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... O'Hagan is to spearhead a dedicated
TalkTalk splits out its consumer and
O'Hagan, will raise the channel bar.

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... B2B cloud and
... solutions, support-
... portal and APIs
... businesses to
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... bar for the channel."
... Full story in next month's issue

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3-10

Industry News

Catch up with the latest news

20

Interview

Adept CEO offers productivity booster

22

Profile

MSP has Microsoft to the Core

24

Channel Forecast

Mobile opportunities and the way ahead

32

Comms Vision

Maximising the Golden Triennium

48

Comms People

This month's movers and shakers



O'Hagan aiming to raise the bar

VIRTUAL1 CEO and entrepreneur Tom O'Hagan is to spearhead a dedicated channel division as parent company TalkTalk splits out its consumer and business operations. The move, claims O'Hagan, will raise the channel bar.

SPECIAL REPORT

Virtual1 was acquired by TalkTalk Group in April 2022 and this month became the channel brand.

"We evolved our combined business into two new units to support wholesale partners across consumer and business," stated O'Hagan.

"These two types of customers have different connectivity requirements, therefore to support the growth of partners

operating across these markets we need to provide specific solutions and expertise.

"Investing in a business unit focused on the wholesale B2B market also helps us stay closer to partners and customers."

Former TalkTalk Wholesale Services MD Nick Gunga now leads the consumer division while O'Hagan doubles down on wholesale B2B cloud and connectivity solutions, supported by Virtual1's portal and APIs which enable businesses to

manage their networks with visibility of real-time bandwidth.

"With the combination of our SDN, self-serve portals, APIs and the scale of TalkTalk's 3,000 strong exchange footprint we're able to expand the reach of our solutions and increase our scale as a network provider," commented O'Hagan.

"This combination will deliver a product and service proposition that will raise the bar for the channel."

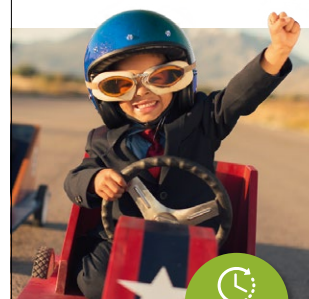
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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

WOW isn't 'Mortimer and Whitehouse: Gone Fishing' thought-provoking these days. The half-hour BBC 'show' becomes less piscatorial by the episode and more concerned with getting older, heart healthy food, whether there's an

after life or not and how close they are to finding out. If the weary and long past it PSTN network had a voice and could hold a rod it'd fit perfectly into the permanent theme of not having much to look forward to.

Where's the optimism? That's what perks you up and puts a glint in your eye, and some colour into your cheeks. Optimism shines a guiding light and will steer us through the current economic uncertainty and cost of living crisis. The power of optimism should become part of strategy and culture. How else can you win? And there is plenty to be optimistic about as we head into the Golden Triennium – the three year period of glittering opportunity to make digital transformation hay in the run up to the PSTN switch off in 2025.

Maximising opportunities in the Golden Triennium is a primary theme at this year's Comms Vision Convention (Gleneagles Hotel, 2-4th November) which will explore how the industry's Big Reset in late 2025 represents more than the PSTN switch off. It's about shaping the channel's destiny and embracing a golden opportunity to drive unprecedented digital transformation, while looking towards a brighter and more resilient future (see pages 32-45).

There is no time to stand on the bank bemoaning the accelerating pace of time and change, you won't catch anything that way. But you will if you take an optimistic line, cast your vision and create a brighter future for your business and employees.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

- Gamma on how Gen Z is driving the UC agenda (p28).
- Catch up with this month's movers and shakers (p48).

NG Bailey IT biz goes big



Kelly Tedesco

BIG plans set out by the IT Services business of NG Bailey target turnover growth of over 42% by 2025.

The strategy follows a strong performance in the year ended February 2022 where the division saw an 8% increase in turnover while operating profit almost doubled over the period.

Kelly Tedesco, MD of IT Services, commented: "We have an ambitious three year vision which includes growing our turnover to £40m.

"The result of the pandemic has been the increased digitalisation of how organisations and their customers live and work across all sectors.

"This market shift continues to create new opportunities as we emerge as a stronger, more resilient business unit."

According to Tedesco, if the 2020s have taught us anything it's the importance of resilience and digital connectivity through the integration of data management and analysis.

"Opportunities ahead of us in areas such as 5G will truly change the way in which people and businesses think about interacting with technology, in the same way that phone lines shifted the dial of mass communication," she added.

"This advancement will also see further demand for cyber security work, as businesses look to protect their data and assets from evolving threats while embracing the power of automation and the IoT."

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Focus seals acquisition of Incom

FOCUS Group's growth campaign continues with the acquisition of Incom-CNS Group, a UC provider with offices in Manchester and south Wales.

The deal also gives Bowmark Capital-backed Focus additional contact centre skills and Mitel expertise following Incom's designation as a Platinum Partner.

Incom's CEO David Hughes and CTO Jason Kilvert will continue to lead the business under its existing brand supported by investment from the parent company.

Focus Group co-founder and Director Ralph Gilbert commented: "In Incom, we've targeted another great business with an excellent team, strong organic growth and a strategic location for the group."

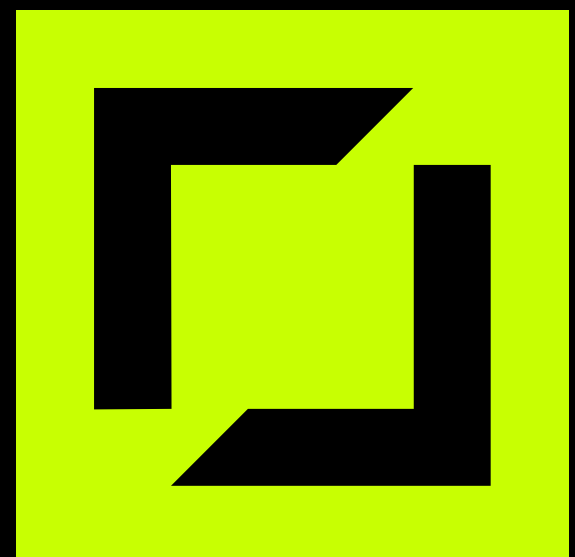
Hughes commented: "Our 33 year history in the comms industry has seen us grow the business both organically and through acquisition.

"During that time we have attracted interest from a number of potential purchasers and repeatedly rebuffed their approaches. However, the opportunity to become part of Focus Group provides the perfect fit for our team."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

FLOTEK is poised to kick off a buy and build campaign having secured substantial backing from Tower Leasing. The IT MSP, which has a particular focus on south Wales, has a pipeline of deals set to complete by the end of the year and is pursuing further opportunities for consolidation. CEO Jay Ball said: "This backing is an endorsement of our business model and management team, and a real boost to the buy and build growth strategy we've set out." Flotek recently completed the acquisition of legal and professional services IT provider Gower Business Systems, expanding its geographical profile and contributing £1.2m in revenue.

MANCHESTER-based BCN Group's acquisition of Microsoft specialist Evo-Soft adds particular expertise in Dynamics 365 Business Central. The deal takes BCN's combined annual revenue to over £50m and follows investment by ECI Partners. BCN Group CEO Rob Davies said: "The existing capabilities around development, Microsoft Modern Workplace, analytics and Azure are heightened by business applications services with Microsoft Dynamics."

Giganet feathers its nest

FULL fibre provider Giganet has extended its reach to nine million homes nationwide with the acquisition of Cuckoo.

Giganet owner Fern Trading also owns Jurassic, Swish, Allpoints Fibre and Vorboss.

Cuckoo will become the lead consumer brand for Giganet's core residential customers, with Giganet itself continuing to be the brand serving its enterprise customer base.

Giganet CEO Jarlath Finnegan commented: "The acquisition marks a meeting of minds at a time when consumers deserve more from a utility as critical as the Internet."

Cuckoo Chief Executive Alexander Fitzgerald commented: "Cuckoo's expertise lies in building customer experiences, while Giganet is expert in building and running networks. Together we will deliver better broadband for millions."

Following a £250m funding injection from Fern Trading, Giganet is now working to connect hundreds of thousands of UK homes and businesses through the deployment of its own full fibre network infrastructure, as well as across CityFibre's and Openreach's nationwide footprints.

Gamma puts in strong H1

STRONG growth in Gamma's indirect business during H1 helped to drive revenue and gross profit which grew by 8% to £234.7m and £120.4m respectively, with gross margin maintained and adjusted EBITDA growing by 13%.

Gamma's first half financial results also show a strong performance in the European business which in local currency delivered a gross profit growth of 4%.

Interim CEO Andrew Belshaw commented: "Our direct business in the UK has returned to growth. And the UK indirect business continues to be strong with good growth in the new variants of SIP which support MS Teams users."

"Our European business has increased the number of cloud seats by 7% despite a challenging economic environment."

"We are seeing some effects of inflation in connectivity and hardware costs which we are generally able to pass on to customers. We expect this to continue to increase in the second half and into 2023."

"We are also seeing salary inflation which we continue to manage while focusing on retention and ensuring that we



Andrew Belshaw

support our lower paid staff seeing unprecedented rises in the cost of living."

NEWS ROUNDUP

UPDATES to the GoTo Partner Network include a GoTo Resolve offering designed for MSPs along with streamlined sales and demand generation support for all partners via the new Partner Concierge Programme. The revamp aims to help channel partners streamline set up and day-to-day operations while serving SMBs. GoTo Resolve provides MSP-specific account administration and reporting features, professional services automation integrations and remote monitoring and management capabilities – backed up by zero trust security architecture within an RMM solution.

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Editor: Stuart Gilroy
sgilroy@bpl-business.com 07712 781 102

Publisher: Nigel Sergent
nsergent@bpl-business.com 07712 781 106

Managing Director: Michael O'Brien
mobrien@bpl-business.com 01895 454 444

Sales Director: Simon Turton
sturton@bpl-business.com 07759 731 134

Business Development Manager: Heather Miles
hmiles@bpl-business.com 07519 790 297

Production: Frank Voeten
fvoeten@bpl-business.com

Circulation: info@bpl-business.com

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Giacom-DWS sign up Baker



James Baker

FORMER Softcat Alliances and Marketing Director James Baker has joined Giacom and Digital Wholesale Solutions (DWS) as Chief Alliance and Product Officer.

He brings circa 25 years experience including a stint as Director of Product Management as part of Insight's European leadership team, managing partnerships across 16 countries.

Giacom and DWS, along with Union Street, became part of the same group in 2020, bringing together cloud, communications and IT solutions. The group supports more than

5,500 channel partners and the appointment of Baker is part of its strategy to grow its vendor portfolio and maximise the way products are brought to market.

"The role will include making sure we bring the right products to market and managing our strategic alliances and vendor relationships, from both a cloud and comms perspective," commented Baker.

Giacom CEO and Chief Commercial Officer at DWS Mike Wardell added: "Investment in the right people is critical to the foundation of strong business growth."

Parker nets Cavendish and Berry

SERIAL acquirer Babble Cloud has completed the acquisitions of Newhaven-based Cavendish Communications and Salisbury located Berry Telecom.

Berry and Cavendish serve approximately 1,700 and 700 customers respectively.

The deals strengthen Babble's presence in the southern England region and take its overall acquisition tally to 21.

Babble CEO Matt Parker stated: "Where we will add value is bringing more innovation and variety with the technology we can offer."

These latest transactions follow a pattern of double swoops, most recently the additions of Yorkshire Telecom/Biscuit IT and Basildon-based mobile services provider ADSI in July.



Matt Parker

Fidelity Group diversifies with merchant payment platform

FIDELITY Group has expanded into the SME merchant payment market with the launch of Payments-as-a-Service.

The proposition encompasses payment software solutions, credit card terminals, online payment gateways, EPOS and e-commerce services.

The service will launch with a mobile credit card terminal with Elavon as the acquiring bank. Fidelity will then expand the service offering.

"Since inception Fidelity has diversified and scaled its service offerings in line with its Everything-as-a-Service



Alan Shraga

model," said MD Alan Shraga. "The launch of Payments is another value add service that

can help retail businesses access payment software solutions and technology at affordable rates.

"Our partners now have access to additional revenue streams and a fully managed merchant payment platform."

Fidelity Payments is based on a partnership with the Modern World Business Solutions merchant platform.

Fidelity will also become acquirer agnostic by attaining certifications with multiple acquiring banks.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

LDC-backed Onecom's acquisition of Bristol-based Gamma Platinum Partner Solution IP Communications adds circa 400 customers and is its second transaction this year. Onecom Group CEO Martin Flick said: "The move supports our mission to extend our geographic presence and customer reach by acquiring strong businesses that share our culture, values and ethos. In addition, Solution IP has strength in serving enterprise and SME customers and its customer base is a perfect fit."

LEEDS-based The Technology Forge has been snapped up by Civica Group, adding more capabilities to Civica's property and asset management software suite, which supports public bodies across the UK and worldwide.

CANADIAN tech firm Converge Technology Solutions has marched into UK territory with the acquisition of Stone Technologies Group, its 35th transaction. Converge CEO Shaun Maine commented: "2022 has been a monumental year of growth for Converge in the European market. Along with recent acquisitions in Germany we are leveraging the knowledge and skills of Stone Group."

ITS ramps up in dark fibre

WHOLESALE full fibre provider ITS Technology's dark fibre portfolio has been boosted following its acquisition of NextGenAccess.

The transaction adds 455km of dark fibre across Greater London, Newport and south Essex, and adds 28,000 business premises passed.

ITS' existing full fibre footprint is on track to pass 25% (circa 500,000) of UK business premises by the end of this year.

The transaction kick starts ITS' acquisition strategy following £100m funding secured in April this year.

ITS Technology CEO Daren Baythorpe said: "There are significant synergies between our two businesses. In addition to the fibre assets in the ground and portfolio of solutions, the experience that this team will bring to ITS will enable us to substantially bolster our dark fibre credentials.

"This will allow us to deepen our relationships with carriers, telecom operators, service providers and resellers; and accelerate our full fibre roll out and reach as we play our part in creating a Gigabit Britain."

Baythorpe also noted that ITS will expand its own data



Daren Baythorpe

centre offering by developing NextGenAccess' proposition in the space, and open new opportunities on the network to deliver Layer 2 and 3 services to partners.

NextGenAccess MD Mark Weller commented: "Following a successful period of growth, backed by Amber Infrastructure since 2018, the time is right to allow partners and their customers to benefit from our joint capability and experience in the full fibre market."

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Colt aids crisis hit sufferers

COLT has donated €170,000 to the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) which brings together 15 UK aid charities to raise funds in times of crisis.

Currently the DEC has two active campaigns supporting displaced individuals from Ukraine and the recent floods in Pakistan.

The donation will support lifesaving services, emergency housing and, in the long term, help refugees rebuild their lives.

Colt employees joined together for the fundraising efforts, driven by Colt's global CSR teams.

The campaign included a global charity auction. The business then matched employee contributions euro for euro.

Gary Carr, Colt's CFO, said: "We have been deeply saddened by conflict in Ukraine and beyond. It is a time to dig deep and raise funds for those affected by crisis across the world. I've been amazed at the generosity and energy of Colt employees' fundraising efforts."

Saleh Saaed, DEC's CEO, added: "DEC charities are continuing to provide life saving food, cash, medical care, and much more, both in Ukraine and neighbouring countries."

Nasstar appoints new CEO



Paul Cosgrave

NASSTAR CEO Wayne Churchill has stepped down after three years in the role, making way for Paul Cosgrave who joins from Cognizant Technology Solutions where he led the EMEA/APAC cloud business and the global AWS Business Group.

Prior stints also include being UK CEO and then Group Chief Strategy Officer for New Signature, a US-based Microsoft cloud consulting business which was acquired by Cognizant in 2020.

Cosgrave commented: "Nasstar is well positioned to continue its transformation into a differentiated cloud and network services provider."

Chairman Patrick De Smedt commented: "Paul's experience with the hyperscaler providers will be instrumental in helping us to accelerate the next stage of our development."



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NEWS ROUNDUP

GEOFF Kneen has taken the reins as Content+Cloud CEO following Peter Sweetbaum's move to parent company Advania Group (which acquired Content+Cloud in December 2021). Sweetbaum's new remit is to support Advania's pan-European growth ambitions as Head of New Markets. Formerly Content+Cloud Group MD for five-plus years, Kneen has 20 years experience leading technology businesses and transformation programmes. "The opportunity for growth and development within the UK market for our services is clear," he said.

NFON partners now have access to cloud-based telephony billing and VoIP billing services following a link up with PRD Technologies. NFON approached the billing software vendor to develop a scalable white-labelled bureau billing solution for its reseller partner programme. The collaboration also enables NFON partners to streamline the billing process and eliminate the need for them to work with a separate billing vendor. NFON Business Operations Manager Marie Ellis commented: "Intelligent Billing can support all the products and services NFON offers to reseller partners."

Lily crowned as best firm



Team Lily celebrate top firm win

LEEDS-based Lily Comms achieved first place in the Best Companies UK Telecoms Companies league table for Q3.

The top ranking was based on the results of a b-h heard employee survey which assessed levels of employee engagement through questions on leadership, wellbeing and personal growth.

As well as being ranked first among UK telecoms companies, Lily came 12th in the Yorkshire & Humber and 29th for the best mid-sized companies to work for nationally.

MD Chris Morrisey said "We're confident that earning our place on these Best Companies league tables will help us attract and retain some of West Yorkshire's best talent."

Lily Comms has more than 80 employees and based on their feedback has increased holiday pay, improved maternity and paternity packages, improved sick pay and facilitated extra parking and a shuttle bus from the station to the office for commuters.

The company also offers its staff volunteering days and has recently extended lunch breaks for all employees.

Lily continues to invest in staff development and has an in-house performance training academy. Regular sessions help people to develop core skills including time management to reduce stress, problem solving, confidence building, teamwork and customer service.

Oak sells software to Focus

FOCUS Group's channel play in the primary care sector has received a boost following the acquisition of clinical systems integration software Contact Assist from Oak Innovation.

Focus sees the move as a key step towards facilitating further CRM integrations across a range of healthcare verticals.

The investment will enable Oak Innovation to reinvest in its recording platform, Clarify.

Oak CEO William Emm said: "Clarify will form the cornerstone of our future plans. We have an outstanding relationship with Focus and as one of our largest partners it made sense to both parties."

Focus Group Sales Director Rhys Bailey said: "Focus is the largest reseller of Oak's clinical system integration software and the purchase of the software gives us the ability to control the development of the product, while expanding into new vertical markets such as dentistry and veterinary."

"Focus Group is already channel focused, currently accounting for 25% of our business, and we're keen to grow this. We see this investment as a way of strengthening our channel business."

Tupman heads up new MSP

CONNECTION Capital-backed Mode Solutions has integrated with eacs under the Espria brand. Mode acquired eacs in June 2022 and their unification creates a comms and document management provider led by CEO Alex Tupman.

"Our offering, underpinned by a fresh brand, brings together a range of digital solutions to help businesses power their digital transformation and work-space," he said.

Espria provides managed IT, cloud, communications and connectivity, hybrid working and document solutions.

"Business leaders are stuck between a rock and a hard place," added Tupman. "On the one hand, desperate to continue recovery, and on the other, facing economic uncertainty."

"How can organisations increase revenue and capitalise on opportunities at a time when they are financially constrained and facing an unpredictable future? The answer for many is to outsource elements of their operations. IT outsourcing is a key driver of increased business agility and resilience."

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Sustainability

How prepared are you for the Net Zero World?

In November the Comms Dealer editorial team will be recording the latest in our Channel Forecast Editorial Round Tables on the hot topic of Sustainability and the drive to Net Zero in the channel.

The recorded content will form the basis of a follow-up editorial feature in the December issue of Comms Dealer together with a programme of video shorts highlighting the key questions shared online and via social media.

Join the debate!

To participate in this editorial round table contact **Heather Miles** on **01895 454405** or hmiles@bpl-business.com for full details.

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JD Networks reaping benefits of energy

The team at Yorkshire based JD Networks has been providing cost effective and efficient services in business telecoms, energy and merchant payment systems for the past 20 years. They are constantly looking for new ways to help businesses thrive throughout the United Kingdom and pride themselves on delivering the highest quality service to their customers.

Director, James Sweaton, explained why JD Networks became a Fidelity Energy partner over five years ago: "JD Networks already had a strong B2B Telecoms base when I first discovered Fidelity, but I could see an opportunity to further grow our revenue potential and ultimately make our customers happier by expanding the services on offer.

"They really understood our needs and worked closely with our core team to build their knowledge of the industry, the quoting process, and shared key insight from their dedicated expertise to enable us to create our own specialism in the area. It felt like a true partnership.

"The ongoing support has been invaluable. We receive regular energy market reports which we share with our customer base. We also have a fantastic account manager in Jason Fernyhough who regularly visits and is always happy to attend customer meetings should we need him to."

Like most businesses, JD Networks was impacted by the pandemic, but Sweaton underlined how energy played a role, and the successes seen from being able to offer energy procurement to customers since.

"In addition to our own office closing for a period, our customers have also been impacted and all of this has been exacerbated by recent wider global economic events. However, because of our dedication to customer service and always seeking to go above and beyond for them, we have been able to sustain core revenue in difficult unprecedented times.

"We have had incredible success with Fidelity and within the energy industry in general.



JD Networks Director, James Sweaton

As an illustration of this, I can share an example of a builders merchant having trouble with its broker due to them allowing meters to expire. The broker simply did not have the time to give the business the attention and care that it requires. After spending time learning about their business, their priorities and needs, we won the account. We have now secured and managed more than 150 energy meters for them since they became a customer and it's ever growing."

Since the partnership with Fidelity began, energy has become more than just an additional service for JD Networks and Sweaton described how it has progressed: "At first, I was the only individual within our company that was selling energy products. However, as our knowledge has increased so has our success, and now the full breadth of our team promotes the product to new and existing customers.

"Energy is now vital to our business, and I take pleasure in watching it grow and compete to be on a par with our existing successful telecoms business. We have a dedicated section on our website for energy and I am excited to see what new energy related products, such as EV chargers, become available in the future so that we can continue to serve our existing loyal customers with all their energy needs.

"I would just like to express my gratitude to Fidelity Energy and the fantastic team they have built. It has been a pleasure partnering with them and I look forward to working with them more in the future and continuing to build on our joint success," he added.

Westcon sets up cloud hub

IN A BID to secure a big share of the cloud market Westcon-Comstor has set up a new Cloud & Collaboration division led by Antony Byford, formerly UK&I MD, now Vice President of the new organisation.

The unit will provide commercial and marketing support to vendors and partners in the cloud and collaboration space which Cavell Group says will be worth more than £1.9bn by 2024 in the UK alone.

The new business unit will be focusing on the UK&I, Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Germany, France, Spain, Portugal and Italy. And the vendor relationships to be leveraged include 8x8, Avaya, Jabra, Microsoft, Mitel, Poly, Ringcentral and Spectralink.

"With the economy shifting to subscription models and our vendors to recurring revenues, it became clear that we needed to change the way we work in this space," commented René Klein, who is Executive Vice President, Westcon Europe.

"Cloud technology is in high demand, more so thanks to the hybrid work revolution. By

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Antony Byford

reinventing how we work with this vendor community we'll improve our support to partners and ensure their success."

Byford commented: "The vendor landscape is complex but we can help partners succeed through integrations and synergies, helping them navigate ecosystems.

"Partners need support operating within this new model and they now need to manage their businesses differently thanks to the introduction of cloud billing systems and automation.

"Vendors need the channel community to help support their accelerated drive to these models. That's the rationale for the new division."

NEWS ROUNDUP

PRINT and document solutions provider Woodbank Office Solutions has acquired Wirral-based print management business Datatech Systems. Headquartered in Stockport, Woodbank also has regional offices in Liverpool and Leeds. Woodbank founder and MD Janet Bowden said: "We've been looking to expand our business for some time and when the opportunity arose for us to acquire Datatech it was evident throughout the process that they are a natural fit."

LOGICALIS, Claranet, Vodafone Global and VMware veteran John Hayes-Warren has joined Agilitas IT Solutions as Chief Revenue Officer. CEO Shaun Lynn stated: "With an illustrious career in the technology channel John brings experience, integrity and confidence that will help Agilitas build upon its solid foundations."

RESPONDING to partner demand for advanced and bespoke reporting Union Street Technologies has introduced the Azure Data Feed, an optional feature for its Affinity billing platform which enables users to access information held in Affinity from a secure database hosted in Microsoft's Azure data centre.

Alert over tech roll backs

THE emphasis on ICT solutions providers to deliver public and private sector organisations with training, advice and up to date digital technology has never been greater, says new research from Virgin Media O2 Business and Censuwide.

The study highlights that a loss of talent, a lack of tech training and recruitment struggles are creating a digital skills gap which could worsen as businesses begin to roll back technology introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The research suggests on average half of organisations that introduced new technologies during Covid-19 lockdowns are planning to revert to pre-pandemic practices.

And 50% of employees say that rolling back these tech advances would make them more likely to resign.

Mike Smith, who is Large Enterprise & Public Sector Director at Virgin Media O2 Business, said: "Our research shows that technology could be the tipping point for many.

"From concerns about digital skills shortages to outdated tech holding them back at work, employees are ready to vote with their feet. A decision to revert to pre-Covid technologies could see one in two leave their post in the next six months.

"By stepping up investment in technology to help everyone work smarter, backed by the right digital training, both the private and public sectors have an opportunity to improve the employee experience and boost outputs at the same time."



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Onecom Partners promise



Martin Flick

Last month's official launch of Onecom Partners promised to turn traditional channel models on their head, with fresh thinking and innovation underpinning an ecosystem of partnerships that balance scaling up with long-term interconnected business strategy.

Onecom's intention to become a major force in the channel crystallised last month with the official launch of Onecom Partners, the next iteration of 9 Group which Onecom acquired in March 2021. The deal came just weeks after Onecom pocketed close rival Olive Communications, its fourth transaction since mid-market private equity firm LDC backed the business in July 2019. Former Olive CEO

Martin Flick then became Onecom Group chief exec' and during the Onecom Partners launch event (staged at the Vodafone Pavilion, Newbury 8th September) he gave the megaphone to his strategic priority for Onecom Partners to become the leading channel services provider.

"The 9 Group acquisition was a strategic decision to expand our go-to-market strategy beyond a direct customer

play," stated Flick. "We see a huge market opportunity. Onecom is directly active in the mid-market touching into enterprise, but there is a vast SME market that we can't reach on our own. So we bought a best of breed partner channel and are enabling it to sell an expanded product portfolio, leveraging the expertise of strategic suppliers like Vodafone. Our investment in our partner business is a measure of long-term

commitment to the channel. We want to change how the comms sector operates and need to dare to do things differently."

Big ambitions

In June 2019 Onecom signed a record partner deal with Vodafone and set out plans to become a comms channel powerhouse. "Onecom has worked with Vodafone for 20 years at a strategic level," added Flick. "Vodafone is our most strategic supplier

and we have products and services that we want to enable partners to sell as part of a new go-to-market strategy centred around 'partnering for success'."

Flick also shared his strategic aim for Onecom Partners to become synonymous with a strong ecosystem of business relationships with the dual purpose of better serving customers and meeting the business growth requirements of partners.

s new approach

"We are invested in the ethos of thinking differently," added Flick. "We aim to build a channel ecosystem that co-exists based on growth and relationships. Yes we have an appetite to acquire certain partners but we will also act as an introducer and facilitator for partners wanting to exit and those wanting to expand and scale up. We're looking to work with partners and help them scale organically and inorganically, as well as support those that want to do more of the same."

Flick set up his first comms company aged 32 and grew it from a standing

Our investment in Onecom Partners is a measure of our channel commitment. We want to change how the comms sector operates and dare to do things differently

start to £6 million revenue in five years. The business was acquired by Azzurri Communications, where Flick spent a number of years before buying into Olive Communications ten years ago. Within three years of his arrival the company grew threefold from £10 million to £30 million. "I've been a channel partner for 25 years, seen great change in the industry, seen what's good about working with large organisations in partnership, and I've seen what doesn't

work," stated Flick. "I've had a wish list as long as my arm that I'd like to have seen in all those years. Part of our ambition at Onecom Partners is to bring that wish list to life for the benefit of our partner channel."

Changing times

Flick's mission to deliver positive change for partners in the most effective and innovative way is timely as resellers face the challenge of securing growth in turbulent times. "We are facing into political and economic uncertainty globally and we're seeing a massive technology shift," he explained. "OTT providers are coming forward and software companies are eating the lunch of traditional vendors. We have the ISDN switch off, a big move in the flexible working space, and there are products and services coming along that will revolutionise the way we all operate and what we can sell."

"The channel has a huge responsibility to UK plc to help them navigate this minefield of immense change. Customers

want expert advice and guidance and we need to sell products and solutions that are in close proximity to customer need. That's where a channel play comes in. There is no better way and it's a big opportunity."

A key approach is to look at the addressable market that exists in customer bases, noted Flick. "If there is a need for products not in a partner's portfolio we can help them penetrate those products to get more

wallet share from existing customers," he added. "Cross sell should become the most important part of any sales strategy."

Onecom began its commercial life 20 years ago and built a solid reputation for being highly acquisitive and mobile-first. Today, at least 50 per cent of revenue is non-mobile and as noted earlier in this article Onecom's most strategic supplier is Vodafone. "Onecom is one of Vodafone's longest standing and biggest partners, a genuine partnership that has embraced shared risk and shared reward," commented Richard Horner, Head of Partner Services, Vodafone Business.

"We are helping partners disrupt in the market, find opportunities for change, and helping partners to deliver that disruption in a business as usual way. Vodafone's number one asset is the fixed and mobile network, but behind that are operational, marketing and technical teams. We are focused on making sure our partners have access to and can leverage these assets."

At the coal face

After a long spell working in the abstracted world of corporate procurement functions Horner is relishing the opportunity to interface with partners and witness for himself business transformation on the ground. "The customers that the partner community can reach, and the scale and breadth of what this community can do together, is huge," he enthused.

"They're helping customers stay in business, helping schools keep running

Continued on page 14

What does the future hold for the UK's booming Altnet market? Chris Croot, KCOM's Chief Architect, looks ahead

In the last few years, the number of Altnets declaring their plans to build full fibre infrastructure across the UK has been increasing at a huge rate.

This has been part-driven by a realisation that, once a national full fibre infrastructure has been built, there are unlikely to be any major telecoms infrastructure projects for the next two to three generations minimum.

This has created the current 'land grab' with the Altnets stating funded plans to deploy full fibre networks to the UK's premises more than twice over. When you add the incumbents into the mix, this leads to overbuild with multiple operators. This will then reduce the potential addressable market for each operator's infrastructure and pushes back the timescales for RoI and profit. It also reduces the value of an Altnet assets when the majority are using PIA products and only own the fibre in someone else's ducts.

The Altnets can broadly be split into two groups. Those with national plans and those just looking at regional services – these can be further split between those entirely retail focussed, entirely wholesale focussed or those doing a mix of both.

Generally, those with more retail focussed businesses can generate greater ARPU and margin but can suffer lack of percentage uptake unless they have a strong brand presence. Wholesaling network services can lead to greater percentage penetration, but at the expense of margin. Typically, a large number of homes passed is required to pique the interest of the large ISPs to consume their wholesale services. This is due to high integration costs of onboarding a wholesale Infrastructure Provider (INP) into their OSS/BSS.

For those that do wish to wholesale their services but don't have significant premises passed counts, it would appear logical to seek co-operation with others to help on-board the larger CPs by giving them a way to access higher numbers of homes for a single set of integration within their OSS.

This could be achieved by network



Chris Croot

interconnects between those collaborating INPs with a single standard API or with one entity acting as an adaptation layer between a single external API and individual INP APIs. This would also mean some alignment on products and availability checkers etc but this sort of cooperation could help generate RoI of their networks.

The UK NICC (Network Interface Consultative Committee - the UK telecoms industry standard forum for matters on interoperability) has an Access Technology Task Group that commenced work on PON OLT-ONT interoperability and the creation of a Wholesale API - but low traction within the NICC members meant little headway was made. It could easily be reactivated if there was sufficient interest within the industry to work on such interoperability standards. There has been the creation of such a platform with the 'Common Wholesale Platform' based around the collaboration of six Altnets driven by some of the wholesale requirements of BDUK Project Gigabit.

Even with co-operation, the certainty of significant overbuild in the market will lead to the inevitable consolidation in the market in a similar way to what we saw in the cable market of the 1980s. This will enable some to expand their network through acquisition but inevitably some of the Altnets will fold. Until then the Altnet community must choose its locations carefully and try to minimise overbuild and really test what appetite there is for co-operation.

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Continued from page 13 during Covid, and helping to find new solutions like 5G. I have admiration for the entrepreneurship, the problem solving, the can-do attitude I see from every partner and distributor I've worked with – that's typified by Onecom."

According to Ker Anderson, Head of Radio and Performance, Vodafone, the network operator's strategy is more about moving from a connectivity provider to becoming a technology company, shifting to a model where the network functions as a platform that facilitates capabilities. For this to happen the platform must be accessible to everyone, which means taking it to the next generation of standardisation, incorporating APIs, building in automation and greater visibility, and making the operational activity close to zero touch, all while moving as much to the edge as possible.

5G potential

Anderson also noted that Vodafone is launching 5G standalone next year. Trials currently under way at Coventry University are exploring immersive and augmented virtual reality applications. "In the next couple of years we'll start to see what 5G is capable of delivering," commented Anderson.

Critical to the success of Onecom's strategy is the removal of channel conflict, noted Onecom Partners Managing Director Adam Cathcart, who cited just three occasions in the past 18 months and each time the direct arm stood down and recommended the partner. "All three partners walked away with the deal," stated Cathcart. "We will continue this way. The channel has to win."

Onecom Partners is entirely separate from the Onecom Group, with its own billing,



Adam Cathcart

CRM, provisioning and finance systems, with no cross over of data between the organisations. "There is a metaphorical wall and we run as an independent partner business," added Cathcart. "Yes we have a large profitable direct business, which we see as being advantageous to our partner community. On bids where a partner may lack the required skills Onecom's direct team could support in many ways including joint bids, or fronted by the partner or Onecom. If there is anything we can do to keep the competition at bay by providing those additional products we're here to support partners."

True aggregator

Onecom Partners is now a fully fledged aggregator of services providing access to best of breed suppliers, offering the 'complete stack' and options within that stack – quite different from 9's heritage. "At 9 we had our own IP product internally, offering SIP, hosted and connectivity," said Cathcart. "That was generally our main game. Now we've redeveloped our proposition to be a true aggregator of

services. When a partner comes into our organisation we provide choice across various tier one carriers and networks – providing access to two or three leading tier one and two carriers and best of breed products. Partners can pick and choose on a case by case basis across mobility, connectivity and voice. Onecom's relationship with Vodafone has helped us to develop this proposition. Vodafone connectivity now makes up 90 per cent of our broadband orders."

The rebrand of 9 Group to Onecom Partners marks a stepping up of its commitment to accelerate channel growth, build a mutually beneficial partner ecosystem, add new products and services for resellers and leverage the extraordinary relationship with Vodafone. "For the rebrand, we wanted to make sure the partner business felt part of the group and associated with that scale," added Cathcart. "Strengthened by the extent of Onecom Group with access to commercially aggressive propositions, our partners are empowered to grow their revenues and increase margins."



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Top trends

Innovation is tipped as the big industry theme in 2023, driven by 5G standalone, the wider adoption of open RAN and new applications and services designed for the network edge.



Kerem Aarsal

According to Omdia analysts telcos stand to gain by moving up the digital value chain by pursuing network edge. “Network edge represents the symbiosis between applications and connectivity,” said Kerem Aarsal, Senior Principal Analyst, Service Provider at Omdia. “It is one of the most obvious paths of evolution for CSPs that wish to make the transition from connectivity provider to digital technology company.

“Pursuing network edge holds significant new revenue opportunities for CSPs by allowing them to leverage their growing cloud-based 5G networks, and carries huge potential by enabling telecoms companies to assert relevance in the larger digital value chain.”

Over the coming year Aarsal expects the network edge ecosystem to expand as CSPs and technology companies forge deeper partnerships. “This will come in two forms,” he added. “The first will see CSPs climb up the edge stack, getting closer to applications and taking an active part in orchestration, which is already being seen from Lumen and NTT with

VMware as a key partner. We will also experience CSP edge platforms and public cloud companies working closer together. In 2023 and beyond, interoperability and optionality will therefore become key competitive differentiators for CSPs, as they work to engage customers with complex cloud needs and deployments.”

True 5G emerges

According to Roberto Kompany, Principal Analyst for Service Provider Networks, Omdia, next year will likely see ‘true 5G’ emerge with more deployments of Standalone (SA) networks taking place. “5G SA can be hailed as true 5G because it enables many of the advanced performance benefits that 5G was designed for, such as low latency, slicing, and edge computing,” he commented.

“These features are likely to help with the development of new 5G-native business and consumer applications. As of today, there are around 25 operators globally that have launched 5G SA networks commercially. In 2023, that number will grow significantly and will likely more than double by the end of next year.”

Open RAN has also been gaining momentum over the past couple of years as operators look for more flexibility and choice in the way they build their radio networks. Recent headlines regarding major open RAN players hitting bumps in the road in this space have not deterred operators from looking at open RAN with serious intentions.

“We can expect open RAN to mature and grow in 2023,” added Rémy Pascal, Principal Analyst, Mobile Infrastructure, Omdia. “However, we can also expect it to be challenged by both its opponents – some of the traditional RAN vendors – and also by some operators who are yet to be convinced of the business case.”

Pascal believes that open RAN has the potential to become a significant technology in the medium to long-term, so the challenge for its supporters in 2023 is to demonstrate the value in live deployments to build up broader advocacy. He added: “It certainly won’t become the dominant model in the 5G era, but it is still an important complementary model and may well go on to become the dominant model for 6G.”



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Stay true to Net Zero

In the midst of pressures that threaten to take the edge off efforts to tackle climate change challenges, Zen CEO Paul Stobart urges business leaders to hold their nerve and ramp up for Net Zero action as the future of the planet is critically at stake.

All business people are deeply worried about inflation, particularly the increases in energy costs. The Government is providing welcome relief for households and businesses but in the case of the latter this support is for six months only. Thereafter we have uncertainty. And it's not just energy costs that are hurting business – inflation is impacting all supply chains everywhere.

As we struggle through this difficult period, some are arguing for the climate change discussion to be put to one side – 'we should park our net zero ambitions until the economic outlook improves' is the argument. I believe this would not only be a mistake, but a dereliction of our duty to the generations that will follow us, none of whom will appreciate our choosing short-term expediency over the longer-term health of the planet.

I don't want to diminish or underplay the current difficulties facing businesses,

but, at the time of writing (and as if we needed reminding) we have drought conditions in Europe, most of Pakistan under water, and confirmation that the Greenland ice cap melt is irreversible, leading to inevitable sea level rise. In such circumstances, we cannot sit idly by. We must press on with our quest to reduce carbon emissions.

For energy-intensive businesses, increasing costs over the next 12 to 24 months will present a significant challenge. The economist might well say that we are only now paying the 'right' price for energy – historically it has been too cheap as we have not taken account of the true cost of fossil fuel. We have paid for the 'private' costs of energy (the costs of extracting fossil fuel from the ground, refining it and delivering it to where it's needed) but not for the 'external' costs involved in fossil fuel extraction, production, and consumption (dislocation of ecosystems, pollution, carbon emissions and climate change, to name a few).



Paul Stobart

We cannot sit idly by. We must press on with our quest to reduce carbon emissions

Private costs have been the basis for calculating energy prices, but the latter take no account of the vast external costs of fossil fuel, the impact of which is now being seen in the extreme weather we are (and have been) experiencing across the world. If we had to pay for these external costs from the outset (in the form of some kind of carbon tax), then we might have moved off fossil fuel to green energy much sooner. We would certainly have done everything we could to reduce energy consumption, and well before now.

We are, though, where we are, and must face the market environment as we see it. The Government has a role to play, of course, in accelerating the move

away from fossil fuel (and therefore our unhappy dependence on overseas energy supply) to home-grown renewables, nuclear energy and new technologies such as hydrogen. But we, as businesses, also have a responsibility to focus on energy reduction and, in parallel to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels.

One way to reduce reliance on fossil fuels is to invest in solar. At Zen we are well advanced with an important solar project. Even at the current energy price cap, payback on capital investment in solar is less than five years.

Given solar panels last 25 years, the returns on solar are exceptional and a great hedge on any further increase in energy costs. A £250k investment in solar at Zen (the panels are deployed on our HQ roof) is generating 170kWh of energy, saving us £58k in energy costs and, in parallel, reducing our emissions by just over 50 tCO₂e.

A simple way to reduce energy consumption is through insulation. Why there isn't a Government scheme in place to ensure that every business property (and home) is properly insulated when we're effectively wasting 20 per cent or more of our energy through ineffective insulation, is beyond me.

If there is a silver lining to be found in all this, perhaps it is that our new-found focus on energy reduction, and therefore carbon emission reduction, means that we are in fact accelerating, rather than slowing down, our progress towards Net Zero. ■



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Terry O'Brien, CEO of Digital Wholesale Solutions, commented: "Another record entry is great news for our industry. This demonstrates the innovation, drive and power of our amazing channel and I can't wait to celebrate with all the finalists in London on October 13th. The event is the highlight event of the year and I hope individuals and companies, regardless of whether they have been shortlisted or not, will attend and acknowledge everything that is great about the ICT Channel."

Another record entry has been announced for the 2022 Comms National Awards, reflecting the ongoing success of resellers providing solutions to customers and the companies that support and serve them in the UK ICT channel.

The awards process, organised by Comms Dealer publisher BPL Business Media and sponsored by Digital Wholesale Solutions, has been staged annually for over 20 years and recognises resellers, vendors, distributors, network providers and service providers that have excelled in their delivery of innovative products and services

over the last year. Due to the quantity of entries received, the largest ever panel of judges has been assembled as Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent confirmed.

"In the current economic climate, we expected a drop in entries this year, so to receive a record of nearly 200 is astonishing. As a result, we have called upon our largest ever panel of industry experts with broad experience across the channel spectrum, who have all committed to our strict criteria and will judge the submissions diligently without fear or favour."

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Kevin Boyer, Managing Director IP Netix

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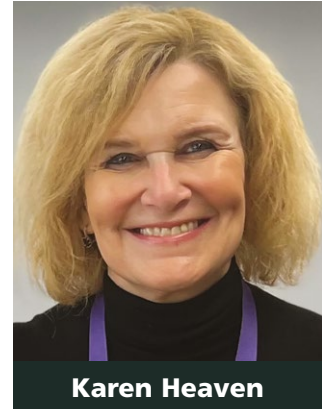
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Karen Heaven

A distinguished marketing executive whose professional prowess and management approach transformed BT Wholesale's channel presence and the careers of those who worked with her.



Karen Heaven

As the architect of a transformation in BT Wholesale's marketing strategy, which reached a zenith during Comms Vision 2021 in catalysing an unprecedented response from conferees, Karen sealed her reputation not only as a stand out marketer but also as a popular figure in the channel community.

She joined BT Wholesale in 2018 as Head of Marketing and wasted no time in elevating its channel presence. She was characteristically gritty, humorous and sublimely practical at the same time, a combination of attributes that ensured she got things done and delivered results. Karen was also respected for the support and care she gave to her team and her willingness to try new things.

Her adventurous spirit was evident far earlier in life when she became the first member of her family to go to university. This was a big move for Karen who was born and bred in a close-knit Wakefield community. A long and successful career in marketing followed, based in London and the south east. Firstly at Securicor where she would always tell you she worked with Nick Hewer of

The Apprentice fame. 'He was just a PR man', she'd laugh over a glass of wine.

Karen then took on a number of senior marketing roles in the real estate industry for nearly two decades before joining 123reg as Head of Marketing and New Media. This move introduced Karen to the telecoms space and she went on to hold senior positions at Exponential-e and UKCloud, making a big impact on both brands.

Role model

But the company that made the biggest impact on Karen was BT Wholesale where she relished the opportunity to appoint a team of young marketers, mentor them and become a role model best known for thinking creatively, challenging the status quo, striving to achieve bigger and better results, being blunt with her feedback to mentorees and being incredibly proud of them as they advanced their careers. Those who worked with Karen know they would not be where they are on their career path were it not for her unique management style.

When Karen joined BT Wholesale she led an impressive transformation of the company's relationship

with partners and the sector, navigating unique challenges given the nature of the business to achieve a significant uptick in channel engagement, increasing first choice consideration and brand loyalty, while generating positive words from customers, industry influencers and internal stakeholders. She also ensured that parts of the business were shortlisted for, and won, industry awards, something that had not happened prior to her tenure.

Karen was also known for encouraging and driving new ideas. This was most noticeable in BT Wholesale's Hope United campaign which helped to bring diversity and inclusion to the forefront of the channel's thinking. She also brought in external agencies to further develop creative thinking that would challenge the status quo.

Karen's achievements were realised not just through hard work and brilliance, but because of her huge and welcoming heart, wickedly glorious laugh and by not taking herself too seriously.

Karen is survived by her husband Stuart, her daughter Helena and stepson Joe.
Karen Heaven: 25th August 1964 – 29th July 2022. ■

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Productivity booster

Improving people productivity is a multifaceted task and requires a management approach that embraces all parts of the business. Here, Adept CEO Phil Race shares insights into his evolving and holistic people engagement strategy and how it continues to deliver positive productivity results.

Every business wants to be more productive: How are you currently assessing your organisation and its productivity levels?

The productivity of many of the roles across our business are readily measured by way of outputs, implicit productivity targets – sales performance, support ticket time to resolve, customer satisfaction, production of finance reports in a timely manner, debtor days etc. So our KPI framework provides a clear measure of performance and operational effectiveness, and a way to compare the great performers alongside those that need more help.

However, there are roles that are more difficult to measure, and roles that contribute to a collective goal. These are more difficult to analyse at a more granular level. It's here that we rely on effective management and motivation. To achieve this, we are focusing on our middle management and the senior management team,

providing them with training, tools and approaches to motivate and inspire their teams. This sits alongside clear empowerment so that they are able to 'do the right thing in the moment'.

Do you see productivity as a competitive advantage? And can you define areas of your business where productivity has given you a competitive advantage?

As an AIM listed business our productivity, be that revenue per head, margin per head, overall EBITDA etc, are all transparent to our investors. So, productivity is a key measure of the effectiveness of our business, but it goes deeper than this.

The ability to execute flawlessly, in a timely manner, faster and better than our competitors is undoubtedly a differentiator in a market where there are multiple providers of the same technology. Therefore, while we don't lead with productivity per se, we will put front and



Phil Race

centre in proposals our customer endorsements and service statistics to re-assure everyone we are engaged and focussed on the right things.

What do you think are the foundations of productivity and how have you established these in your business?

Adept has been on a mission over recent years to implement One Adept in a project we christened Project Fusion. This is a crucial aspect of our business strategy. We wanted to move work across the group in a seamless manner and surface great operational insight.

This platform allows us to measure the performance of individuals and teams, to review processes, to compare, to track trends and map all of this against our KPIs. Consistency of the measurement to be able to

track accurately over time is crucial to ensure we create a culture of continuous improvement against fair metrics in a disciplined way.

What are the challenges and barriers to driving greater productivity?

Being able to measure performance while stripping out the impact of the environment, whether that's suppliers, customers, the technical infrastructure or any number of other potential factors. This is necessary to ensure we are comparing apples with apples. Next, the ability to motivate and train staff that are across multiple sites working in a hybrid manner. This new way of working is proving to be an interesting management challenge.

Have you driven new people behaviours to increase productivity and efficiency?

The most important thing

we do across the business is to make our KPIs, and our team performance align, and then provide our measures in a transparent and open manner. In this way our team themselves look for ways to improve, search for ways to enhance productivity, and share thoughts on how the lowest performers can improve by using the skills and behaviours of the best performers. This is all underpinned by an appraisal process to ensure an open conversation is held with every team member.

Upskilling is also a vital aspect of our desire to improve.

We have developed an appraisal process to identify a skills matrix, we work with partners to help map these skills against specific technologies, and we have developed career ladders to help people travel on a journey of improvement.

Where does organisational behaviour and culture fit into this?

How our culture aligns with productivity is critical. We lead from the front on this, our culture is to be open, transparent, forthright and customer focused. Indeed, we developed a list of engagement 'rules' which include being decisive, being considerate, being focused and being respected. To achieve our goals all of these behaviours need to dovetail with our mission to continuously improve.

What are your top tips for creating a more productive workforce?

Focus on systems, develop processes that align with these systems, be transparent with the information these systems produce and never stand still. ■



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Microsoft to the Core

The rise of collaborative partnering is best displayed in the relationships MSPs forge with customers, according to Core Technology Systems CEO Conor Callanan.

Core Technology Systems expanded into Scotland in August this year with the acquisition of Microsoft Gold Partner CompanyNet. The buy strengthened Core's technical capability, added 25 employees and offices in Edinburgh and Glasgow. The move follows Core's acquisition of Parative in May 2013, and is indicative of its Microsoft centricity, building on over three decades experience in designing, developing and delivering Microsoft solutions to UK businesses.

Core was established in 1990, and in 2002 Callanan completed an MBO which cemented his strategy for Core to be one hundred per cent focused on Microsoft. "Microsoft had an inspiring vision and innovative technology for business growth, and it was growing fast," stated Callanan. "This enabled us to grow faster, and we're not slowing down with more than 30 per cent growth in the last 12 months."

Core became a Microsoft BPOS (the precursor to Office 365) Partner in 2009, and is credited with delivering the first installation of SharePoint in the UK for Microsoft in 2001. "We saw BPOS and Azure as a way for Core to

provide managed services without the need to invest in data centres," said Callanan.

Core is now a £12 million revenue business with a 105 headcount, serving a customer base that spans SMB, mid-market, enterprise, public sector and commercial customers, mostly sitting in the 200-2,500 seat range. "We are expecting double digit revenue growth in 2023 with plans to grow our newly acquired business by 30 per cent," added Callanan. "Our growth plan is set to achieve £20-plus million turnover with 15 per cent EBITDA through organic growth and M&A activity."

Callanan also noted that Core is driving towards more outcome-based solutions through closer customer and partner engagement. "Discovery sessions have become pivotal for our customers, so we continue to develop our Learn, Engage and Plan approach to market," he added. "Surprisingly, there are still many businesses that have significant workloads that need to move to the cloud, and efficient process management and project management will always be a necessity for productive businesses. We are enabling more customer self-service where they want it and



Conor Callanan

will continue to demo and support customers seeking to improve employee engagement and experience with Microsoft Viva. Our customers' need to better connect with, engage, educate and support their employees in hybrid and remote workforces also drives our solution focus."

Key propositions

Another key priority is the development of security and compliance propositions, along with driving efficiency and shift-left success. And to help businesses overcome weaknesses in their planning to meet the demands of forced and rapid change, Core has adapted its propositions to make managed services more flexible and accessible. "This helps to manage cost, flexibility and scalability," said Callanan. "And it provides more opportunity for monthly recurring revenue.

"We've also looked internally at how we can be more efficient, automating more processes and implementing a new PSA

system. Furthermore, we're taking steps to improve our sustainability by reducing our carbon footprint and creating propositions that address this requirement for customers."

Customer value also lies in businesses being able to outsource overheads and costs while enabling their organisation to be more agile, adaptable and scalable, believes Callanan. "We're seeing a strong appetite from businesses looking to outsource their IT overheads, including the expense of expertise, certifications, security and compliance," he said. "The value for MSPs is in supporting a wider range of customers with outcome-based pricing that utilises their in-house talent. MSPs will continue to move from more traditional and legacy technology into the app dev space as platforms like Microsoft 365 and Power BI mature and become central to business processes. At the same time, we drive monthly recurring revenue, moving away from capex and continuing the trend to opex-based pricing."

Just a minute with Conor Callanan...

What talent do you wish you had? To identify the perfect candidate in a crowd.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I have a plate and nine screws in my right ankle (see 'biggest risk taken' below).

If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing? Probably running a local supermarket chain.

Name three ideal dinner guests: Jonathan Sexton, the greatest Irish rugby player; Ireland and Leeds footballer Johnny Giles; and Ronnie Drew, the Irish singer, folk musician, actor and all-round raconteur.

Your main strength and what could you work on? My strengths include creating a culture of collaboration and openness. But I need to work on my patience and frustration at sometimes slower than expected progress.

Best piece of advice you have been given? All feedback is good feedback.

What's your biggest opportunity? Listening to customers and asking the right questions.

Top tip for resellers? Listen more than you talk to customers. Discovery sessions are invaluable and rapidly increase your chance of success if you ask the right questions and listen to what the customer needs.

The biggest risk you have taken? Jumping out of a perfectly good aeroplane with a backpack on my back.

Give one example of something you have overcome? My 20-a-day 40 year smoking habit. Tough, but I'm glad I did!

How do you relax when not working? Going to live sporting events, mainly rugby and soccer, and travelling to beautiful locations.





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Charting mobile opportu

Over the coming years we will witness big changes in the mobile landscape, building on accelerating growth in market opportunities and the advent of 5G. To reflect these evolving dynamics, last month's Channel Forecast insight session examined the current state of the mobile market across the channel, spotlighting the key drivers and developments already in full swing, while highlighting what's required to realise the full potential of over-the-air solutions in the run up to the 2025 PSTN switch-off and beyond.

It is crystal clear that the mobile market is super-dynamic with multiple opportunities for innovative and competitive success – and intelligent mobile data is an area where this dynamism is well-established. “Mobile broadband alone doesn't cut it,” stated Bernie McPhillips, Sales Director, Pangea. “It's about more than taking a mobile SIM and putting it in a router. There are many intricacies in the way intelligent mobile data can be delivered – private VPNs, private APNs, static IPs, multi-network and single network, for example. And there is a need to connect things as well as people, make inanimate objects smart, automated and more efficient. Mobile data is supporting every industry and the trend is going upwards with a 33 per cent increase in mobile data year-on-year.”

The channel would be wise to find innovative ways to harness the growing volume of mobile data and bolster relationships with customers, says Julien Parven, Director, Daisy Partner Business. “Large sections of the partner channel still perceive IoT as switching

small packets of data,” he added. “But when intelligent mobile data is overlaid onto the IoT environment it opens up many application possibilities. There needs to be broader thinking to gain an understanding of what the end customer wants to achieve. We're not just selling small data enabled things, we're selling complex solutions that require a consultancy approach. Once you start consulting with the customer there is money to be made.”

Two-way conversation

Rob Kittler, Head of Connectivity Practice, Gamma, also noted that from a mobile perspective the conversation has shifted significantly. “Two-plus years ago we and partners would have a one-way conversation with the customer,” he commented. “But since the pandemic customers understand how mobile can underpin their critical services. The efficiencies these technologies bring has been the driver and it will remain that way for the foreseeable future. As 4G and 5G services deploy and develop, customers will feel more comfortable in dealing with us as an industry



Julien Parven

Large sections of the partner channel still perceive IoT as switching small packets of data. But when intelligent mobile data is overlaid onto the IoT environment it opens up many application possibilities

because we are always there to help and advise.”

Mobile technology has leapfrogged from 2G to 3G, 4G and now 5G. And each jump in technological

development has, in its day, been a macro driver for new markets – 5G is no exception. “5G is fundamental to the continued evolution of our industry,” stated McPhillips. “People often think 5G is

faster 4G, but the benefit to businesses, and our channel, is far more than that.”

McPhillips presents the 5G opportunity as a triangle: Supremely fast mobile



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broadband that will be seen as an alternative to fixed line. Ultra reliable low latency, as low as a millisecond, allowing real-time transfer of information which is critical for driverless cars and smart cities, for example. And thirdly, connection density: 5G does away with network congestion with up to one million devices per square kilometre, which is critical for smart cities. "This is enabled by network slicing, apportioning it to various types of traffic, creating dedicated parts of the 5G network for large enterprises, the public sector, blue light emergency services etc – so 5G is much more than fast 4G," noted McPhillips.

Over the coming years we're likely to see far greater transformations in the mobile landscape, building on the growth of mobile data and the advent of disruptive 5G solutions. This emerging market will be at the forefront of a revolution in how mobile is perceived and understood, according to Parven. "For the first time mobile technology is being seen as business led, simply because of the capability of that 5G spectrum to handle innovative applications," he stated. "In terms of how 5G will fit into channel partners' portfolio, it's very much about changing the way partners think about mobile technology. It's about getting a broader reach into applications that previously were unable to be supported by a mobility backbone, then being able to recognise the breadth of the opportunity."

Sunsetting will also drive some key new developments in IoT, according to McPhillips. Three plans to shut down 3G services in



Rob Kittler

Since the pandemic customers understand how mobile can underpin their critical services. The efficiencies these technologies bring has been the driver and it will remain that way for the foreseeable future

2024 while Vodafone and EE could close 3G earlier to focus more sharply on 4G and 5G services. The big questions: What will be the implications of sunseting on IoT applications and devices that rely on 2G and 3G connectivity? And what upgrade opportunities does 2G/3G sunseting present to the channel?

Market unlocked

McPhillips noted that sunseting essentially turns 3G sites into 4G sites and represents a channel opportunity from an airtime and hardware perspective, with a future proof aspect

too. "I always think of 2G and 3G as the PSTN of the mobile network," he explained. "PSTN was revolutionary in its day, as were 2G and 3G, but they have served their purpose and are increasingly expensive to maintain. Therefore operators are looking to sunset these networks to free up frequency and bandwidth and put that technical and logistical resource into more capable network infrastructures for high data bandwidth applications."

The 2G and 3G sunset will open up a plethora of opportunities that were

beyond the channel's reach until now. There will be hundreds of thousands, if not millions of live IoT connections out there, but the cost of change is going to be prohibitive to winning that business if it involves a change of SIM, noted McPhillips. "When the network sunsets devices will no longer be connected, and when the device is visited it's an opportunity to change the SIM," said McPhillips. "For the first time in possibly decades this business is up for grabs and could be won from a competitor. That's going to drive high competition and

the channel needs to be nimble. That market is about to be blown open when these networks sunset."

As we can see, the fast developing mobile solution world opens up a raft of opportunities for innovation and growth. However, mobile solutions can be complicated for customers which opens up educational opportunities for partners. In this context, Kittler believes that a consultancy play will enable resellers to realise their full potential and help drive growth. "Many end customers do not recognise the opportunity that connectivity speeds can bring, and we have to go through an education piece," said Kittler. "If you said to a customer I have a magic wand... what analytics would you like from the field, from engineers, sales people, from products – how can we help? It would be amazing to see some of the reactions, and 5G slots into that solution."

Many of today's business challenges can be addressed by applying mobile data solutions in an innovative way. So much so that Parven says mobility is becoming more and more the industry watchword. Meanwhile, sunseting highlights the growth of mobile as an enabling technology. "Sunsetting is going to force change and with that comes opportunity," added Parven. "It enables us to have deeper more valuable conversations with customers to gain a broad understanding of their business needs, as opposed to selling a piece of kit that has some enabling air time. The conversation is broadened over a longer period of time, which

Continued on page 26



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Bernie McPhillips

5G is fundamental to the continued evolution of our industry. People often think 5G is faster 4G, but the benefit to businesses, and our channel, is far more than that

Continued from page 25 strengthens relationships with customers."

The dynamic nature of the mobile market will likely help customers overcome a challenge they have never confronted, the 2025 PSTN switch off, which may prompt them to look at mobile in a way that acknowledges its greater acceptance as a business solution. "The 2025 opportunity is huge and there is a big role for mobile," commented Kittler. "Obviously, there is a host of VoIP overlay services that come into action but the key is the connectivity and 4G and 5G's role in that story is absolutely key."

McPhillips noted that there are many connected things which, come 2025 and the PSTN switch off, may prove too difficult to connect again via fixed line. "There's a huge opportunity to connect wirelessly using intelligent mobile data," he stated. "While the UK has a developed fixed network, there are many instances

where it is not logistically possible nor commercially viable to consider a fixed line, whether for primary connectivity or back up. There are many things connected to the PSTN network that are not phone lines, like payment terminals, CCTV cameras, door entry systems, security barriers and intercoms, and it would be difficult for anybody to consider a fixed line solution. Over-the-air connectivity, cellular connectivity and intelligent mobile data is being considered as a viable alternative."

Demystifying IoT
Intelligent mobile data and IoT opportunities are diverse in many senses, but a common characteristic is that these solutions are not given due attention by many channel players. "IoT is more misrepresented than misunderstood," noted Kittler. "Partners are still basing their understanding on what they were told years ago. We are selling efficiencies into customers now as opposed to a piece

of plastic that plugs into the Internet and SIM cards."

According to McPhillips, IoT is an umbrella acronym, and within it there are many different layers and applications – such as analytics, the platform, the device and the connectivity. "Opportunities exist where intelligent mobile data can be used to connect as a primary form of connectivity, where Sogea or fibre might not be available, too expensive to install or takes too long," added McPhillips.

"The opportunities are practically endless with high data bandwidth applications, high revenues per service and it's often easy to deploy, so getting into intelligent mobile data is a brilliant segway into the IoT. We have to get past the myth that there is no money to be made. We have 15 case studies on our website and each one is a million pound contract for our partners. It's here, it's now and the channel is best placed to take customers on that journey."

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Gen Z drives UC agenda

Gamma Chief Marketing and Product Officer Chris Wade explores the many ways Gen Z is fuelling the market for UC and collaboration, providing resellers with an ever more relevant conversation to have with customers.

To meet the many (frankly reasonable) demands of the so-called 'dot com kids', it's important to first understand the drivers behind their employment choices and how they are impacting business technology for the better. Generation Z – the new breed of digital nomads – are turning the tables on how the rest of us approach our 9-5 (or 7-3, or even 2-8). They'll only settle for a business culture that's fully aligned with their personal vision and beliefs. In aggregate, it all comes down to culture, mindset and the technology that underpins them.

This 21st Century generation is the first to be fully connected by digital technology and engaged through social media. Internet usage has imbued Gen Zers with a strong sense of social and economic values. Therefore Gen Z are interested in businesses that have embedded values that align with their own morals. Some larger technology firms have experienced something of a 'Techlash' in recent years, with Gen Z deterred by their positions on global

sustainability or ethical practice. So passionate are Gen Z about business ethics, they'll take to LinkedIn, Instagram or even TikTok to voice their experiences. Businesses that don't offer sustainable technology or processes as standard could hit the viral spotlight.

Gen Z are prioritising their personal life and they aren't taking no for an answer. This new generation of workers see their job as a gateway to richer personal experiences that go far beyond the confines of your office-based 9-5. These experiences include the option for travel. As we all struggle with the cost-of-living crisis, is it any surprise that Gen Z are shunning mortgages and, instead, opting to see the world? A recent survey has shown that Gen Z are expected to live in 15 homes during their lifetime, so they'll be looking for roles that will fit the travel bill.

The only solution to this is the cloud. Remote working technology delivers flexibility, optimum collaboration and connection from anywhere in the world. These young adults can dial



Chris Wade

Failure to reassess business strategy through a Gen Z lens will make it harder to attract and retain talent

into meetings or respond to customer queries instantly, whether based in the UK, a coffee shop in Lisbon or their latest AirBnB rental in Cape Town. In fact, job descriptions that offer perks such as 'six months working from anywhere' are becoming the norm.

Wellbeing-first

This is a self-care focused generation and, from a wellness standpoint, they expect their employer to cater to their wellbeing as a priority. That doesn't just

mean a free gym pass, it means providing the tools that complement everybody's unique style of working. For example, a more sociable team member might be happier working from a shared space with a friend one day a week. Another may want to login slightly later on Wednesdays so they can make their favourite yoga class before work. Some think better on their feet and might prefer to join Microsoft Teams by mobile for their 1-2-1 so they can get their steps in at their local park.

Let's face it, some of the best ideas come to us when we're not strapped to our desks.

Therefore technology is a make or break priority for Gen Z. It's a generation that's used to a yearly iPhone drop and scarily impressive VR simulation. Inside the workplace, the technology we use to communicate is also continuing to evolve. But still, many Gen Zers find themselves resorting to the BYOD option, finding that their personal devices are more advanced than a firm's current offering. Unfortunately, this isn't the most reliable or secure workaround.

For this reason, Gen Z expect tools that will enable them to seamlessly interact with their teams and customers, no matter their location. The beauty of UC is that it can facilitate and carry the weight of all these demands in the background. Once installed, a team's wellbeing and flexibility needs can be complemented and supported by software – at little to no extra expense to the business.

With their fresh, progressive ideas and strong work ethic, it's no wonder that Gen Zers are driving tech adoption and fuelling the need for better business collaboration experiences. Furthermore, it goes without saying that a failure to reassess business strategy through a Gen Z lens will make it harder for organisations to attract and retain talent. You're no longer choosing the right candidate for a role, the right candidate is choosing you. That's a sobering thought when you consider that, by 2025, Gen Z will make up 27 per cent of the workforce. ■



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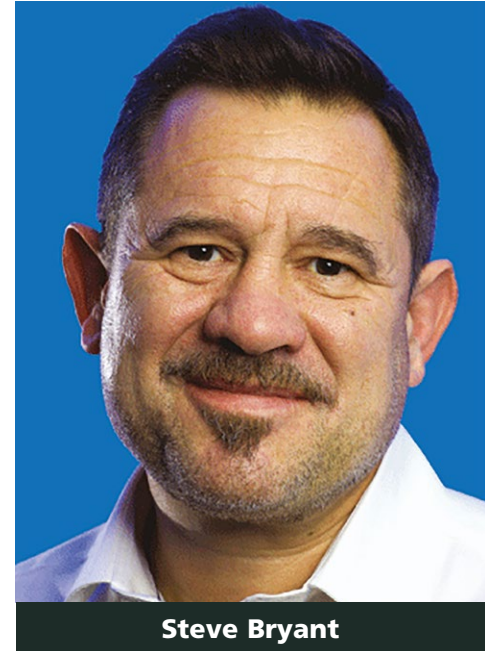
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5G questions answered

5G will add £43 billion to UK GDP by 2030, according to PWC, boosted by supercharged speeds, ultra-low latency and an uplift in capacity. But what factors will determine the pace of adoption? We asked Cloudcell Technologies' MD Kevin Boyle and Technical Director Steve Bryant.



Kevin Boyle



Steve Bryant

The comms industry is seeking to take advantage of the benefits unleashed by 5G services, but many questions remain unanswered – until now...

Can we get 5G?

The rollout of 5G by all networks is gaining momentum, but it's still only available in the UK's larger cities and towns. All operators are continuing to invest in the rollout and we will see an ever-expanding footprint over the coming months and years. Due to this rollout strategy, those who are in a larger city or town can expect to see at least one, if not multiple operators providing 5G coverage, but perhaps less availability in more rural areas for the time being.

How fast is 5G?

Advertised as faster and more reliable with lower latency, the speed of 5G is a key differentiator from 4G services, but that speed isn't always there. While the advertised speeds of 5G run

into the hundreds of Mbps, from our practical experience so far the available speed of 5G is very much dependent upon location. Our tests have generally shown download speeds of between 200 and 300 Mbps and upload speeds of between 20 to 30 Mbps. However, in some large cities such as London and Manchester we have experienced far lower speeds at about 100 Mbps.

These lower speeds tend to be a result of congestion due to the increasing number of 5G users and insufficient connectivity to a cell tower site, as the network operators and service providers need to continue investment in backhaul.

What are the alternatives to 5G?

Not yet readily available everywhere, we are often asked what the alternative is to 5G. In most UK locations where 5G is not yet available there is now access to advanced 4G services which can often provide a very fast broadband service. While

this service will be fast and dependable it will lack the advanced capabilities and attributes of 5G services, such as ultra low latency, but the performance offered is still impressive for many applications. As providers work to increase the

The speed of 5G is a key differentiator from 4G services

availability and scope of 5G there is also the possibility of using 4G+ (LTE-A) which aggregates multiple 4G connections to provide improved performance of between 100 and 200 Mbps download.

What's the closest to 5G performance I can get without 5G?

For those who are attracted to the capabilities and performance of 5G, finding out their area is not yet covered can be disappointing, but the good news is that in our experience all is not lost. Through intelligent engineering and utilisation of the latest, evolving

technologies, a very fast broadband service can still be provided, even if it appears that 5G is not available at a particular location. For example, the latest high powered directional antennas often provide the reach to access 5G

services on the periphery of serviced cities and towns.

The antenna technology is significantly more advanced in these devices than that of a mobile phone handset or dongle, so 5G services may actually be available, even if you can't get it on the mobile itself. Equally, 4G technologies continue to see investment and advanced developments. The latest modems allow advanced 4G LTE-A, which can allow aggregation of up to four cell tower services into a single speed service. Also, technology is now available to allow the aggregation of 5G and 4G services which

has seen services delivered in excess of 400Mb/s during recent testing.

Can I access 5G indoors?

For many, 5G is a service that's primarily used outdoors. The capability for it to work indoors is there but performance can depend very much on the construction of the building. Due to the higher frequency ranges (3400 – 3800 Mhz) used for 5G compared to 4G (600 – 2600 Mhz), some building types will struggle to support 5G inside without the support of internal solutions. The use of external antennas often helps optimise the 5G experience within a building and allows the higher native speeds to be presented within the building itself.

With all providers invested in not only the rapid rollout of 5G but also the continued advancement of 4G and 4G LTE-A technology, it is clear for all to see that 5G will increase in prevalence and be backed up by comprehensive 4G service support. ■

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All-IP era dawns: Why it's of your digital destiny

Channel partners should be ready to transform in the face of the UK's digital destiny, and position digital enablement at the heart of their strategy, says BT Wholesale's Head of Channel Gavin Jones. Why? Because the all-IP era will soon be here to stay and the train is leaving the station.

This year's Comms Vision will focus on opportunities in the Golden Triennium, the three year period between now and the PSTN switch-off in December 2025. The countdown is underway to what will be the UK's biggest digital infrastructure shift in a generation. While 2025 seems like a long time away partners have a lot less time than they think. The transition to all-IP is already underway by communications providers, and Openreach has announced that the nationwide stop sell of PSTN products will be in place by September 2023.

It is happening and there's no shying away from it. Now is the time for partners to dictate their own all-IP journey. Those yet to move simply have to start, or risk being left behind. We are all facing into a future of services, applications and opportunity. But if you want to go where innovation and technology is going then don't anchor yourself in the past.

If we look at the big technology trends of the past few decades – the Internet, the boom in smartphone usage or the shift from office-based to remote and hybrid working – the one constant is a thriving channel community, with vendors and partners collaborating to bring best-in-class technology to UK plc. The transition to all-IP requires the same ingredients.

The shift to all-IP is an opportunity for partners to bring innovative, supercharged solutions to customers, but everyone is at different stages of their digital transformation journeys. That's why we're consistently adding new products and services to make it easier

for partners to accelerate their own businesses, as well as educate customers to do the same.

The economy and the very nature of the industry means there's always change, so there has to remain a constant presence, something to keep pushing partners forward. The channel requires trusted vendors that are always there, no matter what, for the long-term. That is our role: Driving partner growth has always been a priority and, combined with the progress we've made in making ourselves easier to do business with, we'll show how the channel can drive the most value from the Golden Triennium. We've always been there through the big technological shifts and it's no different now.

Evolving process

The journey to all-IP can take many forms: There isn't a one-size-fits-all and it's not a one-and-done exercise. It's a sustained process that continues to evolve as businesses grow and their requirements change. So partners need support at every stage, in areas such as complete connectivity, complete convergence, a complete portfolio and complete support.

Our Complete portfolio brings together connectivity, convergence and support. Complete Connectivity relates to a wide portfolio of access technologies. Whether it's SoGEA, FTTP, Ethernet or DIA, these future-proof solutions enable partners to seamlessly order and sell on to their customers. Complete Convergence is about making it easier for partners to drive the most value from all-IP in new ways – and we're introducing Complete Switch, a single order journey for broadband and voice solutions

The shift to all-IP is an opportunity for partners to bring innovative supercharged solutions to customers



's time to take control



COMMS Vision is the leading annual leadership forum for CEO, MD and CTO delegates making up the major league of the UK reseller community. Places are limited and by invitation: If you would like to join us this year, please register your interest to attend at www.commsvision.com

We are all facing into a future of services, applications and opportunity. But if you want to go where innovation and technology is going then don't anchor yourself in the past

including porting and end-to-end support from a high touch team. Finally, Complete Support provides the tools to support partners and customers. As part of this, we'll introduce the Hub, our new digital platform, and support through our partner programme, Partner Plus.

Maximising awareness

It is key to simplify the journey to all-IP while giving partners the tools to grow revenues. In fact, recent Partner Plus research identified that 89 per cent of brands within

the channel agree it's a challenge to maximise awareness. We reacted to that research immediately, adding new features like the Marketing Toolkit which provides an all-in-one, off-the-shelf resource bank to partners. Member partners also get learning resources across the entire portfolio, sales and management tools, and early access to new product and service launches. In the move to all-IP it's key for vendor partners to be in the channel's corner, helping partners gain a competitive advantage in what is already a noisy industry. ■



Embracing challenger m the Golden Triennium

Having forced a deep shift in the UK's connectivity landscape, and with secure backing and gathering momentum behind its network rollout, market disrupter CityFibre and its partners continue to embrace a challenger mindset that will further accelerate business growth during the Golden Triennium and beyond, says Wholesale Channel Sales Director Andy Wilson.

In September we announced that we'd passed more than two million premises in our rollout, with 1.8 million 'ready for service' (RFS) and able to place an order and be connected in as little as five working days. As well as homes, our services are also within easy reach of tens of thousands of SMBs and thousands more coming into reach each month, generating an enormous and growing opportunity for our wholesale partners. An opportunity that they need to address and capitalise on without delay. For despite the uncertain geopolitical and economic picture, faster connectivity and better service is what British businesses need and are demanding right now. They can't afford to wait until brighter economic conditions come around. They need to be ready to seize opportunities the moment they arise.

Quickening the pace

While the achievement of this latest milestone is hugely significant, even more important to our channel is the fact that we've been accelerating the pace of our rollout, building the second of those two million premises passed three times faster than the first million – we've learned how to accelerate and improve and that's exactly what we're doing. We set a target of the end of 2025 to reach eight million. We're a quarter of the way there already and once that programme is complete we will address approximately one third of the UK market. That will include 800k businesses, 400k public sector locations and 250k mobile/5G sites.

It has always been our mission to unlock the digital potential of entire communities and end the digital

divide and digital poverty. To that end we're purpose-building a fresh, fibre-only network for the data age. One that enables partners to provide connectivity that's quick, reliable and can be depended upon entirely. Our infrastructure is free from legacy constraints, totally independent and provides open access to other network builders, enabling us as an industry to work together to deliver the very best networks across the UK.

Research by the consultancy Hatch (Economic Impact of full fibre Infrastructure from CityFibre's Network), which we commissioned earlier this year, identified over £38bn in potential economic benefits, derived over a 15-year period, stemming just from our own rollout of future-proof full fibre infrastructure in 285 cities, towns and villages in England and Scotland. The research also showed that one in three of our locations have already been identified by the Government as most in need of levelling up, enabling us and our partners to further reduce the digital divide and focus our efforts where they're critically needed. The dependency on the Internet and connected technologies keeps growing and that's been magnified even more in recent times. That in turn underlines just how important our acceleration is – for businesses, public sector organisations, mobile network operators and of course the end user customers that partners will serve on our network.

Innovation is key

From April 2023 we'll be deploying XGS-PON access technology as standard across our network, enabling the provision of up to 10Gbps symmetrical connectivity, an

We've learned how to accelerate and improve – that's exactly what we're doing



Mindset key to success in



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attractive option for many customers and generating even more opportunity for our wholesale partners. Meanwhile, our new Business FTTP product, consumed locally and/or nationally, is now available across 75 towns and cities – delivering affordable, gigabit capable connectivity to enable businesses to achieve the economic growth and benefits available from switching to full fibre.

Our investment in quality and our commitment to getting it right first time is already making us the network of choice for many in the business, public sector and residential markets and enabling our ‘challenger mindset’ to lead the industry. Some of our traditionally business-focused partners are also reaping the rewards from new opportunities in consumer markets that are booming as usage habits evolve and bandwidth demand soars.

Fully funded

Earlier this year we secured a debt package totalling £4.9bn, facilities that form one of the largest single financings dedicated to fibre deployment across Europe. The financing followed £1.125bn in equity investments that we closed in 2021 and fully funds our rollout to a third of the UK market by 2025 and the potential to add more by participating in BDUK’s ‘Project Gigabit’ programme.

The industry is backing us too. More than 30 consumer ISPs and hundreds of business-focused partners have made us their network of choice. Our partnership model and close co-operation with them to drive awareness throughout the build process has proved highly

effective, with mature locations such as Milton Keynes now exceeding 20 per cent take-up and growing.

Setting the challenge

This confidence is something that’s reflected in our new branding and communications. The new look and voice are bold, impactful and vibrant. They reflect the positive mindset and momentum that we have and reflect our status as the nation’s digital infrastructure challenger. As we continue our rollout, this fresh new image will help us and our partners to engage more effectively with customers and get the message across that the best way to improve their experience is to demand better and change their network.

Our partners can be confident that they’re working with a provider that doesn’t settle, that continuously strives for improvement and challenges unacceptable industry norms, sparking innovation, demanding more and striving for better – be that in terms of product, price, technology or service experience.

All this marks us out as a force for change in what is undoubtedly a challenging but exciting market. We’re determined to keep raising the bar with better products, better services, and better economics. We’ve already achieved so much with our build programme, and our pace is accelerating, sweeping us ahead in the race to full fibre. It’s time to rise to the challenge with us, to fully embrace the challenger mindset and aim even higher. We’re in the right place, at the right time. Together, let’s make a difference. ■

It has always been our mission to unlock the digital potential of entire communities and end the digital divide



Navigating 2025: A guide

major change factors

In the face of irreversible industry transformation now is the time for channel partners to reset their planning through a 2025 lens. Here, Gamma Managing Director for Channel Daryl Pile provides a guide to the consideration points and market opportunities that should be reflected in all successful growth strategies.

It's only been two years since businesses were forced into adopting new technology to survive. Despite this user 'immaturity', we've seen first-hand how cloud communications technology, once properly deployed, can drive growth. With this new growth appetite comes new market opportunities, but in this era of constant change, and with so much confusion and apprehension still surrounding it all, businesses are wondering what to address first and how to begin. To take advantage of what's to come, partners need to lead via support and education. Let's look at some of the current and upcoming challenges businesses are facing to fully understand these opportunities.

Staying switched on to the switch off

Openreach is currently touring the UK, switching off Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) exchange services tranche by tranche. The deadline year of 2025 is being banded around a lot, but many aren't aware that the National Stop Sell of ISDN orders comes into action at the end of 2023. With two million customers set to feel the impact, there's ample opportunity to be had from the switch off, but partners need to understand their part.

To many, this event will feel unprecedented. Businesses may be delaying action because of the deadline. Some might be confused by what the switch off truly means and what their options are. On the flip side of the coin, those in the know are aware that these soon to be switched off services aren't fit for the digital age, but they're tied up by the complexity of migration. The channel should be making headway now to address this plethora of queries and needs. We all have a responsibility, and should all have the

foresight, to educate on what is already becoming a monumental, country-wide communicative change.

Partners have a prime opportunity to educate on the flexibility, reliability and security of the cloud. Keeping up-to-date with and acting on the switch off will enable partners to better assess which technology is most appropriate for which market, when is best to deploy and how to balance out any complexities. In turn, this will allow customers to invest their time and resources into their core strategies. This truly is a time for education. Yes, the switch off may be seen as a challenge initially (and it certainly will be for those who delay), but it's a golden opportunity for your customers to adopt technology that's built to empower people and cater to today's digitally-focused, omnichannel expectations.

Sustainable partnerships

Updating to more customer and user-friendly technology doesn't just afford businesses better connectivity and experience, it's also a chance for cost-saving and more economically friendly practices. Sustainability is at the forefront of business leader strategies, with more and more people looking to secure their spot on a carbon neutral network. As the spotlight shines even brighter on climate awareness and responsibility, buyers are becoming even more driven by their values. To avoid any techlash and to play their part in this important movement, businesses want to partner with those with strong green credentials.

It's not just businesses that are becoming more values-driven, it's employees too. As Gen Z continue to infiltrate the workforce, they're looking to work with

Partners have a prime opportunity to educate on the flexibility, reliability and security of the cloud



e to maximising the



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companies that share their outlook for ethical business. This ethos must be visible, and shine, through the tech stack. As this realisation hits more company radars, the need for cloud technology will increase exponentially. Partners must familiarise themselves with this demand and highlight the benefits of a sustainable strategy. To encourage and enable a more sustainable digital future, we must leverage changes such as full fibre deployments and the rise in hybrid, eco-conscious working.

Consultancy isn't a hard sell

The pandemic gave businesses a taste of more modern, cost-effective business possibilities such as flexible working and remote collaboration. These are practices and culture opportunities that, in the past, some leaders might've incorrectly assumed were either out of their budget or, within budget, but too complex to migrate to. We know now that neither of these are necessarily correct. The real deterrent is often fear of the unknown.

When it comes to change, partners must counteract any negative sentiment by leading with education and opportunity, not fear. Trusted providers should be able to combat any uncertainty. We're not simply 'selling', we're tailoring a solution to each individual business requirement or challenge. As consultants, we must rely on our secret weapon, our immutable trust. It's

something that, at Gamma, we've aided our partners in fostering with their clients through exceptional service, training and unique, tailored marketing.

We need to utilise the long-standing and trusted partnerships we've built with our peers to create an approach to change that's responsible and inclusive. In the years we've spent bolstering these rich relationships, our partners have gained a unique insight through the lens of their customers. We know their strengths, we understand their challenges and we're best placed to direct them through any unprecedented digital change.

People-first partnerships

Successful partners put people first, and our technology is built and enhanced with people at the forefront. With this in mind, we all have the ability to support businesses, giving them the confidence to embrace change. We constantly pressure test and evaluate our solutions to ensure that our partners are equipped with the tools to tackle customer challenges. We regularly implement partner feedback, running a fine-tooth comb across the data to make sure that our partners are equipped with the best possible technology to cushion any customer impact and negate disruption. With so many opportunities lying in wait, and all the tools readily available and at your disposal, are you ready to tackle change? ■

When it comes to change, partners must counteract any negative sentiment by leading with education and opportunity, not fear



Innovative partnership strategies in a changing world

The stakes may have never been higher as we approach the Golden Triennium – the three year period of challenge and opportunity in the run up to the 2025 PSTN shutdown. And according to Onecom Partners Managing Director Adam Cathcart, to overcome hurdles, maximise opportunities and accelerate growth a fresh perspective on channel partnerships is key to success.

The rapid pace of industry change, technological advancements and evolving customer expectations are driving the need for partner ecosystems rather than one dimensional partner relationships, according to Cathcart. He said the experience of channel partnerships is often mixed, prompting Onecom to rethink conventional approaches and launch Onecom Partners last month, which Cathcart says redefines how relationships are structured, including shared strategic objectives.

Onecom Partners unveiled its Partnering for Success blueprint at Vodafone's HQ in Newbury, where Onecom Group CEO Martin Flick and Cathcart outlined to more than 120 resellers (existing and prospective partners) how combining the two organisations will empower channel businesses to succeed and grow, following the former 9 Group business's acquisition by Onecom Group.

The event focused on the combination of Onecom's access to products and services from Tier 1 networks and carriers with the suite of value-added services offered by Onecom Partners. "As part of Onecom Group, Onecom Partners is now able to leverage Onecom's relationships with suppliers and its scale as a £165 million business to bring partners attractive propositions that they can pass on to their customers," said Cathcart.

These efforts include competitive rates and an expanded choice of products and services from multiple networks and carriers. "We are now a true aggregator of services able to offer our partners choice," added Cathcart. "When ordering, partners can pick the best

option according to the needs driving their individual customer. For example, for connectivity that may be resiliency, bandwidth or price. We're already seeing the value that additional choice brings to partners."

Interconnected partnerships

It is a fact that many strategic partnerships fall short of the mark, but Cathcart reiterated that Onecom Partners will be known as much for the success of its interconnected partner ecosystem as its portfolio proposition and differentiation factors. The proof is in the pudding as channel resellers have responded well to the launch: Onecom Partners' base of circa 450 partners is fast expanding and, notably, in Q3 2022 it added three times as many new partners as the whole of Q1 and Q2.

Cathcart says partners are attracted by a core portfolio comprising voice services, connectivity, mobile and value-added services. An important aspect of this is Vodafone connectivity, previously not available from the 9 Group business but now comprising 90 per cent of broadband orders.

Working in partnership to offer strategy and business growth capabilities goes a long way to solving many issues faced by resellers, and, of course, strong support will help to maximise opportunities such as the ISDN switch-off in 2025. "We are working closely with our partners to transition the services they have with traditional lines over to hosted or SIP services, ensuring we are supporting and updating them as we remain engaged with Openreach about the planned stop-sell points

Onecom Partners is now able to leverage Onecom's relationships with suppliers and its scale as a £165 million business



Strategies vital for growth



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and closure of exchanges," explained Cathcart. "We're making sure that our partners stay informed and educated on what this means for them and their customers."

Smooth transition

Onecom Partners also offers guidance as to how partners can help customers focus their digital transformation journey. For example, ahead of the 2025 switch-off's impact on ADSL and FTTC services the business is collaborating with partners to drive the transition to SoGEA and FTTP services, again through strong relationships with Vodafone and BT. "We are helping partners to ensure the transition is commercially strong and that they can offer customers the choice of provider that sits best with their customers," said Cathcart. "Through our portal, partners can enter a postcode and see multiple options across leading Tier 1 carriers."

"This is similar with IP voice services, where along with our existing IP offering and as a BT Wholesale Elite Partner we have recently introduced BT Wholesale's WHC hosted and SIP services. Importantly, Onecom Partners' status as a Super Reseller means our own partners can transact and manage their customers directly through BT's portals."

Furthermore, Onecom's heritage in mobile and its close relationships with the UK networks means partners can choose to buy multiple networks on a wholesale model at a discounted rate while owning the customer contract, billing and support relationship, backed up by Onecom Partners' support if required. Onecom

Partners also offers a Vodafone Red Bill solution, where partners are able to sign up under a Vodafone sub-agent agreement to provide mobile tariffs billed by the network with commissions ranging from 56 per cent to 68 per cent based on ARPU. "A large proportion of this is provided up-front to support partners in providing hardware options for customers," said Cathcart.

He noted that many partnerships look great on paper but may not deliver in practice, with poor choice, a lack of value added services and no on-hand expertise among the road blocks – barriers to growth which Onecom Partners has removed. "A key differentiator is our suite of value-added services that complements the core range of products and services, providing a one-stop support shop for partners," said Cathcart. "An example of this is our white-labelled back-office support service (the Virtual Office team) who can answer the phone on behalf of the partner, provision orders and support with new customer installations."

Additionally, Onecom Partners' bureau billing service supports partners with a white labelled billing solution with the option of a Direct Debit facility. The company also provides a concierge marketing service with bespoke marketing support. "Onecom Partners is on hand to help partners support their end customers by leveraging the expertise and knowledge of our teams," said Cathcart. "We also provide choice to empower partner revenue growth and increased margins. That's the true meaning of Partnering for Success." ■

We are now a true aggregator of services able to offer our partners choice



Virtual1 ramps up as TalkTalk and raises the bar

TalkTalk's acquisition strategy has been solidly executed with Virtual1 becoming its channel brand while TalkTalk Wholesale Services sharpens its focus on developing and building carrier capabilities. From a channel perspective the restructure aims to raise the bar and scale partner opportunities, underpinned by an expanding network, SDN, portals, automation and APIs.

TalkTalk Group's capacity to increase scale as a national provider of Ethernet solutions was boosted by the acquisition of Virtual1 in April this year. The deal added Virtual1's capabilities in automation, API and its portal, all built off Software Defined Network services. At the time TalkTalk CEO Tristia Harrison outlined the deal rationale that last month came to strategic fruition: "Since taking the company private in February 2021 we have looked to invest to strengthen both our B2B and wholesale platforms. As all businesses continue to experience increasing demands for high bandwidth services, we see huge benefits in acquiring Virtual1, coupling our national scale network with its APIs and software capabilities."

Virtual1 CEO and founder Tom O'Hagan continued to lead the standalone business of 200 people as part of TalkTalk Group. And he wasted no time in working closely with TalkTalk Wholesale Services to understand how best to support the needs of partners across both brands. "We are evolving our combined business into two new units to support the needs of both our consumer wholesale partners and our business wholesale Partners," said O'Hagan.

"In an ever-changing and competitive market we have seen customer needs evolve faster than ever over the last few years. We know that customers across consumer and business markets have very different requirements when it comes to connectivity and, to

support the growth of our partners operating across these different markets, we need to provide specific solutions and expertise to address these different needs."

Vision for growth

O'Hagan is leading the new business unit which specialises in the wholesale B2B market and is dedicated to wholesale cloud and connectivity solutions. TalkTalk Wholesale Services' current Managing Director, Nick Gunga, will move across to lead the new consumer division. By combining Virtual1's speciality in automation, API capabilities and portal experience, with TalkTalk Wholesale Service's national scale, O'Hagan's vision is to become the fastest growing provider of Software Defined high bandwidth services in the wholesale B2B market.

"We have brought the businesses together to deliver the best possible partner opportunities and experience," he stated. "The combination of TalkTalk's network reach and the SDN, portals and APIs of Virtual1 is hugely exciting for the market. This combination will deliver a product and service proposition that will raise the bar for the channel."

Virtual1 built an award-winning self-service portal and suite of APIs to enable businesses to virtually manage their networks with complete visibility of real-time bandwidth, reducing partners' manual intervention and cost, while improving the customer experience. "The combination of our software capability and the scale of TalkTalk's 3,000 strong exchange footprint is

We have brought the businesses together to deliver the best possible partner opportunities and experience



TalkTalk channel brand



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By focusing on exploring how a customer's business functions, the channel can have much richer conversations, involving many more products and deliver much more value

an exciting proposition to bring to the market," added O'Hagan. "We're now able to expand the reach of our solutions and increase our scale as a network provider. We're confident that by investing in a specialist business unit focused on the wholesale B2B market it will enable us to stay closer to the needs of partners

and customers. TalkTalk partners can get access to Virtual1 products now. It's business as usual."

TalkTalk Wholesale Services is structured to empower partners and their customers, and a key tenet of its strategy is the principle belief that there is no such thing as a single site business. "Even if a company only has a single office their data and applications are spread far and wide," said O'Hagan. "Add home and remote workers into the mix and a single office business now has all the challenges around integration, security and performance that used to only trouble much bigger multi-site businesses. By focusing on exploring how a customer's business functions, the channel can have much richer conversations, involving many more products and deliver much more value."

Key points to consider...

- Even a one office business has multiple connectivity and cloud opportunities.
- The connectivity conversation is much broader than how much bandwidth do you need.
- The richer conversations will open up opportunities across your portfolio, and move you towards that trusted advisor status.



Taking the strategic long bigger opportunities

We cannot imagine the full scale of the market opportunity if we fix eyes solely on the Big Reset of 2025. What comes next is bigger still, according to Diego Tedesco, Director of Wholesale Fixed at Virgin Media O2 Business.

Despite difficult circumstances, UK connectivity has come on leaps and bounds over the last few years – driven by investment, innovation, and competition – alongside Government incentives, like Project Gigabit. Full fibre connectivity is lighting up towns, cities and villages across the UK. In fact, according to Ofcom, last year represented the most significant year-on-year increase in gigabit-capable coverage the UK has ever seen.

This great work continues as we race towards the Golden Triennium – the three-year period in the run-up to the PSTN switch-off – and an all-IP future. However, the connectivity industry can never stand still. We must think years, even decades, in advance. So, while the approach to 2025 will be hugely significant, we must also lay the foundations for what comes next.

Building a smarter future

So what does come next? For the connectivity industry, it's an enormous opportunity to help drive social change and business growth, whether that's through building a more inclusive workforce or unlocking access to online development opportunities. We've seen the power of digital to underpin the way we work and live more clearly than ever in recent years – and this will only continue past 2025, enabling new and smarter ways of operating in sectors from manufacturing to healthcare.

The productivity and efficiency gains enabled by the rollout of 5G technology will deliver £43 billion of value to UK GDP by 2030, according to a report by PWC. Meanwhile, the shift to Edge architectures (supported by high bandwidth, low-latency infrastructure) will drive further innovation, allowing businesses to harness next-generation applications like VR (virtual reality), AR (augmented reality) and IoT (the Internet

of Things). In short, connectivity powers change. It drives productivity and transformation – and it opens the doors to new technology. But as we look ahead to 2025 and beyond, there are steps the channel will need to take to help bring this change to life.

Working together

At Virgin Media O2 we can leverage our expertise and scale to play a pivotal role in building out the nation's network infrastructure. Last December we finished upgrading our entire national network to gigabit speeds. Now, we're committed to upgrading our fixed network to FTTP, and earlier this year we saw a multi-billion pound investment that will take our fibre footprint to 80 per cent of the UK. However, in our mission to upgrade the UK we also recognise that we're not the only organisation providing fibre – and our fixed wholesale division exists to leverage our national fixed network infrastructure to help other network partners.

This collaborative approach will be important as we head towards – and past – 2025. Leveraging fixed infrastructure in this way will help the channel connect customers with the solutions they need to fit their requirements for the next decade. Whether that's building out their own core networks to better serve business and domestic users, or reselling business grade connectivity to end customers. For the UK to realise its potential – both in terms of harnessing tomorrow's applications and connecting communities across the country – it's vital that we continue to work together.

For service providers, this means working hand in hand with connectivity solutions providers (CSPs) and resellers to create new propositions and innovations. By doing this, we can create an environment that allows them to embrace new technologies like 5G, FTTP and edge

While the approach to 2025 will be hugely significant, we must also lay the foundations for what comes next



g view opens eyes to



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infrastructure, supporting innovation and providing better outcomes for UK businesses and their communities.

Flexibility is king

Innovation breeds opportunity. But we know that for many, it's not always that simple – and as the unpredictability of the last few years has shown, flexibility has become a byword in the channel. For the UK to truly embrace the innovation on offer, wholesale service providers have a duty to develop products that allow partners to scale and flex to a timeline that suits their specific needs. After all, CSPs each have their own unique commercial goals.

That's why we developed UltimateFlex. Enabling partners to upgrade, downgrade or cancel their contracts at any time. It's an offering that allows them to plan for 2025 – and beyond. And they have the certainty of knowing that they can adapt to a changing market.

Flexible services and price assurances will be vital to supporting CSPs' objectives. With these continuous waves of change ahead, connectivity players will need to upgrade, enhance and re-architect their core networks. And those that resell will be doing the same for their customers. It's important then that CSPs have the confidence in their service suppliers to back up their solutions with expertise and a partnership approach – so they can grow together.

Staying on track

The next few years will be transformational and there's a lot to get excited about. Concepts like the metaverse are now mainstream, with potential

to influence the way we work as well as play. The promise of technology like autonomous cars and IoT will move increasingly from the confines of the lab to the real world. And smarter cities will create safer and more sustainable urban spaces for us all.

CSPs will help contribute to such progress. The growth of 5G and FTTP coverage will continue to open up more solutions for end customers. Full fixed-mobile convergence solutions will offer seamless connectivity between types. And low latency, high-speed connections will unlock new opportunities for businesses.

Changing landscape

But we must be aware, too, that the channel landscape is changing. Organisations need to move massive volumes of data efficiently and cost-effectively. While the Golden Triennium is a useful target to rally around, we should not take our eyes off the even greater opportunities further down the line. Opportunities that will require both significant investment and strong partnerships.

As we look ahead at the years to come, it's clear to us that the biggest opportunities for the connectivity channel depend on capitalising on all our individual strengths. And venture beyond conventional boundaries that may have been holding us back. Many of our partners are already finding ways to work with each other, rather than against, to augment their business offering, and are leveraging wider ecosystems to expand their impact on their end customers' success. If we can all combine that strategic focus with flexibility we can continue to add value for customers, enable innovation and realise the game-changing potential connectivity has for the UK. ■

For the connectivity industry, it's an enormous opportunity to help drive social change and business growth



Maximising Golden Triennium

hinges on migration

A successful Golden Triennium (2023-2025) will depend on how efficiently and quickly the channel migrates customers to all-IP ahead of the 2025 PSTN switch off. And to help catalyse action on this critical issue, Zen Internet's Voice & UC Portfolio Manager Lee Houston (Comms Vision Platinum sponsor) looks at the scale and complexity of the task and offers solutions for a successful migration plan.

We have a duty to our customers to get this right, to ensure they are equipped with the information they need as well as the products and services that will best suit their requirements

As an industry we have been talking about the end of PSTN since it was first announced and we had seven years to migrate 16 million WLR lines. The scale of the task had many speculating that it would never happen, or that it would be hampered by significant delays. We achieved four million migrations in those first five years, leaving us with 12 million for the coming three. That translates to migrating a service every eight seconds! Even for a smaller player with 1,000 services, that would mean migrating one service every working day between now and end of life.

Yet here we are at very different stages of the migration process and with no cross-industry approach to reference. Many in the channel have yet to formulate a cohesive plan, and more again have not actively engaged with their customer base. We have a duty to our customers to get this right, to ensure they are equipped with the information they need as well as the products and services that will best suit their requirements.

On a positive note, there has been a significant reduction in the new installation of ISDN services, but what we are yet to see at the scale required to meet the 2025 switch off deadline is enough services being migrated.

Planning the transition

We know what we have to do, and that is to migrate millions of customers to new products and services within the next one to three (absolute deadline) years. But what do we migrate them to? How do we pick the

right product for the right customer? And what are the challenges we need to consider? Many in the channel have been supplying IP-based telephony solutions such as unified communications systems for some time now. However, a particular concern is the small business or SME market, which predominantly resides on PSTN. In the current cost of living climate making connectivity changes will not be a priority for them – they will be getting by just fine with what they have.

Raising awareness

Without the right approach, these customers run the risk of being left behind. Our industry must offer strategic counsel and build awareness levels that will help future proof a business using suitably designed connectivity solutions. Essentially, we need to make sure all of our WLR customers transfer to the next generation of products, and we need to get moving on it as a top priority. Once in a stop-sell exchange any premise move, provider switch, or new line installations will no longer be possible on the older technology. A customer will only be able to take either FTTP or SoGEA.

At Zen, we are already encountering customers wishing to add to their telephony capacity in stop-sell locations. We are working with them to find newer solutions that will best meet their needs. Everyone should be proactively cross referencing their installed base against the Openreach stop-sell list. This will equip your business with the insights to lead on a proactive approach and mitigate the risk of customers not being able to make agile changes to existing solutions.



annium opportunities



it comes to getting customers onto all-IP technology. If your customer will be FTTP enabled in as little as three months then plan that migration now, but don't move them to SoGEA in the first instance or you will have a double migration in quick succession, impacting your costs and resource while also disrupting your customer base.

Identify those customers in your installed base that can only move to SoGEA for the foreseeable. At Zen this customer type comes under our Managed Migrations umbrella. Start looking at your portfolio of products that can accommodate their needs while also considering your migration timeline. Here the customer insight piece will be crucial to your migration plan.

Engaging your customer base

You will encounter customers with complex and intricate solutions, which require time and a great deal of thought on the best approach to migrating them to a future proof solution. Trying to do this in a short space of time with a pending switch off/loss of service puts your customers at greater risk. This is why we must engage early to allow enough time for the transition. And that is why you must formulate your plan with a key focus on reducing costs, maintaining revenue streams and reducing churn.

One of the biggest threats with this programme is churn, particularly for channel partners who have split services. There is no coordinated industry approach to marketing the change and therefore individual providers need to be educating their installed base on the upcoming changes. Having those conversations with your installed base to demonstrate the future technology available has become an urgent matter. Because mark my words, if you're not talking to your customers about this already, someone else will be.

This should also help with the planning process and building an understanding of your customers' requirements: What products are they on? What products do they need to move to? And what insight is your frontline gathering? Armed with this information it is time to compile your migration matrix. This will also involve a portfolio review so you can identify gaps: Do you already have future proof products you can move your customers to? If not, what do you need to do to bring them into your portfolio? How will you package them up for differing requirements? Can you generate up-sell and cross-sell opportunities to your existing base while doing so?

Things will go wrong along the way. We keep hearing about the land grab opportunities full fibre presents, but we must acknowledge the scale and complexity of the task at hand. At Zen we firmly believe that people, processes and systems which are all underpinned by an exceptional customer experience will be key to success. ■

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A fibre first approach

Now is the time, if you haven't already done so, to analyse your base and identify customers that are already FTTP enabled. Put simply, if FTTP is available at a customer premise, then prioritise these migrations. While doing so, consider the service overlays you can offer with the added benefit of this extra bandwidth. Package up the benefits in layman's terms for your customer to really understand the future proof technology now available to them. This needs to become always on activity. As soon as another customer becomes FTTP enabled, start the migration.

The stop-sell works at an address level: If an address can get FTTP then that will be all that is available to them. In some locations (circa two million premises at the time of writing) FTTP will very soon be the only option. By May 2023 there will be 580-plus exchanges FTTP enabled, giving our industry plenty to go after. What about customers that are not FTTP enabled? That is where SoGEA comes in, doing a lot of the heavy lifting when

Formulating a migration plan

1. Cross reference stop-sell exchanges with your customer base. Prioritise those already FTTP-enabled.
2. Review your remaining base more holistically
Divide your base into cohorts based on size, complexity and current solutions.
3. Highlight any gaps in your portfolio: Do you have solutions to migrate customers to comparable services?
4. This is a forced change so exemplary customer service is a must. Listen, educate (not scare), advise and design.

We need to make sure all of our WLR customers transfer to the next generation of products, and we need to get moving on it as a top priority

Channel prepared to pounce on a wealth of opportunities

Business plans concocted pre-pandemic were thrown out the window as the requirement for two years of crisis thinking to protect revenue and staff wellbeing became paramount. In the wake of the pandemic, thinking pivoted from response to recovery; a stabilising period that saw many get back on their feet.

According to a joint leadership piece from Deloitte and Salesforce, we are entering a third stage, where businesses can come out of recovery and begin to thrive, putting in long-term thinking for the next three to five years.

The joint report aptly labels this stage as 'Preparing for the next normal', which will largely be driven by emerging technologies that the channel has become proficient proprietors of. The looming PSTN switch off and the fibre and 5G rollouts all present significant revenue potential for channel operators.

With the shift to a thrive mindset, it seems like prime time to check in with the channel to discuss future planning. We asked our forward-thinking channel friends to share with us the key trends shaping long-term strategy and divulge how they were aiming to maximise on the big opportunities that lie ahead.

Our expert panel also discussed potential future roadblocks and how they aim to minimise risk.



CHRIS MORRISEY
LILY COMMS

The 2025 switch-off presents a huge opportunity and we are firmly focused on capitalising on the 'Golden Triennium' period. This has shaped our long-term strategy, along with SME's post-pandemic realisation of the need for digital transformation, which is no longer a buzzword for businesses but a requirement. It's also seen as a practical way to improve revenue and efficiencies, presenting further opportunities. Roadblocks however have appeared on our growth journey, such as interoperability challenges as big networks are now finding themselves becoming reliant on software developers to keep track and facilitate product growth at pace and with industry-leading USP's. The main challenge this year however

has been recognising the distinct barriers to excellent recruitment. To overcome this, communication through the right channels, is key. If you find and retain the right people, you will likely win. Fail to attract the correct talent and you may struggle.



MICHAEL J THORNTON
KSM TELECOM

KSM Telecom's long-term strategy is one of full integration of all IT and comms solutions provided as a single pain of glass, or as some put it, one a...e to kick. Being able to provide businesses with all their IT and comms needs provides them with continuity of supply, productivity, security and improves performance across all departments. Many will say this is nothing new, but the fact remains that few companies are providing comprehensive solutions. Key to the success of this direction of travel is to have the right products and services but ultimately the right team members. Our strategy is and always will be to recruit people that can add value and skill set to the team. Additionally, our industry-recognised apprenticeship programme also provides an excellent platform for young graduates to join and succeed. Our goal is simple; provide the best, deliver the best, support the best.



DUNCAN WARD
ENREACH

Planning and preparedness are things we've embraced even more post-pandemic, with the potential threats to the quality of customer experience, such as lack of real-time engagement, communication and customer understanding. We have been able to demonstrate adaptability, reactivity, and flexibility which means supporting customers with the best approach. We put the customer at the heart of everything we do and have a core focus on customer experience, which allows us to plan with confidence. Delivering excellent customer experience isn't just about being responsive, it's about meeting the exact needs of every customer to their requirements. To continue

delivering this high level of service, we are improving our ways of working so we can be completely responsive to customer needs and preferences. Whether that's video calls, live chat, on-site visits or remote support, we are diverging our communication portfolio so customers can reach us 24/7 with confidence.



MARK SHRAGA
SOUTHERN COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

The future of SCG is focused on delivering on the promise of cloud to businesses at every level. By leveraging our ability to deliver software-defined services, hybridised telephony solutions, and a full spectrum of licence-based solutions, we are solving 'knotty' problems in the health, education, and retail sectors. These are focused on workflows, supporting dispersed workforces and enabling flexible estate management. Educating the marketplace is key to our growth strategy, with significant investment going into video case studies, 'how to' guides and an online learning platform for our channel partners and customers. We have been investing in strategically placed infrastructure, particularly over the last six years, positioning us extremely well as 2025 approaches. Alongside an array of valued carrier/supplier relationships we are differentiating our offering with two cloud telephony platforms, direct routing and a SIP network that enables us to provide highly resilient and secure, customer-centric solution.



**Prepare your customers for the
full-fibre future**



BERNIE MCPHILLIPS
PANGEA

Once-in-a-lifetime changes are happening - the PSTN is switching off and 2G and 3G networks are sunsetting. Suddenly, a tonne of legacy devices need swapping out. This represents a huge opportunity for providers of intelligent mobile data solutions. Many of these devices were previously out of scope due to the cost of change, but now the connectivity is up for grabs. And fibre is no longer king here. In fact, it can even be inconvenient to use. But intelligent mobile connectivity's flexibility and robustness make it the perfect replacement. And we're supporting the channel by running webinars and deal clinics, plus offering sales tools that tell our partners when their PSTN services switch off—and the perfect mobile data service to replace them. It's up to the channel to engage, but once they do, we'll hold their hands and guide them through these seismic shifts in the growing IoT world.



ANDREW DICKINSON
JOLA

Most resellers and MSPs in the UK either sell or have sold mobile but comparatively few have productised mobile data. In terms of margin and opportunity the two couldn't be more different, but resellers set up to bill CDRs and support traditional mobile have a head start when it comes to IoT/M2M. Jola's strategy is simply to encourage the channel to get into mobile data by supplying differentiated products, keenly priced, delivered and managed via a world class self-service portal. The only barrier is mindset and we overcome this through case studies, use cases, and the MRG™, a unique process that helps our partners find, convert and deliver large global IoT/M2M projects. For many PSTN-replacement projects, mobile data is the only viable solution. If resellers don't establish a partnership with a mobile data aggregator soon their customers may come under attack from competitors with a full switch-off portfolio.



ANNA ROPER
ONECOM PARTNERS

The impact of the big switch off, 5G roll out and IoT in driving digital transformation are shaping our long-term strategy. Our strategy as an aggregator of services enables our partners to access tier 1 carriers and networks, providing them with choice of best of breed products across mobility, connectivity and voice. Harnessed by our relationship with suppliers we can provide aggressive propositions to empower our partners to grow their revenues and increase margins. The industry's ability to provide access to new technology to support customers leading up to the big switch off in 2025 is a potential roadblock. We make sure we educate and upskill our partners around new technologies and the market transition to all IP,

whilst also providing them with bespoke support to manage the change with their individual customers.



SHIV PASSAP
BTT COMMS

The legacy network switch-off of and, in particular, the longer-term goal of the removal of all copper-based services is a key factor in our long-term strategy, as we know connectivity is the foundation building block of utilising modern-day comms and bandwidth is key in delivering this. With the introduction and deployment of faster, more reliable full fibre FTTP broadband networks being built rapidly across the UK, we are partnering with strategic partners utilising the various FTTP networks that are now available across the UK and looking to early adopt where possible. The biggest problem we face is that FTTP is only available to approximately 37% of UK premises, and as an MSP our reach is lower than this due to partnerships which are not always possible with all fibre carriers. Having access to all FTTP carrier networks, particularly in rural locations is key to enabling us to deliver our solutions.



FRASER FERGUSON
KUBENET

At KubeNet we understand that we share many of the same challenges around rising costs, rapidly evolving technology and a difficult recruitment market. As an MSP, it's on us to find solutions to these challenges, with a sustainable Cloud and achievable Digital Transformation strategy crucial to the success of the Channel and our clients. In 2021 we started to develop an internal strategy which could be transferable, with our goal to bring our clients along with us on the journey by developing client-centric platforms including enhanced data analytics, reporting and AI network monitoring. Our aim is to deliver agile solutions that provide enhanced business continuity and insight and create future revenues. We do face challenges and resistance, particularly around ownership, with clients feeling they may lose control of their environments. Despite the increasing difficulties we are facing, we believe this will be key to our future and the challenges ahead.



SOHINI RAIATHATHA
REDSQUID

It's an incredibly difficult time for many businesses, battling with the energy crisis, inflation, challenges with recruiting and looming cyber threats. At the same time, many are still operating on legacy technology that slows operations down. At RedSquid, our focus is on creating digital roadmaps for all our new and existing customers over the next 6-12 months. For those that fail to do this, they will find themselves left behind and unprepared for the coming years. While doing this we have a core focus on security and making sure it is implemented in all our solutions. Cyber security, SOC and SIEM technology is the way forward, and we are planning to ensure our customers will stay compliant and secure. Therefore, our team is constantly developing new solutions we can bring to market, to ensure customers stay safe against attacks, and that way equipped in a competitive and unsure market.



NICK LAKE
ARMSTRONG BELL

Acquiring an MSP capability was always part of our strategy. Finding an organisation with the right people and ethos at the right time was the challenge, and we're fortunate to have found that company and completed the transaction in 2022. Our biggest opportunity now is to cross sell and upsell the two portfolios of products – adding significant value in the process. For any reseller the key to success is maintaining relationships with reputable partners that respect the history and skillset of the smaller party and we will work with them flexibly to mutual benefit. Currently, recruitment, retention, rising costs and the uncertain economic outlook are all concerning, but we have been through worse – we'll stick to our values and

look after our customers who rely on us to steer them through the same choppy waters. Our long-term strategy and purpose remain to enable productivity, process and collaboration.



DAVID OWEN
INTERCITY

We cannot ignore the challenging times ahead. Increasing inflation and economic headwinds mean businesses will be looking to cut costs and hold back on investment. The challenge for us will be making sure that our customers, partners, and prospects realise that investing in our solutions will help them reduce costs as well as increase productivity at the same time. At a time of economic stress, this will be critical to business survival, and we are one of the few businesses that can stitch together the many elements in one service wrapper. Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS) and Contact Centre as a Service (CCaaS) are rapidly becoming conjoined.

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Partner marketer



Emily Vandervell

AT THE vanguard of Onecom Partners' marketing strategy is incoming Head of Marketing Emily Vandervell who brings valuable marketing and brand experience having held senior roles across the web hosting and technology industry. She joined as Onecom Partners launched its new brand identity and channel strategy last month (see page 12).

"In my first week I had the opportunity to attend the Onecom Partners launch event in collaboration with Vodafone Business and met some of our partners in person," said Vandervell. "I look forward to attending more industry events and getting to know the channel market, alongside planning and developing our marketing strategy for the upcoming year."

Group Director of Marketing Lucy Callaghan added: "Emily's appointment

gives new focus to the Onecom Partners channel marketing strategy. The newly launched Strategic Partner Programme incorporates concierge style marketing support, spearheaded by Emily and a growing team of talented marketers."

Also on the move...

TELENT Chairman David Naylor-Leyland is stepping down, making way for incoming Non-Executive Director and Chairman Paul Lester CBE who boasts 30 years top level leadership experience.



Paul Lester

Naylor-Leyland will continue as a Non-Executive Director. Lester is currently Chairman of McCarthy & Stone, Essentra and Funeral Partners. He was formerly a Non-Executive Chairman of Forterra and John Laing Infrastructure, and Director of Invensys. He was Group Managing Director of Balfour Beatty before becoming Chief Executive of engineering services company VT Group. Naylor-Leyland said: "After almost 12 years as Chairman it is time for me to step down. Paul has a wealth of experience and is, I believe, a fantastic choice to move the business forward to our strategic objectives."

GLIDE Group's incoming Business Sales Director Richard Malizia has big plans to boost the altnet's 2,000km-plus fibre optic network and spur the adoption of FTTP services.



Richard Malizia

Malizia brings over 20 years experience within the field having previously worked in the sale of dark fibre, DWDM waves and connectivity in domestic and global markets. His new remit is to oversee Glide's sales growth across all business segments

including data centres, wholesale carriers, enterprise and SME. "As a key focus I'll be sharing Glide's vision of smart building solutions for high-density public places, industrial parks and flexible workspace environments," stated Malizia.

TIER 2 wholesale fibre network provider Fibre 1 has appointed Dietmar Wand as Head of Channel and Business Development, based at the company's new offices in the centre of Edinburgh. Wand brings circa 20 years experience working with IT providers across the central belt of Scotland and will spearhead Fibre 1's channel expansion campaign. Fibre 1 was founded in 2017 and is experiencing annual growth of over 80 per cent. "We believe there is a niche market for great connectivity," said Wand.



Dietmar Wand

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