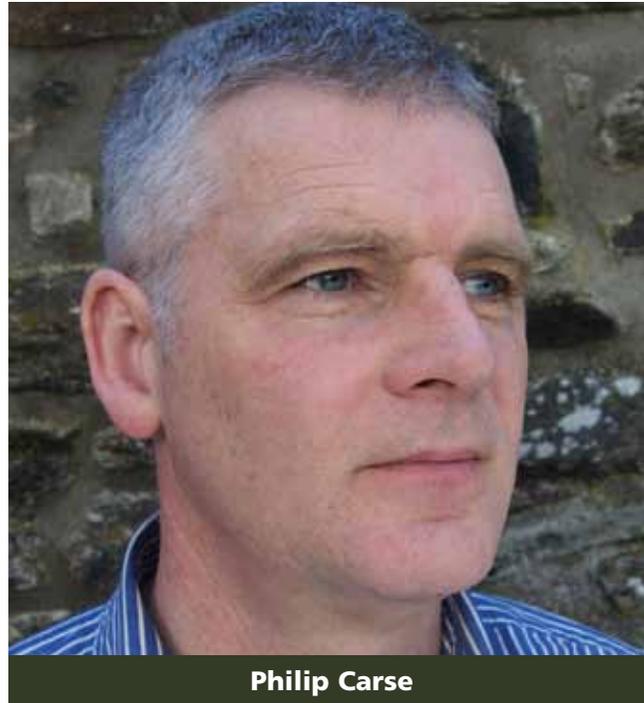
So how does the Daisy deal change the B2B supplier landscape? We estimate that Daisy and Alternative today have about a 3.1% and 0.8% share of the UK's £19 billion B2B comms market respectively (though less if one also included the similarly multi-billion UK IT services market). The deal elevates the combined business to about £720-730 million revenues, or about a 3.9% market share. It also moves Daisy above Virgin to behind Arqiva, though the latter with its mobile and TV masts and broadcast transmission is a very different business to Daisy. In pure business comms and IT services terms, we estimate that Daisy is now fourth behind BTEE, Vodafone and O2.

Meanwhile, the pick of the bunch of recent results and

updates, for all the wrong reasons, are Alternative Networks' third profit warning in 12 months, a major accounting issue at Redcentric, TalkTalk admitting what all the City analysts already knew, that full year EBITDA would be at the low end of guidance, and more dire results from PCCW-backed wireless broadband provider UK Broadband.

Alternative Networks reported on its year to forget, with EBITDA down 17% to £18.4 million on revenues down 8% to £135.8 million for the year to September 2016. As the details show, the year was derailed by non-EU roaming and Advanced Solutions' non-recurring revenue weakness, offsetting some good progress in mobile subscribers, connectivity and hosted desktop. With a better second half than the first (EBITDA down 27% on revenues down 4%), the outlook is reasonably positive.

In somewhat of a shocking statement, AIM-listed managed IT services provider Redcentric announced in November that historic accounting misstatements over several years have overstated net assets by at least £10 million, while net debt is nearer £30 million than the high teens implied by an earlier trading update. The company



Philip Carse

does not appear to be in any fundamental danger given that the higher and more accurate net debt of £30 million is still only just over 1x full year EBITDA, but it will clearly need to regain the trust of its bankers and shareholders.

TalkTalk reported first half to September 2017 EBITDA up 44% to £130 million on revenues down 1.1% at £902 million, within which corporate was strong at a carrier driven +11% to £208 million (underlying +2.3%). With a sense of *déjà vu* the company now expects full year EBITDA to be at the bottom end of the £320-360 million range, though the city had already guessed this given current consensus of £318 million.

KCOM announced first half 2016/17 EBITDA down 14% to £32.0 million on revenues down 7.1% at £165.3 million, partly reflecting increased costs following the sale of its national network to CityFibre and lower spending on the major HMRC

project. The results can best be described as reflecting a period of transformation for KCOM as the company starts to reinvest some of the £90 million received from CityFibre for its national network into its Hull fibre network and enterprise national business.

Adept Telecom reported interim revenues up 19% to £16.5 million, although the majority of this growth came from the five month contribution of Comms Group, with adjusted EBITDA up 20% to £3.5 million. Adept also revealed the £2.0m/1.5x 2015 sales acquisition of CAT Communications, further strengthening its Avaya presence.

Accounts to April 2016 from Excell Group showed a second year of solid growth with EBITDA up 23% to £3.0 million on revenues up 10% to £30.0 million, with exemplary operating cashflow. However, the fireworks are happening this year off the back of a major

contract with Workspace Group and an acquisition. In contrast, accounts to January 2016 from BGF-backed mobile-cum-unified comms service provider Olive Communications showed a poor year, with revenues down marginally at £28.6 million, a one third decline in estimated EBITDA to £3.1 million and substantial cash outflows.

The overdue 2015 accounts for PCCW-backed wireless broadband operator UK Broadband showed yet another poor cash-guzzling year, with EBITDA losses up 6% at £17.2 million on revenues up 114% at £3.3 million, with the company's Relish 4G product yet to deliver the goods.

Share price under-performance

Although telecoms and networks share prices broadly tracked both the Megabuyte universe and the FTSE All-Share over the last three months, with a decline of 2.4%, the peer group has under-performed considerably over the last year. The average one year decline of 0.7% compares with +8.5% for the FTSE All-Share and 15% for the broader Megabuyte universe in which software stocks have generally performed well. The major share price under-performer over the last three months is Redcentric, down 60% on its accounting issues. Alternative Networks is down 16%, but only after the shares jumped 18% on the Daisy bid announcement. ■

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COMPANY NEWS ROUND UP

Exponential-e confirms more strong growth

Lee Wade, founder and CEO of connectivity and cloud player Exponential-e, has confirmed that the company is on track for another year of exceptional growth with revenues and EBITDA both up by approximately 25% for the year to January 2017. He also set out some equally strong forecasts for coming years.

Telecom Plus to gain Opus Energy windfall

Energy utility Drax Group has announced the acquisition of Opus Energy Group, a B2B energy supplier in which LSE-listed multi-utility provider Telecom Plus has a 20% stake. The latter will receive £71 million in cash and book a £60 million exceptional profit in the year to March 2017, effectively doubling reported profits. The entire proceeds will be distributed to shareholders. Going forward, Telecom Plus will lose about £5 million in annual profits and dividends from Opus, worth about 10-15% of reported profits and operating cashflows.

Daisy set to buy Alternative Networks

AIM-listed business comms and IT service provider Alternative Networks has announced a recommended takeover by peer Daisy at 335p per share, a 17% premium and valuing the company at an estimated £184m/10x fiscal 2016 EBITDA. While the multiple is fairly full, the 335p price is much below the 500p+ of a year ago, with Alternative Networks having issued three profit warnings in the last 12 months. For Daisy,

the deal would boost its business by a quarter.

Arqiva reports pre-IPO growth pick-up

Rumoured IPO candidate, broadcast and comms infrastructure provider Arqiva is starting to play the 'public company in waiting' game by publishing quarterly results headlines. For the quarter to September 2016, revenues and EBITDA grew 10% and 12% to £230 million and £110 million, representing a step up in performance and aided by 4G upgrades, while the company also refinanced about £1.1 billion of debt.

Equinix buys Verizon data centres for \$3.6bn

Verizon has become the latest telco to exit the capital intensive sector, selling 24 US and Latam data centres to Equinix for \$3.6bn/13x forward looking EBITDA. The deal boosts Equinix' Americas operations by a third in EBITDA terms, and comes after M&A-led enhancements to its presence in European (via Telecity) and Asia (Bit-Isle).

Vodafone UK shows slight improvement in second quarter

Vodafone has reported first half 2017 revenues and EBITDA down 3.9% and 1.7% at 27.1 billion euros and 7.9 billion euros, but up 1.7% and 4.3% on an organic constant currency basis, helped particularly by stronger than expected growth in Europe. UK EBITDA was impacted by the costs of the well publicised billing issues, but second quarter revenues were down 2.1% versus 3.2% in the first quarter.

Virgin reports best customer adds since 2009

For the third quarter of 2016 Virgin Media has reported EBITDA up 5.6% to £530 million on revenues up 2.8% to £1,205 million, with cable growing 4.3% to £848 million and B2B 3.2% to £168 million, but mobile falling 10% to £102 million – B2B is now benefiting from changed accounting of upfront fees.

8x8 and Vonage maintain UCaaS pace

US-listed UCaaS peers Vonage and 8x8 have reported strong results to September 2016 as well as nudging up full year guidance. Vonage B2B revenues grew 44% organically to \$106 million, while total revenues and EBITDA grew 11% and 21% to \$248 million and \$41 million respectively, with consumer continuing its planned decline. 8x8 reported revenues up 24% (26% constant currency) to \$63.2 million and non-GAAP net income up 79% at \$5.3 million, and highlighted 30% growth in the UK.

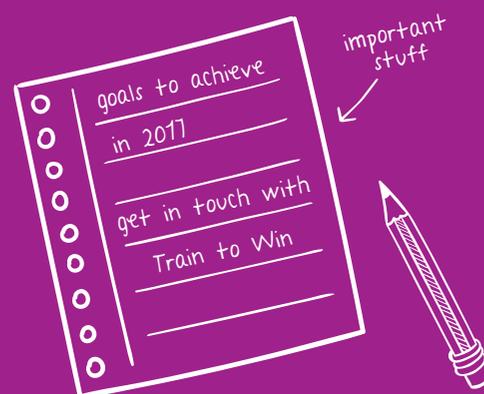
Teleware records profits jump

Latest accounts to March 2016 from owner-managed Teleware Group, which develops solutions for routing, recording and analysis communications, show a fourth consecutive year of about £10 million revenues, but significantly improved EBITDA of about £0.5 million due to headcount reductions. Profitability has been held back in recent years by investment as well as expansion into the US.

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UCaaS challenger seeks growth

Ireland-based UCaaS provider Blueface has gone into overdrive, launching a new platform into seven operating markets while revving up its channel proposition and setting out big ambitions to become a global top ten player in cloud communications. We got the story from Group CEO Alan Foy.



Foy offers a vision of Blueface at the vanguard of a UCaaS-led march across territories far and wide. His key to unlocking international business is an in-house designed and built UCaaS platform being rolled out in Ireland, the UK, the US, Italy, France, Germany and Spain. "All elements of the platform were developed in-house to reflect the demands of the market, and the entire value chain

of activities are controlled by Blueface end-to-end," said Foy. "To become a top ten global provider we need to operate in more markets, more verticals and build strong partnerships."

The clout exhibited by Blueface in UCaaS driven growth is as much about ambition as technological innovation. "With our new territory launches we are building a global SaaS business model that can

deliver growth and scale in a managed way," added Foy. "We intend to build large direct customer bases and partner relationships in these markets in order to scale the business significantly over the next few years.

"Globally, there is a significant uptake of UCaaS in enterprises and companies moving from on-premise solutions to cloud-based delivery models. The cloud model goes well beyond prior

online delivery approaches by combining the efficient use of shared resources, simplified solution packaging, self-service provisioning, with elastic and granular scaling."

Strong contender

Blueface is a challenger brand with a challenger mentality. As such, it constantly seeks new ways to optimise the value chain of communications activity and add value to its customers. "This drives the development

of our business model, which is to focus on the efficient delivery of service, removing waste and empowering the user as much possible," commented Foy. "Our entire platform is designed around achieving the aim of offering scale and delivering a better customer experience."

Blueface employs almost 50 people in Dublin, London and Rome. It serves circa 20,000 customers, all business clients with a good mix of

global top spot

SMEs and enterprises. The firm is set to grow top line revenue by 35 per cent this year and has been ranked in the Deloitte Fast 50 of Ireland's fastest growing technology companies over the last five years.

The Blueface story is not akin to yarns of 'born in the cloud' upstarts with no legacy in their short wake. It is a narrative laden with experience, both in technology and business. In the early days Foy pursued a business degree and a strategy research degree at the University of Dublin, Trinity College. He then joined Ireland's leading independent investment firm, NCB Stockbrokers, and worked in corporate finance, investment banking, wealth management and equity research.

IT sector beckons

"During my time at the firm I met many companies in the IT, communications and telco landscape and developed a keen interest in the IT services sector," explained Foy. "I left NCB to establish or join a technology start-up that I could both invest in and work with. In 2010, I joined Blueface and conducted a management buy-in to the business with the backing of Lord Iveagh of the Guinness family."

Blueface was founded by Aaron Clauson and Feargal Brady in 2004 as a VoIP player that initially serviced the residential market. Six years later Blueface decided to target small to medium sized businesses that needed VoIP services as its platform was bristling with a range of business grade offerings including call conferencing, follow me

functionality, SMS marketing tools, global numbers etc. Since then, Blueface has successfully pivoted entirely from residential to business customers and is now 100 per cent business or carrier focused.

"We have increasingly focused on large enterprise customers across multiple sites and jurisdictions," commented Foy. "We are experiencing real growth in this segment in addition to our SME and corporate business. Also, large carriers and mobile operators have opted to take a white labelled managed service from Blueface whereby we deliver our platform as an end-to-end branded experience for a third party. This has been successfully deployed through a white label or full service API approach. We expect to see more international customers and white label opportunities in the months and years ahead."

Foy noted that integration with other business applications and SaaS based products is vital for voice communications and there will more adoption of cloud communications as integrations and delivery models evolve over time. "These cloud-based models are changing everything, and tomorrow's competitor will look entirely different to the traditional contenders we see today," he added. "But resellers are well placed to service the customer. As cloud communications platforms evolve and adapt, there is an important role for these partners to develop new approaches to serving the end customer as part of a total solution sale and managed service." ■

Just a minute with Alan Foy...

Role model: Warren Buffet, a value investor who could identify huge opportunities and invest wisely over the long-term

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I used to meet and greet music and TV celebrities when they arrived at Dublin Airport

What talent do you wish you had? To remember song lyrics

Give one example of something you have overcome: I lost weight and now exercise regularly

How would you like to be remembered? Passionate about building a great business, brand and team while also being a positive influence and having a can-do attitude

What do you fear the most? Regret

Industry bugbear: Billing. I don't understand why large telcos tie themselves up in knots over billing

Your greatest strengths and what could you improve on? I'm a good communicator but could work on my time management

Lesson learnt: I would hire hard and fire fast. Keeping and motivating the right people with the right attitude is vital

Top tip: Focus on the customer experience and delivering value. Everything else is just noise

Best achievement: Convincing some amazing people to come on the business building journey with me

The biggest career risk you've taken: Leaving my job in the investment business to become an 'entrepreneur'

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Donovan on strategy

For MF Communications, it's time to move forward and exploit a different strategy for growth – acquisitions – a new approach that has been catalysed by the introduction of a successful network services operation, according to Director and Operations Manager James Donovan.

Donovan's reaction to the success of the network services arm was as decisive as the roll out itself. "The biggest turning point for us has been introducing the network services side of business three years ago," he stated. "Since then we have built our reputation, particularly in the local market, for telecoms services based on customer service, competitive pricing and excellent suppliers. While telephone hardware is a huge business area for us, we intend to grow and further compete in the UK network services arena and are looking for a telecoms company, or comms part of a business, to purchase. We are self-funded for this acquisition and positioned to move quickly."

While the introduction of network services has sown the seeds of a great harvest, to favour one group of technologies is not to exclude another, even if it falls into the category of 'legacy' systems. According to Donovan, traditional products are often overlooked despite being in strong demand. "We have stuck to our roots

of selling telephone systems and last year reached the milestone of exporting hardware to more than 100 countries with record sales," he stated. "One of the main challenges we face is the sourcing of telecoms equipment that meets our high standards. Although we remanufacture and refurbish products at our facility in Tunbridge Wells, the base level of quality still needs to be there."

The company was established in 2000 by Fraser Young and Matt Emmins who saw an opportunity to use their knowledge of the telecoms industry to buy and sell telephone hardware to businesses and trade companies. "With huge advertising campaigns at the time promoting new technologies it was initially thought that the business had a finite life span," added Donovan. "However, time and hard work has shown that there is, and will continue to be, a market for new and second user telephone hardware."

The company has a headcount of 20, annual turnover of circa £2.5 million,



James Donovan

and serves international businesses and telecoms trade companies as a full service telecoms business providing telephone systems, accessories, parts and replacement phones, all service requirements, maintenance and support.

Strong foundations

"We have increased the range of telephone manufacturers we supply and support, expanded our maintenance services with new engineers and secured better deals for our customers on network services," said Donovan. "We have the foundations of a strong business and are working on increasing our profile and reputation within the industry and among our potential customers."

In other developments, MF Communications launched Office Phone Shop, an online portal for UK businesses to purchase telephone hardware and accessories, a move

that displays the company's agility as a fast responder to industry requirements. "Like many markets, telecoms is fluid, so we have to be too," stated Donovan. "Furthermore, the market is moving towards being software licensing based, so resellers will need to be manufacturer approved. This means they will either have to align themselves to specific manufacturers or be more consultative in looking for customer solutions."

As for MF Communications, key considerations right now include Brexit and keeping a keen eye on how this affects the free market throughout Europe and opens up opportunities in emerging markets. "The pound rate is also important to us, as is new telecoms technology, acquisitions within the industry, discontinuation of phone models by manufacturers and new market players," noted Donovan.

He knows that all of these areas, and more, require his full attention, and will draw on his skill sets and experiences. "After 15 years of working in business information, followed by two years of sales and marketing training and strategy, I turned to the telecommunications industry," he explained. "While it seems like a big change to move into telecoms, my strengths lie in business strategy and planning as well as sales and marketing, so I did my research before jumping in. My background is helping MF Communications to continue to grow at excellent rates." ■

Just a minute with James Donovan...

Role model: My Father. He always did the right thing and taught me one of the most valuable lessons in life – whatever your decision is, make sure it's a fair one

What talent do you wish you had? A better golf swing

Your strengths and what could you work on? My strong points are fairness, loyalty, dependability and emotional intelligence; but I could work on prioritising and not putting things off

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I like to DJ and do it now more than ever

What do you fear the most? A loss of humanity

One example of something you have overcome: London to Paris cycle ride

What are your primary business challenges: Finding good staff fast to keep up with our growth, and sourcing a good company to buy to expand our reach and customer base



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Future's bright for buoyant 3CX

Communication software company 3CX has made quite an impact on the unified communications landscape this year and the company's growth is continuing at a pace, so what ambitions does CEO Nick Galea have for the business in 2017?

One thing is for certain, Galea and his 3CX team will continue to be one of the telecoms industry's key disrupters in the months ahead, as he explained.

"We had a good year in 2016. We achieved all our growth plans with 3CX. That goes for all our product targets too. One of the most important innovations in 2016, is the option of using the 3CX easily both on-premise and in the Cloud. We also launched a multi-platform for both Windows and Linux. We're still working with the Release Candidate version, but we'll be going officially live in December or January. The great thing is that you can now run 3CX on small appliances, on a server (virtual or otherwise) or through a cloud server, such as Amazon.

"That way, companies can run in the Cloud in an easy and affordable way. You don't necessarily have to engage with a cloud company. The disadvantage of that sort of company is that you often lose the control of your data. And if you add it up, monthly, you'll notice that it's quite expensive."

"With 3CX, you can work as much as you want in the Cloud. This is really convenient if you have a lot of people working for you remotely, and you don't want large servers in your company. In addition, you stay in control on Windows or Linux. This is possible with Version 15 of 3CX. First reactions from buyers are very positive."

Web Meeting

Another well-received innovation this year is the 3CX integrated conferencing system, based on open standards. It's called Web Meeting and it's been a huge success with usage increased dramatically, by no less than 500%, in the last 12 months.

"Almost everyone has started using it, within our platform," said Galea "Telephony is obviously always extremely important to 3CX, but besides that, video and web conferencing integrated into the system are playing an increasingly large



“ With 3CX, you can work as much as you want in the Cloud. This is really convenient if you have a lot of people working for you remotely, and you don't want large servers in your company. ”

Nick Galea

You used to need a different system for web meetings, sometimes even separate hardware, and you had to pay a monthly sum for it. Even then, there were still some employees who couldn't use it. With Version 15, everything is fully integrated and everyone in the company can use it. Every 3CX user can start video-conferencing with no extra costs or separate account and, very importantly, the person at the other end of the video conference doesn't have to install any client software."

Galea believes growth in videoconferencing will continue in 2017 within joined up communications environments. "I think that our customers are going to make much more use of VC and there will be more and more companies who want to have it integrated into their Unified Communications platform. It means every 3CX user can start video-conferencing with no extra costs or separate account. That's something we can offer, so they know where to come to. This form of PBX is the future."

Strategic partnerships

3CX achieved more than 50% growth in the past year but Galea is confident this is just the beginning.

"We're going to grow even faster in 2017", he said. "We have entered into two large strategic partnerships with companies who together have around another 100,000 companies beneath them. All those companies are changing over to 3CX. Our organic growth was already explosive, but now, thanks to these partnerships, we can double our market share, or even more."

Software IP PBX with complete UC

3CX is a software-based, open standard, IP PBX that offers complete Unified Communications features, out of the box. As an affordable software-based solution, 3CX makes installation, management and maintenance a breeze, while at the same time offering resellers and their customers a number of benefits as follows:

- Easy to install and manage
- Cheaper telco bills by using SIP trunks/VoIP providers
- Enhanced UC productivity with Presence/Chat
- Mobility - work from anywhere with the Android and iOS clients
- Integrated Video Conferencing using WebRTC
- Improved customer service via Click2Call and CRM integration
- Install on premise - virtualized on a server or on a low cost Mini PC
- Deploy in the Cloud on Google Cloud or OVH and stay in control.

Why listening must beco



Adrian Auld

Playing close to the wind of developments in ICT as they happen is not in VSL Director Adrian Auld's business plan, but that's not to say he doesn't get the full measure of new technology to give customers exactly what they want when they want it. By keeping both ears to the ground, he has mastered the art of listening as a strategy.

The task for any good sales person is to listen attentively to their prospects, which can be instructive, helping them to take on the character of a trusted adviser. Much has been made of practicing a consultative approach, and from the basic act of listening the conversation becomes customer led. It's a simple philosophy that has served Auld well.

"The biggest influence on our development has always been the messages coming from

our customers," stated Auld. "We do not always lead the charge on the introduction of new ideas, but if a customer pushes us in a certain direction we will go there. Getting into hosted because it seemed like a good idea was not on the agenda, but coming up with hosted services to satisfy the requests and needs of our customers most definitely was."

VSL's future outlook is predicated on putting basic principles back at the centre of business activity. "VSL

will continue to listen to customers and move in a complementary direction," added Auld. "Currently, this means improving the completeness of our end-to-end provisioning. Once this is in place there will be a platform to sell other applications, perhaps including non-voice solutions."

Growth plan

Auld's part-reactionary response to market dynamics fits with his methodical growth strategy and sensible

planning. "VSL has adopted a conservative approach to expansion," noted Auld. "All growth has been organic, the office premises are owned and there is no debt in the business. However, we have seen a tenfold increase in turnover since our incorporation. Growth has continued at a steady rate and two new staff members were added this year."

VSL has touched over 1,300 customers in its 20 year history and most of them are still on the books. Customer

type varies from owner operator businesses through SME, public (education sector) to large global businesses. The company has also committed to a 'year out scheme', every year taking a business studies student from either the University of Herts or Portsmouth.

Auld himself completed a degree in business studies at what was then Liverpool Poly. The third year entailed a placement with BICC, a global business, working in the fledgling IT department. "I realised that the sales guys coming to see us with the latest and greatest ideas were having more fun and I decided that was the career for me," he said. "In 1985 the best opportunity for a career in IT sales was in the telecoms sector, BT having just lost its monopoly position. So I joined the Norton Telecom graduate scheme. After three years at Norton Telecom followed by one year with Siemens I was ready to have a go myself."

In 1992 Auld began operations from a spare bedroom with just a mobile phone, Amstrad PC and a dot matrix printer. "I started out as a freelance salesman selling voicemail and IVR solutions for existing reseller businesses," he recalled. "There was an opportunity to sell this new technology at a premium and it was being missed by most traditional PBX vendors. The late John Massey at Callback Communications and a then youthful Tony Parish at Genesis were great supporters.

"As the business grew I developed customers of my own and then pushed the button on the next level in

ome a strategy

The biggest influence on our development has always been the messages coming from customers

1996 when VSL incorporated and took on its first engineer. Voicemail and IVR products were joined by Toshiba and Mitel with a particular leaning towards call centre solutions. The business is still owned by me although run more and more by my management team."

Complete solution

The focus on call centres differentiated VSL from traditional PBX vendors. "We were providing a complete solution – PBX, voicemail, IVR and reporting tools," explained Auld. "Adding a calls and lines business was also a significant change. This eventually led to a close relationship with BT Wholesale which has been transformative – the development towards becoming a provider of connectivity grew from here. VSL is now a fully fledged provider of connectivity and hosted applications."

Other developments of significance include an investment in a co-located data centre facility as well as connection to BT Wholesale services to provide Ethernet, ADSL, SIP trunking and BT hosted services. The investment in Mitel MICD enabled VSL to build bespoke

hosted solutions including the provision of private cloud for key customers. "Hosted has happened and connectivity is important so we need to make sure that we can manage the whole provision end-to-end," commented Auld. "We now have the capacity to deliver a full MPLS network for our customers and to provide them with resilient applications such as voice, call centre and recording. All of this has resulted in a swing to the provision of subscription-based services, although we still sell our fair share of CPE."

VSL offers a full suite of voice applications either as local CPE or hosted. "With the benefits of Mitel's offering we can show our customers a clear migration path from bespoke tin through ISS, virtual provision to full hosted," added Auld. "We can provide basic Internet access (resilient across six ISPs) protected by the latest Cisco technology right through to the most sophisticated multi-media call centre. We have solutions that scale from two users to thousands and offer a support service to back this up. We are particularly strong in the financial sector and have traditionally done well with schools.

"We see an opportunity to add value to our hosted and CPE offerings by taking up a more pro-active role in the provision of the LAN infrastructure. We are looking at options here, again driven by feedback from our customers. Our customers are by far our most valuable and vital asset and they provide most of our marketing resource. Nothing sells better than word of mouth." ■

Just a minute with Adrian Auld...

Role models: My two first managers: Frank Dinn at BICC and Martin Cawood at Norton Telecom – they were both ready and willing to give young people a chance

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I could spend all day reading history, but limit myself to holidays only

What talent do you wish you had? To be good at tennis

Give one example of something you have overcome: The business started just after a recession and has come through two more

How would you like to be remembered? As somebody who was willing to extend the same opportunity to young people that I was lucky enough to enjoy

Current pain point: The cost of training, in terms of time more than money. This applies to all staff members

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? Perhaps teaching

What possession could you not live without? The keys to a car

In hindsight: I would have focused more on mobile. Mobility will represent a growing opportunity going forward and we are looking at strengthening our approach

Describe the VSL company culture: Open, customer focused and friendly

Your greatest strengths and what could you improve on? I have always been ready to listen and take on board advice, but I could always do better at selecting which to follow

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Gavin Henry: A man desti

SureVoIP's Managing Director Gavin Henry is over the moon about last year's ITSPA award win for Best Business ITSP (medium enterprise), an accolade that was achieved just three years after pressing the ISP button. In many ways, this industry recognition was determined long before Henry even established the company.

Henry's teenage ambition was to become a pilot – his training funded by a spell working on the tills of a large supermarket. Although he rang up the cash for flying school in Florida, USA, it turned out to be a case of the school 'ripping off' UK learners, so he flew home and was accepted for a degree course. "My path to where I am today is just how it was meant to be and I wouldn't change anything," stated Henry.

A stint at the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen studying for a degree in Electronic and Communications Engineering introduced him to Linux, programming and open source software, and before the course had finished Henry secured his first job as a graduate engineer. "But I became disillusioned and kept going back to Linux on my desktop, realising that other businesses could benefit from it," he explained. "In 2003, a year after starting the job, I asked

my boss if I could establish Suretec Systems with two other directors, whom I bought out at a later date. The plan was to sell Linux IT support and consultancy."

It soon became clear that the business of consultancy was a 'long slog'. "There were great day rates with excellent big clients using open source software, but no service revenue," added Henry.

"After getting into Asterisk and VoIP in 2006 I looked at my options for a service type business and focused on VoIP on-site systems for three years. In 2009, when SureVoIP was founded, we applied to Ofcom for number allocations and signed up to BT Wholesale's IPEX service."

In 2014 the company moved from renting equipment to becoming a fully fledged network operator supplying its own VoIP optimised Internet connectivity – first in London, then Edinburgh as well as being on every public peering exchange in the UK. SureVoIP also started work on SS7 interconnects in 2015, set to go live in Q2



Gavin Henry

2017. "This, and the addition of WLR3 in 2016, allows us to move up the supply chain to offer the highest quality and pricing for customers and partners as well as long-term company stability and offerings," said Henry.

His target markets are medium enterprises ranging from oil and gas, travel and hotels, care homes and technology companies. "We plan to move into Europe within three years and have a strong focus on encryption, data analytics, machine learning and innovative comms," added Henry.

The company generally grows at least 50 per cent each

year but 2015 saw 63 per cent growth, while 2016 is looking steady due to changes in the oil and gas market. "We're getting close to the milestone of £1 million turnover which I can't believe for a small self-funded company of six people," stated Henry. "All of our guys live and breathe VoIP. We still have a long way to go, and the next three years are going to be amazing."

Wise moves

SureVoIP has grown organically and Henry's never borrowed money, but he has re-invested wisely. "I'd be classed as a slow burner to date as all of our progress and decisions have been

expensive and involved big changes," he said. "Now we are established but not complacent. We have a platform and infrastructure that allows us to move fast when we want to test something or ask customers via beta programmes. As well as organic growth, we are considering the possibility of acquiring right fit companies in our sector."

According to Henry, SureVoIP currently lists the 'ingredients' of VoIP on its website but the focus has swung sharply onto improving the sale of 'recipes' to partners and customers. "We are launching a new portal to front our API," noted Henry.

ined to succeed

"This is going to help us get to the next level in terms of customer self-service, bring innovation to the customer quickly, and simplify the management of pricing plans and data analytics. We are also engaging with software consultancies to give us more flexible billing solutions and various other offerings that will be presented via our new portal. These will address the new ways in which we wish to sell to help customers' budgets and offer greater choice.

"We have almost seven years of data for some customers and when we apply machine learning to this information it will reveal lots of useful intelligence for clients. This is the real opportunity in the telecoms sector right now that no one else is offering easily at our level. We want to be at the forefront of giving customers the insights and data they need to do business in the most informed way possible."

He believes that analytics and standards-based communications are key trends, most notably WebRTC and the IoT. "There are big changes happening with everything trying to find its place – the same is true in the virtual mobile world," commented Henry. "We've been tempted by that in the past but no one has really solved the number porting issues."

Henry also plans to strengthen SureVoIP's partner channel operation and potentially establish a wholesale division. "Our new partner portal will take us there," he said. "In fact, our new portal will drive so much. I'm also exploring a suite of native mobile apps

to give customers their data instantly. There's a lot of cool and valuable things that can be done that the bigger guys simply are not doing."

Rewinding the clock, Henry's early career achievements are more remarkable considering tough challenges in his personal life. "My son Ben was born at 28 weeks and weighed less than 2lb 13oz," explained Henry. "He was in neonatal care for 10 weeks before we got him home. After some time it was explained to us that Ben had Cerebral Palsy due to a brain bleed from a lack of oxygen at some point. He's now 12 and happy, but can't walk or talk. We're lucky because he is a very happy kid."

Perspectives

The death of Henry's father last year at the age of 59 also put things into a wider perspective. "I've had a good think about life as I'm getting close to 40 myself, and looked at how my Dad influenced things," he said. "Personally, becoming a father and overcoming the term 'normal' was a challenge. There's no such thing as normal. Everyone, everything and every business is different."

'Difference' is something that can be found in abundance within SureVoIP's client base. "The mix and locations of our customers are interesting," commented Henry. "We have them all over the world, even an island in the Bahamas. Our customers range from oil companies, TV channels on Sky, care homes, start-ups, wind farms, hotels etc – all business clients. We've built a wonderful platform to enable us to do many things. So, it's time to start showing that to more people.

"Myself and the team cannot believe how far we've come since October 2013 when I pushed the ISP button and now winning the ITPSA award. It makes me go 'wow' and smile. I am a humble guy but it's nice to think about these things sometimes." ■

Just a minute with Gavin Henry...

Role model: My son Ben. He is 12 and has Quadriplegic Cerebral Palsy. He can't walk or talk. His world is so difficult but he just gets on with it and is amazing to be around

What could you not live without? My drive for knowledge to improve what I know and what we do

What do you fear the most? Incompetence and not knowing something when you should

Name three ideal dinner guests: Ray Mears, Sir David Attenborough, and my Dad

How would you like to be remembered? That I made a difference in the world

What couldn't you do without in your job: Belief from my team

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? Possibly a teaching post

What talent do you wish you had? To sing

Top tip for resellers: Know the industry you're in, do your due diligence on suppliers and always sell what you can add value to

How do you relax when not working? I'm into bushcraft and the independence of self-sufficiency. Being in the woods with nothing and producing fire, shelters and identifying food sources is very rewarding

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Harman talks up Annodata

Kyocera's acquisition of Annodata extends the capabilities of both companies in a deal that also ensures the Herts-based managed services provider retains strategic and operational independence, explains Annodata's co-founder Andrew Harman.



Established almost 30 years ago by Andrew and Tim Harman, Annodata has become one of the UK's biggest providers of managed print services with an impressive list of blue chip clients and partnerships with some of the largest vendors in the industry. According to Harman, the time had come to take the business into the next phase of development. "Kyocera's investment and expertise will enable us to continue our growth trajectory," he said. "This will bring new opportunities for

staff for career progression, and for clients who will benefit from being part of a larger organisation."

Annodata's revenues currently stand at over £70 million, up from £57.3 million in July 2014, and the employee headcount currently stands at over 340 which has almost doubled in the last few years. Profitability has also seen healthy increases, up by over 91 per cent during the past four years due in part to Annodata's focus on high value managed services. This increase in profitability

has secured the company 24th position in The Sunday Times BDO Profit Track 100 2016, one of only a handful of IT services companies to have made the grade.

Deal maker

Annodata has worked with Kyocera for a number of years but what tipped the balance in terms of selling was that the acquisition would allow the firm to continue independently while gaining access to the additional resources of Kyocera Corporation. "We had interest from

a number of different organisations ranging from venture capital firms through to trade buyers, but it was vitally important to us that we chose a company that continued and upheld Annodata's legacy," explained Harman. "With Kyocera's investment we believe that we are well positioned to capitalise on market trends and grow our business further."

Annodata will operate as a separate business entity to Kyocera Document Solutions UK, with its own independent

strategy and management team. "Our independence is important to us, and also to Kyocera, so that won't change," confirmed Harman. "Annodata's management team has a wealth of experience dealing directly with customers in almost every vertical, both here in the UK and also on a global basis. Remember, although our organisation is solely UK-based, we support and deliver services across Europe, EMEA and ASIA. That comes as a huge benefit to Kyocera and supports its proposition well."

ata acquisition

The acquisition has been well received by staff, although it did come as a surprise to some, noted Harman. "Nonetheless, it comes as a good piece of news as it puts us in a stronger position against our competitors and allows us to drive investment in further training and developing our staff," he added. "There are absolutely no plans to reduce the number of Annodata employees as a part of this transaction and we're currently recruiting in excess of 18 new members of staff. Our customers and our people will be the top priorities for Annodata post-acquisition. Without them, what do we have?"

Strategic view

There will be no changes to the leadership team, confirmed Harman. Rod Tonna-Barthet will continue as CEO working alongside the wider management team. As well as this, Harman and his brother Tim will also continue to guide and support the management team where required. "I will focus on shaping company strategy, overseeing major investments and continue to work with several of our largest and most strategic customers and partners," noted Harman.

"Annodata has formed strong direct customer relationships over three decades and this experience is something Kyocera will stand to benefit from. We can support regional players with our nationwide coverage, and going forward we will be able to complement the dealer channel to strengthen the Kyocera proposition with our established and national ICT services portfolio."

Kyocera's investment and expertise will enable us to continue our growth trajectory

Cloud is also a big focus for Annodata and a core component of its corporate strategy. "While cloud does increase stickiness with customers, for us, it's more about enabling our customers to consume IT in the ways that they want to," said Harman. "Many IT directors and IT departments as a whole are extremely busy with resources stretched to breaking point. Organisations such as Annodata can help those customers deal with non-core services, offering expert advice and consultation along with access to the latest technology."

In terms of challenges, the IT skills shortage in the UK is a major obstacle for the channel as many specialised IT skills are in short supply, meaning that finding the right staff can be challenging. For resellers in particular, having the relevant technical skills are an important factor in their preparedness to succeed in 2017 and beyond. Although this challenge has not impeded Annodata's growth, it is one that is fully understood by Harman.

"We have been sure to make the right investment in people to enable us to take a consultative approach with our customers," added Harman. "To this end, we

have invested heavily in an accredited Sales Academy to drive awareness and skills among our sales people about cloud, connectivity, UC, mobile, infrastructure and support services. We also work alongside our partners to ensure that all staff have the correct level of knowledge and expertise."

According to Harman, the greatest growth potential comes from existing customers. "A major part of our success lies in the fact that we are able to supply one of the broadest range of services in the market, allowing us to establish deeper relationships with customers as they streamline the number of suppliers they work with," he noted. "This means that our customers have a single point of contact for their ICT estates, significantly easing their management of ICT. Post-acquisition, we will continue to focus on meeting the diverse needs of our customers."

Over two years ago Annodata acquired a well established IT services company to help broaden its services portfolio. Now the market is rapidly consolidating around a number of significant players and Harman believes that Annodata will be one of them. "Customers want to work with partners, not just suppliers, who can help them with a wide range of technology requirements and enable them to grow," added Harman. "Annodata has a strong heritage in print, communications and IT – and with Kyocera's long reach, investment and experience, we're in a strong position to expand our footprint in the UK and perhaps further afield." ■

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Comms industry enters aq

Supplier and reseller operations must be brought up to date if the comms industry's cogs are not to jam. But fear not – the rise of highly developed portals will ensure that the channel's wheels remain well greased for today and the times ahead.

The comms industry has in the past been guilty of creating ill-considered user interfaces that are, at best, clunky in terms of the flow of information, user interaction and user experience, believes Aled Treharne, Director of Innovation and Development at Siphon (part of the Nuvias Group). "As an industry, our benchmark should have been higher," he stated. "We're providing communications systems, so communicating with customers should come easily to us. The onus is on us to deliver new ways of communicating with end users."



Aled Treharne

Putting words into action Siphon has developed Dovetail, a new portal to help customers deploy and manage CPE, which is scheduled to launch in Q1 2017. "We took the decision to build our own system," said Treharne. "The biggest change is a different approach around the data model. Dovetail has been designed to have a multi-tier channel model at its core and we've made it flexible enough to fit any business model. Couple that with the white label functionality, which allows our channel partners to present a branded interface of their choosing, and Dovetail represents a significant shift for us in the distribution market."

There are two key factors motivating Siphon's focus

on software development – commercial drivers and customer feedback. "Style preferences change over time without delivering incremental value, so we've focused the development effort on the delivery of tangible value changes for end users as well as for our channel partners," added Treharne. "The biggest challenge is to ensure that we allow our customers to stay ahead in a rapidly changing industry."

Dovetail provides a pre-deployment network assessment tool to verify the inherent capabilities of the network as well as a simplified interface to configure and manage the handsets through their whole life. Dovetail also

offers a consolidated view of the quality of service experienced by customers as well as diagnostic information required by support engineers so that channel partners can be notified proactively when they need to take action.

Personal touch

"Self-service and automation form part of an overall channel offering that builds a trusted partnership," said Treharne. "As many partners segment their market focus to serve specific business verticals, the personal touch is a key part of that delivery. We've been working with a number of partners to deliver attributes of human interaction to their portals through the integration of technologies like WebRTC. This work recognises that

not all users understand the language that's used in the industry to describe the technologies available – nor should they need to. With the rise of Amazon Echo and Google Home, it's feasible that an enterprising B2C communications provider will deliver seamless integration between those physical interfaces and their control systems."

There's a drive to improve efficiency by integrating portals and back office systems. From Siphon's own experience, around 70 per cent of orders are placed over an API that provides direct feedback to customers as well as minimising the potential for human error and the time taken to process an order. In the absence of

this kind of efficient process, the ability for Siphon to scale its business would have been restricted.

Despite big advances in portal development there is often a misconception about the extent of automation they offer resellers, believes Dave Dadds, CEO, VanillaIP. "Our concept with Uboss is that it goes beyond bundling services and reseller branded billing," he said. "It is the central platform for managing all elements of the reseller's business and back office, including adding their own non VanillaIP services."

Single bundle solutions are not cutting it any more, believes Dadds. "Resellers need to be able to put together their own mix of services, tariffs and 100 per cent white label all customer touch points," he added. "We have to continually develop Uboss to give resellers the differentiation they need as well as additional revenue streams. For example, the SMS integration we have built into the BroadSoft call centre solution. Another key focus area is reporting and analytics, not just for customers but also for resellers."

The Internet has changed everything, not least buyer behaviour. And considering the way customers purchase and consume service now, portals like Uboss are not

ge of the portal

just a way of accessing the service they actually become a part of the product. "Customers can take service from our resellers 24/7 and they only see the packages and tariffs that the reseller is using," said Dadds.

VanillaIP has just moved into a brand new 10,000 sq ft office in India to support its 80-plus plus Uboss software development team and the growth it sees within this unit. "Interestingly, we only need four BroadSoft engineers, which is what many people in the channel know us for," said Dadds. "This reflects the reality of our business as a software development firm. I don't think any of us are in 'telecoms' anymore. The days of buying a closed PBX that did everything the customer wants are over and customers and resellers are embracing multi-vendor solutions.

"The key question for the channel is how can you bring all this together and present it as a single solution for the customer where they can access everything in one place. Uboss unifies everything for the customer and reseller. If the customer has to log into different portals to get billing, call recordings, call centre reports, add users etc, that's just a mess. Customer service is absolutely key for us all in reducing churn but if you are running around hand cranking different services you will struggle."

Uboss includes a fully featured ticketing system provided free of charge for reseller partners that use VanillaIP's billing. And a Feature Request button offers a traffic light system where requests are

Business value can take many forms but automation is going to be the difference maker

accepted, prioritised and scheduled, so the partner can see the status of all their open feature requests. "Typically, we release 20 new features in Uboss each month," added Dadds. "Approximately 50 per cent of the product development in Uboss is driven by partner feature requests. Innovation and enhancement is vital to our partners and their customers' tools. So we've gone a long way beyond provisioning and billing but have a lot further to go yet."

Differentiation

Virtual1 has always placed 1Portal at the centre of its business, with committed budget and previous spend now in excess of £2 million. "We know that making things easy for our partners is a huge part of our differentiation in the market," stated Neil Wilson, Product and Marketing Manager. "So we built 1Portal to combine quoting, ordering and service management as well as to share sales enablement collateral and operational guides.

"This helps to drive more collaboration with our partners, helping them to keep overheads down while driving revenue opportunities up. The success of 1Portal is

clearly shown in the usage data, with over 90 per cent of partners transacting through 1Portal and an average of 5,000 quotes being produced every month. Over 60 per cent of our orders are fully automated from quote to go live. This means we can run leaner than many legacy networks while delivering a higher level of service, driving down our costs and ultimately those of our partners."

Business value can take many forms, but automation is going to be the difference maker in today's marketplace, believes Wilson. "Partners need to provide differentiation through service and customer satisfaction, as well as reduced costs and quicker time to revenue," he added. "Automation is how they can realise this, as well as other benefits such as improved end customer satisfaction through faster, right first time delivery. The more successful the project, the happier the customer and the greater the scope for upsell opportunities."

Wilson believes that the future for portals lies in an accompanying suite of APIs. "Portals have been fantastic at moving the industry forward and streamlining the relationship between wholesaler and channel," he commented. "The next generation of resellers are pushing that relationship further and want to integrate their own systems directly and deliver a native experience that connects with their supply chain automatically. To that end we have already delivered the first of a suite of APIs to allow our channel partners to integrate directly with us for quote generation."

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Leasing for all reasons

As long as resellers consider leasing as a last resort missed opportunities will be endemic in the channel, according to Julie Henehan, Sales Director at PEAC (Pan European Asset Company).

Among the lasting lessons that can be drawn from our discussion with Henehan is that old concepts of leasing in the comms and IT sector require fresh ways of thinking or resellers could find themselves at a competitive disadvantage. She says the best course of action for resellers is to reconsider traditional attitudes towards finance and redress the imbalance between the comms sector and other industries where the benefits of leasing are reaped with enthusiasm. That said, comms and IT resellers, so often off the finance message, are starting to get the leasing lowdown and act on the good advice of experts such as PEAC (which is engaged with almost 150 UK IT and comms resellers and manages the Avaya Financial Services programme).

"The IT and telecoms channel has traditionally delivered low leasing penetration," said Henehan. "Most times, leasing was only used when requested by the customer. Today, more partners understand the importance of offering finance to customers who need equipment to enhance their business performance. This is an ongoing process of education and raising awareness. But there's a

long way to go before we see the penetration levels achieved in other markets."

The outcome of current trends in ICT procurement are likely to be driven by the evolving preferences of end user buyers and a growing number of resellers who readily build leasing into their modern day propositions. "There is a move away from traditional equipment sales with hardware becoming just a part of an overall solution rather than making up 70-plus per cent of the sale," added Henehan. "The structured payment terms of a subscription can easily be matched to a lease rental which is ideal following the rise of 'as-a-service' solutions in the market. This has driven greater adoption and created the need to develop funding models for intangibles such as whole software and hosted solutions, moving from a straight cash loan to a more sophisticated leasing approach that matches the subscription payments to the lease rentals."

As intangible solutions become a dominant feature in resellers' product portfolios the emphasis will move further away from traditional selling and installation towards a consultative approach, providing value added services on top of



Julie Henehan

the diminishing levels of hardware relative to the overall customer project. "Leasing plays an important part in this consultancy process, driving a different and valuable dialogue around the customer's short, medium and long-term plans and financial budgets, as well as the anticipated impact of planned investments," noted Henehan. "This enables resellers to offer alternative and competitive payment solutions that are aligned with the customer's acquisition strategy, positioning the reseller as a trusted advisor and differentiating their offering."

Market drivers

Henehan cited figures from the Finance and Leasing Association that suggest the UK ICT leasing market was worth £2.3 billion in 2015. With numbers such as this, it is a wonder that leasing has not gone viral in the ICT sector. Low interest rates and an uncertain economy have helped to stimulate

this growth, putting a brighter spotlight on the traditional benefits of leasing as an alternative source of funding, with the ability to fix repayments for the term of the lease becoming a more influential factor in rising adoption rates.

The leasing industry has also witnessed the retrenchment of some big global players, leaving independent finance companies such as PEAC to fill the vacuum. Although a new name in the leasing market PEAC brings strong experience in the IT and telecoms space and has worked with many of its partners for over 10 years. "Our organisational structure means that we are agile and quickly adapt to changing market conditions," commented Henehan. "As technology evolves we are constantly reviewing the assets that we fund, with the term 'asset' becoming less and less relevant to the IT and comms market with the move into the cloud and IoT."

PEAC acts as a finance partner to its reseller community, helping them and their customers to finance as much of the project as possible, thereby simplifying the acquisition process. "It is important for partners to combine as much of the hardware and project costs into the lease as possible, to include software, up-front training, consultancy and cabling as well as the hardware element," advised Henehan.

"Operating in the financial services market is not, as a rule, a core area of expertise among resellers, so we have developed operational guidance which details key areas of compliance in simple terms. Our partners also get instant online credit decisions, same day payments, electronic documentation and e-sign, supported by a team that understands the market."

Henehan believes that resellers who act against the wider demand for leasing risk putting themselves at a disadvantage that could jeopardise their progress. To any reseller, leasing is a gift. It is cash in the bank today rather than postponed payments tomorrow. "Leasing allows resellers to be paid up front for the total solution, and PEAC funds them the same day," said Henehan. "We urge resellers to fully embrace the benefits of leasing and encourage them to highlight financing options early in the sales cycle in all of their proposals. Leasing doesn't just mean a structured payment plan. Our most successful relationships are built on the foundation of understanding the lease cycle and making the most of upgrade opportunities." ■



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It's time to recognise your

Acknowledging the success of the hardworking teams in your channel business should never be underestimated and the opportunity to give them the recognition they deserve has come round again.

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We are delighted to announce that the Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards 2017 is open for entries!

Now in its sixth year, the Awards will once again give ICT Channel businesses a unique opportunity to acknowledge the skill, determination and success of their sales and marketing stars.

Specifically aimed at teams rather than individuals, the Comms Dealer Sales and Marketing awards will once again be fully supported by KCOM, who take up their position as headline sponsor for the fourth year running to the delight of Director, Pete Tomlinson.

"This event has become an anchor moment in all our marketing calendars, not only because it gives us the opportunity to say thank you to all the sales and marketing teams that we rely on every day to achieve our growth and deliver our ambition, but also because on finals day we get to see and shake hands with the many channel partners that we all work with collaboratively day in day out.

"The channel continues to be a remarkable place. It's rare in business that we can sit alongside our competitors and champion their success;



KCOM director Pete Tomlinson

but in the channel, that's exactly what we do. Every day we learn from each other, we compare services, we use training resources, we repurpose marketing ideas; by sharing our experiences and

learnings we can all achieve a better outcome for our customers and that's what makes the channel great."

This year Tomlinson has welcomed the inclusion of

four new categories namely:

- Best Partner/ Customer Event
- Best Partner/ Customer Portal
- Best Company to Work For
- Best Apprenticeship Scheme

"Each of these celebrates the efforts that we all put into turning both our customers and colleagues into fans," he said.

"Those partner events we all love attending, with maybe a few too many glasses of fizz, are the work of dedicated marketing teams who want to add value to your businesses; the portals don't update themselves but are a rich and valuable source of content to help us sell and market our products. And we should never forget how important it is to develop and retain our talent by providing a fun and rewarding work environment. "Wouldn't it be great this year if we found those stories where we took a risk, moved out of our comfort zones to try something new and it paid off? Maybe recognition for the traditional comms reseller who's successfully moved into Cloud services; or for the brand that has changed their competitive focus, maybe from price to experience; whatever we celebrate we want to make sure it's something we value and champion across our communities and something that we can collectively take pride and inspiration from.

"We continue on our mission to make technology easy to take advantage of and enjoyable to use. For us, our place in the market is clear - simple, reliable solutions and a great customer experience - and we try not to get distracted from that path. We encourage everyone to do the same, find what you're good at and make it great and then ensure that it's embedded in everything you do for your colleagues, your customers and your partners.

"We all know first-hand that our sales and marketing teams don't stop working at the moment of sale. They continue to deliver huge value throughout the relationship with account management, training, guidance, bid support and end customer on-boarding. This hand-in-hand relationship is what keeps the channel growing, adding increasing value for both us and our customers. "So I urge you all to find the time to enter, to dig under the surface of your business to find the nuggets of greatness that we all have to celebrate. Writing award entries can be time consuming but the moment when you are regaled as the winner is the greatest buzz in the world. Only by putting pen to paper will you make sure your teams get the recognition they deserve for helping you all achieve a great 2017."

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**Andy Grant, Bowan Arrow
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"Bowan Arrow are proud to support the 2017 Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards, for a second year as Hospitality Sponsor. These awards are one of the key events in our industry's

calendar as they celebrate success, team work and creativity within our sales and marketing teams. "This truly is a motivational industry event and the accolades don't just stop at winning the awards as the benefits for the finalists are felt across the entire year. The winners, who are the industry's best, celebrate their success with their colleagues and team mates which creates strong team bonds. Plus, the sales and marketing programmes featured always push the boundaries and explore new ways to meet customers and partner's needs. "We would like to wish the very best of luck to everyone who enters and is shortlisted for the 2017 Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards."



**Justin Blaine, NTA Ltd
Sponsor of the Distribution
Channel Account Team of the Year**

"NTA is pleased to have chosen to sponsor an award at the 2017 Comms Dealer Sales and Marketing Awards for the first time. 2017 heralds a new era in the growth and development of NTA and we see sponsoring an award as another step up for the company. "We are set to launch a number of exciting and innovative new products this year having already broadened out our offering to include an additional new "per seat" model for resellers. The Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards event gives us a valuable platform to spotlight the company's extended portfolio and to align our brand with this established and credible awards ceremony. "Rewarding excellence in the hardworking channel sales and marketing community is something close to our hearts and we would like to wish all those who enter for an award, the very best of luck."

WINNERS 2016



"The CDS&M Awards is a great opportunity to celebrate fantastic success and recognise the channel's sales and marketing team. For Entanet, winning both the Channel Marketing Team of the Year and Channel Account Team of the Year this year was the icing on the cake. It was an amazing day!"

**Darren Farnden, Entanet,
Best Vendor Sales Team
and Best Vendor Marketing
Team 2016**



"The awards help build a sense of pride. These awards remind us to stop and pat ourselves on the back. Our win did stir local PR and increase web traffic. I was stopped by people in shops, even by my son's headmaster, congratulating us on our success. Awards work!"

**Shahram Bagherzadeh,
Best Small Reseller
Sales Team 2016**

THIS YEAR'S CATEGORIES ...

Reseller Categories

- Reseller Sales Team of the Year (businesses up to £2.5m turnover)
- Reseller Sales Team of the Year (businesses £2.5m- £7.5m turnover)
- Reseller Sales Team of the Year (businesses over £7.5m turnover)
- Best Marketing Campaign

Distributor Category

- Channel Account Team of the Year
- Channel Marketing Team of the Year
- Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year

Vendor Category

- Channel Account Team of the Year
- Channel Marketing Team of the Year
- Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year

Service Provider Category

- Channel Account Team of the Year
- Channel Marketing Team of the Year
- Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year

Special Awards

- Best Channel Marketing/PR agency
- Best Partner/Customer Event
- Best Partner/Customer Portal
- Best Company to Work For
- Best Apprenticeship Scheme



The outlook: cloudier and



At this time of the year the web is usually awash with economic and business predictions for the year ahead, but this year it's been eerily quiet. It's probably because with so much economic uncertainty people just don't know what awaits us or are fearful of sticking their necks out in case they get it all wrong.

In 2016 the pollsters predicted the UK would vote to stay in Europe, but we didn't and Brexit, soft or hard, awaits. Most predicted that Hilary Clinton would win the US presidency, but she was 'Trumped' ... by a businessman. And nobody expected Leicester City to win the premier league title, but they did - against odds of 5000-1!

It was a crazy year when so many 'expected' outcomes just didn't

happen. For example, after the Brexit vote economic analysts predicted the UK would plunge into recession, but that hasn't occurred (yet) and in a dramatic U-turn the Bank of England has doubled its economic growth forecast for 2017 and scrapped its planned interest rate cut.

So where does that leave the good ship Channel Enterprise? Should we prepare for stormier waters, drop anchor and wait to see what the fates bring us, or surge ahead regardless?

Based on our straw poll of industry commentators it would appear that the channel outlook remains bullish and its hardly surprising. With demand for cloud based communications increasing in line with the promise of better broadband connectivity, 5G gaining traction and IOT opportunities increasing, there is every reason to remain upbeat. Security and the growth in software are threats but also present massive opportunities for clever ITC solution providers who can use the education of customers as an intelligent selling mechanism.

Whatever the next year brings people will always want to communicate better, so the message is simple: Choose good partners who can help you address the massive opportunities that are out there. Oh and never make predictions, especially about the future. Happy New Year!



JOHN CARTER
DMSL

“ We're expecting to see massive growth in 2017. Hosted voice sales have mushroomed this year, but we have only just got started. Penetration of the market is less than 10 percent, so we are still in the early stages – the growth could be phenomenal over the next year. We also expect to see ultra-fast growth in ultra-fast broadband, so there is plenty of sales potential for 2017. We have partners who are investing strongly in the channel, and who are positive and hungry for new business and we're ready to talk to any reseller looking to grow. Barring any major economic upheaval, what's happening in the world of politics is neither here nor there. We are just getting on with the job. ”



RICHARD CARTER
NIMANS

“ Whilst Brexit and, to a slightly lesser degree, Donald Trump continue to cause market uncertainty, for the channel there's no need to panic. Price rises are never ideal and make all our jobs harder but 2017 will generally be a good year for the majority of us. End points and WLAN will see further growth. As the 'logistics engine of the industry' we've invested heavily to provide a complete 'cradle to grave' IP end point support programme so that dealers are in the best position to take advantage. The channel is in a good place to move further forward. ”



PHILLIP REYNOLDS
OAK INNOVATION

“ 2017 will be a year of change for Oak Innovation as we begin to deliver our new hosted and cloud solutions both here and in North America, but also a year of consolidation for our existing CPE products. Brexit and Trump are creating a time of uncertainty which I don't believe is helping in what is an already dramatically changing telecoms market. In fact, the way that the world communicates is changing dramatically so much so that I think 'telecommunications' may become simply 'communications' in the not too distant future. ”



MARK SAUNDERS
NINE WHOLESALE

“ Nine is looking forward to a tremendously happy new year in 2017. With new product launches aplenty and many new resellers to meet and work with, the atmosphere amongst the expanding team here is ebullient and bullish. By providing an unmatched breadth of insight and support, we allow resellers to focus on growth, not gremlins. With every SME they talk to having an increasing desire for cloud services high on their list of January resolutions, the connection and communications opportunities for our resellers are truly beguiling, whatever surprises the UK and global economy may deliver. ”

OK, let's grow

We're all in this world to grow. Here at Total we've been preparing for a better tomorrow, taking a new perspective on growth. We've got a new identity and a fresh spring in our step.

and less stormy (possibly!)



NEIL WILSON
VIRTUAL 1

“ UK businesses will need to invest to make the most of opportunities both at home and abroad, and so the channel must be ready to provide a platform for that innovation. Every year analysts and leaders alike predict that this will be ‘the year’ of IoT, Cloud, digital transformation, driverless cars and other trends. Whilst there is an air of inevitability about, 2017 might just be it for one or more of those trends. One thing is absolutely certain, high capacity and quality connectivity is essential to all. With the CAGR of bandwidth already at 22%, UK businesses are outgrowing their existing infrastructure, and fast. That is why we have been planning ahead, productising 10Gb connectivity and updating our core network to 40Gb. ”



PETE TOMLINSON
KCOM

“ I have a feeling 2017 is going to be a very exciting year for us. From a business perspective we’re relaxed about Brexit and the Trump factor, as neither change the fundamental drivers of our growth ambitions or our ability to execute on them together with our channel partners. The big trends of convergence and consumerisation are still happening and so our goal of making technology easy and enjoyable is still hugely important. We fully expect our connectivity and cloud hosting platforms to play a big part in next year’s plans, as the adoption of new SDN and NFV capabilities will underpin big leaps forward in delivering on this goal. ”



STEVE WARBURTON
ZEN INTERNET

“ I expect Zen to grow again in 2017. We continue to see strong demand from our partners to buy more services from one supplier, and we continue to invest heavily in upgrading our network. We have seen minimal impact from Brexit so far. The weaker pound has meant the cost of some networking equipment and cloud services has increased, but our customers and partners are continuing to grow and invest in IT. The biggest opportunity is fibre broadband. BT will commence rollout of G.Fast and Business FTTP, giving more businesses access to higher bandwidth. Many will use this change of technology to question if they have the best supplier, so it’s a great opportunity for our partners and for Zen. ”



PAUL HARRISON
THE VOICE FACTORY

“ Our business will continue to grow in 2017. We took a decision three years ago to build in business robustness within the changing world with a key focus on international providing a safeguard to our growth and brand. Post the Brexit vote the weakness of the pound to the US dollar means some of our costs have increased and we must now work in advance of 12 – 18 months in our purchase planning to protect customers from these increases. Overall the opportunity for TVF has not changed, with the need for businesses to collaborate using unified communications across any device anywhere. We are now live in the US and we are optimistic it will continue to be ‘business as exciting as usual’. ”



ROB DERBYSHIRE
MARSTONS

“ I expect Marston’s Telecoms to expand in 2017, realising our investments made in 2016. I don’t think that Brexit or Trump will make a material difference to our business, other than on the Dollar/ Sterling rate which will affect the cost of capital equipment. We see SD-WAN as being a big opportunity this year, and we’ll be investing time and money in this. We’ll also keep a watching brief on futures around 5G, and also the impact of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016, which has the potential to introduce significant complexity and compliance issues into our business. ”



MARK WHITEHEAD
GCI

“ Regarding Trump and Brexit, these are things we have to deal with and move on. Opinions and emotions regarding both are running hot, but the common denominator is that change brings opportunity. Our experience this year as headline sponsor at ‘Microsoft Future Decoded’ was an eye opener. The ‘tyre kicking and pondering’ of recent years for all things UC and Cloud has ratcheted up to ‘doing and delivering’. We have attended panel debates where less than 8% of resellers were actively engaged selling Skype4Business. Elements, not all, of the traditional voice channel are sleepwalking into 2017 and that concerns us a lot. Regarding the technology winners in 2017 we think there will be a Big Four: UC, Cloud, Compliance and Security Services. ”

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How to implement ISO

While ISO27001 certification is widely considered to be the benchmark for standards in data security, it can be an uphill struggle for many organisations to achieve. Enter Union Street's José Fernandez, who joined the company 13 months ago with a remit to implement ISO27001. Having established a well thought out formula for success Fernandez recorded a triumph when the company was certified in October. Gaining ISO27001 certification demonstrates a company's commitment to information security and confirms that it has established robust processes for data protection. In many cases, having the certification can be a prerequisite for trading with enterprise level clients. So here's Fernandez' roadmap to gaining ISO27001 status:

Purpose

Before you can begin implementing ISO27001 the senior stakeholders in your business must believe in its aims and understand the benefits of the project. It requires support from the top. We had a number of objectives. These included improving our data security, ensuring that we are doing everything possible to protect partners' data, making sure all staff work in a secure manner and that our products and services meet the latest security standards. Implementing a sound best-practice framework for ensuring risk and data security is at the forefront of our minds.

Cost

It's important to create a budget. You need to be comfortable with the



José Fernandez

It is one thing to talk-up data security as a priority, it is another to pass the ultimate test and achieve ISO27001 certification. Here, Union Street's COO José Fernandez provides a plan of action for channel companies wanting to implement ISO.

cost of completing the certification. Time spent upfront fleshing out the costs and getting approval from your finance team will make the journey easier. It will also ensure surprises are kept to a minimum. The costs you need to consider are related to training, audit and certification, external consultancy, increased IT spend and penetration testing. IT spend is probably the trickiest to predict but don't be put off by this prospect as most modern organisations will find themselves in a good place already.

Focus

To complete any major project you need focus. It has to be someone's day job to get the project done. We created a new role and appointed an internal Standards and Security

Officer (SSO). The SSO quickly created a detailed project plan with key milestones, set up a project board and a risk committee made up of 'risk owners' from the various parts of the business. Assigning risk owners early was instrumental to the success of the project. It created accountability.

Document framework

Create a document framework that is simple, clear, and most importantly easy to use. No one wants to read a 50 page policy on cryptographic key management when a clear one page document will suffice. We created too much documentation at first but scaled it down to something more user friendly as we got our heads around what was needed. There are plenty of document toolkits out there to get you started.

Educate

You have to start at the beginning. Sounds obvious but if you miss this stage it's difficult to get people to understand where you're going. If the project appears to have no relevance to staff they simply carry on doing what they've always done. We started by running internal workshops to get the message across. We split these into two key areas: Why is data security important and what simple things can we do to improve it?

Empower

By creating a framework for risk identification and improvement, and ensuring everyone in the company knows how to use it, we made sure that everyone had a role to play in ISO27001. This is ongoing and probably the most important element

of what we do today. Ask yourself this question: Can anyone identify a security risk (or any other type of business risk for that matter) and does everyone have a clear way of improving the way they work?

Consistency

Once we had documented our policies, processes and procedures we created department or role specific training based on that material. There is no point in going to the trouble of writing up your business processes if no one uses them. Train people and empower them to improve and refine the processes they use every day – always with data security in mind.

Friend or foe?

Auditors are your friends, so welcome them with open arms and embrace their findings. We approached all of our external audits with this mindset. It will help you to stay relaxed with the process and to appreciate that their suggestions can, and should, be used to improve your business.

Conclusion

We've experienced positive benefits having implemented ISO27001. We now develop our products with security in mind. We think about security throughout the development and testing process, and carry out external tests to make sure customer data can't be compromised. This gives us a competitive edge and provides peace of mind to our partners. Best of all, we now have clear documented working practices with an avenue for continual service improvement, something everyone in the business can contribute towards. ■

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Entanet's apprentices



FOUR apprentices have joined Entanet following a link up between the company and the Telford College of Arts and Technology. Kicking off its first apprenticeship scheme the wholesale comms provider has filled

Technical Support roles. Tim Roberts, HR Manager, said: "We chose TCAT because of its local reputation and flexibility in tailoring the Customer Services and IT Professional Competence courses to our needs. The four candidates have demonstrated great skill in learning what each of their roles entails, and there is potential for each of them to progress into different roles once they've achieved their qualifications."

Chief Executive Elsa Chen commented: "The apprenticeship scheme complements our previously established programme of undergraduate placement and demonstrates our commitment to finding and keeping the best young talent in the local area. We've been located in Telford for the last 20 years and have no plans to change that as we're committed to investing in the local economy."

Pictured (left-right): Oliver Ginger, technical support apprentice; Elsa Chen, CEO; Jak Mason, technical support apprentice; Shannon Thomas, HR assistant; Tim Robert, HR manager; Hannah Jinks, customer services apprentice; and Daniel Saxon, customer services apprentice.

Public sector team boost



Sangeeta Dewan

EXPONENTIAL-E has added two senior consultants to its public sector team. Sangeeta Dewan has been appointed as Senior Public Sector Director

with responsibility for the health sector, having risen through the ranks managing healthcare IT contracts at Atos and RPS Group. Ed Renwick has also been appointed Senior Public Sector Director and will specialise in the education and local government sectors. Before joining Exponential-e he worked on developing cloud, networking and data propositions for Oracle, Virgin Media and 2e2.

David Lozdan, Head of Public Sector, said: "Public sector organisations are facing a challenging future with Brexit fears and spending cuts looming. Many are looking to make savings while boosting efficiency. There is an increasing need for high capacity, agile services that won't break the bank. Our investment in our public sector team will enable us to provide services and counsel to a growing roster of public sector clients."

Also on the move...



Paul Ceaser

SOLAR Communications has on-boarded 30-plus years of comms and IT experience with the appointment of Paul Ceaser as Director of Operations with a remit to head up all aspects of Solar's customer services.

Previous positions include CTO in the Royal Corps of Signals, Director of Voice at GCI, and latterly CTO at 7 Technologies Group. Solar's CEO John Whitty said: "Not only is Paul a proven customer-focused leader, he knows the importance of service and communication in the most mission critical of environments."

CORE has kicked off the new year with a brace of boardroom appointments, instating Eamon McGann as COO and Lloyd Carnie as CTO. McGann has worked at Core for 21 years, leading the Operations and Technical units and the team that



Eamon McGann

delivered the first UK SharePoint project in 2001. Carnie co-founded Parative, an IT infrastructure migration business that was acquired by Core in 2013. As Cloud Services Director he was instrumental in large Microsoft Office 365 deployments and

the development of Core's Aurora platform. "These roles will ensure that Core is able to bring the most appropriate and innovative solutions to meet our customers' needs," said Conor Callanan, CEO.

Gibson gets warm tribute



Paul Gibson

DMSL and Cloud Telephones Sales Director Paul Gibson's decision to retire prompted a glowing tribute from Managing Director John Carter. "I want to thank Paul, personally and professionally, for the tremendous effort and enormous contribution he has made to both DMSL

and Cloud Telephones. He leaves us in great shape and ready to move into the next phase of development. It has been a pleasure to know him and to work with him. We are genuinely sorry to see him go, but wish him a long, fruitful and happy retirement. He has earned it, that's for sure."

Gibson's decision to retire ends a 30-plus year career in the comms and printer market channels. Before joining DMSL he spent 15 years in the print sector working at OKi Printing Solutions, Kyocera Mita and Brother International. "It's been a long and exciting journey over the past 30 years," he said. "At times it has been challenging, but it has also been tremendously rewarding and a lot of fun."

NEWVOICEMEDIA has welcomed Artur Michalczyk to the CTO role with global responsibility for the company's technology strategy, development and operations. He brings over 20 years industry experience, joining from Syniverse where he was Senior Vice President ESG Technology.

Inform Billing's in hiring mode



Inform Billing's new recruits

INFORM Billing has bolstered its reseller support and software development team with the appointment of six new starters. The appointments follow a rise in the number of reseller partners as well as plans to launch new features for the Eclipse billing software in 2017. Shaun Bodsworth, Managing Director, said: "We have increased our headcount by almost 30 per cent to help facilitate our plans for growth. With more than 160 resellers now using our billing software and close to 40 per cent taking up our bureau services, we need to maintain our levels of support. We also invest 40 per cent of revenues into improving our software and have a number of upcoming enhancements on our development roadmap."

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We anticipated more caution from clients in the light of Brexit, but maybe it is too early to gauge what the real impact will be in the future. Our customers, many of whom span multiple countries and currencies, continue to invest and grow, in converged and more traditional solutions.

Our NetCentrix and SystemsHOST acquisition in June 2016 was our 13th acquisition since 2008 and broadened our capabilities in cloud-based technologies, helping cement our position as the leading unified communications provider. Looking ahead we are always



“Our customers, many of whom span multiple countries and currencies, continue to invest and grow, in converged and more traditional solutions.”

Rob Burbidge, CFO, Elitetele.com

dominated by businesses which have reached a crossroads: do they take the risk and invest in new areas (products, services, specialisms) hoping it will succeed; or do they join a larger group where these other areas are already being addressed. Sometimes it's far less strategic – after a lifetime in the sector, it's time to retire and enjoy the value you have created!

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Robin Jest
Workflow Group



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