



**NTA CEO creates growth in unity with partners p22**

**Comms National Awards celebrate industry leaders p26**



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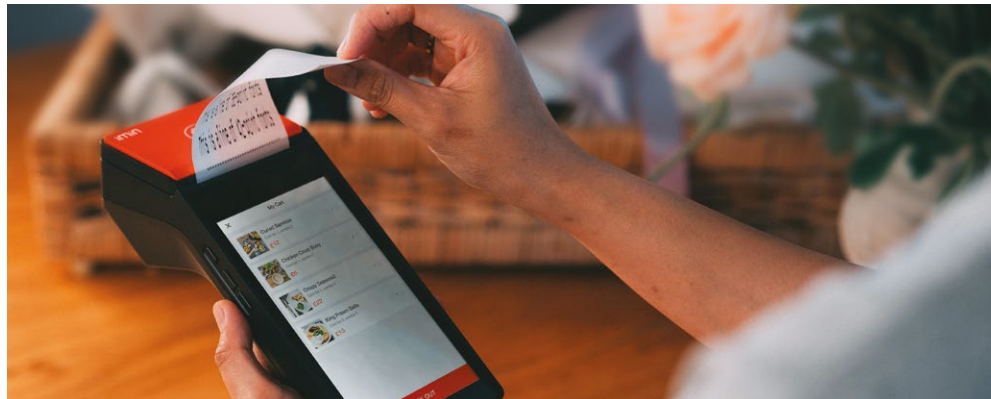
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# Payments drive premium deals

**BIG changes to the way organisations pay for goods and services in the fast-expanding metaverse has sparked a new Payment-as-a-Service market opportunity for the channel.**

**SPECIAL REPORT**

Analysts predict that the commercial potential for first mover payment service providers is significant in a global Payment-as-a-Service (PaaS) market predicted to generate £4.2tr in value by 2030.

According to Fidelity Group MD Alan Shraga his business is at the vanguard of this emerging channel opportunity having signed an exclusive deal with payment specialist MWB

Solutions that will give reseller partners fast access to its operations portal.

“MWBS is an ISO fintech business and our partnership gives resellers a fully brandable platform that provides data from 14 of the major acquirers,” commented Shraga.

“Resellers can instantly determine what banks will fund their solutions and see how their collective estate is performing.”

Shraga says PaaS will add value to reseller businesses,

lock in customers and ‘revolutionise’ their own and their customers’ sales processes via the data it produces.

“It’s a standalone business model and there are multiple incomes from selling payments,” he added.

“A typical solution will include a Wi-Fi set-up, a payment button solution, a terminal solution, and an IoT income. You’ve got four different values there out of one sale.”

**Full story on pages 24-25**

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## EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

THE quest for True Vision: We're edging towards that time of year when industry watchers get compelled to scratch their 'predictions' itch. It's an annual condition that afflicts analysts most – but no-one has their finger on the pulse of the

market more than those at the coalface every day of the year. Still, the prediction factories will get the dust blown off them, ramp up and churn out predictable observations dressed up as compelling routes to gaining a competitive advantage in the time to come.

It would be refreshing if sections of the analyst quarter could focus their efforts on predicting the elusive and latent trends, track what's happening between the lines, marry that with true intelligence and create scenarios worthy of deep consideration.

Failing that, let's just keep an eye on what emerges from this year's gold standard Comms Vision Convention (2-4th November, Gleneagles Hotel – see pages 33-78). The big theme this year – Maximising the Golden Triennium – and working together to power the uptick during the three-year countdown to all-IP and beyond. It's not quite Christmas come early for the industry, nor any body for that matter given the unimpressive state of the nation right now with an economy bruised and sensitive to the touch following recent political blows. But positivity and optimism pays off.

Turning back to predictions – we all know what's coming down the line: We can listen to vendors talk about R&D, read tech magazines, and there's enough futurists out there evangelising various versions of the future. Yet there is a lot more to it than picking and mixing what grabs your imagination most. The trick is in knowing how to optimise and leverage real and relevant knowledge, absorb all that valuable imparted insight and strategise from a position of certainty to gain a solid competitive advantage. That is why Comms Vision can never be called a convention for the crystal ball gazers.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

# Auxilion set for UK push



Philip Maguire

AUXILION has earmarked a £15m investment for acquisition and UK expansion.

The Irish IT services and solutions business is looking to acquire a mid-tier IT service provider in the UK and expand its services operation which is based in Sheffield.

Auxilion also plans to boost its UK headcount by 60 over the next two years, as part of a three year expansion strategy.

Auxilion also currently operates in Telford and Warrington.

Its key partners include Microsoft and Hewlett Packard Enterprise, and the investment is expected to strengthen its partner ecosystem.

Earlier this year Auxilion stated that it is on course to grow its revenues by 25% by

the end of 2022, compared to 2021, taking its revenues beyond £40m.

Auxilion CEO Philip Maguire commented: "Our acquisition plans and this significant investment show how committed we are to expanding our presence in the UK market, where we have operated for more than 20 years.

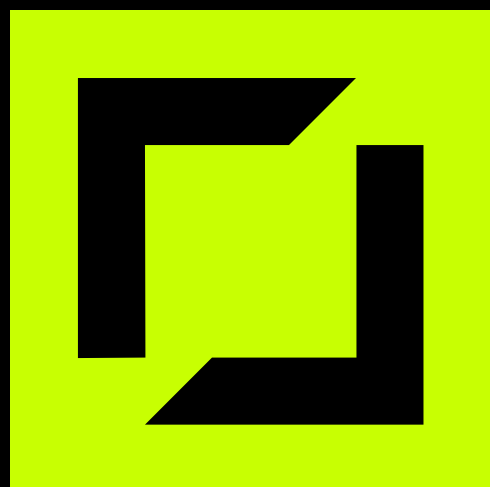
"The north of England offers opportunities, most notably due to the access it provides to top quality talent. By taking advantage of the talent pool in the north of England and acquiring a like-minded, similarly aligned company, we can lead digital change and make a real impact."

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## NEWS ROUNDUP

ISLE of Man-based plan.com's five year growth plan received a boost with the acquisition of Telford located Telserve, giving the group a presence in four locations and a combined team of over 170 personnel. Telserve's senior leadership team including MD Stuart Box remain with the business. plan.com CEO Dan Craddock said: "Telserve has established a successful business model that complements our partner-led route to market. Our combined expertise will provide a strong foundation for expansion in the UK." Telserve has been a plan.com partner for over six years.

PRINT and document solutions provider Woodbank Office Solutions has acquired Wirral-based print management business Datatech Systems, strengthening its presence in Liverpool and the Wirral. Woodbank is based in Stockport with regional offices in Liverpool and Leeds. The business was founded in 1989 and has circa 1,000 clients. Founder and MD Janet Bowden said: "We've been looking to expand our business for some time, and when the opportunity arose to acquire Datatech it was evident throughout the process that it was a natural fit."



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NEWS ROUNDUP

CARDIFF-based Sage 200 business partner Prosys Computing has been acquired by Pinnacle. The deal is Pinnacle's fourth in a year and strengthens its presence in Wales and the south west of England, adding over 100 Sage customers to its 1,900-plus base. Pinnacle MD James Spencer said: "Prosys has been operating in Wales and the south west for 30 years. Its team is skilled in implementing Sage 200 in industries that are of key interest to us including food and drink, pharma and electronics."

WAVENET has become a UK wholesale service provider and top tier VAR of Avaya OneCloud. "By offering a combination of Avaya's UCaaS and CCaaS experience technology with Wavenet's bundled voice plans we are able to provide wholesale partners with a self-service managed platform, allowing them to control their customers and bill directly," said Antony Black, Director of Wholesale, Wavenet.

TALKTALK Group has augmented its customer base following the purchase of SSE Phone & Broadband from OVO Energy. The deal adds circa 135,000 customers plus the OVO Energy supporting team.

## QBS hails new distie Orchestra

QBS Software has launched a new distributor in the UK called Orchestra, bringing together five 'hypergrowth vendors' from global software investor Insight Partners.

"The launch provides a strategic offering across Europe for modern enterprise technology vendors that want to get into the market and enhance their footprint," said Dave Stevinson, Group CEO, QBS.

"This can be via a modern sales and channel management as-a-service model or the traditional two-tier model, which appeals to venture capital and private equity firms with a portfolio of vendors at various stages of maturity and often with aspiring international go-to-market requirements."

Thomas Krane, MD, Insight Partners, commented: "The technology market is changing at breathtaking speed with new models of delivery and consumption, at boundless scale and with global reach.

"It can be difficult to keep up in this increasingly data-driven world and the modern channel needs a new approach to sales, marketing and execution to reach customers and influence the buyer's journey."

# Gaphite gets Digital Space



Neil Muller

NEWARK-on-Trent business Digital Space has new owners following the exit of Horizon Capital which owned the company since February 2017, and which sold to mid-market private equity firm Graphite Capital last month.

CEO Neil Muller and his management team will continue to lead the firm with a strong emphasis on organic growth augmented by acquisitions.

"In today's challenging economic times we will continue to help customers reduce their costs and improve their productivity through digital transformation," said Muller.

Humphrey Baker, Senior Partner at Graphite Capital, added: "With strong demand for digital transformation and modern ICT services, Digital Space

is well positioned to capitalise on its strategy and integrated managed service capabilities."

Digital Space was founded as Timico in 2004. Following a number of acquisitions the business rebranded as Digital Space in 2021.

NEWS ROUNDUP

ANS has mobilised suppliers and partners to raise £2m in a bid to help SMBs drive their digital transformation projects during the cost-of-living crisis. ANS itself is offering direct discounts. The funding pot is available for the next 12 months and businesses with fewer than 300 employees can apply. CRO Richard Thompson stated: "With the current economic conditions it's understandable that some SMBs are considering pausing digital investment. But these projects are often critical for businesses to compete during the tough times." ANS CEO Paul Shannon commented: "We want this fund to fuel, enable and accelerate the digital growth of UK SMBs."

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# VMO2 eases digital divide

FREE digital skills training will be delivered by Virgin Media O2 Business volunteers working with local authorities and the public sector across the UK.

Following a pilot in Greater Manchester the company is now working with public sector organisations to roll out the initiative and support those most digitally excluded.

The UK's digital skills gap is costing the economy £12.8bn, with 5.4 million Brits unable to carry out simple digital tasks, new research from Virgin Media O2 has found.

In response it launched the Connect More Programme to tackle digital exclusion.

Anyone in Virgin Media O2 Business' team of more than 2,000 employees can volunteer as a digital skills trainer.

Jo Bertram, MD, Virgin Media O2 Business, commented: "From preventing people booking GP appointments online right through to locking them out of job applications and promotions, the impact of the digital skills gap on society



Jo Bertram

and the economy is staggering. More than a third of people say it's already held back their earning potential.

"No one sector – public or private – can tackle this inequality alone, but working together we can pool our strengths and have a bigger, better impact.

This isn't just about funding, it's about real boots on the ground support."

## NEWS ROUNDUP

GOTO customers can manage any device from any location via a single app following its acquisition of Miradore. GoTo CEO Paddy Srinivasan said: "Our enhanced device management capabilities from this acquisition plus our support of Windows devices allows GoTo to provide an all-in-one integrated IT management experience."

A NEW £985m finance facility will enable London-based ISP Community Fibre to catalyse the roll out of its full fibre network to 2.2m London homes by the end of 2024. The near-£1bn financial boost is made up of £685m committed facilities with a further £300m uncommitted accordion.

A LINK-up between Commsworld and Netomnia promises to bring full fibre broadband to 90,000 homes in North Lanarkshire. Bruce Strang, Commsworld CEO, said: "These new connections, which are due to be completed by the end of 2023, are the beginning of what we believe Commsworld and Netomnia can achieve in the future."

# Sharp increase in number of outsourced CCaaS projects

THE number of CCaaS projects outsourced to Support to Win reached record levels during H2 with September seeing more contact centre projects and seats installed than any other month.

Orders increased by 33% during the period as channel companies lacking the skills or scale turned to Support to Win, driving a 109% uplift in CCaaS revenue which matches the professional services firm's work in enterprise hosted telephony and UCaaS.

Support to Win CEO Julie Mills said: "We see two main factors behind this increased



Julie Mills

demand: More CCaaS providers and partners using our smart-sourcing flexibility to get projects done, and more interest in

our DNA (Discover, Normalise, Automate) capabilities to accelerate migration projects and cut out human error.

"There are big opportunities for anyone selling CCaaS who needs to remove the operational headaches, particularly around customer onboarding and go-live."

The white label services in most demand include project management, deployment, complex migrations and in-life customer care.

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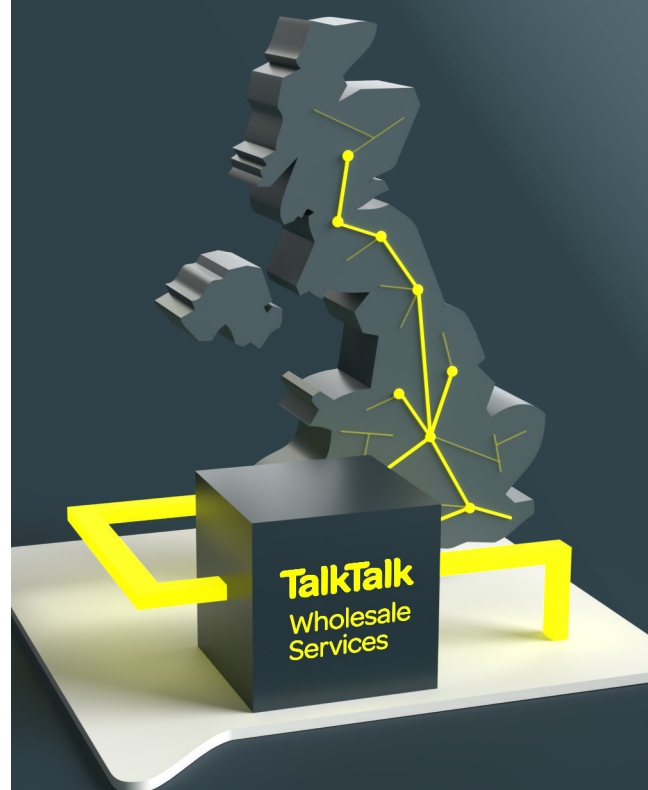
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# Firstcom nets reseller Calteq



Christian Bleakley

BOLTON-based Firstcom Europe has acquired Hertfordshire business Calteq, adding £6.2m revenues (80% recurring) and £1.2m EBITDA.

The deal also expands Firstcom's UK geographical reach and range of products.

"Calteq's expertise in offering multi-site and bespoke solutions will complement our unified communications products and enhance our ability to grow the business organically," commented Firstcom Europe CEO Christian Bleakley.

Calteq founder and Director Mike Stephenson added: "One of the reasons we were keen

to join with Firstcom is the opportunities it provides my colleagues to progress. With Firstcom Europe's product set, our customers will be able to transition seamlessly to cloud-based solutions."

Investment firm Kartesia has committed over £30m to Firstcom Europe to refinance its existing debt and support a buy-and-build strategy.

This funding enabled Firstcom to acquire two businesses in Germany and a number of customer databases in the UK.

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# Virgin helps staff with cost of living

VIRGIN Media O2 employees earning £35k basic pay or under will benefit from a cost of living crisis package including a support allowance of £1,400 and flexible leave policies.

Chief People Officer Philipp Wohland said: "We're supporting our employees most affected by the rise in the cost of living to help them through the difficult months ahead.

"Coupled with an earlier pay uplift and bonus this latest measure represents an overall above-inflation increase for many of our people."

VMO2 is also offering 26 weeks paid maternity or adoption leave, and 14 weeks paid paternity leave to any new parent. The company will provide up to 10 days paid leave for those who have experienced pregnancy loss.

Parents whose babies are born prematurely or sick and require neonatal care shortly after birth will be offered 12 weeks paid neonatal leave.

The company will also offer up to five days paid leave to help employees deal with emergencies at home, and 10 days paid leave to support people who have experienced the loss of a loved one.



Philipp Wohland

With over 10% of VMO2's employees self-identifying as an unpaid carer, the company is introducing five days of paid carer's leave. "Our leave policies will support all our employees, including LGBTQ+ families," added Wohland.



HATS off to retired Union Street founder Tony Cook who completed last month's London Marathon, raising £6,500 for mental health charity Mind. Running alongside his two sons Frank and Ollie, Cook completed the 26 mile 385 yard course in just under four hours. "This was my first marathon and it was an unforgettable experience," he said. "We ran together all the way round and Frank and Ollie had to give me a lot of help to get over the line, but it was worth it. I'm delighted we finished in under four hours, but more important was the money we raised for MIND." Pictured: Frank, Tony and Ollie Cook.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

PANGEA co-founder Chris Romeika has sharpened his focus on technology and engineering following a job change from Operations Director to Chief Technical Officer. The move follows the appointment of Phil Taylor as Chief Finance and Operations Officer. He previously worked with Pangea in a consulting capacity.

CROFT has acquired Coalville-based Diacom Networks which was established 30 years ago. Its specialities include the design, implementation, management and maintenance of IT infrastructure solutions. Croft CEO Mark Bramley said: "The technical knowledge, skills and experience that the team at Diacom bring is a benefit to Croft."

ABERDEENSHIRE Council is trialling six smart technologies in partnership with North, as part of the company's IoT Accelerator Pack Programme. The packs are being rolled out to 12 towns, enabling the council to explore reductions across cost and energy consumption, while improving operational efficiencies and reducing carbon footprints.

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## 'Recession proof' IT spending

GLOBAL IT spending is set to hit \$4.6tr in 2023, up 5.1% on 2022, according to Gartner, which says demand will be driven by enterprises pushing ahead with digital initiatives in response to economic turmoil.

"Enterprise IT spending is recession proof as CEOs and CFOs, rather than cutting IT budgets, are increasing spending on digital business initiatives," commented John-David Lovelock, Distinguished VP Analyst at Gartner.

"Economic turbulence will change the context for tech' investments, increasing spending in some areas and accelerating declines in others, but it is not projected to materially impact the overall level of enterprise technology spending."

Lovelock noted that companies will use digital technology to reshape revenue streams, add products and services, change the cash flow of existing products and services, and change value propositions.

He added: "This has fed the shift to building, composing and assembling technology to meet specific business drivers. This shift is foundational to the growth of cloud over on-premises for new IT spending."

# Stobart states SBTi net zero ambitions

ZEN Internet is targeting net zero by 2040 having established near and long-term emission reductions in line with its commitment to the Science-Based Targets initiative (SBTi).

Zen responded to the SBTi's urgent call for corporate climate action by committing to align with 1.5o C and net zero through the Business Ambition for 1.5oC campaign.

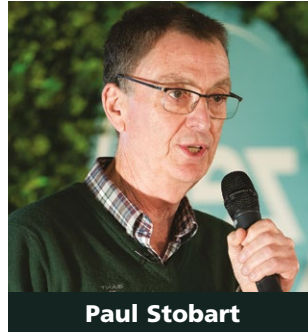
Zen has also become part of Race to Zero, the UN-backed global campaign seeking to halve global emissions by 2030.

Zen Internet CEO Paul Stobart said: "The Race to Zero is something I am not only professionally passionate about, but also personally.

"It is therefore of the utmost importance that while we run our business at Zen, we strive to make a positive difference to the world.

"Achieving B Corp certification in 2020 was a big milestone for us, and having our commitments validated by SBTi is another demonstration that we are not just paying lip service to the sustainability agenda, but have transparent objectives that we are determined to meet.

"We're under no illusions that this involves a huge amount



Paul Stobart

of work within the business, but it's something that is non-negotiable. For our Scope 1 and 2 emissions we have a num-

ber of initiatives in place, from swapping out gas use in our HQ and refurbishing the equipment we send out to customers, to minimising manufacturing to investments in our data centre for increased efficiencies.

"We want to show the industry that it is possible to be successful without neglecting social responsibilities."

Stobart also noted that cross-industry collaboration will be key to achieving Scope 3 targets.



DISS-based distributor Midwich rolled out a cost of living package to support its 350-plus staff through September and October. The initiative aimed to benefit every employee with support such as supermarket and fuel vouchers, hot drinks, biscuits and cakes, hot and cold lunches, everyday items for staff to take home such as food, toiletries and cleaning products, along with family treat bags and firewood. Mark Lowe, MD UK&I, commented: "We have plenty more ideas and have recruited a full-time person to help with this. We hope that other businesses in the region can be encouraged to implement creative and impactful ways of supporting staff during challenging times."

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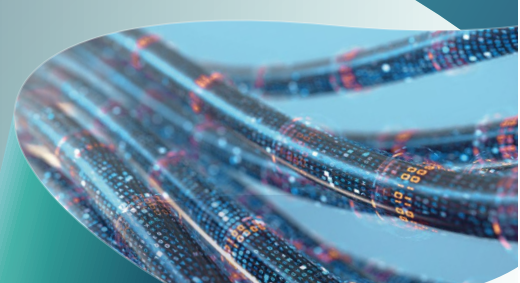
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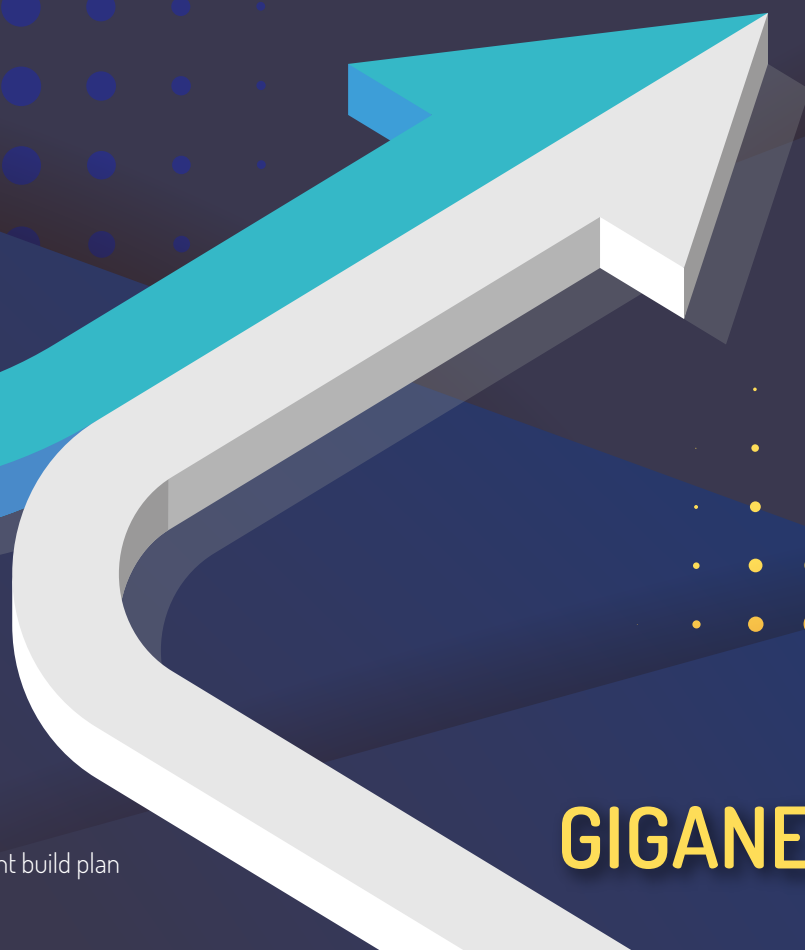
**2023**

148,000 businesses\*



**2024**

259,000 businesses\*



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\*Forecast figures based on current build plan

# Physical security in heightened demand

JOLA CEO Andrew Dickinson has swung a spotlight on the physical security system services market which generates £1.4bn revenue and witnesses 11.8% annual growth.

He says the PSTN switch-off in 2025 is an ‘especially compelling’ event in this sector as it impacts almost all monitored devices in the UK.

“Anyone involved in physical security is planning to upgrade to IP either via a fixed connection or mobile data,” he said. “Mobile data features disproportionately in this sector because for millions of devices an upgrade to a fixed connection represents a significant increase in cost.”

Dickinson also noted that many resellers and MSPs lack a mobile data proposition and are therefore unable to offer a one-stop solution to customers in the security sector and beyond.

“Early movers who have partnered with a mobile data aggregator have been surprised at the margins achievable,” he commented. “This is because independent channel-only aggregators are able to provide differentiated products such as un-steered multinet SIMs and preconfigured specialist hard-



Andrew Dickinson

ware that the MNOs don’t offer. They have also found the products relatively easy to sell, deliver and support. Book-to-bill times can be as little as a few days which means revenues flow quickly.”

Dickinson observed that the security sector is cranking up demand for mobile data solutions which he says plays into the hands of resellers as an ‘easy’ product to sell, provision, support and bill, leading to high margin recurring revenue.

Value creation is not limited to recurring revenue, noted Dickinson, who pointed out

that financial markets attribute higher EBITDA multiples to IoT/M2M, therefore including mobile data in a portfolio increases the overall value of a business, as well as delivering a competitive advantage.

“Jola partners have beaten the MNOs directly to win large SIM deals from well known logos in the security market,” he stated, also noting that solutions with network and device security built-in protect users from DDOS attacks and hackers.

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## Marketing urged as a priority

ALMOST 90% of channel partners struggle to maximise brand awareness with nearly 73% suffering from a shortage of in-house marketing and finance skills, according to research by BT Wholesale.

But the dilemma is not lost on partners as 78% intend to increase investment in marketing tools and 73% in up-skilling marketing teams. Partners expect to spend circa £36k on marketing activities over the next 12 months.

The study also showed that partners favour off-the-shelf marketing materials and need more guidance on marketing channels. Social media is rated as the top lead generating channel followed by telemarketing.

Christopher Wellbelove DL, Senior Marketing Consultant Partner Plus at BT Wholesale, said: “With channel partners prioritising driving leads and generating revenue, it’s crucial that marketing doesn’t get sidelined and that investments are made into activity that adds value.

“While the shortage of in-house marketing skills can be daunting, there is a plethora of useful tools and support available to elevate partner businesses to the next level.”

## NEWS ROUNDUP

BABBLE’S cyber capabilities have received a boost following its acquisition of Bucks-based activereach, its seventh transaction this year (22 in total). Babble CEO Matt Parker stated: “This deal is one of the most exciting things we have done. Bringing activereach into Babble is a huge step forward in the growth of the cyber portion of our business.” activereach MD Mike Revell added: “We see exciting times ahead in building an enterprise cyber practice that will sit alongside the three other Babble product pillars.”

GIGANET and Cuckoo are to create 250 new jobs with the majority based out of regional customer service hubs. Giganet will also develop a graduate training programme, building on its existing apprenticeship scheme with Fareham College. Places will be offered to up to 20 graduates over the coming financial year. The moves follow Giganet’s acquisition of Cuckoo last month. Giganet CEO Jarlath Finnegan said: “Giganet is growing and these new jobs will help us push forward and bring faster broadband to people.” Cuckoo CEO Alexander Fitzgerald added: “We want to tap into the talent we know is all over the country.”







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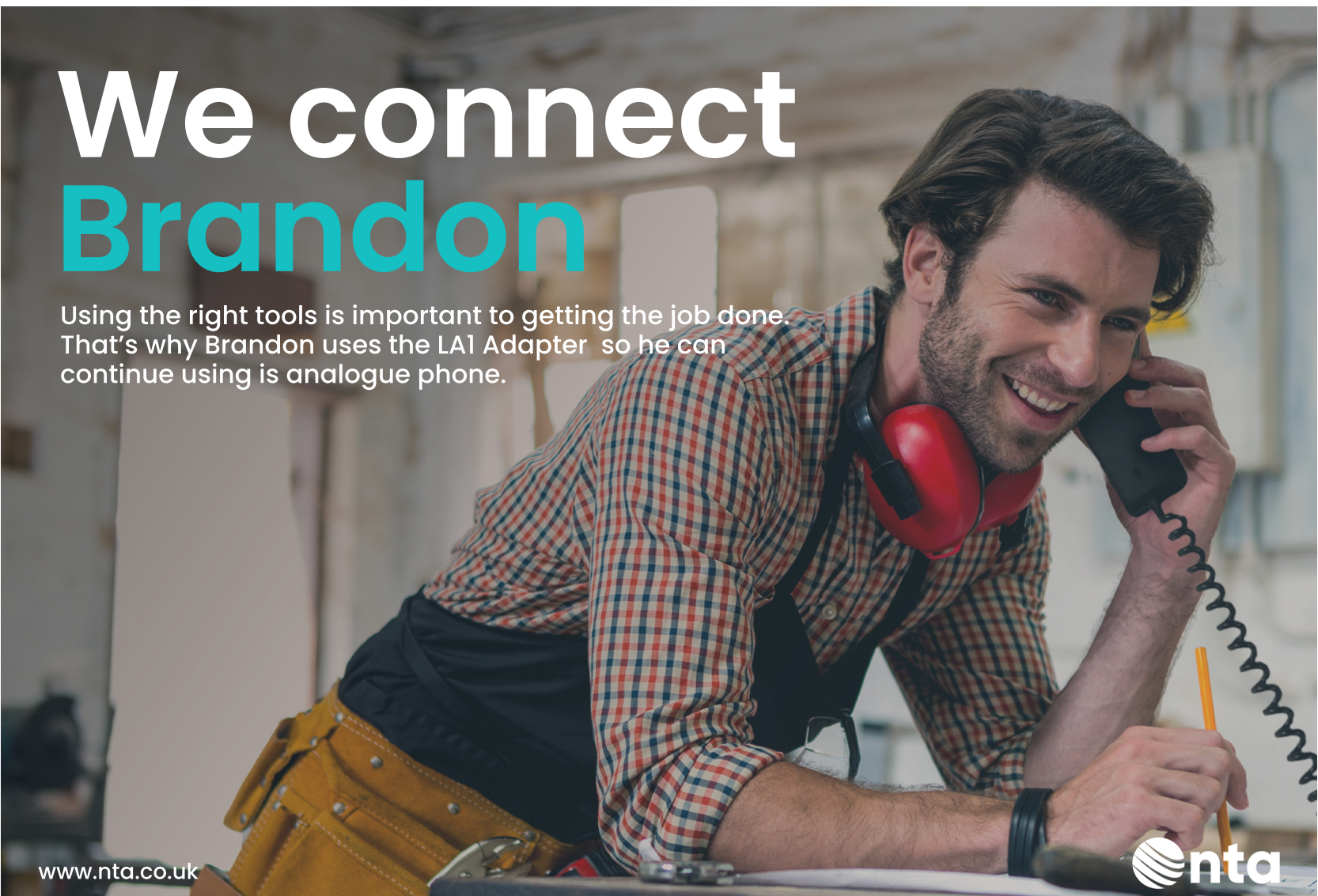
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# O'Hagan's next steps

In October Virtual1 became TalkTalk's channel brand while TalkTalk Wholesale Services sharpens its focus on developing and building its 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. Here, Virtual1 CEO Tom O'Hagan shares insights into his plans and market perspectives...



Tom O'Hagan

## Why were two new business units created following TalkTalk's acquisition of Virtual1?

Customers across consumer and business markets have 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.

## What is your biggest opportunity?

Helping the channel to exploit the next wave of technology and innovations. It's why we all love being in this industry. The forward momentum is relentless and each new innovation brings fresh opportunities for those businesses nimble enough to embrace and bring them to market. We are in a great position to help partners do just that, for example through our managed SD-WAN roll out and altnet aggregation.

## Which new technology areas are on your radar screen?

We were ahead of the game using automation to redefine the service experience and we expect this trend to continue with AI and machine learning. We expect this trend to continue across the industry with self-configuring and healing networks, pre-emptive maintenance through to automated security and threat mediation. Automation also gives us the flexibility to adapt and grow our portfolio as and when the demand arises.

## What connectivity trends are you tracking that interest you most?

The altnets are particularly exciting. They will deliver a different and more competitive connectivity marketplace with a genuine choice of infrastructure providers that businesses and the UK as a whole haven't seen before. For us it is key to maintain our agnostic stance, giving

partners access to complementary products without the need to significantly expand their supply chain, and remove the complexity and cost that this brings with it. It's our job to keep things simple and help partners do what they do best.

## What's your top tip for partners?

Recognise how valuable a conversation around connectivity can be. At our last FutureConnect event we talked about the rise of cloud and that there is no such thing as a single site business today. Data and applications are widely dispersed and businesses need to be able to consume them in a secure, high performing and flexible way. Conversations therefore should move away from speeds and feeds and focus on understanding how a business operates, increasing opportunities to up-sell and cross-sell, not just in the connectivity arena but across the breadth of the portfolio. ■

## 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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# Sustainability remains top sector priority



Deborah Johnson

**S**ustainability remains front of mind in the industry despite years of disruption from the likes of Covid-19 and Brexit, according to a report by Agilitas which also noted that this year saw continued optimism in building a more resilient business model to survive external factors. It was also revealed that many technology channel businesses are now measuring purpose and profit in equal measure, with almost half of those asked stating it has become more of a focus.

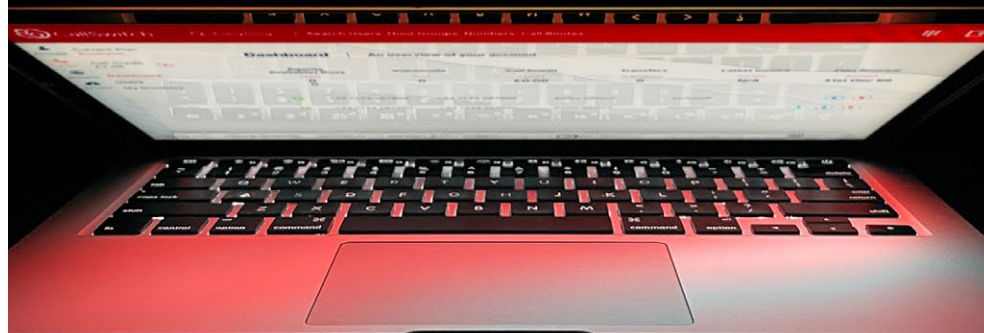
However, despite this increase in overall optimism and awareness of measuring sustainability targets, the channel did see a slight fall in confidence when it came to its ability to adopt eco-friendly processes across the supply chain. That said, over 98 per cent are currently making strides to improve their impact on the planet.

Channel firms are no longer waiting for vendors to

make the first move, with more companies taking ownership and building their own localised ecosystems through increased partner-to-partner collaboration. This was shown by 82 per cent of those surveyed saying they only opt for partners they align with.

“With the impact of climate change now a significant concern, sustainability is no longer something that can be claimed through small actions or gestures like offsetting,” commented Deborah Johnson, Head of Sustainability at Agilitas. “To be effective, it requires a complete transformation of business processes that start with a sustainability-first mindset and an even deeper collaboration with industry partners, which is something we are already seeing.

“As a result, becoming sustainable without significantly increasing costs is proving to be a real challenge, but has been met by those in the industry with positivity and confidence.” ■



## There's something beyond the Horizon...

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# Resilient trading continues

The comms sector's resilient performance continues despite economic uncertainty and industry change, with ICT channel M&A a particular hotspot, writes Philip Carse, Analyst at Megabyte.com.

**M**egabyte's coverage of the UK Telecoms Services market covers almost 1,000 UK registered companies spanning the major networks, asset light network players, emerging FTTP players, comms, IT and satellite resellers, telecoms network support services, and niche verticals such as M2M. Major recent headlines include – potential mobile consolidation (Vodafone/Three UK), plus M&A in broadband, B2B resellers and fibre, significant fibre fundings, and the usual mixed trading fare ranging from Gamma's continued growth to Avaya's travails.

## Mobile consolidation

Following speculation in recent months Vodafone and Hutchison in early October confirmed that they are in discussions concerning a possible combination of Vodafone UK with Three UK, with a 51%/49% post deal ownership achieved through a 'differential leverage contribution' rather than cash changing hands. The deal rationale is stated as the bringing together of two players that Ofcom has characterised as sub-scale in order to accelerate the rollout of full 5G in the UK and expand broadband connectivity to rural communities and small businesses. For context, Vodafone UK's revenue/EBITDA/capex of £5,501m, £1,186m and £692m (year to



Philip Carse

## M&A continues unabated in the channel, with bolt-on acquisitions recently for several private equity-backed buy and build platforms

March 2022) compares with Three UK's £2,440m, £609m and £784m respectively.

Out of any potential market consolidation in the UK telecoms market, this is the one that both makes most sense strategically and has become more likely recently, ever since Ofcom flagged in February that it would now judge industry consolidation on the circumstances of

a particular merger rather than just on the number of industry players. From a mobile perspective, the two are clear also-rans, with Ofcom noting consumer subscriber market shares of EE and VMO2 on 34-35% each, Vodafone on 18% and Three on 13%. It is hard to see any other combo to get to three players passing muster with competition authorities. There is a

different split in terms of spectrum ownership: BT has 32%, Vodafone 24% and VMO2 and Three 22% each.

The merger argument is also compelling in the context of the overall UK fixed, mobile and pay TV markets, where Vodafone's £5.5bn and Three UK's £2.44bn annual revenues (i.e £8bn combined) somewhat trail BT's £13.2bn (Consumer plus Enterprise retail), VMO2's £10.4bn and Sky's circa £9.0bn (mainly pay TV).

## Channel consolidation

M&A also continues unabated in the channel, with bolt-on acquisitions recently for several private equity-backed buy and build platforms, including Croft (seven so far in 2022), Babble (six in 2022, more to come), Focus (three in two months), and Firstcom, Onecom and Wavenet (their first in 2022). Strategic benefits include economies of scale, new product capabilities/vendor partnerships and geographic expansion, with a common theme being further inroads into IT services.

In consumer land, TalkTalk acquired OVO Energy's broadband business, which was acquired as part of its acquisition of SSE's retail business in January 2020. OVO accounts and press reports suggests this is a circa £50m revenue, around EBITDA breakeven business from around 150,000 customers, comparing with

TalkTalk's year to February 2022 EBITDA of £276m on revenues of £1,455m (prior to the acquisition of Virtual1).

## Fibre funding

Despite VMO2 owners Liberty Global and Telefonica, along with institutional investor InfraVia, announcing a new 7m premises FTTP network in late July with VMO2 as anchor tenant, money continues to flow to altnet FTTP players. Those receiving their first major external funding in the last couple of months include Brsk (Ares, £178m), Spring Fibre (River & Mercantile, £155m), Rural Broadband Solutions (Tiger, £75m) and Wessex internet (Abrdn, £20m), whilst CommunityFibre raised £975m in follow on funding and F&W was acquired by Foresight.

## Trading variation

On the whole, UK telecoms trading remains resilient despite broader macroeconomic and geopolitical concerns and a looming cost of living crisis. For the channel, this is best highlighted by AIM-listed Gamma: six months to June 2022 accounts showed revenues and EBITDA of £234.7m and £51.9m, up 8% and 13% respectively. Divisionally, UK Indirect revenue grew 10% (to £143.7m) while UK Direct was up 7% to £55.4m, but Europe was mixed, up 1% (4% pre-forex impacts) to £35.6m. The short-term outlook hasn't





changed from Gamma's early August trading update, with a stronger UK Direct supporting a full year 2022 profit outlook in the top half of analyst expectations – consensus is EBITDA of £105m (+9.6%) on revenues of £485m (+8.4%), all growth rates organic.

Some service providers are, however, suffering from supply chain constraints. For example, AIM-listed business comms, cloud and IT services provider Maintel issued poor interims to June 2022, with EBITDA down 17% to £3.6m on revenues down 13% (11% like for like) at £46.7m, with the majority of the decline reflecting supply chain impacts (mainly Cisco networking equipment). Demand is certainly not the issue with an order book of £45m being double the prior year, and approaching £50m by year end, and with the company continuing to grow its cloud base by 37% to 160k seats. Maintel assumes a normalisation in equipment supply from the second quarter of 2023.

At the other end of the scale, legacy telco vendor Avaya reported third quarter to June 2022 EBITDA down 69% to \$54m on revenues down 21% at \$577m (versus prior low-end guidance of \$140m on \$685m), blamed on shorter contract durations and missed CapEx licence sales, whilst the company also booked a preliminary \$1,272m impairment charge and, with a 2023 repayment of \$350m of debt raised only last month, issued a going concern notice. This coincided with the abrupt replacement of long term CEO Jim Chirico with Vonage's Alan Masarek. ■ [philip.carse@megabuyte.com](mailto:philip.carse@megabuyte.com)

## COMPANY NEWS ROUND UP

### LoopUp undertakes rescue funding

Beleaguered AIM-listed conferencing-pivoting-to-business telephony-player LoopUp has raised £3.5m ahead of a planned £1m broker offering at 5p per share, representing a 22% discount to the last close and 56.5% of the existing market cap. The use of proceeds includes investment in cloud telephony and Hybidium (virtual events, from last September's SyncRTC acquisition), the transfer of legacy conferencing customers from the recently announced PGI deal, and general working capital/balance sheet strengthening. The company reiterated first half 2022 headlines of a £1.5m EBITDA loss on £6.6m revenues, versus +£1.2m and £11.5m last year, with net debt rising £5.6m to £8.0m (prior to an expected £1.9m R&D tax rebate). The PGI deal has commenced with the transfer of 8.1k enterprise customers - against this first (and largest) batch's current £34m run rate revenues, LoopUp 'prudently' still expects total PGI business to generate £10m revenues and £5m net cash over the next 12 months.

### ITS Technology launches fibre buy and build with Nextgenaccess

In a piece of wholesale B2B fibre altnet consolidation, Aviva-backed ITS Technology Group has acquired NDIF/Amber Infrastructure-backed Nextgenaccess on undisclosed terms. Nextgenaccess adds 28,000 businesses passed to ITS's end 2022 target of 500,000, as well as 455km of dark fibre, related services and data centre connectivity, whilst the estimated headcount uplift is 17 on 124 according to LinkedIn. ITS, which claims now to be EBITDA positive, also flagged that Nextgenaccess represents the launch of its 'build and buy' strategy. ■

### Volpi Capital to turbocharge Xalient's growth ambitions

Network and security MSP Xalient has announced an investment from private equity investor Volpi Capital (we believe for a small majority) on undisclosed terms to support the company's organic growth in terms of international expansion and an enhanced product portfolio, as well as potentially M&A. Since its founding in 2015 Xalient has grown rapidly, for calendar 2021 reporting a 25% rise in EBITDA to £2.5m on 12% growth in revenues to £26.3m, representing a year of consolidation and investment after the prior two years' circa 120% annual growth. For calendar 2022, guidance back in July was for a return to strong circa 30% growth in both revenues and EBITDA (implying around £34m and £3.3m respectively), before operational leverage kicks in next year.

### Telecom Plus upgrades outlook on growth and energy price cap

AIM-listed multi-utility reseller Telecom Plus has issued a positive trading update for the half to September 2022, now expecting full-year adjusted pre-tax profits to be 'materially ahead' of expectations for £75m (on £1,826m revenues), which itself was already up 21% of fiscal 2022. There are two drivers: customer growth (+86k to 814.7k in the first half, representing an annualised 24% growth and supporting its goal of 1m additional customers over the next 4-5 years), and an improved outlook for energy affordability/less need for multi-service discounts due to the new energy price caps. The company's house broker has increased its full-year adjusted pre-tax profit forecast to £95m, up 53% on fiscal 2022. ■

## The rise of UK Alt-Nets is well documented – but what of the infrastructure that connects them to the wider world? KCOM Wholesale Product Architect Rich Tyas takes a closer look.

Last month my colleague Chris Croot talked about the rise of the Alt-Nets and the providers that are causing geographic networks to pop up around the country.

These providers need a reliable and resilient backhaul to connect their internet customers to the rest of the world.

As with all step changes in speed the cry will be "but we don't need all that bandwidth", but they said that with Kilostreams and look where we are now!

Applications will catch up and with the rise of remote working, there is still bandwidth required to aggregate user connections to businesses,

"Here at KCOM we've created a resilient 80Tb capable transmission network that allows us to have ample capacity to connect to transit and peering partners across the UK".

Rich Tyas  
Wholesale Product Architect, Kcom



Major tele hotels in the cities around the country are not always in easy reach of the alt-net networks so extending the network with sufficient capacity and resilience can be a tricky design task.

Once these networks are in place there's opportunity to use them for leased line connectivity to connect businesses together and to the cloud provider's data centres across the UK. There are a real range of partners out there each offering their own unique networks to allow national connectivity or connectivity to customers' premises.

Fibre backbone networks around the UK are nothing new but, with the demand for bandwidth increasing and the advances in DWDM technology, 10Gbps and 100Gbps circuits are now affordable and being put to use.

These are not yet commonplace but as the optics in the end equipment become more affordable, then customer circuits will start to grow.

the cloud and ensure our working days are seamless. As more 5G sites appear the demand for mobile aggregation over longer distances will also increase and these transport networks are ideal for providing those robust connectivity options.

Here at KCOM we've created a resilient 80Tb capable transmission network that allows us to have ample capacity to connect to transit and peering partners across the UK. We're now establishing relations with many interconnect partners to offer a range of cost effective connectivity across the UK. This will allow our customers to offer connectivity from our expanding network in Hull and East Yorkshire to the rest of the UK via two diverse paths.

It's fair to say that the pace of change and progress in the world of network connectivity continues to be as frenetic as ever – and we providers certainly need to be on our game in the decade ahead to make sure we keep up with ever growing demands.

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# Flotek CEO builds fast on

**Flotek is not your average start-up: With a trio of seasoned and entrepreneurial business leaders at the helm led by CEO Jay Ball the fledgling firm has a pipeline of acquisition targets, one already bagged, just weeks after inception.**

In August 2022 Cardiff MSP Flotek acquired Swansea-based legal and professional services IT provider Gower Business Systems, adding £1.2 million revenue and ten members of staff. The deal was supported by Tower Leasing which boosted Flotek four weeks later with a beefed up M&A war chest. The IT MSP, which has a particular focus on South Wales, now has an established pipeline of deals set to complete by the end of the year and is pursuing further IT and comms opportunities for consolidation.

“We have agreed heads of terms with six target acquisitions to take the business to £3 million revenue within a short period,” stated Ball. “In 2023 we expect a £5 million revenue run rate.”

You may be surprised to read that Flotek began its commercial life in July 2022, established by Ball, Managing Director Malcolm Holland (formerly Managing

Director of Southern Comms) and Finance Director David Middleton. “We saw a huge opportunity to consolidate across the south west and bring IT and comms together in the right way for small and medium businesses,” commented Ball. “We will continue to grow each year through acquisition and organically and by creating an employee part-owned business.”

The management pedigree is notable, given that Ball is a driven entrepreneurial business leader and Holland has excellent experience in managed services having been responsible for large teams throughout the sector. Middleton has deep experience in leading the sales of numerous telecoms and IT firms as a corporate finance expert.

Flotek currently employs 24 staff and generates approximately £1.8 million revenue with (as mentioned) a projection of £3 million revenue before the end of 2022. “By the end of the



Jay Ball

**We will continue to grow each year through acquisition and organically and by creating an employee part-owned business**

year we expect to see 750 customers with an average customer user count of 25-plus spread across multiple industries, but with specialities in the legal sector,” added Ball. “We will continue to have key sectors that we specialise in and work with niche partners to focus on the pain points industries suffer from.”

Flotek’s primary technology partners are Microsoft, Ericsson-LG and Zen Internet – and important focus points for the firm are cyber security and managed services. “We are up-skilling on cyber and the Microsoft Azure platform so we can take a cloud-first approach to every technology we provide,” added Ball. “LoRaWAN is also seeing

growth and it promises opportunities for the future.”

#### Digital support

While Ball’s immediate task is to build the business through acquisition his other mission is to ensure every customer is supported amid widespread digitalisation in the marketplace. “We have seen too many businesses



# past successes

settle with their existing suppliers and as a result fall behind," he added. "Without having the opportunity for digital transformation these businesses are not able to utilise the different technologies available to them to improve efficiencies. We have a responsibility to educate and develop SMEs that have been left behind in this way."

Ball cited, as an example, how the market has evolved to the point where customers no longer need physical phones, creating a requirement to mobilise customers with a mobile-first strategy that enables

**Today, nearly every business allows their team to work remotely in a variety of ways, but not necessarily with the right tools and security to back it up**

remote working and real mobility for employees. "Covid has changed the way we do business," stated Ball. "Three years ago a minority of companies offered some form of remote working. Today, nearly every business allows their team to work remotely in a variety of ways, but not necessarily with the right tools and security to back it up.

"We are seeing a significant number of businesses that evolved the way they work

and now require support to enhance their set-ups and improve cyber security. I also see growth in FMC, Teams, cyber security and LoRaWAN – all technologies that enable true mobilisation backed by security. We are working on a new range of products that make the entire cyber landscape safe, easy and affordable for every SME."

**Damascene moment**

Ball's biggest achievement to date is exiting a business at 34 with financial freedom and realising he's not yet finished. This Damascene moment occurred after he sold his previous firm, DataKom, to Southern

Comms 13 years after setting it up on his own aged 21. "I saw a huge opportunity to support SMEs working for myself," he explained. "Going from a fantastic corporate to my own business and then sitting on the board of a private equity backed company has been a whirlwind of experience and lessons, which have all shaped my knowledge of what Flotek needs to be and how to take it to new levels."

The 'fantastic corporate' Ball refers to is The Carphone Warehouse where he worked after studying IT and networks at college. He progressed through sales to management, a pathway that gave Ball a solid grounding in how important company values and culture are to any business. "Working under Charles Dunstone gave me the best insight into the importance of values and vision to a business, and how if you get this right, everything else follows," concluded Ball. ■

**Just a minute with Jay Ball...**

**Role model:** Charles Dunstone: He has incredible vision of this industry and is always one step ahead.

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

My strong points are vision, drive and passion. But I need to work on patience, detail and working too much.

**If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing?** Working in the financial market. I have a fast paced way of looking at financials and making good decisions.

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I teach scuba diving in my free time and love to wreck dive.

**Three ideal dinner guests:** Charles Dunstone, to hear his vision of the future in ICT; my Grandad who was a huge role model in my life; and Steve Jobs to get his view on the next big thing.

**One example of something you have overcome:** The change from PBX to cloud. We went from one per cent to 100 per cent cloud within a year.

**In hindsight:** If I had invested in people with different skills to my own I could have grown the business I exited to greater levels.

**Best piece of advice you have been given?** To look at someone's problem through their eyes.

**How would you like to be remembered?** As one of the good guys of the industry who was always on the end of a call to help someone.

**What talent do you wish you had?** To mind read: It would be a lot quicker to negotiate if I knew what the other party was thinking.

**Top tip for resellers:** Stop doing what you've always done. Focus on tomorrow's challenges and how you can help your customers be better.

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# Keefe talks strategy

**Two years into the job Nuvias UC CEO Jeremy Keefe continues to act fast on strategic execution and deliver remarkable results. Here, he discusses his leadership roadmap and what we can expect from the business in the time ahead.**

**F**ormer Poly Regional Vice President of Western Europe Keefe was appointed CEO of Nuvias UC in October 2020. And like all stand out leaders he thought the best course of action is to quickly build on past successes and take the business to the next level. He wasted no time on pouring his own leadership experience into meeting challenges and opportunities, an approach that delivered 70 per cent growth to date despite the talent challenge. "Since I moved from vendor world back into distributor land it became clear the market has changed considerably," he said. "There is a real lack of quality people and we are competing with many more organisations too. Therefore, we see people moving between businesses on a more regular basis, so employee retention is a big focus for us now."

A priority was to recruit within the customer service and sales support teams. "As part of this restructure I also wanted to empower more people within the business to make their own

decisions, so I put a wider management team in place, allowing me to take the business from an owner-led organisation to management-led," added Keefe. "We also expanded our European footprint from five per cent to 15 per cent (percentage of revenue) and by the end of this fiscal year it should sit at 25 per cent. This was achieved by investing in people in France, Benelux, and acquiring an established distributor, Alliance Technologies, in DACH."

Since 2016, Nuvias UC has been part of the Nuvias Group which also comprises a separate business focusing on cyber security and advanced networking. But in July this year Infinigate acquired Nuvias Group in a transaction that did not include Nuvias UC, which operates as a separate entity under the continued ownership of Rigby Group. The previous owners and founders, Steve Harris and Rob Smith, stepped down in April 2021.

"The foundations built by Steve and Rob were solid," added Keefe. "There were



Jeremy Keefe

## I wanted to empower more people within the business to make their own decisions

strong technical capabilities within the business and we took the opportunity to up-skill, cross skill and add different experience into the team. This cemented our place as a specialist within the UC distribution marketplace which led to vendors and customers wanting to work with us. We were also fortunate that Zoom embraced us as a master agent and wholesale distributor."

### Key collaborations

Meanwhile, Nuvias UC worked with RingCentral to develop its European business, and integrated solutions from Logitech, DTEN and Pexip. Microsoft also picked up on its

technical expertise on supplying and supporting MS Teams room environments.

Of course, no growing business is short of its own challenges but those issues over which no control can be asserted are especially tricky. "There were a few things out of our control, such as the pandemic and the silicon chip shortage which had a knock-on effect on stock shortages throughout the whole industry," explained Keefe.

"However, due to our wide portfolio we have always tried to offer alternatives. If this wasn't possible we would simply be upfront and honest with our customers and keep them updated with

lead times, even if they were longer than usual. Most of the time our loyal customers just appreciated the honesty."

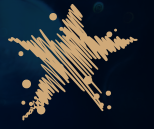
### Decision time

Making the right decisions is key to the success of all leaders and some decisions are tougher than others. For example, Keefe cites recent cases concerning requests from vendors to work with Nuvias UC. "We ensure that our team has expert knowledge on all of the vendors within our portfolio and as you add more products in you risk losing that focus and devaluing the relationship you hold with existing vendors," he commented. "It's important for Nuvias UC to offer a full end-to-end solution rather than box shifting as many products as possible. Therefore I often have to do what is right for the business and our vendors and say no to some of the opportunities that arise."

As well ensuring a strong fit-for-purpose portfolio Keefe aims to strengthen Nuvias UC's core functions as a precursor to supporting future growth, while establishing deeper relationships with vendors and adapting their solutions to stay relevant within the market. Keefe also noted that Nuvias UC is keen to develop its software, platform, cloud and contact centre offering and bolster its services capabilities. "Markets are services-rich and therefore margin rich for our partners," he said. "We're currently launching a set of new services to help those who wouldn't ordinarily play in these spaces, to help break into this market and take more wallet share. Watch this space." ■







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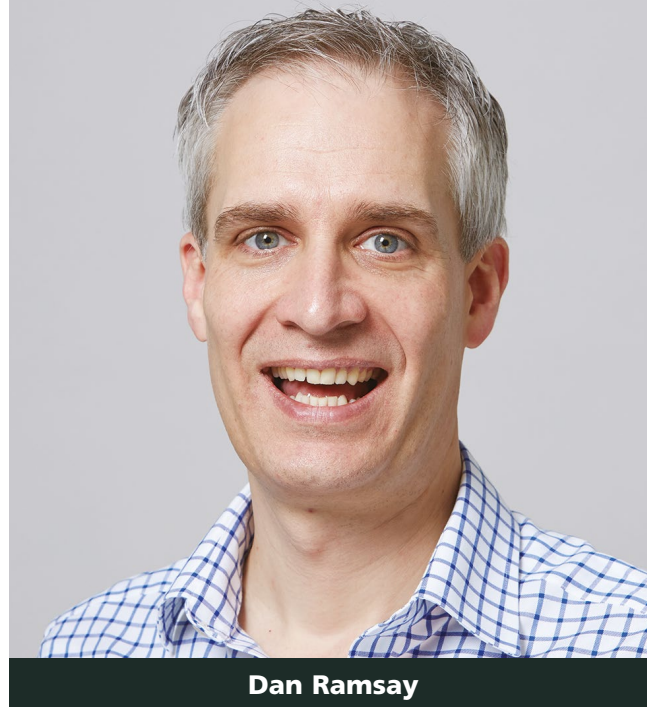
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# Driving fibre adoption

Last month CityFibre passed two million premises marking the completion of 25 per cent of its 2025 rollout ambition. But actual take up of full fibre services in general happens at a slower pace. Here, CityFibre Chief Marketing Officer Dan Ramsay shares insights into the fibre adoption challenge as he sees it.



Dan Ramsay

**W**hat are CityFibre's take up rates compared to the circa 24 per cent average?

In mature build locations, we're above 24 per cent and seeing great progress due to marketing, word of mouth and innovative ways of working with our ISP partners. Other areas that are still in the earlier stages of build have a naturally lower penetration rate. In terms of ambition, we're only getting started. We've got much more ambitious marketing plans that are yet to launch, and this will see us get to many times higher than the 24 per cent average.

**Is full fibre perceived by customers to be superior to the broadband connectivity it replaces?**

Yes it is, when customers experience it. However, research we've carried out shows that a massive 64 per cent of consumers don't understand the difference between full fibre and

existing copper connectivity into their homes. There are a number of reasons for this, but it's partly because the large scale awareness campaigns that will see full fibre promoted as the norm have only really started this year.

**When will full fibre adoption accelerate?**

It's already growing well, and with over a third of the country now theoretically served by full fibre, ISP marketing is changing and we are on the verge of seeing them seeking to migrate the bulk of customers. ISPs needed time to develop their systems to accept orders and prepare for the wider rollout of FTTP, but much of this work has now been done, so watch this space.

**How do we reverse the confusion about part fibre versus full fibre?**

Our industry must acknowledge the barriers it's created and step up to fix them. Education and

consistency of message is important, and we must stop trying to explain technology differences to consumers. It's ok for some, but it's too easy to lose people. Lots of ideas of varying complexity have been discussed to help drive take up, including better labelling and Government-led awareness campaigns. CityFibre is keen to support these solutions, but as yet nothing has borne fruit and it's not something we can wait for. As well as investing in marketing, we're working with our ISP partners to make migration happen without a customer having to evaluate the decision at all.

**How do you see the full fibre competitive marketplace panning out?**

Three thriving national networks would be a great outcome for the UK. We could see more though, especially if consolidation results in other altnets honing business models to serve distinct markets. Whether it's three or 30, it's good news

though. For too long we've suffered a weak duopoly that's failed to invest. It's seen the UK fall behind globally and consumers suffering through lack of choice and poor service. Recent years have seen a great deal of private investment flowing in to change this for the better, but it remains vital that Ofcom and DCMS continue to control the conditions that have incubated this positive change.

**CityFibre clearly sees itself in that top three, what gives you that confidence?**

No one ever got ahead by standing still and CityFibre has a challenger mentality deeply ingrained into its DNA. From the 'land of no' we sparked the UK's full fibre revolution and have since grown our network to serve over two million premises. Today we are fully financed to complete our rollout to a third of the UK market and we operate a proven business model committed to providing

better economics and a better product. Demand from end customers is also healthy. In Milton Keynes for example we are now the largest full fibre provider with our ISPs having made huge market share gains. We're confident not complacent though. We take nothing for granted.

**To what extent will new hyper-local consumer ISPs disrupt a stagnant retail space?**

There's a fantastic opportunity for hyper-local ISPs to make inroads into the consumer market. The time is now and our national access product supports them. Many ISPs we're already working with have their roots in enterprise markets. They are taking the high standards they have set in that market and are now applying them to consumers. Others have entered the market from related industries, bringing a wealth of other experience to bear. What they have in common is a clarity on what hasn't been good enough in the past and an opportunity to win customers as market confidence grows.

**What is the role of the channel in future fibre adoption?**

Channel partners and ISPs of all types and sizes, serving all markets, are vital for driving the digital transformation of the UK. Building to serve homes is what has secured us the investment levels we needed to build nationwide, but we're also committed to businesses with our 'one network to serve all' approach. Our Business FTTP product has already launched and the development of friction-free customer install journeys and smooth volume migration is set to benefit all. ■

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# NTA develops growth in

**Software developed in tandem with partners is revolutionising channel paradigms, according to NTA CEO Paul White who is working alongside resellers to develop innovative software-based comms solutions to sit on the firm's hosted platform.**

**E** Essex-based service provider and distributor NTA laid out its software development programme to key partners last month and unveiled a new range of VoIP hardware end points, which White claims are 'selling like hot cakes'. For years, resellers have taken on board new solutions from the major vendors which have been presented as a fait accompli. Consultations with partners on the developments of these solutions have been rare, which makes the NTA approach refreshing.

White and his team readily accept they punch above their weight, but with 46,000 handsets registered they're taking on major vendors with far greater R&D funds and unveiling ambitious UC solutions which they are happy to fine tune with partners, who have early access to new programmes and features in Beta.

"What we're doing is true collaboration," stated White. "We have a community of

resellers who have become true business partners and, as they're selling our solutions, why wouldn't we ask and act on the feedback they give us?"

Suppliers like NTA have no debt mountain, no nervy investors or stakeholders, so in the new world of software and web-based comms they can be flexible and nimble. Changes to programs can be made in days, in some cases even less. If an NTA reseller needs a tweak to a bespoke solution to address a specific application it can be done almost overnight. This is the new world of comms provision and it's very compelling.

#### Case in point

Take call recording as an example. NTA partners can now go to the company portal and mix and match fully encrypted call recording bundles for customers that can be storage or time based on a per seat/per month basis for up to seven years. The recurring revenue opportunities in that process



Paul White

## We don't make solutions for our partners to sell – we make solutions our partners want to sell

alone would be highly beneficial to a reseller's cash flow and business planning.

NTA's new solution to address the PSTN switch off is a prime example of the company's agility and ability to roll out solutions rapidly. The LA1 adapter, designed by NTA for the UK residential market, has colour coded device ports for ease of

installation and is no bigger than a cigarette box. The unit plugs into the LAN port of a broadband router, the analogue telephone plugs into its dedicated port, and the device then converts the analogue signal into VoIP. It means countless homes reluctant to dispose of their fixed analogue and DECT handsets have a plug-and-play solution to

purchase before the switch off happens in 2025.

Head of Sales Cliff Chandler believes the residential market represents a massive and virtually untapped opportunity for NTA partners. "There are around 27 million homes in the UK which is why we are launching a dedicated white labelled residential service



# partner unity

for our partners to add to their portfolio, on top of their per seat and service provider business models," he explained. "We are also working closely with our partners to create and add additional features that a residential customer would use and benefit from."

In production and set for launch later in the year is NTA's 'completely rewritten' MobeX mobile and desktop app that allows users to

## We have a community of resellers who have become true business partners

make and receive calls on a mobile or computer from anywhere in the world using an office extension. The app interface allows calls to be placed on hold and transferred to another extension or external telephone number using a Wi-Fi connection. The MobeX app is able to 'handover' to GSM when the Wi-Fi signal is poor or not available.

This is being enhanced to include a full video conferencing suite that will allow users to share more than one screen at any time either on a PC or an iOS or Android mobile device. Chat functionality is also being further developed. "Our goal is to deliver all the features you can find in similar apps from the big players like WhatsApp, MS Teams and Google Meet, but since MobeX is fully integrated into our system, customers can also benefit from the huge range of

features that our platform offers," commented White.

### UC interface

NTA Ringo, completely unrelated to the car parking app, is the company's new UC interface which will allow telephony systems to integrate with CRM systems. There are also modules being prepared to offer an automated PCI DSS call recording experience and a secure and tamper proof encrypted call recording solution.

New NTA terminals which can all be white labelled as reseller products include the new F60 with built-in Bluetooth and a 'HiHi type' touchscreen tablet, which will

be pre-loaded with MobeX software, to address business applications where mobile and fully integrated UC is required, such as restaurants and hotels.

In essence, NTA is aiming to be a complete digital solutions provider for the channel with a four-phase development programme stretching into 2024, which it claims will include introductions such as an NTA Online Store, MobeX Conference Suite, a Number Porting Portal and AI Routing

of Inbound Calls. "All these will be produced in line with channel partners," stressed Chandler. "Our wholly owned HVNO hosted telephony platform is one of the most feature-powerful, margin-driven products partners can have in their armoury today. We're UK based and our network is fully resilient and monitored 24/7/365. Ongoing future proofing continues with thousands of pounds being invested in the infrastructure. We continue to ask what is required and then build solutions working from ideas@nta.co.uk, taking the highest requested features as first choice."

White commented: "Our service is all about our resellers. Our partner portals are 100 per cent white-labelled with their own subdomain for logging into the portal, allowing our partners to demonstrate their own solution to their own customers and prospects. Understanding customer needs means asking them first hand. Our development process always has and always will include partner input and feedback. We don't make solutions for our partners to sell, we make solutions our partners want to sell. This puts the passion into our partners and into us because their success is ours too." ■



Team NTA shows its colours at the partner day



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# Opportunity knocks in pa

**Providing Payments-as-a Service is a compelling opportunity for resellers quick out of the blocks and a partnership platform unveiled by the Fidelity Group aims to accelerate implementation across the channel.**



**H**igh street banks are shutting across the UK, and Generation Y and Z consumers now look upon cheque payments as something from the dark ages. The payment ecosystem is changing rapidly and, in the light of the Covid pandemic, the advance to a cashless society is unstoppable.

Sharp thinking channel players will know the convergence of technologies, increased regulatory requirements and digitalisation are driving the innovation behind a rapid rise in new ways to pay, improving cashflow for themselves and transforming customer propositions into the bargain.

The PaaS model is gaining traction due to cost effectiveness and is a fast-moving trend for banks and financial institutions looking to accelerate digital innovation, stay relevant, and avoid losing new and existing customers. Embedded finance is one of the most

exciting digital developments in the evolution of payments. With consumers demanding fast and frictionless ways to make payments from a variety of devices, from wallet to wearables, embedded payment options can open new revenue channels for non-financial organisations such as ICT resellers.

The real time payment market has been growing exponentially. According to payment business ACI Worldwide, more than 118 billion real time transactions were made in 2021. That number is expected to leap to more than 427 billion in 2026, equivalent to around a quarter of all global electronic payments.

Back in 2013, Fidelity Group was one of the first industry players to commercialise the Internet of Things, via its bespoke vM2M offering alongside its other channel ventures.

Fidelity is now applying its channel model to the payments sector following



Alan Shraga

an exclusive partnership deal. Managing Director Alan Shraga has forged with UK merchant services specialist MWB Solutions, a fintech ISO company which has built a portal and ecosystem which effectively offers resellers 'payments in a box'.

"When we investigated this marketplace, we spoke to a lot of people, but they didn't have an automated platform," said Shraga.

"The managing director of MWBS, Warren Whitfield is a guru in the payment solutions sector and within half an hour of meeting him, I could see his technology stack was miles above



Warren Whitfield

anything else we'd seen. The channel adapts well to portals, and we recognised it would probably cost us a million pounds to develop our own. We felt it was better to partner with a Fintech company that has already done it. MWBS is a technology player, but they are not experienced at managing the last mile relationship, which is where channel resellers fit in."

MWBS is a registered payments ISO which, in the world of payments, means the company is regulated by a large bank to resell their services. The company's USP is the relationship it has developed with multiple

acquirers over an 18-month period effectively creating, a 'compare the market' aggregator platform for the payments sector.

"We now have relationships with 14 different banks and sell on behalf of major players like Elavon, World Pay and AIB," said Whitfield.

"Historically, what has happened with ISO companies is that they grow their business through linking with one brand or bank, employing a load of self-employed salespeople to run around the UK knocking on doors saying, we can save you money. This struck me as wrong. I didn't feel as though one solution would ever fit the narrative of every customer out there.

"I didn't understand why there wasn't a product where you could partner with everybody, meaning a reseller could select a solution that was right for the customer they were sitting in front of, rather than putting a square peg in a round hole.



# Payments race

“Eventually we got to the point where we had a piece of technology that we could white label and deliver to partners. It’s become very successful in the payments space, because it’s the only one that delivers all the information and gives partners access to all the main acquirers rather than just one.”



Shraga believes that resellers can add a powerful payments addition to their ‘as-a-service’ portfolio in a matter of days and the products they’re selling can be rapidly authorised for payment.

“What Warren and his team have built is on par with other channel platforms we’ve developed over the years, including our comms portal Anvil. It means a partner coming on board can load their customer opportunities into the payments platform and it would give them a choice of acquirers that would accept their customer business via the SIC code – the Standard Industrial Classification of economic activities.”

One of the most exciting benefits for channel partners is the speed of implementation and the multiple income streams PaaS can deliver.

“We were up and running within two days,” said Shraga. “MWBS do the training exactly like Fidelity and the platform is instantly live as a standalone business model which can be reseller branded. Salespeople can immediately capture leads and achieve multiple incomes from selling payments. This opportunity complements a telecoms or IT resellers’ offering and provides four valued income streams namely commissioning, terminal hardware sales,

IoT revenue and Wi-Fi. “Every single company now should have a payment partner. It doesn’t matter what type of company you are. And this isn’t just about just credit card payments. We can facilitate payments across the board, whether it’s on the Internet or via a simple a payment button that someone presses.

“By empowering the channel to manage the last mile relationship with the customer we know historically this reduces churn and improves customer satisfaction.”

As Whitfield stressed, the way his team innovatively applies the technology that sits on the payment device is a key factor for resellers.

“We pride ourselves in joining the dots between everybody that needs to be joined together. The portal dashboard consolidates all the data for the leading 14 banks that we have sitting behind the platform. This means any reseller, or reseller customer, can view their estate via what we call runways, and get real time information on how it’s performing, broken down into leads, quotes, applications and deals each day, month, and year.

“It will also define the number and types of payment devices you have across your estate as a collective and how many customers you have live with each independent

bank. It tells you your average rental term and fee for the hardware, your average authorisation fee across the network, and how many live deals you currently have and how many have cancelled.

“Industry attrition within payments is historically quite high. By creating this platform and offering so many options, we can lower the attrition number by delivering the correct solution all the time.

“We fund the terminals upfront so it’s very similar to how telecoms companies fund their hardware and through the portal they can see how many deals they have exposure to on clawbacks.”

One of the key elements Whitfield believes will attract channel players to the Fidelity platform is the control it gives sales teams and, crucially, the data it provides.

“All the members of a partner or customer’s sales team can be added to the platform, and it will deliver back to the company all the applications individuals are working on and how they are performing.

“Data is key these days and as well as giving the customer everything they could possibly want to build their PaaS operation; we’re building as much data as they could possibly need to improve their business practices going forward,” he concluded. ■

## Channel briefing

10 reasons to explore Payments-as-a-Service for you and your customers.

- 1 It is estimated that nearly 18 million people now own a crypto wallet and a 2020 study by the Marketing Science Institute found that over one-year, online shoppers increased their average purchase amount by 17.4% after adopting one click buying. This creates a new revenue stream which resellers can tap into.
- 2 With smartphone ownership escalating, any significant return to traditional payment methods is unlikely. Covid 19 has accelerated the demise of cash and by embedding finance into solutions, resellers can gain huge opportunities by getting more products to market faster, driving and managing sales better, meeting customer expectations and improve ‘stickiness’.
- 3 Cybercrime in the payments arena is accelerating and giving customers peace of mind is a powerful tool for the channel. By harnessing good and reliable quality data through its portal Fidelity says resellers can fight fraud and financial crime in real-time payments by looking for patterns and trends in transactions.
- 4 Real time payments are increasingly important for managing liquidity and working capital in all organisations, but for the SME sector in particular, cash management is critical. For tradespeople customers, being able to perform a ‘request to pay’ and request payment immediately, will become even more vital in an ongoing cost-of-living crisis.
- 5 Providing payment services creates huge opportunities to gain advantages over competitors. Loyalty cards are losing their appeal. These days a customer’s credit card can become their loyalty card too. It can be used to identify the customer, track purchases - across any channel or region - and trigger rewards.
- 6 Fidelity asserts that with a one button press, resellers can create customer ‘application runways’ on its PaaS portal. Customers are ring fenced, commissions are safeguarded, there’s no duplication and resellers are awarded for the lead. It’s then a simple matter of choosing a favoured acquirer or one of the 14 other banks on the platform and processing the application via a set of forms.
- 7 For sales teams, the ability to establish useful data on a customer is paramount. Again, with a one button press on the portal, salespeople can learn a company’s turnover on a given terminal, how many transactions they’ve made on that machine, the card types used, the average value and busy times.
- 8 According to Fidelity, the transparency and depth of the information available in the portal means there is no excuse for miss-selling. All the available product data sheets can be viewed, reseller operational onboarding teams can easily ascertain the income they’re receiving and sales teams can see how much commission they will get.
- 9 A typical payments bundle will include a Wi-Fi solution, a payment button solution, a terminal solution and IoT income and value. And long term, should a reseller wish to exit, they would have the telecoms valuation and an additional payments valuation based on a high level of customer management and powerful data.
- 10 Fidelity claims a reseller, or a reseller customer, can be operational as a PaaS business in under 30 days, with in-house training taking two to three days. Fidelity believes resellers will choose to fund their own hardware to increase margins and is convinced it’s an easy market to get into because it’s so poorly served.

To find out more visit [www.fidelity-group.co.uk/partners](http://www.fidelity-group.co.uk/partners)



# COMMS NATIONAL AWARDS REWARD

## COMMS NATIONAL AWARDS

13TH OCTOBER  
HILTON PARK LANE, LONDON

The ICT channel's best performers were rewarded and celebrated at this year's Comms National Awards ceremony (main sponsor Digital Wholesale Solutions) held at London's Hilton on Park Lane on October 13th, and hosted by broadcaster and journalist Jeremy Vine (pictured).

This year's stellar event saw Focus Group scoop a trio of gongs including the much coveted Reseller of the Year award. "We are genuinely honoured to have been recognised across multiple categories at this year's CNA's. Business transformation is key to our business offerings and we're extremely proud of the progress Focus Group has made over the last 12 months," said CEO Barney Taylor.

Onecom Group CEO Martin Flick was crowned Entrepreneur of the Year. He said: "This year has been stand out in my 22 year industry career and with the support of the team, my Board and our investors at LDC we have even more exciting times ahead.

"Our industry is facing into a time of seismic technology shift, alongside political and economic uncertainty. The industry is ideally placed to support UK PLC facing into those challenges ahead."

The event followed another record entry and due to the quantity of entries received the largest ever panel of judges was assembled. "In the current economic climate we expected a drop in entries this year, so to receive a record of nearly 200 is astonishing," said Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent.

"Once again, the Comms National Awards demonstrated everything that is great about our channel and the ICT industry. This year's results provided some surprises and it was great to see some smaller organisations get recognition for their sterling work over the last year.

"Most important of all, it was great to see everyone celebrating this dynamic and collaborative community so enthusiastically. Roll on next year!"



Martin Flick CEO of Onecom was a deserved Entrepreneur of the Year.



Awards host Jeremy Vine shows off his favourite magazine.



Redsquid double up on the bubbly? And why not. They did win!

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# AWARDS AND CELEBRATES CHANNEL'S SUPERSTARS



Abzorb's Mark Riddell take his Scottishness to a new level.



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Terry O'Brien, CEO at lead sponsor Digital Wholesale Solutions congratulated all the finalists.



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COMMS DEALER RESELLER OF THE YEAR – FOCUS GROUP



# Channel leaders supporting

This month's Kaleidoscope will look at how channel organisations are navigating widespread cost increases.

Whilst the cost-of-living crisis affects consumer's ability to spend going into Q4, higher inflation and energy prices will affect balance sheets and put pressure on business costs.

A letter to former Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng signed by 300 companies last month detailed that 70% of businesses have seen their prices more than double since June, with 30% of companies having seen increases of over 400%.

Organisations are also under pressure to support staff who need help with their cost of living.

We asked a selection of channel leaders how their organisations would be affected, and what they were doing to support both customers and staff over the coming months.



DAVID WARDELL  
EVOKE

"Despite unprecedented cost increases, businesses do seem to be holding up well under these new pressures. To fight back, many companies are looking for improved flexible working and system integrations to increase working efficiencies. Fortunately, this is keeping us very busy with a strong order book and a healthy pipeline. Many employees have returned to the office; however, this has come with the added burdens of increased costs for travel, lunch and even a bit of socialising. With such pressure on home budgets, many colleagues are worried about how they can continue to make ends meet. Here at Evoke, our management team have been considering what the best supportive actions might look like, especially as cost pressures are in so many areas. We concluded that the best course would be to act at the most money-sensitive time of year. So, all our employees will be getting year-end bonuses this December."



EMILY VANDERVELL-THOMAS  
ONECOM PARTNERS

"Rising fuel prices and utility cost increases have all contributed to inflationary pressure, which has led to a cost-of-living increase that has impacted us all personally. These changes have similar effects on business costs, however our priorities remain the same as we focus on supporting our people and partners. So far, partners haven't tightened their belts and in Q3 we had our highest sales quarter for the year. The forecast for Q4 is also promising despite the annual network freezes in December as customers want to have new tech installed for the new year. To aid staff, we have been working hard to create a range of initiatives and measures which could yield a £170+ monthly reduction in costs for an average family. We are offering independent financial planning and advice from a team of external advisors, who are on hand to discuss individual circumstances free of charge."



DARREN GARLAND  
PROVU

"Like everyone, we have been impacted by the increased costs of energy. The fluctuations in currency exchange, however, are the largest impacting factor for us. Many of the goods we sell are imported which has resulted in numerous price changes already. Our focus now is to make our systems smarter to deal with these changes, making it simpler to keep our customers up to date. Business has still been strong, but it has been quieter than we had forecasted. There seems to be some reluctance to sealing the larger projects. From the conversations we're having, this is largely due to the uncertainty in the economic climate. We expect no real change to this in Q4. Back in May, we put in place a company-wide policy to increase everyone's wage in line with the rate of inflation at a minimum of 7%. For us, it was important that we acknowledged the increased cost of living and did what we could to support our staff."



JAMES FINUCANE  
INTERCITY

"As energy prices continue to soar, we've found that businesses that manage their infrastructure in-house are particularly feeling the sting due to vital heating and cooling costs. Our Tier 3 data centres are helping customers negate some of the impacts of rising prices, in addition to improving their data reliability and security. Companies are under pressure to re-evaluate their strategies on property, infrastructure, technologies and people. Most businesses recognise that working with an experienced partner to invest in infrastructure and services can deliver better results than simply standing still, which has meant we've seen customers wanting to engage with us and review how they can leverage technology to deliver operational benefits and cost reductions. We've also put together a package of support for employees as they navigate the cost of living, this includes an interest-free loan up to £1,500, a companywide £250 cost of living support and financial wellbeing workshops."



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# g teams through cost hikes



MARK PILLOW  
VOIP UNLIMITED

"Like all businesses, we've been exploring measures to mitigate the current economic conditions and energy crisis. Thankfully, we're fully prepared for energy brown/blackouts, acting as a 'disaster recovery role model' for our customers, with an onsite backup generator ready to provide us with uninterrupted power to ensure reliable back-office operations. Our staff are all part of the VoIP Unlimited family, so at minimum, we pay our staff the living wage and they know the door is always open to discuss individual challenges. We'll always be there for our 'family' for any cost-of-living concerns. Looking to our customers, we've noticed the retail and hospitality sectors especially are tightening their belts before winter (understandably given predicted energy costs), and we're being as flexible as possible with those customers. Though we're seeing other sectors, like manufacturing and green energy expanding significantly, which at least is a silver lining to all this uncertainty!"



JOHN DOWBIGGIN  
X.COMM

"To mitigate passing on rising energy costs to end users, we've expedited planned upgrades within our data centre environments. After profiling the workload on various network, storage and computing elements, optimisations were found allowing us to streamline our systems and lower energy consumption while improving performance. Many of the optimisations centred around our SAN systems. After years of use and incremental storage growth, multiple SAN units had been added to our environment. Each unit possesses a (relatively) large energy footprint (direct power and cooling costs). Consolidation into a smaller number of modern SAN units utilising the latest technology and caching achieved a considerable energy footprint reduction. Further reductions were made by examining workloads on various servers. We found many servers were under-utilised. Consolidation allowed us to put several servers into standby, reducing our power requirement while still maintaining resiliency and growth. Overall, we've achieved power usage reductions of circa 50%."



CHERIE HOWLETT  
JOLA

"The cost-of-living crisis is having an impact. Employees are worried about putting on their heating when working from home, and the rising costs of fuel travelling to the office. Many businesses are worried about how they will carry on with much higher energy bills. However, in a crisis, there is also opportunity. The opportunity for employers to react to challenges faced by employees by offering cycle-to-work schemes and cost-of-living bonuses. Demand for products such as mobile data is increasing as companies look to implement technology as a way of cutting costs. For example, councils are implementing smart street lighting and smart bin collections. Demand for smart meters is high, which creates mobile data opportunities for trusted channel partners to provide and manage. As companies look to cut costs, smart device-as-a-service solutions become more attractive with no upfront hardware costs and the ability to upgrade or switch devices as required."



MIKE VAN BUNNENS  
COMMS365

"Chip shortages caused by Covid have delayed hardware procurement across all industries with availability not balancing out until mid-2023 at the earliest. By ensuring we're forward purchasing and managing our own inventory, we're mitigating that risk for partners. Energy price rises are increasing the cost of running datacentres, and we're working with partners to continually review our requirements. Without doubt, our partners will see some customers giving new projects a second review. With so much uncertainty, decision-makers will naturally be more cautious about signing off large expenditure on projects. Fortunately, given the inherent ability of IoT solutions to help reduce costs and carbon footprint in many areas, some project rollouts may find themselves accelerating. Our robust IoT solutions help resellers become even more invaluable by supporting this fast deployment requirement. Back in March, we started providing all staff with additional monthly payments to help with the increased cost of living."



IAN ROWAN  
WILDIX

"The energy crisis is one that will impact many businesses this winter, costs have risen and unlike domestic energy costs, there is no cap on the cost increase so energy costs could be exponentially higher than previous years. As a business, we had to think about how to be smarter with the energy we are using. A very simple exercise we completed was having an EPC check completed on our building, just like we do when we sell a house. This check highlighted some very easy wins we could make from an energy saving perspective, such as LED and motion sensor lighting. This also highlighted some more expensive improvements that we made such as upgrading our old boiler with a more energy efficient unit. After we did this for the office, we repeated the exercise for all remote workers, ensuring that those people not in the office were as energy efficient as those in the office."



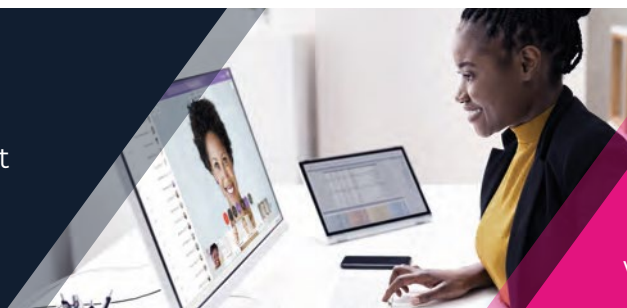
SOHINI RAITHATHA  
REDSQUID

"With the current state of the threat landscape, we are seeing our customers divert their budgets onto IT and security technologies, which have taken priority over other projects. The market is very similar to what we saw during the pandemic, where organisations failing to invest in their infrastructure, security and customer experience are the ones that fall behind the competition in the long term. Internally, we are trying to support our team through the coming months. We are investing in their mental health, and we have started different initiatives such as training our entire management team and providing expert support for those who need it, from an external partner. At the same time, we are once again optimizing our office space to make it a welcoming area for our team where they enjoy spending their days and at the same time save on bills at home."

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## Does remote/hybrid working increase productivity?



Darrol Stevens and Ollie Benn

The UK has seen a huge shift over to remote/hybrid working over the past 18 months and the ICT sector is no exception. Telcos have in the main embraced at least a hybrid option, with many seeing it as an essential offering to their employees in order to ensure retention and new candidate attraction. But is it all it's cracked up to be?

According to a survey conducted by PWC, productivity has risen since the move to remote/hybrid working. A majority of business leaders said their organisation have performed better against workforce performance and productivity targets over the past 12 months. However, less than two thirds of business leaders are confident they are building high levels of trust between workers and managers.

So, it seems that productivity and performance gains may have come at the expense of longer-term employee trust. Is it an employee's fault that their leadership team doesn't trust them just because of where they are working from? Perhaps company bosses need to find a solution for this that enables

them to ensure trust levels and productivity are both high.

There is no doubt about it though, giving people the option to work from the office, or at home seems to be working in the main. At neoci, we speak to many hiring managers who say that although they enjoy the social aspect of being in the office, they feel the distractions there mean they are much more productive at home. We also speak to a lot of fully remote candidates, who are generally positive about it. However, one of the biggest concerns they have is being cut off or forgotten about. There is a genuine concern from employees that if they do not have a visible presence in the office, they may be overlooked for that promotion, or not be appreciated in the same way as their office-based colleagues.

Overall, Hybrid appears to be the logical solution. You get best of both worlds, and it makes sense that most telcos who embrace this will be more attractive places to work.

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

# A strategic move



Ali Mohsin

2CONNECT'S evolution from a single product company into a multi-product solutions business is to be spearheaded by incoming Growth & Strategy Director Ali Mohsin. 2Connect's heritage in selling leased lines to enterprises and service providers is set to become a thing of the past, superseded by an expanded product offering including connectivity, cloud telephony and cloud contact centre.

2Connect founder and Commercial Director Paul Botham stated: "I have known Ali professionally for over 10 years in different roles within our ICT channel. With his experience of Tier 1s and MSPs and his knowledge of 2Connect, Ali is the ideal person to accelerate our growth plans and effectively create a 2Connect 2.0."

Mohsin added: "There are so many things happening in our industry and the broader market right now. The post-pandemic world is completely different with remote working, hybrid working and greater acceptance of the cloud and hosted solutions, all of which are driving demand for bandwidth and stable, reliable connectivity. Then there is BT's big switch-off in 2025, which is causing a huge number of businesses to seek alternative connectivity and digital solutions. Diversifying our product offering enables us to meet customers' demand for additional services and to capture new business in a changing market landscape."

## Also on the move...

PULSANT'S new Chief Operating Officer Ben Cranham brings operational and commercial leadership experience from across the technology sector. He was previously COO at MTI Technology Group



Ben Cranham

and prior stints include spells with Capita IT Enterprise Services and Trustmarque Solutions. "I'll be using my experience and understanding of the IT sector to ensure excellence is embedded in everything Pulsant does across the entire network of data centres," said Cranham. "Only by ensuring the highest levels of service, flexibility, resilience and security, can we help organisations embrace the digital future, achieve their goals and fulfil their potential."

AGILITAS IT Solutions has added 30 years experience in the technology channel with the appointment of John Hayes-



John Hayes-Warren

Warren as CRO. His prior roles includes stints at Logicalis, Claranet, Vodafone Global and VMware. Hayes-Warren's new remit will draw on his expertise in strategic planning and operational execution. "Agilintas has potential to help accelerate its customers' ability to realise the benefits of technology innovation," he commented. Shaun Lynn, CEO, commented: "With an illustrious career in the technology channel John will help Agilintas build on its solid foundations in delivering customer success strategies."

ALCATEL-Lucent Enterprise's new Country Business Leader for UK&I Gerry O'Hanlon aims to catalyse the development of the vendor's distribution and business partner network, expand its client base and elevate brand reputation. He joined the firm seven years ago and was most recently Major Accounts Director. His prior experience includes stints at Intelcom Group and Unify. Laurent Paterac, VP Sales Europe North at Alcatel-Lucent Enterprise, commented: "With his previous accomplishments, experience and market knowledge, Gerry will significantly expand our local footprint and brand awareness in the UK."

MARK Jones has joined Sangoma as UC Channel Account Manager UK&I. He brings 30 years experience working in the technology industry and moves from Beyond Connectivity. Jones has also held executive positions at BT and Virgin Media. "With my experience and contacts I'm confident of growing the brand," said Jones.

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# COMMS VISION CONVENTION 2022

THE NETWORK SUMMIT FOR ICT CHANNEL LEADERS

**EVENT SUPPLEMENT**



# Comms Vision 2022: Max

## in the Golden Triennium

**This year's gold standard Comms Vision Convention (Gleneagles Hotel, 2nd-4th November) will explore how the industry's Big Reset in late 2025 represents far more than the PSTN switch off. Crucially, it is about securing a resilient future amid an accelerating pace of change – and there is no turning back.**

It's time to accelerate momentum, take collective action, shape the channel's destiny and embrace a golden opportunity to drive unprecedented digital transformation and innovation as the UK nears the three-year countdown to all-IP. We all know that innovation is a powerful driver for growth, but how can we turn this abstract concept into tangible business results? In his keynote address entrepreneur, innovator and business strategist Josh Valman, founder and CEO, RPD International, shares insights into the impact that innovation has on business success – and he shines a light on the critical factors that successfully disrupt established business models, challenge received wisdom and enable innovators to grow faster.

Furthermore, this year's Comms Vision Super Session will provide an understanding of the major catalysts reshaping the comms industry in the Golden Triennium and beyond. This period in time will also be a catalyst for greater complexity as the channel focuses ever more sharply on ultrafast, full fibre, the move to all-IP and Net Zero, plus a raft of other business challenges and opportunities at play – and amid this transformational period, ensuring you do not lose sight of the human dimension is critical to success. In his keynote address (Delivering breakthrough customer experiences in the Golden Triennium and beyond) Zen CEO Paul Stobart will explore what human-centered customer experience actually means in the digital age, and discuss how to bring the best possible customer experiences to life through creating moments of magic.

Making a social impact in the Golden Triennium is a key priority for Virgin Media O2 Business which

says the Golden Triennium is a time to elevate societal purpose and values, with social mobility and equitable levelling up becoming universal priorities. In his keynote, Diego Tedesco, Director of Wholesale Fixed, Virgin Media O2 Business, will explore how all organisations, bound by purpose, can work together to tackle the challenge of inequality across society, highlighting not only the critical role of telcos, but how businesses can positively influence the way society operates and catalyse the spread of social cohesion.

### Blueprint for success

Maximising opportunities at times of profound change is another priority for all channel businesses, and in his keynote Gamma Managing Director for Channel Daryl Pile will explore the comms sector megatrends supercharging the Golden Triennium, and double down on how to create the right blueprint for success during times of economic uncertainty and unpredictability. He will also spotlight current barriers to growth and provide strategic direction on how to turn challenges into opportunities. This all reflects a vibrant sector facing a series of changes, not least the transition to all-IP and a shift to the next level of new products and services that promise to change the dynamics of our industry.

Charting a strategic roadmap in response to industry developments means knowing where to focus and how to build a competitive advantage. In his Fireside Interview, BT Enterprise CEO Rob Shuter will reflect on these priorities and discuss how to navigate the increasingly complex business comms landscape, including uncharted territory, with confidence. He

**Maximising opportunities at times of profound change is a priority for all channel businesses**



# Maximising opportunities



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

will share insights into the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead during the Golden Triennium and beyond, address fundamental questions about the wholesale market's strengths and weaknesses, assess once in a generation shifts in technology, culture, ways of working and diversity and inclusion – and how to take full advantage of these exciting opportunities.

## Reshaping the connectivity landscape

Meanwhile, the connectivity environment is being reshaped by the unprecedented roll out of full fibre projects which are central to building a digital society. More than ever, project success comes from understanding the changing dynamics of the market, challenging industry norms and focusing on strategic choices that create new opportunities. In his Comms Vision interview, CityFibre Group COO Simon Holden discusses why digital infrastructure is critical to strengthening Britain's social and economic future. He will also explore the challenges facing the fibre investment landscape, the importance of competition – and what this all means for channel partners with decisions to make about their future growth plans.

Investments into the UK's full fibre digital infrastructure space continue at pace, and as the fragmented altnet market matures all eyes should be on positioning to win. In her keynote address, TalkTalk CEO Tristia Harrison will provide insights into TalkTalk's own strategic manoeuvres and explore how the evolving infrastructure market will drive growth for partners. Key for TalkTalk to build an integrated connected future is its acquisition of Virtual 1. In his Fireside Interview, Virtual 1 CEO Tom

O'Hagan will discuss the critical role of wholesale fibre aggregators in providing partners with access to networks and new market opportunities at scale.

Accelerating scale through partnerships is a priority for Onecom CEO Martin Flick who proposes that it's time to reimagine the nature of channel partnerships and the capacity of resellers to scale up while contending with a range of market challenges and opportunities. In his Comms Vision Fireside Interview, Flick will discuss why he thinks traditional value drivers in channel partnerships are no match for a business scale up network underpinned by high levels of interconnection and collaboration, and he advances his belief that future success could depend on the extent to which you 'dare to be different'.

## Understanding the anthropology factor

The study of human difference and its link to business success is a speciality of high performance anthropologist and author Rasmus Ankersen. In his keynote address he will explore how anthropology adds a new dimension to the evolution of business strategy, drawing on insights into why one athletics club in Kingston, Jamaica, succeeded in producing most of the world's best sprinters; why Brazil habitually generates soccer supremos and why so many champion runners hail from one Ethiopian village. As well as revealing how to generate better results through the close observation of remarkable people, Ankersen will share ideas on growing talent, creating your own disruption, sustaining success, warding off complacency, developing new ideas – and why so many successful organisations struggle to stay at the top.

Losing their way is not an option for any serious business leader, so how to pave a pathway towards peak business performances is a key theme at this year's Comms Vision ICT Investment Forum (1st November), the first of its kind at the event, supported by Knight Corporate Finance and attended by a select group of the sector's M&A movers and shakers. The forum, which precedes the main conference, will spotlight M&A trends in the business communications sector, analyse the robustness of current growth strategies, highlight the opportunities and challenges ahead, assess the themes reshaping deal structures, and explore the best routes to business growth in 2023 and beyond.

As part of the preparation for this project Comms Vision produced a research report based on the premise – Is it time to reappraise your business growth strategy? The evening will also include a group discussion bringing clarity to the ten most important questions facing acquirers and vendors. Continuing the theme, Knight Corporate Finance will host a Breakfast Briefing for main event delegates (3rd November).

**In the following pages Comms Vision Convention 2022 sponsors share their market views and strategies.**

**COMMS Vision is the leading annual leadership forum for CEO, MD and CTO delegates making up the major league of the UK reseller community. [www.commsvision.com](http://www.commsvision.com)**

**Charting a strategic roadmap in response to industry developments means knowing where to focus and how to build a competitive advantage**

# The time is now: The power of three to all-IP



Gavin Jones

The comms landscape is changing at record pace with the national fibre and 5G rollouts bringing hyperconnectivity, aiming to meet unprecedented demand for capacity and speed, writes Gavin Jones, Head of Channel, BT Wholesale.

Comms Vision is truly like no other event. Amid these turbulent times a sense of stability and an opportunity to come together has never been needed more. A key theme at the event is the Golden Triennium – the three years from now until the PSTN switch-off in December 2025. This will see the closure of all systems running on copper networks and, in turn, the evolution into an all-IP world. With the right preparation, this shift to all-IP is a clear opportunity for partners to accelerate outcomes for customers.

While it's more of a marathon than a sprint, with everyone at different stages of their digital transformation journeys, there's no doubt that – for those who haven't already – the time to embark on this odyssey is now. The countdown has started on Britain's biggest infrastructure shift for decades, and those who fail to prepare are only preparing to fail.

Comms Vision brings together the best brands

in the channel and we're delighted to be participating in a number of sessions. From the opening super session and fireside chat to our two boardroom sessions, we're exploring the issues that are facing the industry as we head again into unpredictable times.

#### BT Wholesale's Complete Portfolio

One certainty is that all-IP is coming, and our two boardroom sessions dive into what we're doing to make the transition for partners and customers seamless so they can take charge of their digital destiny. Firstly, we're discussing our Complete Portfolio which fuses propositions across Connectivity, Convergence and end-to-end Support – all of which is delivered from trusted experts.

**Complete Connectivity** is our collective portfolio of access technologies. From FTTP to SoGEA, DIA to Ethernet, these solutions enable partners to order and sell the fastest and widest range of access that customers need.

**Complete Convergence** makes it easier for partners to unlock maximum value from digital journeys in bold new ways. For instance, our new Complete Switch enables a single order journey for broadband and voice technologies with ease; number porting is taken care of, collaboration is seamless, and end-to-end assistance is always there.

**Complete Support** underlines how we're on hand around the clock for partners, equipping them with what they need to support their customers. Central to this is 'The Hub', our new platform providing matchless digital experiences, with ongoing support through our partner programme, Partner Plus. From sales and marketing support to online tools and training, it's everything channel partners need to grow their business. As they grow, they'll access even more exciting rewards, events, and offers.

One, two, three to all-IP. With three years to the PSTN switch-off, we're

simplifying the transition for partners down into three simple steps: onboarding; education; execution. We're focusing on this in our second boardroom session. BT Wholesale is here – as the ever-present trusted partner – to supercharge partners and critical to that is Partner Plus. The programme was developed to empower members with the tools and expertise to take opportunities and grow customer accounts.

**Step one** of a seamless transition is onboarding onto the programme, unlocking the huge bank of resources that provide a competitive advantage in what is an ever-more crowded space. Our Hub gives early access to new solutions, and expert teams to help you with marketing and other requirements, Partner Plus is a toolbox that contains everything partners need to thrive.

**Step two** is education. With the countdown on, we understand that knowledge of the switch-off isn't as wide as previous infrastructure

upgrades – as the TV switch-over – so we're providing the content for partners to learn and grow, but also materials for them to educate customers to make the transition now.

**Step three** is execution. Partners aren't on this journey alone, we are here to support when it comes to transitioning. Our Professional Services team can help understand, audit, migrate and implement the right technologies so portfolios, and customers, are future-proofed.

#### Right combination of products

Ultimately, the right combination of products and services is what will supercharge channel partners, resulting in happier and better-informed customers. Making this work requires a long-term and trusted partner, one that can create meaningful and lasting change in the face of uncertainty, all with a complete portfolio, striving for excellence along the way. ■



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# Challenger sets the pace

**As a market disrupter CityFibre and its partners continue to embrace a challenger mindset that will further accelerate business growth and force a change for the better across the industry, writes Wholesale Channel Sales Director, Andy Wilson.**

**A**t CityFibre, we pride ourselves on being a challenger and a successful one at that. It's in our culture, our values and our mission. But what is being a challenger about and why is it important? It's about pushing the boundaries and not settling for the industry norms and expectations. It's about raising the bar and demanding more for our customers. It's about doing things differently and that's what we're continuously doing through mindset, organisation, innovation and sometimes sheer grit and determination.

Since our beginnings we have been told no, it's not possible, you can't do that, it won't work – but we refused to listen. We know that it can be done and we're doing it - we're the proof. Earlier this year, we secured a debt package totalling £4.9 billion, facilities that form one of the largest single financings dedicated to fibre deployments across Europe. The financing followed £1.125 billion in equity investments that we

closed in 2021. This fully funds our rollout to a third of the UK market by 2025 and enables us to add more by participating in BDUK's 'Project Gigabit' programme.

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. The achievement of this latest milestone is hugely significant. We're building a brand-new intelligent fibre network for the data age. One that's better by design, enables everything effortlessly for customers, sets a new standard for digital infrastructure and is creating an enormous and growing opportunity for our wholesale partners.

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 set a target of the end of 2025 to reach eight



Andy Wilson

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.

#### Unlocking potential

It has always been our mission to unlock the digital potential of entire communities and end digital poverty. The fresh fibre-only network that we're building means our partners can offer 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.

The Country's 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 business, public sector organisations, mobile network operators, and of course, the end user customers that our partners serve on our network.

Our investment in quality and our commitment to getting it right first time is already making us the network of choice and enabling our 'challenger mindset' to lead the industry. Some of our partners who have traditionally worked in the B2B market are also reaping the rewards from new opportunities in consumer markets that are booming, as usage habits evolve and bandwidth demand soars.

#### Not all about us

But it's not all about us – it's about you as our partner and your customers; and what

this 'challenger mindset' means for you. You can be confident that you're working with a provider that doesn't settle, continuously strives for improvement and challenges unacceptable industry norms, sparking innovation, demanding more and striving for better 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.

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. ■



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# Why it's time to thrive

**Navigating complexity with disruptive and efficient solutions that meet the ever-evolving requirements of end customers is key to future success, writes Gamma Managing Director for Channel Daryl Pile.**

**T**his year, in our keynote and boardroom sessions at Gleneagles, we will be focusing on the value within our evolving core markets. The Gamma team will be sharing a view of the market and how the solutions that we provide can help businesses thrive rather than survive in a time of economic uncertainty. We will also focus on how partners can use the ever-nearing PSTN switch-off to engage their connections in this major step towards a mass IP-network migration. The opportunity is vast and there are options available to fulfil every organisation's requirement.

Another key area is highlighting how partners can drive positive customer experience with CCaaS. People put a premium on better experiences and better experiences harness the power of simplification. In fact, 57% of consumers say they are willing to pay more for simpler experiences and 76% of consumers are more likely to recommend a service because it provides simpler experiences and communications.

The bread and butter of the future contact centre will be enabling customers to communicate with a business by any means. If 70% of your customers want to communicate through voice, and you only supply a voice service, you're missing out on 30% of potential business. But by enabling your agents to respond to these demands through the desired means of communication, customer retention will grow, and agent satisfaction can be maintained.

Contact centres need to evolve with the customer to deliver the best services, and resellers need to be responsible enough to understand the new technologies available to them and how each can address the needs of their customer base. The way end customers are communicating has changed. The demand for more than voice has grown over the years and the innovations we have already seen are simply just continuing to grow.

We've seen the move away from voice to non-voice channels (WhatsApp,



Daryl Pile

webchats, etc), which has given rise to AI technologies innovating the contact centre space. With the introduction of AI, contact centres have enabled their customers to proceed with an automated chatbot, until they require the service of an agent.

#### Rise of video

Whilst there's been a move away from sole voice communication, there has been a rise in video channels, especially among the younger generation. Whereas you used to have to travel miles to view cars, or houses, make appointments in cold bank buildings or wait for hours at the doctor's, you can do this all through a video service, and the use of these technologies has only been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. I don't see a desire for this fading anytime soon, and I only see the need growing.

Customer retention will

always be at the top of the list. Channel partners need to be aware of what the end-user experience is, and if they are providing the right solution for their market. Making sure you're not just providing the 70% and forgetting the 30% is paramount if you want to grow your market.

The first, and most important thing to consider is a cloud-based solution. Cloud offers the most flexibility and scalability for your contact centre, and this is particularly important for growth and sustainability. With a cloud-based solution, you can expand, and then shrink as and when you need it (think universities during clearing, and then afterwards!).

Resellers and MSPs also need to consider a solution that enables customers and agents to receive the best outcome. A solution that is streamlined for customers

and gets them from A to B without much pain is key, those solutions also enable agents (when they need to step in) to be able to have a clear view of the customer's journey up until that point.

With the continued move to the cloud, there are big opportunities for the contact centres that don't know they are contact centres (car sales showrooms, surgeries, etc.) With a cloud solution, these businesses can enable better, more streamlined services for their customers, vastly improving customer experience and retention.

Most solutions are made to address a large enterprise market, but when an SME enters the scene, it can get a little too big and a little too expensive. With a cloud solution, resellers and MSPs will be able to address the SME market, with SME sized solutions, at SME sized prices. ■



# 2022

Celebrating 20 years of business

This year we celebrate our 20th year of connecting businesses - a milestone that would

not have been possible without you,  
our valued channel partners.

**Thank you!**

We hope you have a great Comms Vision event.



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# Winning partnerships

**Onecom Partners aims 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.**

**G**enuine strategic partnerships are key to growth and success in the channel as we approach the once-in-a-generation period known as the Golden Triennium. The PSTN switch-off, accelerating pace of technological innovation and evolving ways of working combine to present unprecedented opportunities for those who are positioned to take them. At the same time a difficult economic environment, supply chain pressures and market volatility present challenges that resellers will need support to overcome.

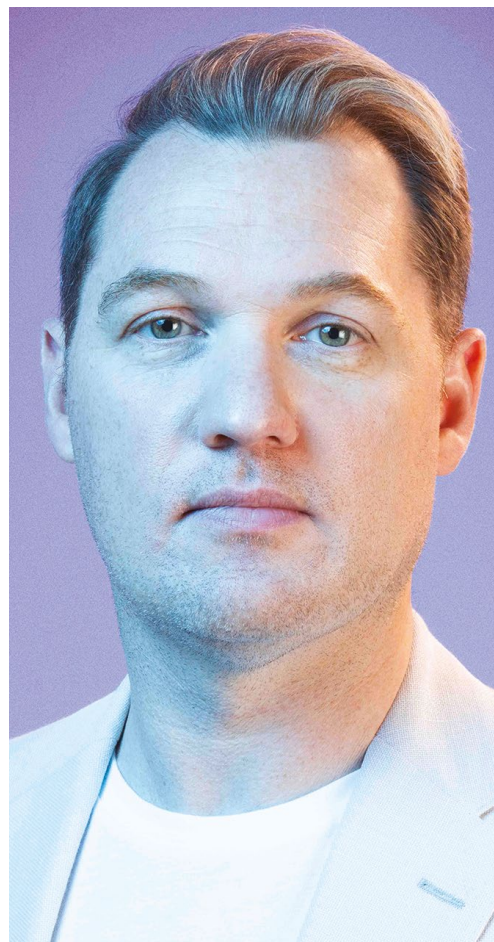
Adam Cathcart, Managing Director of Onecom Partners, explains that following its acquisition by Onecom in 2021 the business previously branded 9 Partners is ideally placed to help Partners accelerate scale through a 'reimagining' of the nature of channel partnerships, enabling their growth while underpinning their resilience. "We're not just looking to be a wholesaler of services that works with resellers – we are fully invested in the success of our interconnected partner ecosystem", commented

Cathcart. "We have our core portfolio made up of voice, connectivity, mobile and value-added services such as bureau billing, white labelled support known as Virtual Office, and a dedicated marketing concierge. We have, through the wider Onecom Group, access to products and services from Tier 1 networks and carriers, all available at commercially competitive rates.

#### True aggregator

"Our purpose, as a true aggregator of services, is to create mutually beneficial partnerships, maximising opportunities such as the big switch-off and the evolution of remote working to overcome the issues Partners face and ultimately to empower them to grow their revenues and increase margins."

At this year's Comms Vision forum, Cathcart and Martin Flick, Onecom Group CEO, will go into detail about the Onecom Partners model, the nature of its partner ecosystem and the catalysts reshaping the comms industry over several interactive sessions. Flick will then take part in a



Adam Cathcart



Martin Flick

fireside session based around the concept of reimagining the nature of channel partnerships and exploring the capacity of resellers to scale up, while contending with a range of market challenges and opportunities.

Flick, an industry veteran with an extensive track record for M&A in the telecommunications industry, will discuss why he thinks traditional value drivers in channel partnerships are no match for a business scale up network. He will advance his belief that future success could depend on the extent to which you 'dare to be different'.

#### Shared experience

Flick will also share learned experience with Partners on what he believes makes

a successful supplier partnership, how they can address the challenges of skills shortages, and the trends Onecom is tracking in the comms sector.

#### Boardroom sessions

During the boardroom sessions, Flick and the Onecom Partners team will be providing an overview of the newly branded Onecom Partners strategy centred around partnering for success.

The group has already demonstrated its commitment to the channel following the recent Onecom Partners launch event which unveiled a number of new products and services supported by extraordinary relationships with multiple tier 1 vendors

including its key network partner, Vodafone.

Cathcart will then be hosting a number of one-to-one sessions with the intention of delving into how specific Partners can individually benefit from the revamped Onecom Partners portfolio, looking in particular at growth and scalability to support future ambitions.

Alongside the programmed sessions there will be an opportunity to meet the Onecom Partners executive team in a more informal drinks reception at the end of Day 2 of Comms Vision. This will be held at 5.30pm on Thursday 3rd November and is open to all attendees – the team from Onecom Partners look forward to seeing you there. ■





# Partnering for Success

Onecom Partners will be showcasing our new identity as a Platinum Sponsor at this year's Comms Vision event at Gleneagles.

We look forward to welcoming attendees to Comms Vision, where the team from Onecom Partners will provide an overview of our comprehensive Partner offering focusing on Voice, Mobile, Connectivity, and our bespoke Value-Added Services.







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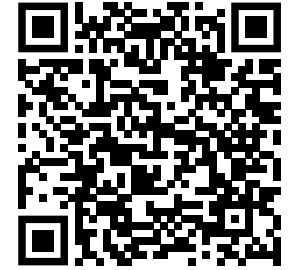
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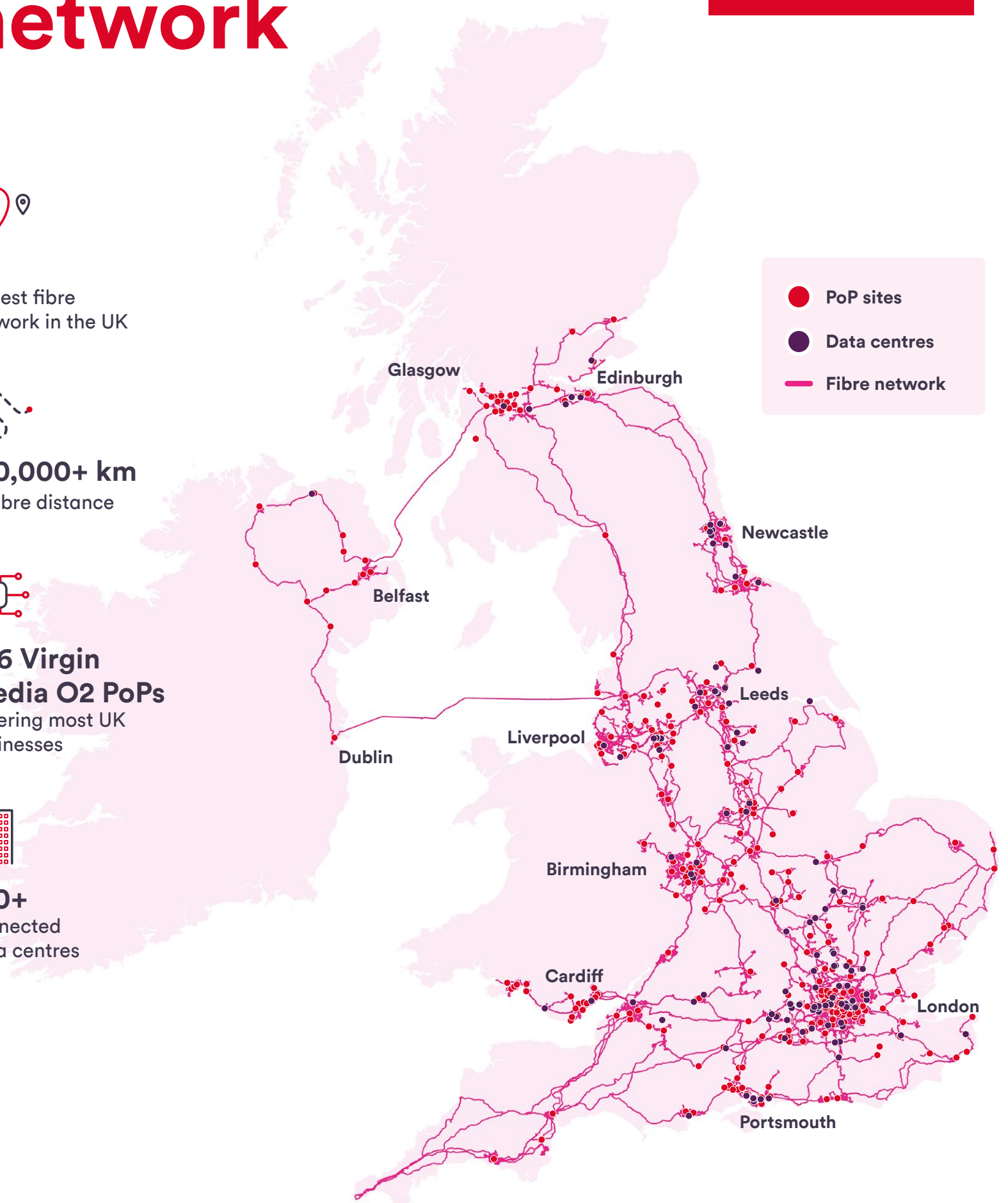


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# Wholesale network services

## How Virgin Media Business Wholesale is expanding the network

At Virgin Media Business Wholesale, we're committed to using the power of connectivity to supercharge communities across the UK. Our fibre-optic network has always been our crown jewel and we continually invest to grow our footprint. Since 2015, we've connected an additional 2.5 million premises to our fixed network through Project Lightning. In total, we now have more than 15.5 million UK premises connected and we're not slowing down any time soon.

## What will this mean for our partners?

We will have completely upgraded our HFC network with FTTP by the end of 2028, increasing our wholesale network to even more of the UK and making more premises serviceable for our partners. We'll also be exploring new capabilities to bring our partners, enabling them to serve the changing needs of UK businesses.

## Our wholesale connectivity products and services:

- Dark Fibre**  
 Our dedicated, unlit optical fibre connections that operate between two sites – providing virtually unlimited capacity. You, our partners can set up your own bespoke network by leasing unused fibre-optic cabling, rather than relying on shared network connectivity. We offer the largest Dark Fibre coverage in the UK, available right across the country.
- High Capacity Services**  
 Our HCS are a layer-one optical connection that follows fixed point-to-point paths between customer locations – offering a low-latency, super high-capacity and bandwidth service (10 to 100Gbps).
- Ethernet**  
 We offer a national, carrier-class, dedicated and symmetrical layer-two, point-to-point connection between end-user sites. Customers can aggregate our Ethernet services into scalable Points of Interconnect (up to 10Gbps) and add extensions to deliver their service over a dedicated fibre pair of up to 35km (100Mbps, 1Gbps or 10Gbps).
- Dedicated Internet Access**  
 DIA is a ready to-go fibre optic internet access service that you can offer to your end customers. And because we own the UK's second largest network, you don't have to invest in your own internet transit and peering infrastructure, meaning you can price more competitively in the current market.

### Want to know more?

Speak to your account manager today or visit our website to find out more about our services.

[www.virginmediabusiness.co.uk/wholesale](http://www.virginmediabusiness.co.uk/wholesale)

# Mapping the road ahead

**As the Great British Switch Off fast approaches, the collective themes of this year's Comms Vision are all about looking to the future. Steve Warburton, Managing Director for Zen Internet's Partner Division, reflects on the opportunities and threats that lie ahead.**

**W**hether it's the transition to all-IP, navigating a difficult economic environment, taking advantage of changing demand or building loyalty through customer experience, the years ahead will pose threat and opportunity in equal measure. It's up to all of us, collectively, to ensure that we come out of this well placed for a prosperous future.

## Talking tech

The impending switch off really is a watershed moment for our industry. Will partners embrace the opportunities that all-IP, full fibre connections bring, securing their customers to ultra-reliable services that make switching much less likely? Or will they be slow to react, not sensing the danger of the seismic changes on the horizon?

In that case, it's likely that competitors will gain an upper hand, and once a customer is lost, winning them back will be difficult. For our part, this is about

providing support and expertise where it is needed. Not only in the provision of new technology, but also in helping our partners to use it to their advantage. Helping our partners to focus on delivering the right technology in the right way to the right people will be our aim.

## Price vs quality

In an inflationary environment, it's easy to become obsessed with price. You want to do the right thing by your customers, you're concerned they'll find a better deal elsewhere, you want to grow your customer base, and you are under pressure to protect your margins and support your people.

Of course, price is immensely important, but so is differentiation. When providers compete on price alone, it creates a race to the bottom where service and quality suffer, and smaller players simply cannot compete. That's why ensuring that your customers see you differently is important too.



Steve Warburton

From striking the right notes in terms of sustainability to building a name for quality of service and customer experience, to compete effectively in the channel you need to stand out for the right reasons. As costs come into ever-sharper focus, that could mean giving greater priority to your installed base. After all, retention costs are much more forgiving on budgets than the costs of acquisition, and ensuring you have happy customers who want to keep buying from you can mean ongoing business for years to come.

## Putting the planet first

Part of that differentiation journey includes a much greater focus on sustainability. Sure, it is a major focus of many businesses today, which doesn't seem to provide much room for differentiation. But

sustainability remains a topic that many are still only paying lip service to. Businesses that can back up their aspirations, prove their promises, are those that customers will trust. And besides, wouldn't you rather be part of the solution than part of the problem? Your customers will certainly thank you. I expect to see much more collaboration on sustainability in the next couple of years, with the industry working together to find new and innovative ways to reduce carbon emissions.

## Customer experience

As customers eyes are turned by better, newer technologies, being a provider of choice won't just come down to whether you're supplying the latest connectivity tech. Another key to building loyalty, to ensuring your customers stay 'sticky', is in providing the

best possible user experience. As well as building loyalty, great service also creates upsell opportunities, and that will be a key component to continued success in the coming years.

In an increasingly commoditised market, there's nothing quite like a provider that genuinely puts its customers first, that creates memorable moments of magic that leave them feeling valued and appreciated. Happy customers will be more likely to stay with you. They'll also be more likely to upgrade and move more of their other services to you. Focusing on your installed base by providing an exceptional experience is invaluable.

## The elephant in the room

Of course, all of this is taking place in an uncertain and tough economic climate. As the cost of living crisis begins to squeeze budgets, costs spiral out of control and belts begin to tighten, the next couple of years are likely to be hard. We want our partners to know that they're not alone. We will support with as much guidance and advice as we can throughout this period. We'll provide training and marketing support to help partners grow their businesses and our CEO Paul Stobart will be on hand with his own unique thoughts and insights.

The definition of true partnership for us is being in this together, and that's the message I want to convey here. The next couple of years will present exciting opportunities and difficult moments perhaps in equal measure. We're here to help our channel partners navigate that journey. ■





Partner



# We weren't all bitten by a radio-active spider

**We weren't adopted by human parents after arriving here from space.**

As far as we know, our bones are not made of super-strong metal. We're just normal people who think that brands can, and should, be trying to make things better, whenever they get the chance. That's why Zen signing up to become a B Corp certified business is definitely not a superhero thing. It's a 'doing our bit' thing.

**Let's be a force for good together.**

**Carbon  
Neutral**

Certified



Corporation

# Collaboration is key

**Full fibre deployment and the successful delivery of Gigabit Britain will be dependent on partnership and collaboration, writes ITS Technology Group Head of Carrier and Key Accounts Dave Ferry.**

ITS designs, builds and operates wholesale full fibre networks known as 'Faster Britain' in the marketplace. We have built a substantial offering which includes an industry-leading self-service search, quote and order portal and APIs giving partners access to gigabit-capable full fibre solutions across the country.

The business has been on a real growth journey over the last few years. Following its second round Aviva infrastructure funding which secured a further £100 million in April this year, ITS recently kickstarted its 'buy and build' strategy with the acquisition of dark fibre specialist NextGenAccess, who provide turn-key design and build support on carrier infrastructure projects. All this is alongside a doubling of the ITS workforce and a strong organic growth and positive EBITDA position.

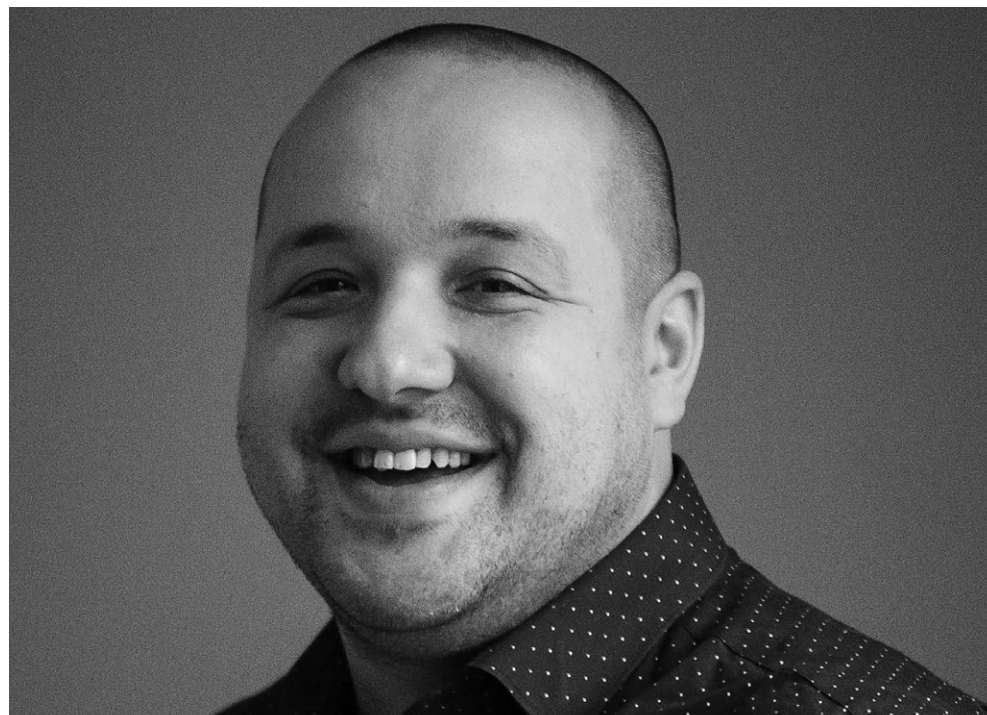
Our view of partnership and our business heritage of collaboration is something that we're proud of. Collaboration in a number of forms has been at the heart of our growth over the last decade and we believe that working together is absolutely key to the UK

hitting full fibre to more businesses and citizens.

ITS has been a proponent for local government collaboration for a number of years, working closely with local authorities to maximise their existing assets, and really drawing on joined-up thinking to remove complexity and drawn out timescales with the outcome of deploying projects more efficiently and with less disruption to the local communities they are designed to serve.

More recently, our work in Liverpool City Region has been in the spotlight, due to our role as a joint venture partner in LCR Connect, the 212km full fibre network that is being deployed across the six local authorities of Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens and Wirral. The Combined Authority have invested into the venture to ensure that the whole region benefits from the digital opportunity.

It's an innovative approach to take gigabit capable full fibre to 29,000 businesses with availability of FTTP, Ethernet and carrier grade dark fibre routes throughout the six boroughs. It's an



**Dave Ferry**

approach that is expediting the delivery of fibre to many organisations, but it's another example of working smarter to overcome the myriad challenges and barriers that come with network builds.

#### Expansive reach

We can connect customers anywhere in the UK using a mix of our own infrastructure and a number of strategic partnerships with major carriers, allowing us the ability to serve gigabit capable services to every business in the UK. This blended approach provides genuine choice and unlimited potential for our partners, helping them to thrive.

For some of the UK's largest carriers, we've collaborated to build diverse routes underpinning their long-haul links, where our channel partners can also take our connectivity services to businesses on those routes. This has allowed us to provide great commercials on

the infrastructure build, while achieving our objectives of bringing fibre to more premises. When combined with Capital Leasing options such as IRU contracts we've been able to make sure all parties feel the benefit.

We're well funded by our investors at Aviva and we're able to use that to our advantage to build quickly and at scale, both when we're building out our core networks or when a partner's opportunity provides a reason to expand our reach to pass more premises.

Recent examples of collaboration have seen us provide connectivity to myriad businesses across the UK, underpin several AltNet and Carrier networks and bring networks into Data Centres for our partners in several locations.

The premise remains the same. By working together, we're removing complexity, reducing timescales and

acting in a flexible way to make use of the resource available to the industry.

We're on a really exciting growth journey, building our Faster Britain gigabit capable network across the UK, working with a mix of partners. We've invested in a highly experienced leadership team and pride ourselves on our expertise in delivering quality connectivity services, utilising the latest XGS-PON technology to deliver super-scalable, resilient fibre services and providing design and build support on infrastructure projects.

Our recent acquisition of NextGenAccess has accelerated our growth and capability to deliver bespoke Dark Fibre networks for our Carrier partners. We're committed to constantly innovating and enhancing the services we offer to our partners and their customers, cementing our place as one of the leading wholesale fibre providers in the UK. ■



# its.

Accelerating full fibre deployment through smart collaboration.



The delivery of 'Gigabit Britain' is being accelerated with joined up thinking across the public and private sectors.

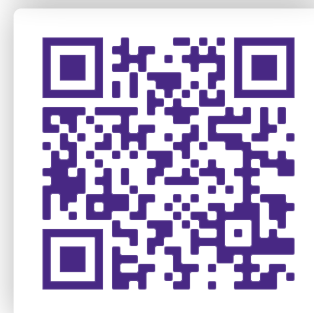
Working in partnership, we'll provide you with access to our wholly owned Faster Britain network with flexible commercials, fast installation and scalable connectivity options including FTTP and ethernet.

We also provide a turnkey approach to bespoke dark fibre build projects, underpinning your network anywhere in the UK.



Be part of it. #FasterBritain

Visit [www.itstechnologygroup.com](http://www.itstechnologygroup.com) or scan here





# Grow with mobile data

**Your customers are working on mobile data projects right now and demand is predicted to increase dramatically over the next few years, writes Jola CEO Andrew Dickinson.**

If you get it right with M2M and IoT you will quickly generate high-margin recurring revenue, and due to higher EBITDA multiples increase the value of your company.

According to McKinsey, revenues from mobile data are set to increase dramatically over the next five years. Factors driving growth are the availability, speed and reliability of 4G, 5G and IoT. Statista says the number of IoT devices worldwide is forecast to grow to more than 25.4 billion IoT devices in 2030. Fortune Business Insights predict this market will be worth £1085 billion by 2027.

People think IoT is very low revenue and you've got to win hundreds of thousands. You don't. You can often get a decent ARPU of £10 to £15 on thousands of devices and sometimes margins in excess of 40%, so it's a really attractive line-of-business to pivot into. Your mobile data partner will need to give you the tools to win deals, usually competing with the direct sales arms of the mobile networks. Your supplier will need to be an aggregator with access to all the networks and ideally, they will also be an independent MVNO. Most importantly everything

must be automated, with real-time APIs offering zero-touch provisioning and management through a single self-service portal.

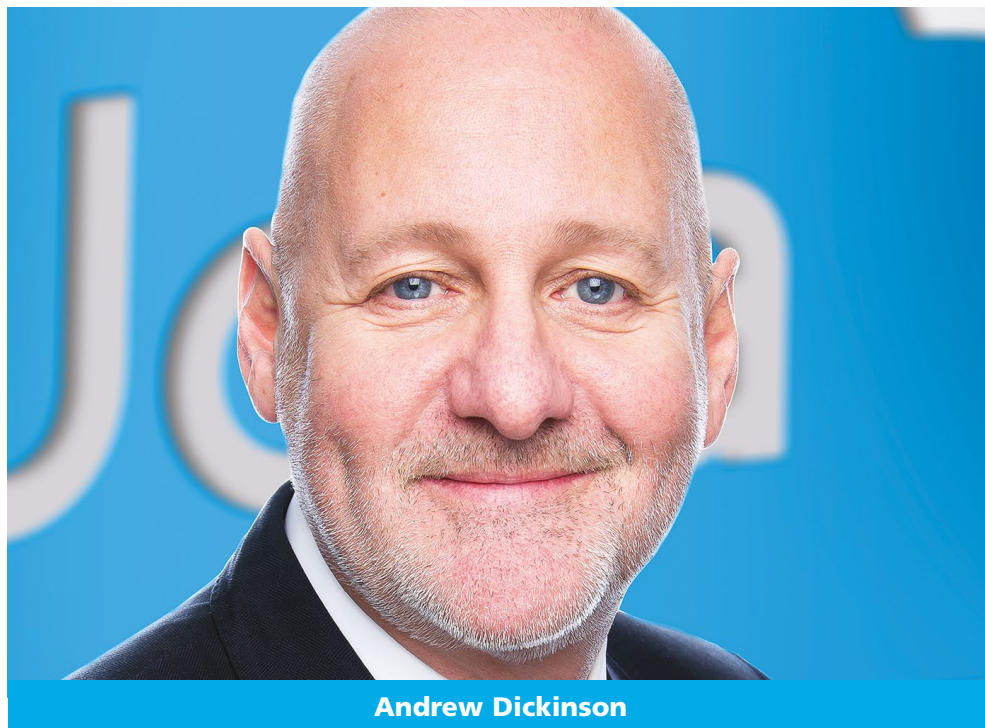
They will need to be innovative, with a constant stream of relevant mobile data and IoT products that the networks would take years to develop and launch. When you partner with the right channel supplier, mobile data is easy to sell, support and bill.

The opportunity for the channel is significant. We may not find ourselves supplying car manufacturers with SIMs for self-driving cars, but ICT resellers already have strong relationships with business customers for IT infrastructure, asset tracking, digital signage, mobile WiFi, monitoring and utilities.

Mobile data is an easy product to sell and provision and needs very little support. Jola took on just over 200 new partners in 2021 and now have over 1200. We recently put 30,000 multinet SIMs into iPads for one public sector project, with a very quick book-to-bill timeframe and no issues.

#### Scale

Our partner didn't have to add any more people in billing or accounts to support



Andrew Dickinson

it. SIMs provision immediately using our Mobile Manager platform, so you don't have to wait three months to start generating recurring margins. As soon as customers put that SIM into their device, you're billing for it.

#### Getting Started

Speak to your existing customers, understand their requirements, and then partner with an aggregator that can provide innovative solutions, unavailable elsewhere. Find out about their current projects and challenges. Once you have established your customers' requirements, start building your solution.

#### The MRG

Jola has developed The Mobile-data Revenue Generator™. It is a six-step process to uncover mobile data opportunities. The process defines the way we work with partners and qualifies opportunities, capabilities and skills. We help our partners to focus on key opportunities and

ultimately win large, high-margin, long-term contracts.

#### Selecting the right suppliers

Who will you partner with for the devices, and where are you going to get the connectivity from? What challenges do you need to overcome? Who has the most cost-effective mobile data solution to meet the requirements? Who is agile enough to develop solutions to meet the time frames? Can you manage the data usage across the estate? Can you control usage and costs, maximise your margin and protect your customer from bill shock?

#### Jola

Jola is a mobile data aggregator and MVNO, part of the Wireless Logic Group, but channel-only and independent, which means that we offer services from all the major UK networks and hundreds of networks globally. We have been selling mobile data to the channel since 2014 and we

understand the pain points of our partners and the needs of their end-users in each vertical market. Over time we have developed a unique portal, that gives you the control and visibility you need to manage global SIM estates. Control you can even extend to your customers.

We have also developed unique hardware solutions that save our partners time, helping them create a great customer experience, maximise their margin and minimise costs for their customers.

There is high demand for mobile data from your existing customers. It is an easy product to sell, provision, support and bill. We have partners who have doubled the value of their business, increased their ARPU and reduced churn by focusing on mobile data. Jola is a Gold Sponsor at Comms Vision again this year. To find out more about how to get into M2M or IoT, come and see us there. ■



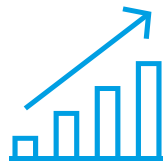


# Channel-only mobile data aggregator

## Partner with us to



Grow profitable revenue streams



Increase the value of your business



Win new 'sticky' customers



Build innovative propositions



### Mobile Manager<sup>®</sup>

Manage your global SIM estate in real-time in our automated white label portal



### Mobile-Data Revenue Generator<sup>®</sup>

6 step process to uncover mobile data opportunities

## Contact us

For further information  
call us on 0115 822 5000  
email [sales@jola.co.uk](mailto:sales@jola.co.uk)  
or visit [www.jola.co.uk](http://www.jola.co.uk)

# Nasstar Channel: One year on

**One year ago we chose Comms Vision to launch Nasstar Channel – a standalone division of the Nasstar Group dedicated to one thing – partner success, writes Dave Hawkins, Sales Director for Nasstar Channel.**

**W**e're delighted to be back again this year to discuss the developments that have taken place, and our plans to help partners unlock further digital transformation opportunities. As one of the largest independent providers of transformative technology in the UK, we have the expertise, the portfolio, and the tools to be your single source of partner solutions. Last year we outlined our commitment to our partners to deliver a new dedicated website, increase automation and simplify our ways of working, plus the development of an enhanced kitbag of solutions. We have since been working hard to fulfil these commitments. Here is our story so far... nasstarchannel.com has arrived!

The website now reflects the full breadth and depth of our portfolio of solutions including new channel offerings. You'll see new areas such as 'the hub', providing you with news, blogs, videos, and insights from our team and expanded marketing resources including data sheets, battle cards,

and white-label collateral to help you make the most of every opportunity. Plus, it is now even easier to access the partner portal, contact the Nasstar Channel team or book a meeting with us when you need additional support.

#### **Improved Partner Portal functionality**

The 2022 development roadmap focused on providing partners with the tools needed to maximise their potential and simplify their path to purchase. We've invested heavily in the launch of new functionality and the portal now provides partners with complete visibility of their estate including connections, orders, services and faults. Partners are presented with all the information needed to quote, purchase and proactively manage end users, simplify the way forwards, and maximise your potential.

#### **Portal Customisation**

We have also launched bespoke portal customisation to give our partners control over how their portal looks and feels when customers access it. Channel partners can now personalise the



**Dave Hawkins**

portal with their own colour scheme, font styles, and company logo – all without raising a single request. At Comms Vision, we will be delving into the practical applications of this new functionality to enable partners to grow their businesses and discuss what comes next. Join us at one of our boardroom sessions to hear more, with an opportunity to feedback and ask questions.

#### **What's next?**

The coming months offer some major opportunities for Nasstar Channel and our partners. Here are some of the highlights:

#### **Industry Transformation**

The PSTN switch off will affect everybody, and we have the solutions, resources, and support to help our channel partners. Our Big Switch Off Hub contains a range of collateral to inform and educate, plus white-label

collateral that is available on the portal to assist our partners in the critical conversations they need to have with their end users.

#### **Future-proof Voice**

The PSTN switch off is a major opportunity, so we are offering a range of IP-based future-proof voice solutions. This includes ISDN replacement solutions for those who aren't ready to move to an IP solution and want to retain their PBX system. Plus, migration products for those seeking an IP voice solution or unified comms option.

#### **Network Transformation**

Over the next 24 months, we will also be transforming our own network, replacing legacy infrastructure and moving from 70 hubs to just 15, creating a future-proof, all-IP Network. This transformation enables us to utilise next-generation technology,

providing an enhanced offering of services and solutions whilst improving reliability and resilience.

And our kit bag continues to grow...

#### **Myriad XT**

Our award-winning, flagship inbound voice platform has also been future-proofed with enhancements and new features designed around our partner's requirements including no more manual provisioning and building your own numbers and routing plans.

#### **OneConsultation**

Based on Microsoft 365 technology, OneConsultation is a fully managed and fully customisable virtual consultation solution, leveraging Microsoft Teams. Ideal for both individual consultations and group sessions, OneConsultation is already used widely in industries such as healthcare and the police, where they see fewer cancellations, increased accessibility, and more productive meetings.

#### **Teams Chat Assist**

With the rise of the disparate workforce, the need for a centralised hub to quickly find answers to your questions has never been greater. Teams Chat Assist enables users to 'Ask the Expert' directly from Microsoft Teams and get the answer they need quickly in the flow of their work, whatever the size of the organisation.

We hope this gives you a flavour of what the channel can expect from Nasstar Channel in 2023. We look forward to meeting with as many of you as possible at Comms Vision. ■





# WE KEEP THINGS BLACK & WHITE SO YOU CAN ADD THE COLOUR.

**Our goal at Nasstar Channel is to help you and your customers succeed.**

We remove the complexity and keep it simple, providing you with the tools to maximise your potential and achieve business-driven results for your customers.

We engage and empower you, recognising that you add the value and the colour. We provide you with the strong foundations to do this. Simple solutions. Expert training. Comprehensive resources.

We're investing heavily in technology, boosting automation and enhancing our partner resources to deliver the best ROI. For us it's more than a partnership, it's a collaboration.

**COME AND TALK TO US AT COMMS  
VISION IN THE STUDY, OCHIL HOUSE  
OR AT ONE OF OUR BOARDROOMS!**



[nasstarchannel.com](https://nasstarchannel.com)  
[partnersales@nasstarchannel.com](mailto:partnersales@nasstarchannel.com)  
0345 122 4777

# Platform lifecycles, the conversation we should be having

**We've seen plenty of M&A activity in the last year, and a growing narrative around the PSTN switch-off. But there's another conversation we should be having, writes Russell Lux, Founder & CEO at TelcoSwitch.**

In amongst all this noise, as important as it is, there's another key topic that isn't being given the airtime it demands – the lifecycle of the platforms that underpin vast swathes of the UK's hosted telephony infrastructure.

When you build a solution on a core platform, you need to know it's there for the long-term, because a customer could be signing up for three or five years, and over that time you may have hundreds or even thousands of customers using that platform. As a channel partner, we know it would reflect badly to deliver a solution to a customer where the platform is set to become, or is already end of life, or will see little to no feature development during the customer lifecycle.

We've already seen the likes of Avaya and Mitel all but hand the reins to RingCentral to deliver a UCaaS offering on their behalf, and while these efforts have been presented to the market as strategic partnerships, they simply demonstrate a failure of these once

goliaths to innovate their products and platforms swiftly enough to meet the needs of their customers. They simply realised too late to enable them to plan, develop, test, and deploy a next-generation UCaaS offering, and ultimately turned to a competitor to help them. In Mitel's case RingCentral effectively paid \$650 million for them to 'leave the front door open' to over 30 million users.

For end-customers of a certain scale and without bespoke requirements, this may not pose an issue; it was at least a path forward for the end-customer, but did this somewhat enforced path serve the commercial or operational needs of channel partners?

It's easy to point at big multi-national examples, but there's a similar story to be told closer to home, with established vendors continuing to deliver solutions built on legacy platforms that no longer enjoy the levels of development investment required, and where the migration path to updated solutions isn't smooth

for the channel partner or their end-customer.

BroadSoft is undoubtedly the biggest example of this, with Cisco having utilised the IP it needed and mothballed future development. So where does that leave those vendors, their resellers, and end-customers? Crucially, have these vendors been forward-thinking enough to innovate and plan for their next generation platforms in time to deliver a solution to partners and customers alike? After all, these things don't get bought and built overnight, and with hundreds of thousands of users, it becomes increasingly complex to internally migrate from your legacy solution to your next gen UCaaS product.

The market projection for UCaaS is likely to follow a predictable pattern seen in many other industries, started by a handful of players forming a competitive landscape, which over time has started to scale with more M&A activity – this is where our industry is today. But with the expanse of M&A fewer players will remain in the market, and



**Russell Lux**

with a shortage of platforms many of those vendors will only be delivering slight variations of a handful of underlying solutions, such as FreeSWITCH and Kamailio. Those vendors set to enjoy long-term success will be the ones already well into strategically acquiring sound IP to build and deploy a next-generation UCaaS solution with a platform that can thrive and scale in the long-term. And those resellers who follow them will be better served for it.

## Longevity of platform is key

As a technology-led business, longevity of platform is something we are fanatical about at TelcoSwitch, and we remain laser-focused on platform choice to ensure we continue to deliver powerful, secure solutions. At the cornerstone of this strategy is delivering a proprietary next-generation platform, empowering us to innovate where others simply cannot

follow, and 100% housed in public cloud infrastructure for security, resilience, and horizontal scalability.

Planning for the long-term is something we've been working on for the last two years, and with over 15,000 of our 180,000 active users already stress-testing the platform, we cannot wait to share it with you all.

Have no doubt, with so much M&A activity underway, we will be left with a small number of industry players who will oversee the lion's share of UCaaS deployments in this country. As a channel partner that means aligning with the right vendor today to ensure your base of customers can rely on the longevity of the products you recommend and deploy to them. My advice – have that platform conversation with your vendor and scrutinise their underlying roadmap for platform choice. It will help you place the right bet. ■





**There's something  
beyond the Horizon...**

# Elevating opportunities

Channel partners are the lifeblood of 8x8. With a community of more than 6,000 partners and growing, channel routes to market represent the majority of our total ARR, writes **Lisa Del Real, Global Vice President Channel, 8x8**. In FY22, channel partners drove 30% year-over-year ARR growth. That's why we welcome events like Comms Vision where we can come together to deepen these relationships and address the issues facing the sector.

The experience, insight, and focus our partners bring to the table are absolutely priceless to our company and help countless new 8x8 users transform their communications and, with it, their business.

Outstanding partner experience is vital. We listen to our partners and give them the tools, resources, and incentives they need to



Lisa Del Real

succeed with 8x8. We hear them talk about the concerns that face us all in the Golden Triennium as we move towards an all-IP future. That's why we launched our new partner programme, Elevate.

The 8x8 Elevate Partner Programme is a global programme that raises the bar on what partners should expect from a channel programme. One of the key differentiators is the opportunity for partners to choose how they work with 8x8. Partners can transact with 8x8 as an agent or resale partner. It's their business, their choice.

Key to success for any partner is being well-equipped to talk about the solutions in their portfolio. That's why 8x8 provides all of our partner sales and technical certifications at no cost. We want partners to succeed, and we remove the barriers to that success.

#### Scaling channel business

Make no mistake: Elevate isn't just a programme name. It's what we do when it comes to supporting and rewarding our partners for their commitment and sales growth. The partners that tier in the Elevate

programme are the best of the best. They train, they prepare, and they move mountains for their clients. Our programme rewards these partners with exclusive incentives, experiences, and executive insights that scale as they climb the Elevate programme tiers: Peak, Apex, and Summit.

#### Support all the way to the summit – and the future

From enhancing the partner experience to delivering market-leading solutions such as our eXperience Communications Platform and composed experiences, 8x8 consistently leads the industry—and we do so with our partners by our side. As we see more companies moving towards the cloud and doing away with siloes, it's vital that we continue to build on the three key factors for channel success: relationships, support, and incentives. It's going to be an exciting three years for our partners, the sky's the limit! ■

**8x8** ELEVATE  
PARTNER PROGRAM

Join 8x8's partner programme to grow your customer base, build new revenue streams, and increase profits.

Learn more at [www.8x8.com/partners](http://www.8x8.com/partners)



# Compliance for UC

Cloud-based UC&C solutions are no longer supportive for modern working, but a requirement for many organisations, writes **Simon Peters MD at CallCabinet UK**. Research suggests that 74% of businesses will continue operating a hybrid work structure and 92% of CIOs expect further investment in communications to support this. Pair this with the ISDN-switch off, and there has been a perfect storm to drive the widespread adoption of UC. The industry is buoyant, with a wide range of brands being brought to market - largely through the channel.

Microsoft Teams has enjoyed tenfold growth in live users, from 30 to 300 million in two years. The likes of Zoom and Cisco have had similar trajectories, with almost all UC brands seeing a spike in activations. According to Gartner, by 2025, 75% of all business calls



Simon Peters

made will be recorded. Quality assurance, dispute resolution, agent performance improvement, and regulatory compliance are some of the leading drivers for businesses to utilise call recording.

One concern with the uptake of even mature UC solutions lays in specifications of call recording features that risk enterprises falling foul of regulatory compliance concerns. Most UC platforms do offer inbuilt call recording, but industries including financial

services, healthcare, manufacturing, insurance, and contact centres require complex solutions to avoid regulatory penalties.

CallCabinet has spent over a decade leading the compliance call recording industry, launching the world's first cloud-native call recording platform in 2012. CallCabinet has offices around the world, data centres on six continents, and an award-winning solution that has helped thousands of customers manage their compliance obligations and deliver insights that inform decision-making.

CallCabinet is native to Azure, offering unlimited geo-redundant storage for recordings that is protected by a 256bit AES rotating encryption, five-nines uptime, and is globally accessible 24/7/365. This ensures compliance with regulatory standards including MIFID-II, PCI-DSS, Dodd-Frank, and HIPAA,

giving businesses in all industries protection from costly breaches.

Core to the solution is our AI-driven analytics that can spot key words and phrases and detect the sentiment behind the words. This insight helps businesses develop products, manage agent performance, and improve customer experience. With the broad range of solutions available to the channel, and many resellers opting for a multi-brand strategy, choosing a call recording partner that offers compatibility with a wide range of leading UC platforms is essential.

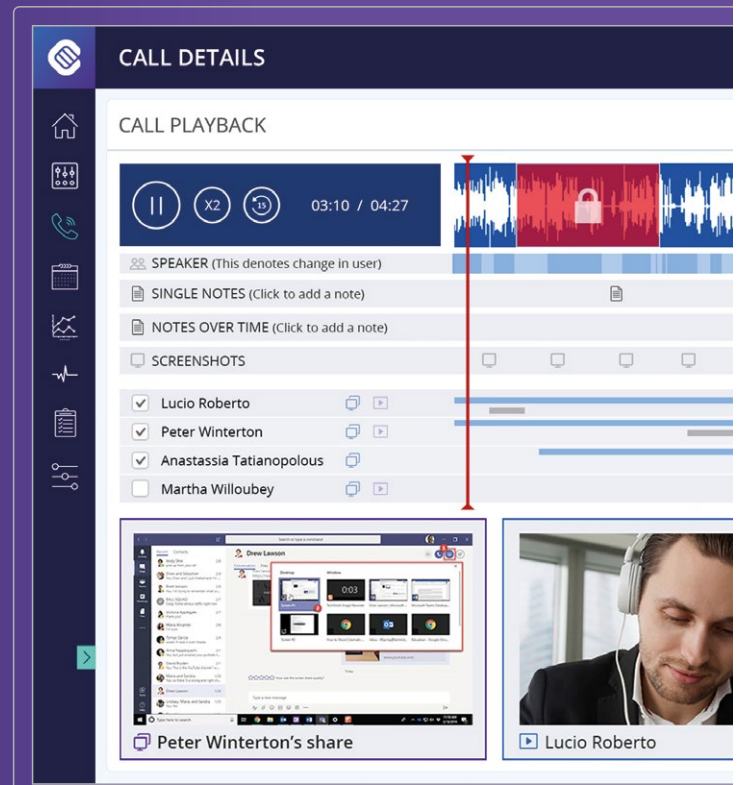
CallCabinet is certified for Microsoft Teams, Cisco, and Zoom, along with all major unified communications brands. So, whoever you work with, CallCabinet can offer incremental revenue, help you strengthen your customer relationships, and enable you to offer a complete UC service wrap.



## You Bring the UC, We'll Bring the Compliance

- ◆ Compliance for Teams, Cisco, & Zoom
- ◆ Automatic voice, video, & screen capture
- ◆ A range of channel partner options

WANT TO KNOW MORE? VISIT [WWW.CALLCABINET.COM](http://WWW.CALLCABINET.COM)



# Perfect partner in digital

**A**t Digital Wholesale Solutions (DWS) and Giacom we help partners bring advanced technology to SMBs, writes **CEO Terry O'Brien**. DWS is a high-growth, channel-only platform business that delivers a range of comms services to over 5,000 UK partners. Giacom offers world-class cloud software solutions via the UK's largest independent cloud portal. Plus, in 2020, we came together with Union Street to bring comms, cloud, hardware and billing all under one roof. We can offer a comprehensive range of high-performance ICT products and services, as well as great service, exceptional knowledge and experience, and first-class support.

## The only way is up

SMBs are hungry for technology. This year alone they've spent more than £10 billion, growing the market at 13% CAGR, and with



**Terry O'Brien**

a major increase in the number of start-ups, the upward trend looks set to continue. However, it's not just the widespread desire for new technology that's driving market growth. The 2025 PSTN switch-off will make it essential for businesses to make the move to All-IP, while the rollout of full fibre and 5G will enable them to do so.

## What does this mean for resellers?

Quite simply, amazing opportunities. With the support of DWS and Giacom, our partners can support SMBs in making full use of

digital technology, helping them future-proof their businesses.

## An All-IP portfolio

Partnering with DWS and Giacom gives partners easy access to an extensive portfolio of products from industry-leading suppliers. We offer solutions designed for the digital future with Single Order broadband, always-on Ethernet services and a range of IP Voice licences.

## Versatile mobile solutions

Our mobile solutions keep customers connected, anywhere, any time. We work with O2 and Vodafone to offer wholesale and network-billed solutions. We also offer connections onto EE via our dealer model, making it easier than ever to sell.

## Easy access to the Cloud

Giacom's Cloud Market platform is about making life easier for channel resellers who look after the IT needs

of UK SMBs. Cloud Market delivers leading SaaS solutions, including Microsoft 365 and Azure, as well as security and backup solutions to over 3,500 channel partners who support over 70,000 end users.

## High-quality products

DWS also offer enterprise-grade hardware to complement our services and solutions. Our e-commerce hardware subscription website, TechStore, stocks over 350,000 products from market-leading vendors, all purchased via a secure, partner-exclusive platform.

## Totally channel focused

We want to be the leading technology platform in the channel. That means making it simple for partners to support customers in seizing the opportunities in comms, Cloud, hardware and billing. Together we can explore all the possibilities of the new super-connected world. ■

Together, we enable you to **win big** in the SMB market

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Power in Partnership

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Request a Demo





# Making it easy to evolve

**A**ccess the technology and support you need to thrive by moving away from the competition and ensuring you achieve and exceed your customer's requirements.



**Paul Harrison**

Evolve IP is one of the leading Global UC service providers, working with the world's biggest tech companies and innovative industry leaders to offer partners a robust and reliable global collaboration platform, suited for any business, **writes EMEA Managing Director Paul Harrison.**

Evolve IP provides two natively integrated voice solutions from two market leading voice providers – Evolve Anywhere with Microsoft Teams and Evolve Anywhere with Webex. These voice solutions are complimented by a full suite of Value-Add Solutions; Intelligent IVR, Contact Centre, Call Recording with Voice AI, Business Call Analytics, API

Integrator, and a Receptionist Console.

As a vendor, we integrate these complex solutions to create a bespoke, cohesive solution for our partners Anywhere Product Suite has been created to support growth and ensures that we are easy to do business with.

Joining Evolve IP gives you access to international coverage, with over 500,000 customers across 73 countries. Evolve IP ensures innovation and agility, giving partners the opportunity to support various industries and businesses of any size. Not only that, Evolve IP has created an

open eco-system that enables partners to have full flexibility over the solutions that they can offer customers, whilst keeping us agile enough to quickly adopt new technologies and react to market trends.

We have worked hard to provide our partners with the best-of-breed technology. We have consciously developed an agnostic solution, allowing partners to offer unbeatable communication solutions. As a vendor, it is our responsibility to provide high-quality, purpose-built solutions so partners can grow their businesses and effectively support their customers. It's our mission to be easy to do business with and support our partners and see them grow.

Evolve IP has a wide range of benefits. Becoming an Evolve IP Partner will give you the ability to support any business's communication strategy. Change your offering by choosing

Evolve IP as your UC Service Provider.

Offer your customers a solution to their business problems by providing them with flexible, scalable technologies that will provide them with business insights and solutions that can support their communication strategy.

Evolve IP sees itself as an industry specialist. As the leading UC provider in hospitality, we have innovative solutions to help partners grow. Here at Evolve IP we also support Healthcare, Automotive, Financial Services and more. Supported by our team of industry specialists and technology experts we rigorously test solutions to ensure reliability.

We bring disparate systems together and help partners support their customers successfully. Evolve IP, working hard in making the future of work better for everyone.



## The Leading Unified Communications Service Provider

Access natively integrated Voice Solutions & Value Add technologies

- International Coverage** – 500,000+ customers across 73 countries
- Open API** – allowing you to build a solution that works for you
- Carrier Grade Voice** – unbeatable reliability with 99.999% up time
- Flexible Licensing** – Making sure you only pay for what you use



[www.evolveip.net/uk](http://www.evolveip.net/uk) [sales@evolveip.uk](mailto:sales@evolveip.uk) 0292 002 0380

Making the Future of Work Better

# Become an energy expert

**M**ore has happened over the last 12 months in the energy market than the previous 10 years. Now, more than ever, business customers need our strategic whole market approach rather than renewing with their incumbent at the end of their term, **writes Fidelity Energy MD John Haw and Sales Director Sean Dixon.**

We have partnered with over 700 telecoms resellers and helped them to successfully add energy to their portfolio and deliver an extra annuity revenue stream from their current base. All your customers use energy and are looking for someone to support them on this product. Be part of their solution.

The government announced an Energy Bill Relief Scheme, to limit the wholesale costs for gas and electricity used for business energy customers. This is an attempt to help



**Sean Dixon and John Haw**

businesses from 1st October 2022 to 31st March 2023, when energy prices are at their highest over winter, causing many to struggle to afford to heat their homes and businesses.

However, now more than ever customers need your help and are turning to their trusted advisers to guide them through an incredibly challenging period. The Channel is uniquely placed to do this, by doing what it does best – solve customers' problems using technology. Over the past year Fidelity's AMBOLT technology portal platform has undergone a number of upgrades to make it even more automated and partner friendly. This tool is a powerful weapon

in the war on rising energy costs. In addition to this, Fidelity Energy have launched Solar and Voltage optimisation propositions. Adding Solar to customers on site generation not only lowers bills and their carbon footprint but also significantly reduces the risk to their energy security. The ROI for solar is now less than 3 years in many cases. Voltage optimisation utilises the properties of Ohms Law to reduce costs and extend the life of on-site equipment by reducing the voltage used within a building.

The energy market has been reaching new record highs throughout this past year. With the colder months coming, concern around supply meeting demand and Russia threatening to weaponise gas, we are not in the clear yet and your customers are looking for help more than ever. With more and more resellers adding energy to their portfolio and energy suppliers adding Telecoms to theirs,

there has never been a better time to become an energy expert.

With help from our energy consultants, you can assess the market and recommend the best time for your customers to forward purchase their next energy contract. Through our 706 partners, we have been able to assist over 4,000 of their business customers to manage their energy effectively. We manage over 2.79 terawatt hours of energy, which equates to 1% of the total UK energy consumption – we are small enough to care about each individual but big enough to be credible.

Visit us at Comms Vision this year in room 405 at The Craigellachie Suite. Or contact us today to find out how you can support your customers even further, be a one-touch solution for their utility needs all whilst generating a recurring revenue stream for your own business. ■

## START SELLING ENERGY

### YOUR CUSTOMERS NEED YOUR SUPPORT

The government has advised businesses to procure their energy contracts as usual - this is where your customers will need your help and support!

If they are out of contract or coming up to renewal, they will not benefit as much from the Energy Bill Relief Scheme.

Become a partner with Fidelity Energy, earn upfront commission whilst supporting your customers through the most tumultuous energy market the world is likely to face.



OF ENERGY MANAGED



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**FidelityEnergy**  
Energing Our Partners



# FullFibre's Full Partnership

**F**ullFibre is deploying a next-generation, wholesale-only, full fibre-only network. Expanding at an ever-accelerating rate the opportunity for our partners is growing as fast as we are, **writes CSO James Warner**. Focusing on underserved towns across the UK we are actively building in over 30 towns across 11 counties that span from the border of South Wales to Yorkshire.

Targeting underserved smaller communities, we know that we are bringing a service to businesses and residents that is not available to them today through the deployment of full fibre access.

We all know networks are being built at a rate of knots but encouraging the take up of these increasingly widely available services is where the focus is turning to. There has never been a better or more exciting time for a retail ISP to enter



James Warner

or grow in this market. With the ability to offer a genuinely unique and enhanced product and service against the traditional Big Four, you can significantly grow your market share. We support our partners heavily in doing this through

education and awareness using our highly visible Fibre Heroes campaigns and partner support initiatives.

### Fibre Heroes

Our B2C marketing campaign Fibre Heroes, which focuses on customer acquisition on behalf of our partners, helps generate intrigue, awareness and prioritises education of the product enabling greater knowledge and greater uptake to our partners helping to grow their customer base.

This allows us to capture customer data and pass it over to our ISP partners when they are ready for a new broadband service.

Working closely with our partners enables us to fully understand their requirements which means we can better position them in the market. Furthermore, customer connections are key as we transition from deployment to uptake.

We are here to ensure that our ever-expanding partner programme can sustainably grow beyond their start-up phase allowing a healthy variety of options for end-users to choose from.

Providing a choice puts the power back into the hands of residents; no longer is a resident forced to go with an incumbent because they are the sole provider in their towns.

At FullFibre, we are focusing on the long-term returns that a network should generate. By placing our partners at the heart of our business, we can make decisions that benefit them, their customers and ourselves allowing rapid progression to be made for all.

By offering a full fibre product with deployment and marketing included within the partnership, now is the time to take advantage of the opportunity. ■

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# DON'T DO HALF A JOB

## Go FullFibre.

Full Product. Full Service. Full Partnership.

visit [fullfibre.co](http://fullfibre.co) today

# Providing enviable value

In the current economic climate, businesses are focused more than ever on maximising resources and extracting meaningful value from suppliers, writes **Inform Billing Managing Director Shaun Bodsworth**. As such, we are concentrating our efforts on the basics of saving time, simplifying processes and increasing profitability for customers.

As a truly independent billing specialist, part of this involves introducing a wide range of partnerships and API integrations with other complimentary applications and third-party carriers, to offer joined up solutions and to increase visibility and simplify the billing process through advancing technologies.

An ongoing development roadmap is critical in the fast-paced industry that we serve. To date we have invested over £3m into our Eclipse



**Shaun Bodsworth**

NG billing platform and continue to plough 45% of revenues back into continually improving our software and services. 2022 alone has seen us add automated dashboard analytics, significant improvements for in-life

mobile management, enhanced user alerts and further self-serve options within the end-customer portal.

With all this focus on product, it's important to remember it is Inform Billing's specialist knowledge and expertise, amassed within the team over decades, that drives the development roadmap and provides enviable value to resellers.

One of the things that makes Inform Billing stand out is our approach to support and ability to demonstrate significant market-knowledge and a proven track-record in dealing with the complexities of billing. This is paramount when it comes to understanding, solving and often pre-empting problems that a reseller may not yet even know exist.

With the continued pressure for resellers on resources, Inform Billing's popular bureau billing service

has come into its own over the past year. Enabling some to divert valuable resources into different areas and others, to reduce risk and reliance on a single point of failure. The service utilises the full feature set of our billing platform by outsourcing the monthly bill run to our in-house team of experts.

As the last remaining truly independent billing provider of size, Inform Billing believes part of any good service is staying close to your individual customer's needs and being agile enough able to respond and adapt to changes in their requirements. Not only do we have a modern API driven software product, with a roadmap that we have full control of, but we also continue to invest in the outstanding training and support that has always set us apart. We are in a very privileged position and resellers can be assured of our commitment to their future. ■



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of billing partner



# How we work for you

Intermedia is pleased to be supporting Comms Vision this year. We are thrilled to join the conversation as collaboration and hybrid work continue to be critical components of the partner landscape, writes **Philippe du Fou, EMEA Sales Director at Intermedia Cloud Communications**. Recently awarded 'UCaaS vendor of the Year' by UC Today, Intermedia services over 500k UCaaS seats globally through our own product developed and backed by our 99.999% uptime SLA. As one of our partners, you can resell this UC and Contact Centre offer under a private-label to separate yourself from the pack, while earning up to 5x more than a traditional agent model. Besides we only sell via indirect channel so we won't compete with you.

As a channel-first organisation, our robust partner program gives you access to our highly competitive



Philippe du Fou

pricing, free phones or rebates with every license, and a friendly partner portal to manage all of your customers and services (quoting, provisioning, number porting, QoS monitoring).

How do you differentiate yourself to customers in a competitive Unified

Communications marketplace? Intermedia has been solving this problem for our partners with our innovative cloud communications and channel friendly programs for years. CRN awarded us the 'Partner Program Winner 2022'.

### Single platform solution

Besides being the largest hosted Exchange provider outside Microsoft, we offer Voice, Video, Chat, Contact Centre, File sharing all delivered through one highly reliable and secure platform thereby eliminating the need for multiple communications providers. Due to the breadth of our application portfolio, we are able to offer comprehensive, integrated solutions to meet our end customers' and partners' communications and collaboration needs, which saves them from the complexity of sourcing, integrating and managing multiple disparate solutions from different vendors.

The market opportunity is for the taking with hundreds of millions of on prem seats that have yet to migrate to the cloud – with projections showing that cloud communications adoption is happening at, and will continue to happen at, record rates.

The advantages of being an Intermedia partner include: Private label option (so you can re-brand it), month to month billing (no minimum contract), consolidated client for both UC and CC, whole solution provisioned via a single pane of glass quoting, provisioning, number porting, QoS monitoring, business email, etc), and free phone/device (no upfront CapEx cost required).

With the Intermedia private-label offer you can retain top-line revenue & customer ownership through our channel-only approach. At Intermedia, we work for you.



**INTERMEDIA**<sup>®</sup>  
CLOUD COMMUNICATIONS

**EARN 5X  
MORE REVENUE,  
AND OWN YOUR CUSTOMER  
RELATIONSHIPS**

VIDEO / PHONE / CHAT  
CONTACT CENTER / FILES / EMAIL




**Rebecca Lund**  
 Senior Acct Executive  
 10:20 AM
 








# End of the M&A boom?

**Starting an M&A boutique at the end of 2008, the year of the financial crisis, was a ridiculous idea, but our first year was incredibly successful and laid the groundwork for the business we are today, writes Adam Zoldan, Director at Knight Corporate Finance.**

**O**ver the course of the last 14 years we have seen the number of acquirers, and the level of transaction activity, increase relentlessly, but with the rise of inflation and increasing interest rates how could this affect your business ambitions?

Inflationary price increases are affecting all of us, and some businesses are certainly more at risk, particularly those with high power requirements and high levels of debt and, with a weakened pound, importers of raw materials. As things stand, it does seem unavoidable that the number of insolvencies will rise, however, the Comms and IT channel has proven form in succeeding during uncertain times. Even at the height of the financial crisis, business failures in our sector were remarkably low. Furthermore, as we saw during Covid, business reliance on the services that the channel provide have become more critical than ever and high levels of recurring revenue offer genuine protection from these economic issues.

Those with exposure to the debt markets are likely to experience the biggest impact. The cost of leasing will increase and we note that the biggest failures in 2008/2009 were those companies exposed to the leasing market. However, the financial crisis then was due to the complete absence of funding rather than the “relatively milder” increase in the cost of funding that we are seeing today.

From our perspective, it is a concern that most acquisitions are funded by debt. This means that acquisitions have immediately become more expensive for buyers and in theory, this should impact the price that they are able to pay. Furthermore, with some acquirers carrying very high levels of debt – perhaps in excess of 5 times their profit – we could see the number of buyers dwindle and reduce the level of competition for acquisitions. I have taken the time to discuss the potential impact and outlook with Buyers and Funders. Of the three banks I spoke to, there is



Adam Zoldan

certainly no panic, and all went to lengths to convince me that their doors remain truly open, albeit with higher ticket prices.

On speaking with acquirers, they generally appear well prepared. The more sophisticated parties have taken positions to hedge the increase in costs whilst for others, with organic growth becoming more expensive, acquisitions are the most effective route to hitting their business plan. In general, we are seeing no let-up in enthusiasm for further deals and valuations are remaining firm.

#### Key driver

Private Equity investment remains the key driver of continued M&A. Recurring revenues delivering predictable cash-flows coupled with a breadth of organic growth opportunities provide very attractive

investment criteria. Our view is that the real test will come when some of the larger ‘buy-and build’ platforms look at their own exit opportunities. These investment houses have achieved significant returns over the last couple of years when they have exited these investments and we will be closely monitoring the market to see if these can be sustained.

As a business owner, the key message here is that we have not yet seen any immediate impact on activity or valuations. We are seeing buyers being more demanding in terms of due diligence so deals are taking longer, but they are being completed. If these market conditions continue, we do expect that average valuations may soften, but equally we expect a premium for organic growth – which remains a key factor in

driving valuation multiples. In the meantime, keep calm and carry on, ensure you are prepared in the event that your perfect partner comes knocking, and if you are considering a transaction, it is more important than ever to use an experienced adviser.

#### Exit planning

It may be worth assessing your exit plans and your view on how the market and your business will fair over the next few years. We expect that for some it may be worth considering accelerating the time to the exit window whilst others will baton down for the long-run, or look for game-changing opportunities. It is worth noting that prior to the 2008 financial crisis, Daisy had revenue of less than £30m revenue, but with six acquisitions, by 2010 its reports show this had grown to over to £130m. Carpe Diem! ■





# CRM that sets you apart

In a highly competitive market with providers offering similar products and services, leaders need to define what's unique about their proposition, writes **Michelle Livingstone, CEO at Layer Systems**. With many companies focusing on service, expertise and one supplier for all products, how can your business stand out from the crowd?

Digital transformation offers the ultimate differentiator. Harnessing technology to improve the speed and quality of prospect, customer and employee experiences generates dramatic results. Finding a trusted technology partner coupled with the right software stack, will fast-track progress and guarantee success. Our mission is to use technology and real-time, accurate data to help customers in the ICT channel solve their greatest challenges and exploit valuable opportunities.



**Michelle Livingstone**

Indeed, many leaders in the channel entrust us to power their businesses, including Tela Technology, Welcomm Communications, Yappl (A1 Comms), NCS Office Systems, BusinessMobiles.com, 360 Group, and more.

As the UK's leading CRM provider for the telecoms and IT sector we help companies build stronger, more efficient and successful businesses and achieve faster growth, increased profits and happier customers & employees. Our platform, The Layer, supports executive, marketing, sales, provisioning, billing, finance,

engineering and technical support teams by providing a holistic view of lead and customer interactions across all business functions from within one platform.


It's been an exciting year at Layer Systems. To meet increasing demand we expanded our exceptional team and built unique technology enabling us to respond faster to the market and collaborate with customers and suppliers on exciting community-driven initiatives. For example, finance and billing integrations with platforms such as Sage Intacct, Sage 200, Aurora's Affinity and Inform Billing's Eclipse have removed rekeying of data by automating data transfer between systems, reducing errors and time to bill, saving £000's whilst improving customer experience and removing inefficiencies.

We're currently working with key industry suppliers, using our new


integration framework to provide automated sales, provisioning and in-life customer management with suppliers such as O2 Telefonica, DWS and Gamma.

By design, the Layer generates accurate, comprehensive data powering the ultimate business intelligence across all areas of your organisation. As leaders increasingly focus on being data-driven, in order to measure what matters, evaluate business performance and identify trends, the ways in which they capture and access data is critical to informing good, responsive decision-making.

Finally, as part of our commitment to support channel providers with industry and legal compliance, we have implemented functionality to accommodate the European Electronics Communications Code (EECC) and GDPR requirements.



Discover more or book a demo



#1 Telecoms & IT CRM Solution

## DIGITAL *The Layer* TRANSFORMATION

Increase efficiency, build better relationships with employees & customers, and grow your pipeline

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#CommsVision2022



# A true partnership

**H**eadquartered in Munich, NFON AG is a European provider of voice-centric business communications from the cloud, present in 15 European countries, **writes UK&I Channel Director Jon Dailey.** NFON enables businesses to make considerable savings while streamlining their communications and delivers true added value through a phenomenal range of 160 high-end functions. NFON's service includes connectivity to and from the PSTN, using standard UK DID numbers and with access to the emergency services – all delivered via the cloud. Its system offers easy rollout, increased control, free automatic updates for life, built-in business continuity, and a scalable pay-as-you-grow model to provide flexibility for businesses in all sectors.

Business Communications with Cloudya enable a user to connect from anywhere, by phone, video



Jon Dailey

or conferencing. Additional, intelligent integrations that improve productivity, collaboration and user and customer experience include integrations with Microsoft Teams, call recording & monitoring, SIP and Contact Center Hub, a feature-rich and fully scalable omni-channel cloud customer contact solution.

NFON owns and develops our own technology making us very agile and able to react quickly to the changing

demands and communication needs of the market. The largest pan-European provider of business communications, we are extremely competitive, with a pedigree working exclusively within the SME market, having helped over 50,000 businesses to grow since 2007.

Our partners can expect recurring monthly revenues from our licenses and integrations, plus revenue from training, support, and hardware.

They receive strategic sales, business development and marketing support as standard as well as professional online training and accreditation, access to MDF and leads, incentives and rewards for their sales teams and a dedicated account manager. An NFON partner can choose from a commission or wholesale business model, that keeps them in full control of their customer. With NFON it's a true partnership where we fully support them and invest in developing their business.

## NGAGE

NGAGE, the Partner programme from NFON is designed with simplicity in mind. The onboarding roadmap and process is straightforward and uncomplicated. Key stakeholders from across the business work directly with the partner through every step ensuring they are completely confident and fully prepared to be sales ready as soon as possible. ■

NFON

looks forward to meeting you at

**commsvision**  
THE GLENEAGLES HOTEL  
2ND, 3RD & 4TH NOVEMBER 2022

NFON.COM



# Mobile data opportunity

There's no denying the winds of change are blowing in the channel. The IoT market is growing and it needs connectivity that can handle its unique requirements. Intelligent mobile data is the only way forward to meet those needs and cash in on its increasing revenue, writes **Bernie McPhillips, Sales Director at Pangea.**

Your customers look to you to deliver a certain quality of service and if you don't, someone else will. It's crucial you choose the right provider, as you're at a massive disadvantage unless you get true, trustworthy expertise. We're IoT, intelligent mobile, and partner only, so you know you can lean on our seasoned connectivity experts at any time for their knowledge and help. Plus, you can rest assured we're not diluting our expertise with other products or undercutting



**Bernie McPhillips**

you to get to your customers.

Without the correct support and guidance, your customers might fall victim to the PSTN switch-off or the 2G and 3G sunset. Today, there are 2.4m businesses that still use PSTN lines. In fact, 25-30% of your existing base will need migrating from the PSTN. Intelligent mobile connectivity is designed to replace the PSTN – it's more reliable than fibre, more flexible, easier to deploy, more cost-effective, and it's often faster.

When faced with the PSTN switch-off, a major government body realised a fixed line was no longer a good enough connectivity option. We stepped in with intelligent mobile connectivity, and helped them migrate street furniture like lampposts, traffic lights, and cabinets, using 4G over L2TP. The migration caused no downtime and won our partner £2.8m in revenue.

## Sunset opportunities

When it comes to the 2G and 3G sunset, 47% of businesses aren't even aware it will affect their solutions, even though more than 50% of all cellular IoT devices still use both types of data.

Our connectivity is the most reliable and robust in the UK and we build it right, so you don't have to waste hours troubleshooting every week. We all know building connectivity can get complicated, especially

when dealing with things like PSTN migration. Do it incorrectly and you can cause damage to your customers, potentially losing them and yourself business.

In the past, it made sense to connect devices using those old copper lines, but now we have IoT solutions made specifically to meet IoT requirements. Why would you look elsewhere or get stuck using fibre again when you'd be wasting time, money, and valuable resources? This time around, take advantage of the technology that's available and most suited for the job.

Just remember, if you go with the wrong partner you might find they lack expertise if they offer a diverse range of services. Or worse, they might make direct contact with your customer base. Since we're channel-only, partners know they can trust us not just with the job, but with their customers too. ■



**PANGEA**  
Connecting Everything

## If all you're after is a box of SIMs, skip this.

But if you're looking for help in uncovering hidden revenue opportunities and building robust connectivity solutions, let's talk.



Scan the QR code to book a meeting.



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contact@pangea-group.net

pangea-group.net

# Harnessing the X factor

**E**nableX was established at the start of this year, a channel-only group company that comprises Pragma, Candio and newly acquired Techland, writes EnableX Chief Executive Officer Will Morey. As part of this change we recruited new people and worked hard to build a solid leadership and management team as well as adding a number of apprentices into key functions. This investment in people is helping us to unlock the growth potential of EnableX and continue to deliver innovative propositions to our partners.

Pragma delivers feature rich UCaaS based on the market leading Ericsson-LG iPECS platform; while Candio delivers white label digital services to help resellers drive recurring revenue and deliver digital transformation to their end users. Techland is a Value-Added Distributor for UC enablement services, providing Ribbon



**Will Morey**

Communications to the channel.

As a channel-only service provider, Pragma is totally focused on providing resellers with great UCaaS and telephony technology propositions and supporting them

to win in the market. Ericsson-LG technology provides both cloud and IP-PBX platforms that help resellers tailor solutions for all types of users and businesses.

Candio provides simple digital services that can be white labelled for our partners. These services are subscription based and provide high impact solutions to simple problems for end users such as helping them be found, chosen and trusted online. These services provide huge value for end users and help resellers to build high margin recurring revenues.

Techland is the sole Gold distributor in the UK and Europe for Ribbon Communications, providing session border controllers for enterprises transitioning from legacy technology to cloud collaboration services such as Teams, Zoom and Cisco Webex direct routing. These added services provide significant opportunities

for partners to drive growth and revenue in the enterprise sector.

Channel business leaders have done an outstanding job in bringing about change and creating new market opportunities. The last few years have been chaotic but I believe we are all more comfortable with uncertainty. ICT spending can thrive in chaotic times, especially as organisations seek to reduce costs, deliver flexibility or secure competitive advantage.

EnableX is built on the simple philosophy that 'partnership is everything'. That's partnership with resellers, vendor partners and our team. Through working with vendor partners like Ericsson-LG and Ribbon we ensure we deliver what the market needs and what our partners want. Our ultimate priority is to model this ethos and ensure that everyone across the business understands that it is the route to success. ■

# enableX



candio

pragma



techland



# The support service buffet

Isn't it great when things just work? With so much competition out there and margins becoming tighter, it can be reassuring to know you're working with a supplier who has got your back, writes **ProVu Managing Director Darren Garland**. Being able to access the right level of support and services as and when you need them can be invaluable when you're trying to stand out in the channel.

Here at ProVu we have been specialising in the development of bespoke services designed to ease the deployment of IP communications hardware and software since 1999. Voted by the Channel as best overall distributor 2022, we offer a wide range of support services designed to support you and your business.

You can take any of the services you want and leave what you don't... it's a Buffet:



**Darren Garland**

### Pre-sales Support

Our team of experts are on hand to suggest the best products and set up locations to make sure your project runs smoothly. We can also assist you with pre-sales compatibility and interoperability testing. Enabling you to find out what will and won't work for your projects before

committing to the purchase.

### Device Set Up & Installation

Whether it's a completely new product line for you, or you simply don't have the resources available, this shouldn't stop you from maximising your opportunities. We can carry out white label surveys and installation services for: Access Control, IP Audio, DECT Solutions, IP Gateways, Video Conferencing Solutions, Remote Installation, Pre-Sales Support, Project Design Consultation, (PCI) Pre-Sale Compatibility Investigation & Interoperability Testing, Device Management & Provisioning.

### Education

Our team are accredited to host training for some of the leading manufacturers. Designed to boost your skills, our training courses include: Mechanical Installation Courses for IP

Access Control & IP Audio  
Multi-Cell Deployment Training & Radio Mapping, On-site Sales Training  
Technical training for 3CX, Snom, Gigaset, Yealink, Sangoma and Algo. We can even create a bespoke course and deliver it at your preferred location.

### Personalisation

We understand that the hardware you provide is an extension to your service. The delivery of your orders is an opportunity to extend your customer experience. We offer a range of services enabling you to personalise your orders including: Branded packaging & despatch notes  
Device printing, Marketing Inserts, and SIM fulfilment.

Whatever your requirements are, we've got your back. Meet us at Comms Vision to discuss your needs and how we can support the growth of your business.

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# Boost sales conversions

**F**rom the war in Ukraine to the change of Prime Minister, 2022 has been a turbulent year with many consequential effects on UK SMEs, writes **Tim Levine, National Sales Manager at Shire Leasing**.

However, for the first seven months of this year, statistics show that new asset finance business grew by two percent compared to the same period in 2021. Despite economic uncertainty, demand from UK businesses for finance options remains and continues to grow. That demand exists in the comms channel too, with over £1.5bn invested in IT equipment finance between July 21-22.

As UK SMEs navigate cost of living increases, rising energy costs and continued effects of COVID-19, businesses are reluctant to upgrade or invest in solutions using cash. For those offering their solutions on a



**Tim Levine**

capex model only, this could result in lost sales due to budget objections or customers opting to delay investment until a 'better time' (which as we've seen since 2020, economic certainty is impossible to forecast).

So why would businesses invest through leasing instead? Finance lease rentals offer certainty.

Resellers offering finance options can consult with customers and form a solution tailored to an

agreed timeframe. Rentals and the interest rates are fixed at the offset, allowing businesses to hedge against rising inflation and know the exact schedule of upcoming payments. By working with a finance provider like Shire, resellers can support UK SMEs to grow and convert more sales, with invoices paid in full within 24 hours of completion of relevant documentation.

At Shire Leasing, we support manufacturers, distributors and equipment resellers in enabling their customers to access the latest technologies, without damaging cash flow of either party. Almost anything business-related that would include an upfront cost can be financed, from a single mobile handset and soft costs to millions of pounds worth of kit. Shire offers conventional finance methods, such as Finance Lease agreements, as well as two off-the-shelf managed service

agreements tailored to the ICT and Comms channel - Technology Lease and Managed Rental Agreement. These refined products allow resellers to deliver a solution for a monthly cost when the order value mainly consists of 'soft costs'.

A key differentiator is our award-winning FinTech solutions and API capabilities. We equip approved resellers and VARs with a portfolio of leading-edge tools that streamline finance sales and can be integrated into existing processes. For example, the Shire Online proposal management tool allows sales teams to quote, propose, complete sales with e-signatory and manage deals on the go. When bolstered with the developed ability to provide a finance decision for customers in as little as six seconds, offering finance suddenly becomes an evolved proposition to maximise sales opportunities in the channel. ■

## Good things come in small packages...



Combine your hardware, software and service solutions into a single, manageable payment for your customers.

Shire Leasing are business finance specialists in the ICT & Telecoms sector, having supported the channel for over 30 years.

Discover our award-winning services:

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**www.shireleasing.co.uk/commsdealer**

Finance for business use customers only, subject to credit status, application, terms and conditions. Shire Leasing PLC is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority for certain types of consumer credit lending and credit related activities that are regulated under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 and by the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000.



# A golden opportunity

**T**here is a perfect storm brewing along the horizon for service providers, writes **Wail Sabbagh, Managing Director at Strategic Imperatives.** Market consolidation, the PSTN switch-off, new switching rules, a radically different supply chain and an increasingly more sophisticated customer base are testing the channel's traditional business model and how service providers do business.

Whilst change at this scale may threaten the established telecom order, it opens up opportunities for new, digitally savvy powerhouses and agile service providers.

At Strategic Imperatives, our focus is ensuring our customers are always ahead of the curve by providing market-leading monetisation and provisioning solutions, backed by extensive industry engagement, driven by thought leadership and

a commitment to innovation.

## **Elevate: Monetisation that Transcends Billing**

We are transforming billing and monetisation in the channel by bridging the gap between traditional channel billing and the capabilities enjoyed by network operators. This is not a statement we make lightly; Elevate has fundamentally redefined how billing works, how service providers perceive it and where it sits in their business.

As the industry embarks on its biggest change since deregulation, service providers are asking more from their billing solution:

- Can I launch multiple brands? Can I offer payment plans? Is my system integrated with payment providers?
- Can I schedule promotions and product launches in advance?
- Can my billing system keep track of customer balances?

In short, can my billing system take me to the next level? Elevate is the channel's only cloud-native, multi-tenanted, real-time, and hyper-scalable billing solution. With its rich payment integration, promotions framework, Pan-European MVNO integration, zero-touch anniversary billing, contract management and real-time view of profitability, Elevate empowers the channel to automate, thrive and escape the legacy of manual workarounds and disconnected processes.

## **The Fibre Café: Transforming the Fibre Wholesale Market**

Rewriting integration rules, transforming the wholesale fibre market and providing a collective vision of the fibre eco-system in the UK is our award-winning, Fibre Café. The Fibre Café eliminates traditional 'spaghetti' style integration by seamlessly connecting disparate

connectivity and service providers via a unified, modern and standards-based interface. By 'plugging in', Altnets' route to market is accelerated with rapid access to participating service providers. The Fibre Café eliminates development barriers, integration costs and prohibitive timescales whilst ensuring that Altnets need only manage and support one integration stack based on open modern API technology.

## **...and for service providers?**

With a unified view of the UK fibre ecosystem, The Fibre Café ensures that the decision to work with a particular AltNet or connectivity provider is not constrained by development priorities, costs, or resources. Timescales for onboarding are dramatically reduced and the need to manage multiple integration points, technologies stacks and maintain an array of interfaces is done away with. ■



Enabling tomorrow's telco winners  
It's in our DNA

## **Elevate**

Redefining channel billing and monetisation

## **The Fibre Café**

The gateway to the UK's fibre ecosystem



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Transforming Telecoms  
- It's in our DNA

Find out more at [imperatives.co.uk](http://imperatives.co.uk).

# Empowering customers

Over the past few years there has been a major shift in the way we work, writes **Vincent Disneur**, **Managing Director for Union Street Technologies**. As a result, a number of B2B customer service trends have emerged that are influencing customer expectations, and redefining what it means to provide a high-quality service and experience. Union Street serves over 950 communication providers (CPs) and, through regular consultations with our partners we have noted a general trend towards the consumerisation of B2B customer service.

Business users are quickly coming to expect the same levels of service they get in their personal lives, with their work interactions. They increasingly expect fast turnarounds, more ways of communicating, and they want to be able to do more for themselves without having to



Vincent Disneur

call or email the CP for assistance. As such, CPs are looking for tools which can be provided to the end customer, putting information directly into their hands and empowering their self-service experience.

The goal for the channel should be to enhance the customer experience

by making it easy for end customers to interact with their CPs at the right time and in the most appropriate way. This presents a fantastic opportunity for forward thinking CPs to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive market.

## Billnow

Our latest innovation, Billnow, is a billing portal that will help CPs meet demand for self-service options, whilst simultaneously reducing the cost of service.

The Billnow portal works by drawing data directly from our aBILLity billing platform, enabling customers to view up to the minute changes in their service usage and conduct their own reporting. It will also enable end customers to make changes to their services such as SIM swaps, check associated networks and SIM numbers themselves, and set bars for certain services.

Our user experience architects have worked hard to ensure the Billnow portal features a user-friendly, modern design, optimised to ensure ease of use for end customers and partners. Each instance of the Billnow portal can be customised and white-labelled with a CP's own logos and colour scheme for a consistent look and feel with their brand. Billnow also offers opportunities to promote new products and services or to make announcements with prominently placed advertising panels within the portal.

The customer experience is greatly enhanced by enabling end customers to monitor and manage services at their convenience. Not only will Billnow serve as a value add for CPs and help to keep customers sticky, but it will also help reduce inbound calls and enquiries, lowering the cost of service by empowering end customers to help themselves. ■



## HELP YOUR CUSTOMERS TO HELP THEMSELVES

Billnow is a self-service portal for your customers to access their bills and perform simple service management actions themselves, without having to contact you.

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# Billnow™





# Raising the channel bar

**T**alkTalk's national scale and Virtual1's award-winning portals and automation have merged into a business dedicated to wholesale connectivity and cloud solutions, **writes Virtual1 CEO Tom O'Hagan**. Virtual1 becoming part of TalkTalk marks a new chapter for our business. As a fresh challenger in a fast-changing market, our long-term vision to deliver a fibre future has not changed, but we have positively refreshed our approach and have so much more to provide to our Partners.



**Tom O'Hagan**

## Capitalising on digital infrastructure markets and the rising demand

TalkTalk Wholesale Services is well positioned to continue its strong growth pedigree and capitalise on the rising demand for business and consumer connectivity, taking partners to the next level. Partners are at the heart of every decision we make – 100% of our

revenue is through the indirect channel and this strategy is unchanged. But as the technology landscape is radically changing the expectations the channel has of a tier 1 carrier is evolving. The need for fast, reliable connectivity, that is also part of a connected and integrated solution is more important now than ever before.

Investments into the UK's full fibre digital infrastructure space continue at pace and as the fragmented AltNet market matures, we're proud to be the only major network-agnostic ultimate enabler. Through our partnerships with Openreach, CityFibre and many others, we are focusing on delivering both value and opportunity to the channel with access to networks and new market opportunities at scale.

## Critical foundations

Significantly, we also recognise that connectivity is the critical foundations upon which all business rely, and the acquisition of Virtual1 has brought many of the complementary services that run over this connectivity into our portfolio. From Managed Security and SDWAN, to Data Protection and IaaS, we help the channel take advantage of the latest technologies, get to market fast, and deliver a more comprehensive set of

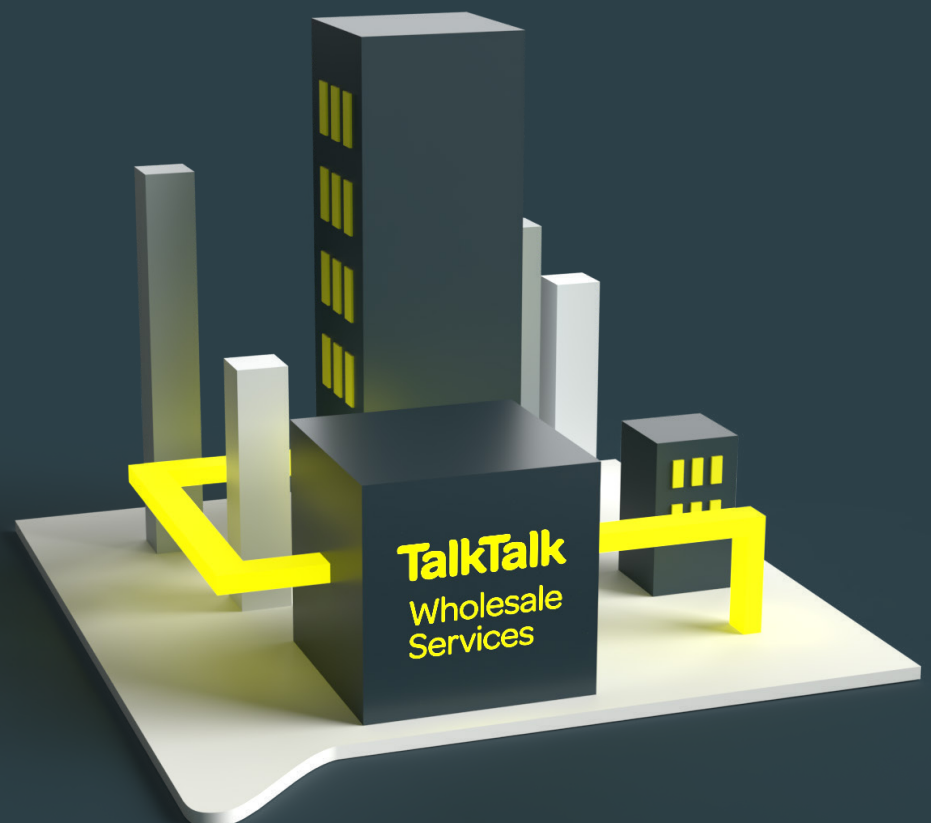
solutions, to deliver the outcomes that the channels customer require.

At Comms Vision 2022, we'll be showcasing how we are bringing together TalkTalk's national scale and Virtual1's breadth of portfolio, award-winning automation and 1Portal into a business dedicated to wholesale connectivity & cloud solutions. Find out how this dynamic combination will deliver a product and service proposition that will raise the bar for the channel.

TalkTalk Wholesale Services is the UK's leading provider of connectivity and cloud solutions, serving the needs of business and public sector customers nationwide and working with over 800 Partners. We're focused on being a fibre first provider and delivering a full range of business-grade communications products and services, including Broadband, Networking, and Cloud solutions. ■

**TalkTalk**  
Wholesale  
Services | **Virtual1**

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AND FUTURE  
READY**



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TalkTalk Communications Limited

# Mastering OTT services

**V**oiceflex is delighted to be sponsoring the Comms Vision Convention 2022, an event widely recognised as the highlight of the channel's calendar. It offers an excellent opportunity to share and gain insight into industry and channel developments, writes **Sales & Marketing Director Paul Taylor**. It also provides a relaxed and informal setting to meet new customers and enhance relationships with existing clients.

The industry has dramatically changed. Technologies have evolved and altered how we live, work, and do business. Technology has transformed the way we communicate forever – we now have several options to choose from – calls, email, video chat, instant messaging, and conferencing.

This year's theme, 'the Golden



**Paul Taylor**

Triennium', a national fibre rollout, the PSTN switch off and the arrival of hybrid working, highlights the need for businesses to transform to this way of life and the significant opportunities available to the channel. The need to communicate using

any device or softphone over an existing internet connection will drive businesses to over-the-top voice services (OTT) to ensure they can facilitate efficient and robust workplace communication among teams regardless of their location, nationally or internationally. It's not a case of 'if' and 'we'll wait and see'; adoption needs to happen now.

## Strong pedigree

Voiceflex is, first and foremost, a telecoms carrier and has been providing services within the cloud to the channel only for over 15 years. We continue to evaluate, innovate and adapt our roadmap to develop our offerings that are core to our business and meet the changing communications landscape. As an innovative service provider, we were first to market, spotting the opportunity for an over-the-top IP voice, PSTN replacement, making significant inroads into

ISPs, MSPs, and Alt-net. Our latest addition to the Voiceflex portfolio, Voiceflex Flow, provides a complete telephony, collaboration, messaging, video, mobility, and Omnicom solution on a single platform, with the underlying architecture of WebRTC. Thus, making things easy for our community looking to replace on-premise or UC applications with UCaaS which is core to the next phase in the evolution of communications.

We support our partners through our agility, flexibility, and ability to create solutions that address the challenges of the ever-changing communications landscape and enable them to deliver robust solutions to open new revenue streams. Our partners are perfectly placed to take full advantage of current and future opportunities.

Not all IP voice carriers are the same. So come and have a chat with us. ■

Flow

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UCaaS  
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# Vendor with a difference

**W**ildix is pleased to be supporting Comms Vision again this year. This prestigious event is considered by so many as the leading event for organisations that work in the channel, **writes Ian Rowan, Senior Channel Manager at Wildix UK.** Why do we like this event so much? It's not a wander round and see what you want type expo, it is an educational forum that adds true value to guests and repays them for the time they spend at the event.



Ian Rowan

As a channel-only organisation, this perfectly aligns with the go-to-market strategy of Wildix. We add value to our channel partners through leading UC solutions, supported educational programs and subsidised third partner training programs to assist organisations in the transition from a world that operated on capex to the world we are in now which is opex led.

Since our introduction to the UK in 2017, Wildix has gained massive traction through an established network of partners who gain the support of Wildix to grow their business levels. This growth and presence in the UK has been recognised with multiple awards for different elements of our solution, from Telephony, to

Hardware, to Contact Centre to Global SIP services. Each element of our product has been designed to add value to partners and their customers retrospectively.

The Wildix solution is built around a single architecture but split into verticals to perfectly match the requirements of your customers.

The core solution is UCaaS focused and features market-leading WebRTC functionality, as highlighted by Gartner: 'Wildix positions its sales-oriented solution by emphasising native WebRTC support, which enables users to access UC services without downloading desktop clients or browser plug-ins. The ubiquitous nature of browsers, combined with Wildix's WebRTC capabilities, enables sales and support for organisations prioritising B2C interactions via the web as part of their communications strategy'.

The product splits into verticals, x-hoppers, a retail communication solution that allows shop floor staff to communicate with other team members, while integrating into EPOS and AI-driven CCTV systems, sending real-time alerts about events in the retail space. x-bees, the world's first UC product designed as a sales tool, features server-level integration with Salesforce, HubSpot or Zoho as a single interface for all interactions in the purchasing cycle, while all the time allowing persistent communications with prospects via WebRTC and push notifications. Driven by powerful AI analytics engines that help spot trends in the sales cycle and identify SWAT to your pipeline.

As a single solution Wildix is not your traditional vendor. It's an organisation that wants to work with you to help you increase sales and make more margin from every opportunity. ■

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# Giving partners control

**W**ith SME customers seeking smarter ways to communicate with their own customers, it is the role of the vendor and partner to deliver a suite of services from Voice, Video, WhatsApp and more within a single platform and price point, **writes Xelion CEO Micha Cohen and MD Dave Reynolds.**



**Micha Cohen & Dave Reynolds**

Xelion has continued year on year to deliver maximum versatility in product via a user-friendly communications platform. Working with service providers and resellers across the UK, Netherlands, and Germany for a decade Xelion focuses on giving partners complete control over all aspects of the final service. The ability for partners to source or recycle hardware from all the popular manufacturers and terminate calls on trunking providers of their own choice combined with the Xelion applications gives

partners the freedom to make each Xelion proposition unique to their customers' requirements.

With an initial focus on hosted voice services, Xelion has embarked on a journey delivering UC and contact centre functionality for businesses from 1 to 5000 users. We are very excited to join our peers for our first Comms Vision, it is a great opportunity to catch up

with our existing partners, explore new opportunities and get further insight into the UK markets.

### Single Licence Model

At the core of Xelion is the simple view that customers should be able to use the features they need and work from any location on any device without having to manage or purchase complex licencing options. The single-user licence model is a central foundation of the Xelion service and a huge selling point for partners as it offers a very predictable cost model for buyers.

### Bring Your Own Devices

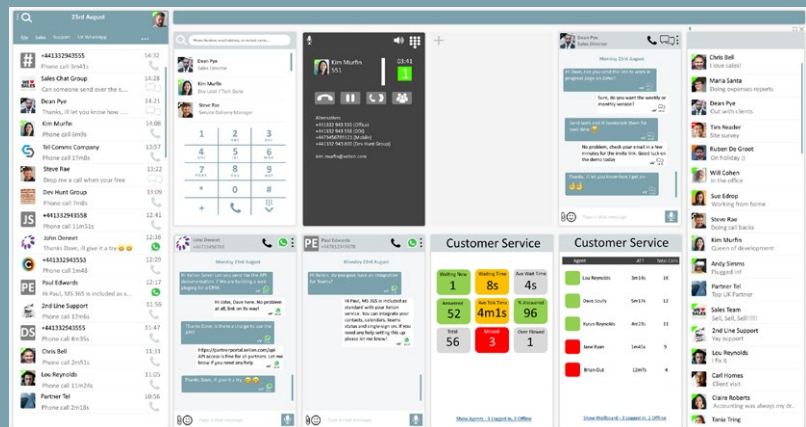
Xelion has an open architecture that allows the partner to source and connect devices from all the popular manufacturers. Polycom, Yealink, Cisco, Snom and many more are supported within Xelion allowing partners to re-use existing handsets from other vendors or

purchase new equipment.

### Comprehensive Sales Support

In 2020 Xelion launched a new Sales Support process to help partners bidding for new opportunities, partners can book via the portal demo slots with Xelion experts and end customers. The Xelion team can handle the demo, technical questions and help promote both the service and the partner as the right company to be working with. In 2021 partners that used Xelion sales support for new business opportunities had an 81% win rate.

Having previously worked on the reseller side of the channel, we understand the challenge partners face when having to master and sell a wide portfolio of services. With this in mind, we wanted our sales specialists to work closely with our partner's sales teams to maximise the win rate of new prospects. ■



Effective communications is a key for a successful business

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# Partnering for Success

Onecom Partners will be showcasing our new identity as a Platinum Sponsor at this year's Comms Vision event at Gleneagles.

If you are unable to attend the event, but would like to hear more about Onecom Partners, please get in contact and our team will be happy to provide an overview of our comprehensive Partner offering, focused on Voice, Mobile, Connectivity, and our bespoke Value-Added Services.