



Iron man with no limits thrives on tinned fish p26

ShoreTel's UK cloud launch heralds global expansion p32



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Our door is open says Government

THE Government says it is determined to help SMEs in the ICT sector 'grasp the nettle' and start selling products and services to the public sector.

EXCLUSIVE REPORT

Speaking at the 'Go Public Sector' event in London late last month Small Business Crown Representative Emma Jones (*pictured*) said: "I have a simple message: The Government is open for business and it is a good client for SMEs."

Jones was joined by senior reps from the Cabinet Office SME Panel, the Crown Commercial Service, BT's Procurement division and specialist public sector trade organisa-

tion Innopsis in urging small comms and IT providers to take advantage of the Government's commitment, initially pledged in the Conservative's election manifesto and rubber stamped by Cabinet Office Minister Ben Gummer, to spend £1 of every £3 through SMEs by 2020.

"Selling to the Government is good for credibility and good for cash flow," stated Jones.

She also confirmed that simplification of the procurement process was high on the Cabinet's change agenda and

that a range of improvements are being trialled.

"Soon I hope somebody will say to me that selling to Government was a delightful experience," she added.

As a starting point, SME comms and IT providers were urged to search online for tender information – for example, Sell to Wales, Contracts Finder and TED (Tenders European Daily), and explore the G-Cloud Digital Market website.

For more advice please contact mike.thomas@innopsis.org

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

IT IS NOT Comms Dealer's habit to go a bundle on the forecasts of market analysts: We have read the hype about UC for many years, which is only just beginning to be realised. We have heard for many years the revolutionary expectations of the cloud, which is only now gaining traction. Ears have long

echoed (for what seems like eons) to the beating drum and march of IoT into the realm of the gods, but only now is the channel market visible, brought into view by trailblazers such as Bamboo Technology Group (see page 40).

Comms Dealer cannot claim to have Mystic Meg-like powers, but we do have insights into what's occupying the minds of those who are catalysing change – the business leaders of comms and IT suppliers who operate at the coalface. And for the first time in our experience, analyst estimations on certain newish technologies are already reflected in market reality.

I refer to the projected growth of BI, analytics and AI. Not for nothing have we given Gartner a platform this month (see page 36). They can see it coming a mile off, driven by a sharper focus on the customer experience. And, forward looking channel players are more readily getting to grips with the concept and practical application of these emerging technologies.

Enter Cloud Direct's Brett Raynes, who states, 'The potential of Machine Learning and AI is mind-boggling. We're starting to experiment ourselves' (see page 26); and Seriu's Justin Sherwood, who said, 'Our vision is to embrace Machine Learning and AI' (see page 30).

Tapping into the post-digital age of experience is also a driver for ShoreTel which is looking beyond communications towards 'innovation in interactions' (see page 32).

The lesson? As we bade farewell to those time-worn technologies of the past, ICT players with vision are certain to remain as monarchs of all they survey.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Distie takes on telecoms



Rami Houbby

STRONG growth generated by Westcoast's cloud computing division has prompted the IT distributor to add voice to its portfolio via a new partnership with cloud telephony provider NFON UK.

Westcoast says that cloud services are playing a far bigger role in IT reseller businesses and that the NFON UK link-up enables them to seamlessly move to telephony.

NFON UK's MD Rami Houbby commented: "The shift to cloud telephony is a natural next step that provides IT resellers with a fast track entry into the world of voice.

"There is a huge market appetite for the streamlined delivery of cloud-based telephony, an out-of-the-box solu-



Mark Davies

tion that IT channel partners can easily train themselves on.

"Previously, the entry barrier into voice was high, but cloud telephony is easy to deploy and maintain, plus it offers benefits in terms of building customer loyalty and enabling long-term predictable annuity revenues for minimal investment."

Mark Davies, Cloud Services Director, Westcoast UK, added: "Adoption of our cloud computing products has been increasing at such a rate that we felt the market was ready for us to make the first step into voice through this partnership with NFON UK.

"Cloud telephony complements our product set and we expect it to be popular with our partners and their customers."

Pennine in radio firm acquisition

PENNINE'S presence in the south west will be more strongly felt following its acquisition of Bristol-based two-way radio and wireless comms firm Co-Channel Electronics, which was founded in 1978 and serves a broad range of customers across its region.

The firm's staff and operations will be integrated within the national PennineRadio division with the Bristol premises kept on as a regional technical and sales support hub.

Bury-based Pennine, a Nycomm Group company, has confirmed that all Co-Channel staff will be retained apart from former joint owner Teresa Griffiths who is retiring, while founder and MD John Crawford will continue as a consultant.

Pennine MD Andrew Roberts commented: "This acquisition will facilitate further growth and provide us with additional resource to service our existing client base in the region."

Pennine began its commercial life as a two-way radio servicing business in 1976.

The company has since evolved to become a provider of UC, mobile telephony, wired and wireless networking, cloud and IT services.

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COMMENT: LOSING OUR VOICE?



Richard Carter

HAS making a voice call lost its crown as the most popular method of communication? Bizarre as it sounds, surveys say that it's now true. A decade ago this would have seemed unthinkable, but the never ending increase in the daily number of emails, combined with the ubiquitous nature smartphones and social media, has triggered an irreversible change in behaviour.

This has wide ramifications for our industry. Ten years ago voice calls accounted for 80 per cent of Nimans' customer interactions, with emails making up the remainder. Now we are handling over a thousand emails per person each week. This dwarfs voice communication. Web chats are massively increasing too. Over the years we have had very good analysis of phone calls with volumes, quality and actual recordings all monitored. We do not yet have the same analysis of emails since apparently it's not possible to analyse them in the same way. Data protection simply doesn't allow it. Basic reports of individual emails sent and received are possible but UC reporting and the law needs to catch up.

There's still plenty of life in handset sales which rose significantly at Nimans last year. No one is suggesting people will stop making calls, but how they are made and their frequency has changed. It's an opportunity not a threat. But the way we communicate is losing its traditional voice.

Richard Carter, Director of Channel Sales, Nimans

- In refusing to recognise personal limits, Cloud Direct CEO Brett Raynes's direction of travel is always towards the top (p26).
- The promised land of analytics and BI has emerged into market reality, according to Rita Sallam, Research Vice President at Gartner, who reveals encouraging market insights that provide context for channel players wanting to understand the demand drivers (p36).

Joos: Time is right for UK cloud drive

SHORETEL'S global expansion campaign took a big leap forward last month with the UK channel launch of its hosted solutions ShoreTel Connect Cloud and ShoreTel Connect Contact Centre for Cloud.

The move forms part of ShoreTel's transition from a traditional vendor to a globally focused software and services business with a strengthening appetite for recurring revenue.

ShoreTel first introduced cloud-based solutions as a partner managed service to the UK in 2015.

ShoreTel Connect Cloud has been available to US customers for 16 months and according to CEO Don Joos the time is right to take it into more markets.

"This geographical expansion better positions us to serve the needs of global customers of all types and sizes, while helping to drive cloud growth in EMEA," said Joos. "Our channel is ready to offer Connect Cloud to their customers."

Cloud partners can adopt a retail model or a reseller structure, and also offer a range of professional services for more complex environments.

Adrian Hipkiss, EMEA VP and MD of ShoreTel, added:



Don Joos

"Our aim is to make cloud-based unified communications simple for customers with a no risk pathway.

"This may include some elements that are not yet suit-

ed to a cloud-only approach. That's why our primary solution Connect has a single code base that enables us to offer alternative deployment methodologies." **Full story on page 32**

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Timico raised by investment

LYCEUM Capital is now the majority shareholder in Timico Technology Group having made an investment of more than £50m in the business.

Lyceum's Simon Hitchcock and Geoff Neville, both Partners at the firm, join Timico as Non-Execs. Timico's founder, Tim Radford, remains on the board as a Non-Exec.

The deal enables Timico to accelerate its growth plans in the IT services space and invest in systems, people and capabilities. The war chest will also fund acquisitions.

Timico has reinvented itself as an end-to-end managed cloud service provider following a business restructure led by CEO Ben Marnham who joined the firm last September.

Marnham and other members of the management team have also invested in a share of the company.



Ben Marnham

"Working with Lyceum Capital is a logical next step in Timico's evolution, building on the foundations laid by Tim and the team over the last few years," said Marnham.

"Lyceum has proven expertise in our sector and we share a similar vision of Timico's future within it."

Hitchcock added: "Timico has a well defined strategy to take it to the next stage in its development as a managed cloud service provider."

Exsel Group gets Coralinn backing

EXSEL Group has won backing worth half a million pounds from private equity company Coralinn LLP.

The investment secures around 50 jobs in Glasgow and Aberdeen and will allow plans for further expansion in Edinburgh to go ahead.

Exsel MD Tom McDonald commented: "As two strong Scottish businesses it will be exciting to see what we can do together and where this investment will take us."

Exsel, which is headquartered at the CityPark offices in Glasgow, was ranked third among the UK's fastest growing technology companies in Deloitte's Fast 50 last year and also ranked 19th in its Fast 500 EMEA listing.

Its clients include the Institute of Chartered Accountants Scotland, Muir Construction, Scottish Futures Trust, Celtic FC and the SFA.

Hugh Stewart OBE, MD at Coralinn and Exsel's new Chairman, said: "Tom and his team have created a fast growing environment providing Scottish companies with a business model offering lower costs yet solutions across a range of tech products and services."

Two years ago Exsel employed three people with a turnover of £100k. That rose to £2.7m in the financial year to last March and is expected to reach over £4m this month.

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COMMENT: STEPS BECOME STRIDES



Pete Tomlinson

MOST channel businesses grasp the benefits of diversifying, both as a proactive growth play and a defence against the fear of losing relevance. They know convergence is happening at pace, and see that what were once separate buying decisions, about separate parts of the customer's

technology stack, are now focused on delivering a single infrastructure and, even better, a single user experience.

So why do some resellers find it so hard to turn this aspiration into reality? I speak with a lot of business owners who have the same problem. They introduce a new capability, everyone gets excited about it for a while then no one sells it for months. They start soul searching, questioning if it was the right solution, the right partner, the right price point, and try to figure out who to fire before ultimately blaming themselves. This, of course, isn't always the case and there are great examples where resellers have hit the ground running when taking new capabilities to market. But what can the rest do?

Looking at resellers that have successfully introduced new solutions and those that struggled, it seems one technique that is missing is the concept of incubation. This may sound counter intuitive as it's tempting to launch new products with a big splash across the entire organisation.

Sometimes, however, you need depth not breadth to gain early traction. Building confidence is critical, so find a few sales, techies or others who are passionate about the idea and let them go at it intensively. This may mean allowing them to work across traditional organisational boundaries, for example having a tech support person doing pre-sales and on-boarding. Let them build their experience, then celebrate every small success, every customer win, every deployment, every pound of revenue. You'll soon find everyone wants a piece of that success and the whole organisation will be behind the new solution.

Pete Tomlinson, Director, KCOM

Colt outlines fresh growth objectives

COLT Technology Services has marked its 25th year in business with the delivery of a three year growth plan aimed at network expansion and a move to greater customer centricity.

The company will invest more than €500m throughout the project, with a €200m spending plan set for 2017.

Colt reported strong top line growth in 2016 and a new executive leadership team has pledged to continue this trend having implemented a strategic and cultural shift in the firm.

Colt's operations have been segmented into the core areas of innovation, the Colt IQ Network and improving the customer experience. There has also been an increase in investment in sales and marketing.

To help deliver the planned increased network capacity and reach, Colt has appointed a new Chief Commercial Officer, Tom Regent. The company also intends to hire hundreds more staff to support customers.

CEO Carl Grivner commented: "We are fortunate to not have many of the distractions of our peers, such as wireless, consumer and content.

"This means we can focus on building an intelligent net-



Carl Grivner

work designed to meet the business requirements of today's demanding enterprises.

"In fact, we believe our customers, and indeed all our competitors' customers, should be more demanding of the industry. We are up for the challenge and confident we will deliver."

Grivner added that investing in the Colt IQ Network is vital. It currently spans 24,500 buildings and 700 data centres, and serves, in the main, enterprises with an increasingly global reach and a local presence.

Colt's investment this year will triple the number of sites across the Colt IQ Network capable of providing 100G enabled Ethernet and IP connectivity, and optical services up to 9.6Tbps capacity per site.

According to Grivner the customer experience matters now more than ever.

So Colt will roll out On Demand network services, and also redesign its internal processes and systems to bring service delivery times down from weeks to days and put customers in control.

The revamp is critical to managing growth in customer acquisitions, which amounted to 1,700 new customers worldwide in 2016.

"Almost 25 years ago, we emerged as a disruptive challenger in the market, and our mission for 2017 is to increase this challenger status as a digital enabler with a global reach, a local presence and agility," added Grivner.

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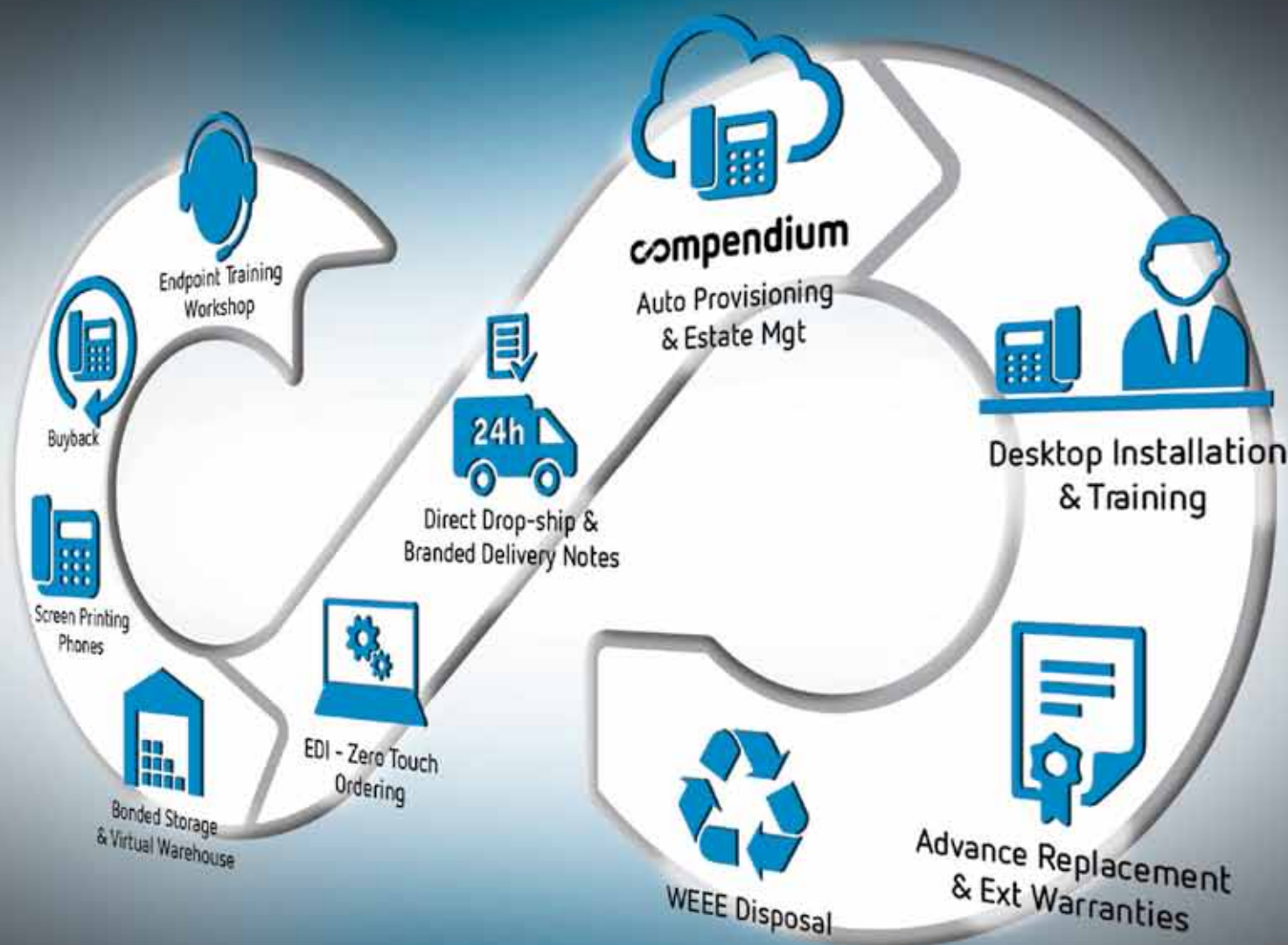
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COMMENT: STRATEGIC TALK



Alex Tempest

VIRTUAL assistants have been in the headlines, but the idea that everyone could have their own personal living room assistant was a far fetched idea until recently. There was also the question of whether people even wanted talking computers in their homes. One year on from the launch of Amazon's Echo speaker with its Alexa virtual assistant, and it's clear that the demand is there. According to Gartner, the global market for voice activated

assistants is set to hit \$2 billion by 2020 when 3.3 per cent of all households will have one.

This year, Alexa made her way from the home to concept cars from Ford and Volkswagen. This is the virtual assistant's first step out of the home and suggests the technology will soon be embedded into a range of future devices. Developers and vendors have been clamouring to integrate Alexa into their latest hardware and services to offer something new and exciting.

At present, voice assistants are largely consigned to private spaces where people don't feel as conscious about asking a robot to order them a taxi, for example. You still wouldn't really expect an employee to be using the technology for work in an office environment. However, the channel is being given a unique chance to help make this a reality.

Amazon Web Services has announced a new programme to help partners integrate Alexa into its own tools. It has claimed to already see 'deep demand' from its partners. The channel has been at the forefront of new business technology, previously with IP, Wi-Fi, cloud and now virtual assistants. However, partners need to ensure they deliver business value as well as the latest technology to keep customers happy.

Alex Tempest, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

Boroughs in ICT upgrade

A LARGE portion of London's boroughs are no longer prepared to suffer the limitations of legacy ICT infrastructures.

According to the findings of a Freedom of Information (FoI) request conducted by cloud firm HyperGrid, over half of London boroughs are currently planning to replace their IT infrastructure, meaning that there is an open door for qualified ICT resellers to push against.

Of the 32 boroughs, 30 responded to the request, and 53% displayed a commitment to refresh their infrastructure, while a further 20% are in the process of an upgrade.

Doug Rich, VP of EMEA at HyperGrid, said: "The findings provide a clear indicator of a need for change and modernisation in local Government IT estates. Legacy systems are no longer capable of coping with the challenges brought about by budget cuts, increased demand for higher quality services and reorganisation to fit the changing role of local Government.

"The demands of digital transformation and ever-increasing workloads mean that IT infrastructure needs to be high performing yet flexible to rapidly changing requirements."



Doug Rich

The FoI also indicated that 43% of boroughs would be receptive to a consumption or subscription-based model.

Rich added: "It is evident that there is an appetite for changing the way IT is consumed in the data centre as refresh projects get under way.

"Choosing a consumption-based model enables local authorities to be much more agile in how they update their infrastructure. This can come in the form of cloud-based services, including email, apps or the Government's G-Cloud procurement system.

"Digital transformation is placing a significant amount of strain on both public and private sector organisations, and local Government cannot afford to be left behind."

NTA adds to hosted feature set

NTA has deployed a new set of features on its hosted platform, adding CRM integration, click to dial, a mobile app and reception console.

The firm's Channel Sales Manager Justin Blaine said CRM integration was the result of a collaboration between NTA and a third party UC expert.

"The new integration delivers connectivity to all of the main CRM applications in the market, plus many more bespoke applications designed for verticals," said Blaine.

The CRM application can be implemented both on-premise or in the cloud; and NTA offers two different licenses with the new suite of products.

The Express version integrates with Outlook and Gmail, while Fusion connects to most other CRM applications.

These licenses also support screen popping, click to dial, presence and chat sessions.

NTA also lifted the veil on a new operator console for large enterprises and businesses with high call volumes, and a mobile app that replicates the functionality of an office desk phone.

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COMMENT: WEATHERING THE CALLS



David Rowlands

AS EVERY Brit knows, the weather is key to any good conversation. However, for contact centres, the weather also has a profound impact on the rise and fall in the number of inbound calls and interactions they receive. For businesses, it isn't enough to know that over the winter or summer they usually become busier

because unfortunately the 'big freeze' or summer heatwave can be earlier or later than anticipated.

This is where having a flexible cloud system in place, with strong reporting and monitoring, will allow businesses to flex up and down as the need arises. Offering these types of solutions can be a real differentiator for resellers while adding value to their customers. Having access to advanced call analytics not only helps businesses boost customer satisfaction but also helps improve their bottom line. It helps brands make informed decisions and be better able to track the peaks and troughs of demand, assigning staff accordingly.

With reporting and monitoring in place, businesses can be notified if the volume of interactions exceeds a certain amount, enabling them to pull in the additional resource needed to deal with the demand. For instance, Swale Heating, a Sussex and Kent-based heating company that uses 8x8's software, found that through tracking inbound calls it was able to improve efficiency and capacity for its contact centre during the winter months, adding and removing agents where necessary.

For businesses, accurately predicting and matching customer demand with service providers so that customers receive quick and helpful service is paramount. However, they cannot and should not pay for high staff numbers when the need is not there. Therefore, being able to give businesses the ability to cut out unnecessary spend during these quiet periods can give resellers the edge.

David Rowlands, Contact Sales Director UK & EMEA, 8x8

Blaine: More focus needed on hosted

IN HIS strongest call to action in years NTA's Channel Sales Manager Justin Blaine has urged IT and telecoms resellers without hosted telephony or SIP in their portfolio to 'wake up and smell the coffee'.

According to Blaine, ICT providers without a cloud or SIP proposition should get to grips with these technologies or 'risk being left behind with an ever-shrinking customer base and revenue stream'.

Blaine commented: "Even some of the most experienced leaders at the helm of respected and established companies may not provide hosted telephony or offer it reluctantly as a second fiddle. They still prefer to sell a PBX!"

The main objections encountered by Blaine on hosted and SIP adoption among a section of comms and IT resellers is that 'hosted solutions don't work as they should', or, 'it's only for small companies'.

"Another barrier to progress is the false belief that connectivity is not fast or reliable enough to deploy a hosted solution in some geographic regions," said Blaine. "There is a fundamental lack of understanding in certain areas of the channel."



Justin Blaine

He noted that misconceptions such as these are all the more stark when considered against the backdrop of digital transformation that is redefining how businesses operate across the UK and beyond.

"We have to embrace the change," emphasised Blaine. "This lack of knowledge within an industry that is supposed to be offering solution-led advice at the point of sale is alarming. Ignoring the shift towards cloud-based technologies is nonsense because customers are already moving ahead."

Blaine concedes that the term 'digital transformation' may be an over-statement, believing that change is more akin to an evolution rather than an upending revolution.

"The first phase of this evolutionary process could simply be a case of moving businesses into a more connected environment where all communications are integrated," added Blaine.

He reiterated that cloud averse resellers should no longer operate at a knowledge level that is below the requirements of the market, and explained that NTA has taken action to educate partners via a series of free sales training courses.

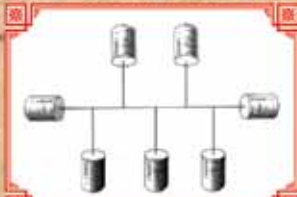
"These courses are designed to up-skill resellers' sales teams and enable them eradicate the myths and realise the ever growing profit potential in this space," said Blaine.

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A brief history of Unified Communications



Many people believe UC is a recent innovation, but in fact the technology on which most Unified Communications platforms still operate was invented by the Pointer Sisters (above) in 1882.



In 1902, the sisters' first functioning UC solution (above) went into commercial production.



The next major innovation didn't arrive until the 1980s, with the introduction of curly wires.



The 1990s saw the advent of the open-source DIY UC boom (above).



Environmental concerns meant hemp was briefly trialled as a replacement for copper between 2002-2003.



But essentially most Unified Communications platforms look remarkably similar now to those early versions of a hundred years ago.



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EXCELL STEPS UP ACQUISITION STRATEGY

Excell Group is poised for an intense period of buy-and-build activity following the formation of a dedicated Acquisition Team headed up by the Group's Finance Director Edward Pettit, who has a string of acquisitions under his belt and is best placed to take the strategic lead.

Excell Group are the largest exclusively business-to-business, end-to-end communications provider in the UK. They own their OFCOM regulated core network which is unique for a company of its size, using it to provide high quality and high-speed managed services to business clients across the UK. They already offer a broad range of solutions to business clients across data, cloud, mobile, audio visual, network and voice. Acquisitions are being targeted to enable growth in current markets as well as diversification into associated products to further



Edward Pettit

expand our portfolio.

Pettit previously played a pivotal role in the acquisition of Resource Utilities Ltd and Green Mobile customer bases. He commented: "These customer bases were targeted because they had an extremely high proportion of contracted, recurring billing". Over 84% of Excell Group turnover is made up of recurring contracted revenues. They are looking to

increase this percentage so a customer base with a high proportion of automated recurring revenues, is highly attractive to them.

Excell Group also recently acquired City Voice and City AVS. The acquisition provided a strong foundation for Excell Group in the audio-visual space. This was a great strategic fit for the evolution of Excell business – helping drive further cross selling opportunities within the enlarged base, while also providing City Voice and City AVS customers with direct access to the group's full portfolio of products and services.

Robert Boyne, Co-Director of both City Voice & City AVS, commented: "The acquisition by Excell Group marks a really exciting time for the teams. Started 25 years ago, and experiencing consistent growth, Excell Group freed our

time up to significantly enhance and develop our offering."

Excell has an acquisition fund of millions and is now actively searching for more targets to acquire. The acquisitions give Excell a controlling interest, but still leave the sellers with a stake. This is generally the start of a partnership where back office and billing worries are taken away, leaving 100% of time to concentrate on developing new and existing customer opportunities.

To find out more about how Excell could release a capital sum from your business and enable you to focus on business generation please contact Edward Pettit in confidence.

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COMMENT: NETWORK MATTERS



James Hickman

IN 1968 a little known company called Viatron used the term 'microprocessor' for the first time which heralded the modern computing age. Early designs were power hungry, painfully slow and only ran computers. Eventually, these things started running non-computer devices like washing machines, lifts and satellite receivers – 'embedded systems'.

In 2000, LG Electronics gave us the first Internet-enabled fridge allowing consumers to have their chilled items maintained automatically. There were a few problems: Internet connections in the UK were dial-up with less than one per cent of the population being able to afford ADSL. The cost was over £10,000 and the fridge didn't integrate with anything else.

Fast forward to 2016 and this new whizz-bang technology making the headlines is, to be honest, old tech'. It's basically microprocessors inside a thing that isn't a computer connected to the outside world. So what's different now? The cost has dropped, but the real breakthrough is the connectivity. We have decent, secure Wi-Fi and protocols that tie together devices from different vendors. Anybody that can't control their heating from their phone is considered old fashioned.

By 2020 it's predicted there will be five billion Internet users, about three times as many as we have today. Each of those will use more than one Internet connected device. As the technology becomes cheaper and leaner, there will be sensors in everything, spewing out large amounts of data. Great news for anybody selling network services.

As providers of technology, we facilitate all this stuff. However, there are challenges in terms of an ageing copper infrastructure and a rapidly diminishing IP address pool, coupled with an ever-increasing demand for bandwidth.

James Hickman, CTO, Virtual1

Paradigm in deal signing



Jeff Tench

NEW Signature's UK expansion ambitions have been significantly advanced following the acquisition of Microsoft partner Paradigm Systems. The deal follows a year of working together on joint projects.

Paradigm Systems displays particular skills in delivering Microsoft cloud and hybrid solutions and integrating services for all types of businesses.

US-based New Signature will benefit from Paradigm's expertise in Azure, Office 365, Windows Server and desktop deployments. Paradigm Systems also has a managed services business that aligns with New Signature's services portfolio.

New Signature operates in the Microsoft cloud arena and the acquisition means it will be

better able to deliver on more complex engagements with customers of all sizes, including large global enterprises.

"Becoming part of a global business will unlock new opportunities for us and deliver a broader range of capabilities to our existing customers," commented Mike Brown, CEO, Paradigm Systems.

New Signature CEO Jeff Tench added: "It was an easy decision to bring together our talented teams. We already knew that great synergies existed between the teams in both our approach to delivering value to customers and with our clearly aligned culture and mission."

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

Vodafone picks out elite team

VODAFONE UK has raised the profile of its top performing partners by hand picking an elite group and giving them Total Communications Status, the company's first round of top draw accreditations under its new partner programme.

The selected companies include Boosh 365, CCS MPW, Comm-Tech Voice & Data, Connected Telecom, DRC, Excalibur Communications, Pescado, PMGC Technology Group, Pure Business Services, Olive Communications, One-com, Redsquid Communications, Trinsic and Vohkus.

Phil Mottram, Enterprise Director for Vodafone UK, commented: "Over 100 partners have achieved new Status accreditation in the first phase of our programme, which has been designed to recognise partners' capabilities and specialisms."

Vodafone's elite grouping pictured with Phil Mottram (front centre).





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Campaign to uplift role of distribution

THE Global Technology Distribution Council (GTDC), an industry body focused on promoting the role of wholesale ICT distribution, has embarked on a campaign to raise the profile of distributors and their evolving role at the vanguard of technological advancement using case studies, white papers and social media.

The initiative reflects the emergence of a 'new distribution model' and will be supported by research and analysis conducted by IT Europa which has identified significant shifts in the products and services being offered by Europe's leading distributors.

"As end user market demand for cloud-based solutions and managed services grows, distributors are adapting their business models and developing new services to support channel partners," stated IT Europa MD Alan Norman.

"The emergence of technologies such as AI and the rising demand for mobility and the integration of technologies to support digital transformation are fuelling these changes.

"There has been a sea change in the way two-tier channels work in recent years, and we have seen in our research of European VARs, integrators, MSPs and other channels that they are adopting a more value conscious, services-led approach, using their technology skills and market understanding to create and drive new propositions in the channel."

According to Norman, 'distribution has stepped up a gear' to meet these challenges, and the IT industry and its components should respond to this and take advantage of what is now on offer.



Alan Norman

"The scale and speed of this move is clearly visible in the additional offerings being made by the distributors, but not all channels and vendors are fully aware of the emerging distribution models," he commented.

In response to increased demand for newer technologies such as cloud, IoT, mobile, and Big Data, distributors are investing heavily in new programmes and processes to efficiently bring those technologies to market, pointed out GTDC CEO Tim Curran.

He believes that some senior executives may not understand how the channel and distributors can play a role in the cloud, for example, although those downstream, the channel leaders, typically do understand the deeper value and potential of these relationships.

"They work directly with distributors and see first-hand how partners prefer their services," stated Curran.

"We want to help senior management realise that Europe's distributors are resilient, diversified and innovative."

GTDC members drive more than \$130bn in annual global sales through business channels.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

Voip Unlimited has marked its 11th anniversary with a brand revamp and the promise of new products and full automation for partners.

The company was founded on Valentine's Day 2006 and according to MD Mark Pillow the firm's 'passion for VoIP' remains hot.

He stated: "From the outset we have focused solely on our technical capabilities, network, infrastructure and innovating new products.

"After 11 years we realised it was time for our image to catch up with a new look and improved online functionalities that came hand in hand with the rebranding process."

Gradwell Communications CEO Nick Thompson is stepping down after three years at the firm, making way for incoming chief exec Simon Mewett, the former CEO of Westbourne-based ISP C4L which was acquired by Selection Services Investments for £20.2m a year ago.

Mewett's remit is to drive forward the company's strategy and provide a platform for future growth.

Bath-based Gradwell was founded in 1998 and now has 70-plus employees. Its solutions are currently used by over 22,000 small businesses and partners across the UK.

A LINK-up between Avnet and IBM aims to accelerate the time to market for IoT solutions. Their collaboration includes the formation of a Watson IoT Joint Lab within IBM's newly opened global Watson IoT Centre in Munich, Germany.

"There is no limit to how IoT can be used to improve the world," commented Patrick Zammit, Global President of Avnet Technology Solutions.

"We're seeing tremendous potential in new IoT applications that we're developing, ranging from protecting our children to preventing Legionnaires' disease."

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Iovox verges on US move



Ryan Gallagher

CALL analytics company Iovox is set to expand in the US and enable organisations to gain deeper insights into call data having completed a \$10m round of equity and debt financing led by Octopus Ventures, SF Capital and Silicon Valley Bank.

Iovox was co-founded in the UK by Ryan and Belinda Gallagher and provides call analytics solutions for big names including BT, Zoopla, AutoTrader UK and Pizza Express.

The firm recently expanded into the US with an office in Mill Valley, California, which will become a springboard for growth in the country.

With its war chest secured Iovox plans to help users seamlessly sync, store, organise and search their call data (desktop

and mobile) across all devices. “Historically, the call tracking industry has been focused on helping prove ROI for inbound marketing calls,” commented Ryan Gallagher, CEO.

“Inbound marketing calls are just a portion of a company’s total call volume. With this new funding we’ve set out to make all calls, regardless of source, actionable, informative, and able to be analysed for individuals and businesses of any size.”

Jo Oliver, Investment Director, Octopus Ventures, said: “We believe the data generated from calls is just as valuable as email and other data that passes in and out of a business every day. This funding enables Iovox to make all this information available and useful.”

Expulsion of mobiles in prisons

PRISON sector specialist Unify Business Solutions has unlocked a £1.7m deal to remove mobile phones from Danish prisons.

Working with Kriminalfor-sorgen, the organisation responsible for all of the prisons in Denmark, Unify Business Solutions will supply its mobile detection solution – UMDS (Unify Mobile Detection/Denial System) – which detects mobile phones, provides live alerts for prison staff and blocks the phones so that inmates do not have unlawful access.

Adam Esposito, Co-Director of Unify Business Solutions, said: “This will create more jobs for the area and is a great opportunity for us to showcase our detection products that we have developed in Sheffield.”

The use of illicit mobile phones in prisons is a growing problem, and in Denmark an average of 1,900 are confiscated a year. “There is no limit to how creative the inmates’ friends are in their attempts to smuggle them in,” added Esposito.

“Phones are sometimes stored inside balls thrown into the prison grounds and picked up during recreation time, or stored in grocery deliveries, books, clothing and shoes.”

Wifinity gets new funding



Aubone Tennant

WIRELESS ISP Wifinity, which provides wireless connections to businesses in some of the UK’s most remote areas, has secured a £10m funding boost from Clydesdale Bank.

The funds will allow Wifinity to continue its development of pay-as-you-go services for the holiday park industry, upgrade its networks at Ministry of Defence sites across the UK and Germany, as well as invest in new technology.

“Entering a relationship with Clydesdale Bank means we can continue to respond to market opportunities,” stated Aubone Tennant, co-CEO, Wifinity.

“Since Wifinity was founded in 2007 we have delivered Wi-Fi to more than 1,500 buildings in 120 locations with more than

120,000 devices connecting to our networks each month.

“Each network has different complexities based on location and the make up of sites so it is critical that we constantly innovate in order to deliver superfast Wi-Fi to any business.”

Wifinity provides superfast Wi-Fi connections to some of the UK’s most hard-to-install locations, including schools, holiday parks, care homes, retailers and military barracks.

Wifinity’s trophy cabinet houses an ISPA Best Consumer Customer Service award.

The company is also listed on the Sunday Times Tech Track 100 and won Megabuyte Emerging Stars, Best Performing Company Telecoms and Networks recognition.

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Data centre sets a trend

REDWIRE CEO Camran Mirza has pledged to put the Ealing-based data centre owner and operator 'on the channel map' and has enlisted Graham Byrne to lead its first partner recruitment campaign.

Mirza said he is on a mission to devolve the power of data centres to their users having established RedwireDC, a new data centre designed for 'modern enterprises and start-ups', he claimed.

"The concept of a modern data centre is changing with the evolution of cloud-based services," he stated. "The cloud shouldn't be exclusive. It should be flexible and accommodate our ever changing mobile world regardless of the platform a user is running."

RedwireDC is located on two connectivity thoroughfares with fibre from multiple networks and is positioned near high speed transport links from east London and the Docklands, through to Heathrow Airport.

According to MD Ameer Mirza the facility is another nail in the coffin of traditional data centres and office spaces, and he provides a new level of customer service akin to that offered by a family business.



Ameer Mirza

"Businesses are not simply cogs in the machine, we empower them to be the machine," he commented. "The trend is towards hybrid data centres that cater for just about anyone's needs. A place that allows the consumer and enterprise to come together and access the cloud however they see fit."

With the increasing number of enterprises developing cloud first strategies there is a channel opportunity to provide not just adaptability but also customisability, believes Byrne.

"Redwire resides at the intersection of the realm of people, offices and the traditional IT stack, hosted in a DC and connected to the public cloud," he said. "Security is our foremost priority, ensuring that the co-work and serviced office space above is separated from our clients' sensitive information and equipment stored below."

Ingram Micro ramps up plans for security

INGRAM Micro is beating the cyber security drum having positioned security as one of the three strategic pillars in its cloud ecosystem alongside infrastructure and services.

The company has also pledged to make several investments into cyber security, including plans to expand its wrap-around services for channel partners and the launch of a cloud security business unit later this year.

As part of its strategy the firm has added the Symantec Endpoint Protection Cloud (SEPC) offering to its Ingram Micro Cloud Marketplace.

SEPC configures policies based on the role of a user in an organisation and enables end users to self-enrol their devices, corporate or personally owned, via their own online portal.

Apay Obang-Oyway, Director, Cloud Northern Europe, Ingram Micro Cloud, stated: "With SEPC our partners have access to a cloud-based endpoint security proposition via a monthly subscription, boasting the benefits of enterprise quality protection at a SMB price."

He cited figures from the Cloud Industry Forum that suggest the user base for cloud



Apay Obang-Oyway

security is set to grow by almost half, with 36% currently deploying a cloud-based secu-

urity solution, and a further 17% expecting to do so in the future. "Now's the time for resellers to maximise on the opportunities," stated Obang-Oyway.

The move follows the addition of Microsoft Azure in the UK to the Ingram Micro Cloud Marketplace late last year.

Global IT distributor Ingram Micro was snapped up by Chinese investment firm Tianjin Tianhai a year ago for \$6bn.

Didata swoops on ex-Cisco sales whiz

GLOBAL solutions and services business Dimension Data has enlisted Andy Ritchie as UK&I Sales Director.

According to the \$7.5bn company the appointment signals big intentions to drive growth in the UK and Ireland.

Prior to joining, Ritchie was Head of Global Sales for BT at Cisco; and he brings 15 years sales leadership experience to Dimension Data having driven sales growth while working for global enterprises, service providers and service integrators.

Ritchie has gained particular expertise in selling and managing complex IT solutions and cloud platforms in the UK, Europe and Asia Pacific regions at Cisco, BT Global Services and T-Systems.

Dimension Data UK&I MD Barney Taylor said: "Our business has seen a strong sales performance and consecutive growth. Andy brings global and local sales experience to his new senior role and we look forward to accelerated services-led sales growth under his leadership."



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Powering your potential

Energy factor is a boost for Uniq2u

POOR support from the major energy companies is providing a 'unique' opportunity for mobile comms specialist Uniq2u.

The Staffordshire based reseller has strategic partnerships with key comms suppliers to deliver the solutions customers need with a service wrap which they claim is second to none. Now, alongside Fidelity Energy, the company has added energy to its portfolio and director Gareth Jenkins has been bowled over by the response to date.

"The Uniq2u customer offer is simple. SME businesses rely on their telecoms as much as corporate customers but are unable to get the same service direct from the networks. Our customers choose to work with us rather than one of the large networks directly and the same applies to the supply of energy. They are fed up with the service provided by the big energy customers and value the personal support we provide.

"As with most telecoms companies, time is a limited resource. The Fidelity Energy offering requires no additional overhead or operational impact. All my customers were already buying energy and the ability to manage their requirements and costs more effectively than they could themselves seemed like a win-win scenario. We've already seen success in 2016 and are looking to grow the Energy offering at Uniq2u over the next year as we see this as a 'bolt on' for current customers and the products we are already managing for them."



Jenkins is impressed with how quickly he has been able to start offering energy services and values the support Fidelity Energy provides.

"Following an initial meeting, Fidelity Energy offered a full white labelled marketing suite along with sales support and inside industry tips. Fidelity Energy manage all operational and regulatory requirements so we can focus on our customers. Initially we worked with existing customers, but we have found that energy can be a great first product to sell to a new customer due to a short sales cycle and the instant benefits.

"For most customers once they are open to a review the process is very simple. For anything outside the norm Fidelity Energy are on hand to give full support the product offering to ensure the customer journey is a smooth one."

The Uniq2u team have not yet come across any customers cautious about changing their energy supplier and Jenkins says he can now confidently address larger energy opportunities.

"Most of our customers had never reviewed their energy and they were glad when I could offer a review of over 16 suppliers in the market and give them a multiple forward procurement strategy with Fidelity Energy. We are working through the range of customers we currently have as well as focusing on large consumers of power and multi-sites as Fidelity Energy has some unique offerings in these areas."

“All my customers were already buying energy and the ability to manage their requirements and costs more effectively than they could

themselves seemed like a win-win scenario.



Gareth Jenkins
Director, Uniq2u

Informatica reaches out

INFORMATICA has lifted the veil on a new global channel partner programme in a bid to extend its cloud and data management solutions to a wider set of customers and markets.

The company is focused on building a strategic network of VAD and VAR channel partners via a two-tier programme designed to bring to market its Intelligent Data Platform.

"The move to the cloud is one of the most fundamental business model shifts of the 21st century," commented Rodney Foreman, SVP, Partner Ecosystem. "For Informatica, that means further extending our go-to-market strategy and finding ways of getting closer to our customers through a broader number of touch points.

"Our channel programme is a crucial part of our vision for the future and will be central to our ability to grow the business and better meet the evolving needs of our customers."

Informatica recently announced a distribution agreement with Arrow and the company has expanded its distribution



Rodney Foreman

deal with Avnet to include the United States and Canada.

Avnet is also a distributor for Informatica in EMEA, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. Howard Goldberg, who is President of Arrow's Enterprise Computing Solutions Business in the Americas, said: "Big data and the ability to cost-effectively analyse and monetise data are rapidly evolving into a must-have for businesses of all types and sizes. Data is playing a critical role in accelerating the digital transformation."

Exponential-e rolls out faster network speeds

CLOUD and network provider Exponential-e has lifted the curtain on a new off-the-shelf 10 Gigabit Ethernet service (GigE) that promises to deliver some of the highest network speeds in the world to most businesses across the country, estimated to be over 400 times faster than the Government's minimum definition of superfast broadband (which is 24Mbps).

Businesses using the service can increase or decrease their bandwidth capacity as required.

They can also split the networks' circuit using secure Virtual LANs to deliver other

services and applications with any combination of bandwidth. An example of this could be dedicating an entire Gigabit to a 4K video conferencing system.

Lee Wade, who is CEO at Exponential-e, said: "The fact that many companies in the UK still struggle for a decent network connection is scandalous. High capacity bandwidth is critical in delivering vital, Internet-connected services that play an important role in carrying out everyday business."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

A NEW digital mapping tool developed by Openreach aims to make it easier for CPs to plan and build their own fibre broadband networks using the company's nationwide network infrastructure.

Planned enhancements to the service include a tool that shows how much capacity is available in each duct and which parts of the network have been reserved for building work by other companies.

TECH Data Europe is creating a cloud ecosystem that enables partners to deliver Microsoft's complete software stack along with complementary solutions through a management platform.

"Microsoft solutions are widely used in most end user organisations and many customers now want to use those applications in the cloud, so it's important that resellers can support the entire stack," commented Reza Honarmand, VP for Cloud in Europe at Tech Data.

COUNCILS that fail to update their printing fleets risk productivity and efficiency losses, according to Annodata which has observed that many local authorities moving to the cloud rarely included print in their migration.

CEO Rod Tonna-Barthet commented: "Although there seems to be interest among councils in the cloud delivery model for aspects of the IT estate, great strides need to be made when it comes to migrating print estates."

CLOUD Direct has bagged its fifth IT firm in 20 months, snapping up Connect Support Services. The deal follows its acquisition of AlwaysOn and adds Microsoft skills in Azure, Office 365 and hosted desktop. Other acquisitions include Redblade in July 2016, ihotdesk in December 2015 and Datel Business Systems in June 2015.

See pages 20 & 26



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SVL in Liquid Voice link up on AlwaysOn Group

SVL Business Solutions has secured a 25% equity interest in Liquid Voice, the developer of call recording and contact centre solutions.

Peter Gough, MD of SVL Business Solutions, commented: "This investment is the latest development in a long-term strategy to diversify our business and consolidate our position as a provider of contact centre and public safety control room solutions.

"Liquid Voice provides solutions that complement our current portfolio. It will enable us to significantly expand our customer base across a wide range of market sectors."

SVL plans to set up a new division to offer the Liquid Voice range of products as well as the company's current SmartVoice range of PCI compliance, customer satisfaction and contact centre training solutions.

This will run in parallel with SVL's existing sales and support operation which will continue to focus on NICE's range of interaction recording and contact centre applications, including robotic process optimisation, real-time solutions, WFM, quality management, customer feedback and analytics.



Peter Gough

Chris Berry, co-founder and MD of Leeds-based Liquid Voice UK, commented: "We have already forged a strong working relationship with SVL's management team and are confident that together we can maximise new business opportunities and extend our presence in the contact centre, financial and public safety markets."

Andrew Barrett, co-founder of Liquid Voice and MD of the New Zealand business, commented: "Liquid Voice has aspirations for development into other international territories, having already built a strong presence in the APAC region, and this move reaffirms our intentions to the market."

CLOUD Direct has bought AlwaysOn Group from private equity firms Foresight Group and Mobeus Equity Partners (along with management and a group of private investors) for an undisclosed sum.

The deal adds £5.5m revenues to Cloud Direct and additional expertise in UC, data communication and managed data services.

Cloud Direct is a provider of cloud-based managed IT services to SMEs, including Unified Comms, cloud back-up, disaster recovery, hosted VoIP telephony, Office 365 and cloud hosting and infrastructure.

Martin Peck, the Executive Chairman of AlwaysOn, commented on the deal: "The current investors built AlwaysON by merging two complementary IT services business. Having completed this process the time was right for a new owner to take the business forward."

Brett Raynes, CEO of Cloud Direct, commented: "Since 2003 we've been helping organisations grow by migrating them to the cloud. Moving forward, AlwaysOn's capabilities will be critical as we drive better business continuity, people productivity and infrastructure.



Brett Raynes

"We'll slowly integrate the business into the Cloud Direct clan as we continue to support organic growth with an ambitious acquisition strategy."

Transcend, a mid-market corporate finance advisory company based in Reading

and Birmingham, acted as lead advisers to the shareholders.

Steve Bartlett, who is a Partner at Transcend, commented: "Cloud Direct represents a strong fit with AlwaysOn and the business will flourish under its ownership." See page 26



ONECOM has secured a foothold in Northern Ireland with the opening of a new regional office in Belfast. Onecom is making an investment of more than £5m in its Northern Ireland operation and expects to employ 30 people in the city within five years. Onecom Sales Director Jason Waterworth said: "We are committing to Belfast for the long-term with the aim of being the largest and fastest growing independent provider of communications in Northern Ireland." Pictured (l-r): Onecom's local team, Stuart Lunn, Paul Lawther, Darren Brown and Mark Fraser.

SHORT CALL

Claranet has expanded its footprint in The Netherlands with the acquisition of Rely, an IT provider to the Dutch notarial sector. The firm has 50 staff and an annual turnover of 6m euros. The company's founder, René Fouraschen, will remain in the enlarged business as Business Development Director for the region. He said: "Being part of a larger organisation gives us the opportunity to grow quicker."

Mitel conference

MITEL reassured partners that its development roadmap was on track and future vision crystal clear during its annual channel event staged in London last month, the first in a series of European conferences.

"The communications industry is changing rapidly and it's essential our partners are prepared and armed," said Simon Skellon, VP UK, Mitel.

"With Mitel's enhanced cloud, unified communications, enterprise and contact centre solutions, our partners can help

power digital transformation. By integrating with an organisations wider IT framework and cloud-based applications, such as SFDC, Google, Evernote or Dropbox, Mitel helps businesses move towards a more seamless collaboration environment."

The London event was attended by 200 of Mitel's channel partners and customers who also witnessed the vendor launch a 'Move to Mitel' programme designed to capitalise on the potential for troubled Avaya customers to jump ship.

International SIP

GAMMA reacted last month to growth in the European VoIP market by enabling resellers to deliver SIP services outside of the UK.

Paul Wakefield, SIP Trunking Product Manager at Gamma, said: "This latest development is all about supporting our UK channel partners who are finding international opportunities and enabling them to deliver those services.

"Initially, our international SIP service will support 11 European destinations in addition

to the UK, but we intend to extend that geographical reach moving forward."

Paul Anderson Operations Director at ITPS, welcomed the news: "We are seeing more opportunities to provide SIP services outside of the UK, and through Gamma's international SIP solution we can now maximise these opportunities, extending our capability internationally," he said.

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Inverse Path snapped up

CYBER security company F-Secure has acquired privately held Inverse Path, a provider of security services to the avionics, automotive and industrial control sectors.

The move gives F-Secure a strong presence in sectors with challenging IT infrastructures.

"Inverse Path is the perfect fit for our fast growing consultancy business," said Jens Thonke, Executive VP, Cyber Security Services, F-Secure.

Inverse Path's customers include mid-market and Fortune 500 companies, and its focus on embedded system security is plain to see in its USB armoury project, a USB stick that functions as a portable platform for personal security applications.

Jyrki Tulokas, F-Secure Executive VP of Corporate Strategy and Development, believes that the acquisition also bolsters F-Secure's capabilities as a high-end cyber security



Jyrki Tulokas

consultancy and provider of managed services, and also adds Inverse Path's reputation for sector specific innovation.

"Inverse Path was one of the first companies to publish research on vehicle security, and it now uses this expertise to help automobile and vehicle telematics manufacturers secure their products," said Tulokas.

Andrea Barisani, founder of Inverse Path, joins F-Secure to lead Hardware Security.

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CityFibre connects Gamma

GAMMA has future proofed its capacity to deliver higher speed services to larger enterprises and public sector customers, as well as meet demand for data services, following an access agreement to connect 15 data centres and exchanges across the UK over CityFibre's long distance and metro networks.

The agreement runs to 2042 and will deliver multi-terabit core and multi-gigabit access speeds using 1,300km of dark fibre in a fully resilient ring configuration between Manchester and London.

Andy Rawnsley, Chief Architect at Gamma, commented: "CityFibre's national long distance network allows us to deliver the speed, resilience and flexibility we need in our core network. We look forward to exploring how else we might work together in the future."

Rob Hamlin, Commercial Director at CityFibre, added: "This project shows our capability to offer unified long distance and metro fibre solutions to national service providers."

NTA forges Oak alliance

HOSTED telephony provider NTA and call recording firm Oak Innovation are working together to provide fully compliant on-premise call recording for NTA customers.

"It was an obvious partnership," said NTA Sales Manager Justin Blaine. "We already had a call recorder, but it wasn't PCI and FCA compliant."

Oak CTO Phil Reynolds added: "NTA uses a channel model based on the number of extensions likely to be in use at any one time. It's an attractive proposition, and the addition of extension-side call recording from Oak creates a solution that ticks a lot of boxes."



CHANNEL Telecom's top partners were rewarded with a four day skiing trip to Meribel in the French Alps where they lived the high life with Michelin style four course meals, luxury chalets, a private hot tub and a sauna. Head of Data Services Stuart Burdett enthused: "Games, free flowing champagne and skiing awards kept us all more than entertained!" MD Clifford Norton added: "This, our fourth ski trip, is the Channel Telecom way of thanking partner businesses for their continued support and outstanding service."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

Venus Business Communications has lifted the veil on its new partner portal during a launch party at London's Phoenix Club.

"While resellers value the support their account manager provides, sometimes they may want to access information immediately when they are out in the field," said Brian Iddon, Venus Business Communications Director.

"The portal provides resellers with the key information they need, quickly and easily to their mobile devices."

The project has been a year in development and was led by Estelle Motley, Head of Channel Sales.

Distributor Westcoast's presence in the enterprise space is strengthened following an agreement with Juniper Networks that enables it to offer the full range of Juniper's networking portfolio including data centre, firewall and mobility solutions.

Westcoast's MD Alex Tatham said: "Having Juniper on board brings an opportunity for growth and fits with our strategy around hybrid IT solutions as well as bolstering our security offering."

Westcoast has invested in its enterprise capability over the last year, creating a new field-based enterprise sales team that works with partners on joint business planning, sales enablement, co-marketing and other services.

Adept has added £5m annual revenue with the acquisition of OurIT Group, bringing 500 IT clients in London and the south east and around 50 staff based at offices in Bevis Marks, London, Chingford and St Neots.

Adept CEO Ian Fishwick commented: "We can now offer IT as a service from two data centres in Milton Keynes and Maidstone. Our enhanced expertise in Microsoft, Apple and VM Ware positions us well for the future."

Firms form a happy union

Sector brings better service



Martin Lauer (left) with Ken Sturdy

TWO companies with complementary expertise in IT and comms have joined forces under one roof, but retain their separate brand identities.

Collaboration partners IT@Spectrum and The One Point have moved into a new £2.75m headquarters at the Bridgehead business park in East Yorkshire, where their teams work together to offer a package of IT managed services to a combined client base of over 1,200 organisations.

IT@Spectrum has more than 30 years experience providing solutions to enable businesses to print more efficiently, manage their data and information electronically and automate processes. Its client base includes blue chip businesses such as Smith & Nephew, Associated British Ports and Cranwsick.

Business telecoms provider The One Point offers IT, business telecoms, software and digital services, and was named the 02 Direct Partner of the Year at the 02 Partner Awards 2016 and is recognised in the top 5% of Microsoft Partners in the UK.

Ken Sturdy, MD of the Office Technology Business at IT@-Spectrum, commented: "We remain two brands, but customers see our people and functions working seamlessly side by side."

"So many questions are answered when customers visit. They see how our two businesses work together, they see the

teams collaborating, they see the latest technology in action, and they see how it delivers business transformation."

Martin Lauer, MD of The One Point, added: "The new offices have opened up so many new opportunities."

"Over the past two years we have worked collaboratively together to ensure this was the right thing to do."

"Now we've gone much further by coming together under one roof and integrating the teams, because that's what makes sense for our customers. If it didn't work for the customer, by delivering a better service and greater value, we wouldn't do it."

"We're literally throwing open our doors to clients and prospective customers."

THE service experienced by comms sector customers is improving, but the industry still ranks as the lowest in the UK Customer Satisfaction Index published by The Institute of Customer Service.

The report gives the UK's telecoms industry an overall customer satisfaction rating of 73.6 out of 100, one point higher than January 2016. But telecoms has the highest proportion of customers experiencing a problem, 20%, compared to the UK average of 13%.

The most common problems are quality or reliability of goods and services, reported by 46% of customers.

Customers also said they had to expend more effort in dealing with organisations than they did a year ago. Along with national public services, telecoms has the highest customer effort of all sectors.

Jo Causon, CEO of The Institute of Customer Service, said: "Generally, it's been a great year for customer service in the telecoms sector, with consumers telling us that businesses are improving overall experiences by getting things right first time and dealing with complaints faster and more efficiently."



Jo Causon

"However, these factors do not necessarily translate into customer loyalty and recommendation. Just being 'good' is no longer good enough, and organisations should think about how they can deliver outstanding service at all times."

"Added to that, better consistency is needed across different channels. Engagement through digital methods such as email, text, apps and webchat functions have all increased in the last year, and these are the channels through which it's most difficult for customer service staff to show empathy."

"Organisations need to make sure that their staff are highly engaged and highly skilled, as every customer interaction, regardless of the channel, counts towards business performance."

Harrison set to go global

HOSTED UC provider thevoicefactory (tvf) is advancing its global expansion ambitions with the launch of a second data centre in the USA.

The move precedes plans to secure a presence in the Asia Pac region next year and coincides with the company's seventh anniversary.

tvf now covers 21 European countries and has a particular focus on vertical sectors including hospitality where it intends to have hundreds of hotels live by the end of 2017.



Paul Harrison

Since it began its commercial life in 2010 tvf has doubled revenues year-on-year and this

month moves to larger offices in Cardiff. The company also plans to launch a new website that reflects its progress.

MD Paul Harrison said: "We are seeing demand for robust global unified communications that allow corporate telephony to move securely to the cloud, remain 'fit for future' with predictability of costs and services for many years to come."

"Working with select partners we aim to bring continued innovation and revenue generating solutions to the market."

Nimans revs new 'engine'



Ian Brindle

NIMANS has lifted the veil on a new reseller support service that reflects the distributor's intention to become the 'logistics engine of the industry' for IP end points.

The company's IP delivery and support solution includes Compendium, an auto-provisioning and estate management service that has been designed to unlock more business in the UC end point market, including Skype for Business opportunities where voice deployment is forecast to rise by 250% in 12 months, says Nimans.

In practice, resellers are able to access their own virtual warehouse and order hosted handsets, including Skype for Business, in a way that saves time and money, claimed Nimans. Resellers can also move

end points from one hosted provider to another overnight.

The service includes estate management, remote firmware upgrades, device tracking, buy-back and refresh programmes and WEEE disposal.

Ian Brindle, Nimans' Head of Conferencing and Telephony Sales, stated: "At the heart of the new initiative is a portal that features a user interface for the creation, modification and monitoring of IP devices.

"Device status and logging are combined with topology and configuration management solutions from a central resource.

"It's not just the delivery of that device but the whole journey from start to finish."

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BT implements iCall

USERS of BT's Wholesale Hosted Centrex (WHC) platform now have access to detailed call stats following the deployment of Tollring's new cloud-based iCall Suite.

The Suite enables BT resellers and their customers to monitor call metrics by accessing real-time reports, dashboards and visual wallboards via live tiles that are optimised for mobile devices.

Steve Best, MD for BT Wholesale Products, commented: "Businesses can access utili-

sation statistics to see who is calling them, when and how.

"This information is invaluable in terms of providing peak traffic flows, destinations and call behaviour.

"For resellers, this will help them differentiate their proposition, increase competitiveness and drive new revenues."

Tony Martino, MD of Tollring, added: "The functionality within iCall Suite will enable BT resellers to differentiate their services by delivering in-depth business analytics." See p54

Circuit on track with upgrades

UNIFY has added a new conference room solution to its Circuit platform, Circuit Meeting Room, which gives mobile and distributed workforces a combination of video conferencing and social collaboration.

Luiz Domingos, Head of Product House, commented: "We're combining collaboration software with video and audio conferencing to bring together mobile workers and capture the knowledge and results of meetings in real-time."

Unify has also introduced a new desktop option and increased features and functionality for mobile users.

"Circuit Meeting Room is designed to help businesses turn any conference or 'huddle' room into an audio and video collaboration space that works for them," added Domingos.

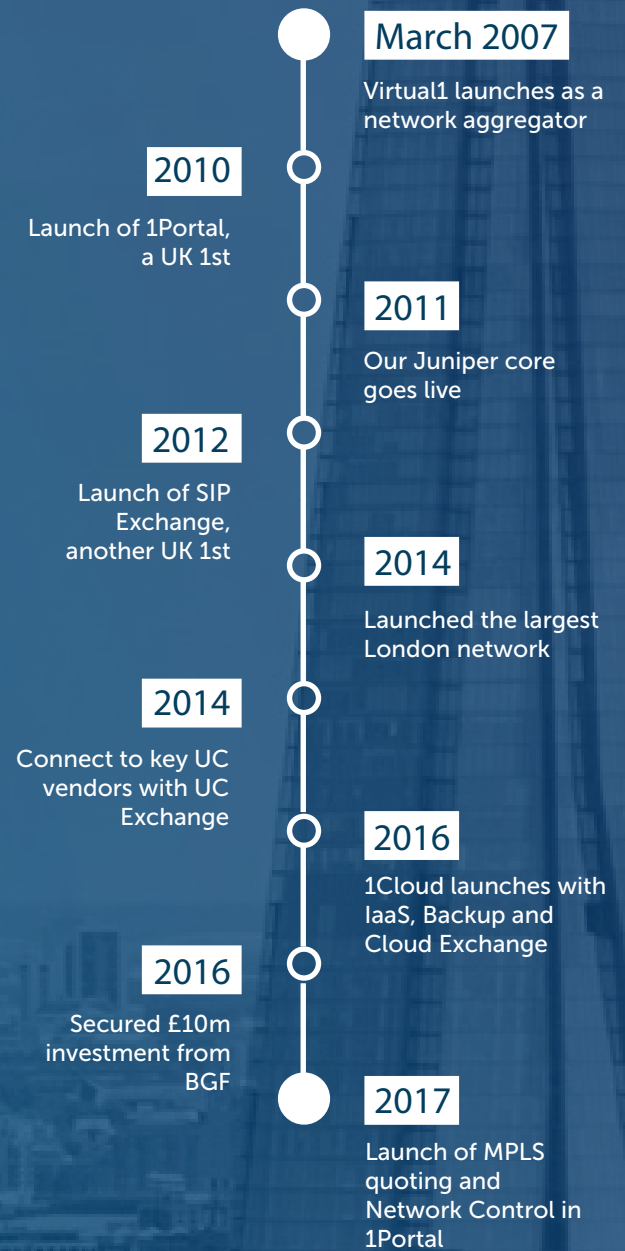
Unify is set to release more Circuit updates focused on improving mobile functionality, including support for Apple CallKit and SiriKit on iOS 10 devices, giving Circuit calls the same priority as cellular calls and enabling users to operate many Circuit functions hands-free while on-the-go.

Circuit will also offer 3D touch support on iOS 10 devices, simplifying navigation in the Circuit app. Push notifications will alert mobile users to new activity within the Circuit application, even if the app is not currently open.



Luiz Domingos

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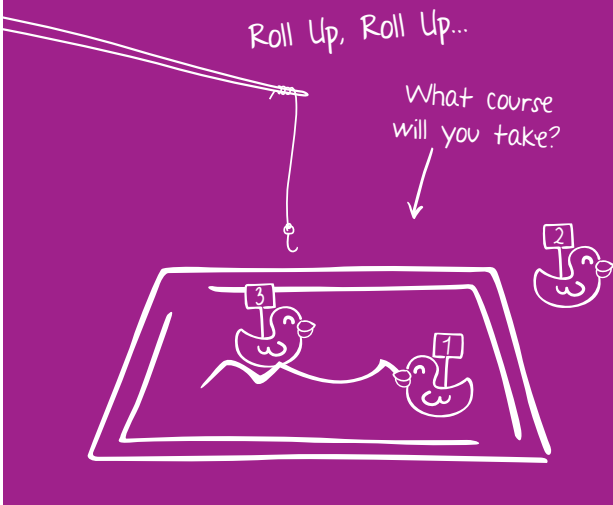
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The Telecoms training company for the Channel.

NEWS ROUNDUP

Responding to demand from partners Voiceflex has introduced FCA compliant SIP call recording and storage.

“Due to the large number of channels we support across multiple data centres, the conventional recording equipment wasn’t man enough for the job,” commented Paul Taylor, Sales Director.

Taylor also noted that call recording has become a de facto must-have within many sectors. “Employees and customers need protection,” he added. “The only way to protect verbal communication is via call recording.”

Phil Offord has joined KCOM as Enterprise Sales Director, bringing over 15 years of international business experience to the role. He reports to Executive Vice Principal Stephen Long and is responsible for the direction, development and management of the sales organisation.

Long commented: “Phil’s vision for the evolution of an enterprise sales function that listens more than it talks is a perfect fit for us.”

Offord added: “Companies are looking for partners that are large enough to make a difference but also agile. KCOM fits that need.”

He joins KCOM from CORETX (previously Selection Services and C4L) where he served as Group Sales and Marketing Director for over two years.

Openreach has appointed Sir Brendan Barber and Edward Astle as independent members of a newly formed Board to oversee strategy, investment and service delivery.

Barber was formerly General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress and current chair of Acas, while Astle is a former Board member of National Grid.

Openreach said a fourth independent non-executive is due to be announced with a focus on customer service.

Vuzion rocks up in Ireland

COBWEB Solutions company Vuzion, which launched a year ago as a Microsoft Indirect Cloud Solution Provider targeting resellers, service providers and ISVs, has expanded into Ireland and enlisted Kieran McDonnell as Country Manager based in Dublin.



Kieran McDonnell

McDonnell joins from Microsoft with a remit to drive cloud adoption in the country based on Microsoft Azure, Office 365 and Dynamics 365.

Vuzion has pledged to help resellers build their own customer-ready Azure solutions, including bespoke offerings.

Aisling Curtis, who is the Director of SMSP at Microsoft, said: “We are encouraging part-

ners to use the Cloud Solution Provider model to supplement their own resources with those available from indirect providers such as Vuzion.

“Using services provided by Vuzion, Irish partners can build their own solutions and services without having to make a substantial investment to build infrastructure to support their transition to the cloud.”

COMMS provider FluidOne has been ranked 17th in the Sunday Times 100 Best Small Companies to Work For listing. CEO Piers Daniell said: “This is a fantastic achievement that eclipses any previous ranking, and highlights all the good and positive actions the business is taking to make this a great place to work. This award shows that we have engaged and happy employees, and it is only through our people that we will continue to grow and achieve our business objectives.”



PinacL supplies IoT to smart Newport

PINACL is set to ‘smarten’ up Newport city with a number of proof of concept smart solutions for the council following the implementation of a city wide IoT platform.

The open access IoT network will also enable IoT vendors to trial new products in a ‘living lab’ city environment.

PinacL is hoping to join forces with interested parties (manufacturers and R&D institutions) to collaborate on developing new IoT solutions within urban environments.

PinacL is currently deploying a LoRaWAN (low power wide area network) solution across Newport, providing connectivity to thousands of remote smart sensors that can be battery powered with a lifetime of up to 10 years. Stream Technologies will monitor and manage the network and connected devices.

The IoT network will sit alongside the existing dark fibre network in Newport, connecting back to NGD’s data centre and the public Wi-Fi infrastructure installed within the city centre.



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Fidelity sparks Gold Rush by selling energy



John Haw

IF REASON guides business decisions then selling power is a logical no-brainer, claims Fidelity Energy MD John Haw who urged resellers not to deny themselves the key to sparking up a new engine of growth.

In a bid to capture the channel's imagination Fidelity Energy is gearing up to stage two power-packed reseller roadshows (March 28th in London and March 30th in Manchester). Their aim is to shift a critical mass of power into the hands of resellers, thereby enabling them to spot sales opportunities at a 100 paces and step confidently into what Haw describes as 'the margin rich energy market'.

"In education, strategy, planning and support, our roadshows show the easy way to make selling energy pay," stated Haw.

He also noted that the channel is adept at morphing into new areas, and that Fidelity Energy's roadshows have been designed to fast track delegates into becoming resellers of energy in just three hours.

"The 'Gold Rush Discovery' roadshows will provide a full overview of the energy marketplace and showcase the tools that enable partners to grasp this opportunity at speed," commented Haw.

He says the door to the energy market is wide open but success hinges on the support structures put in place by

Fidelity which has invested significantly in developing a portal that is capable of procuring and managing a customer's energy services in just a few clicks.

"Delegates will learn how to sell the proposition, the angles that give partners a way in, details of the processes and how to ensure a great customer experience," added Haw.

The company has also invested heavily in marketing tools along with straightforward go-to-market strategies that Haw claims will ensure partners gain an edge on entering this new market sustained by Fidelity Energy's support.

"For marketing we offer partners email templates, brochures and websites," explained Haw. "The roadshows will also outline what can be achieved when a comprehensive strategic plan is put in place."

He added that the roadshows will provide insights and deep context ranging from matters concerning the customer and winning deals to the main suppliers themselves, one of which will provide an overview of the energy industry.

Also being revealed is Fidelity Energy's new 'docu-sign' process that caters for all suppliers, which Haw claims is a 'first for the industry'.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

Tech Data has wrapped up its \$2.6bn acquisition of the Technology Solutions business from Avnet, creating a global end-to-end IT distie.

Tech Data CEO Bob Dutkowsky commented: "Our combined company is positioned at the epicentre of the IT ecosystem with the scope to serve markets throughout the world, giving customers access to an end-to-end portfolio of IT solutions."

The transaction is expected to be accretive to Tech Data's non-GAAP earnings per share in the first full year. The firm also expects to achieve annual cost savings of approximately \$100m within 24 months.

Leeds-based Diva Telecom is targeting businesses of all sizes with the launch of Diva Cloud, a hosted telephony solution based on Ericsson-LG technology.

Diva Telecom MD Erica Lewis said: "Hosted telephony isn't a new concept but to date it has been restrictive. We'd rather wait until technological innovations reach full vitality. With the backing of Ericsson-LG's technology Diva Cloud is now ready to be put through its paces."

The news follows Diva's recent launch of Gigabit City Leeds, an ultrafast business broadband service.

Chess picked up two gongs at the Sunday Times 100 Best Companies to Work For awards, securing second place in the mid-size category while Chief Executive David Pollock was identified as the UK's Best Business Leader.

"The Best Leader accolade is an award for all Chess leaders," said Pollock. "And being voted second is an amazing achievement after being listed for eight years in the top 100."

"Our growth creates opportunities for everyone to progress their career, to develop knowledge and skill, to gain reward and recognition and to maximise their potential."

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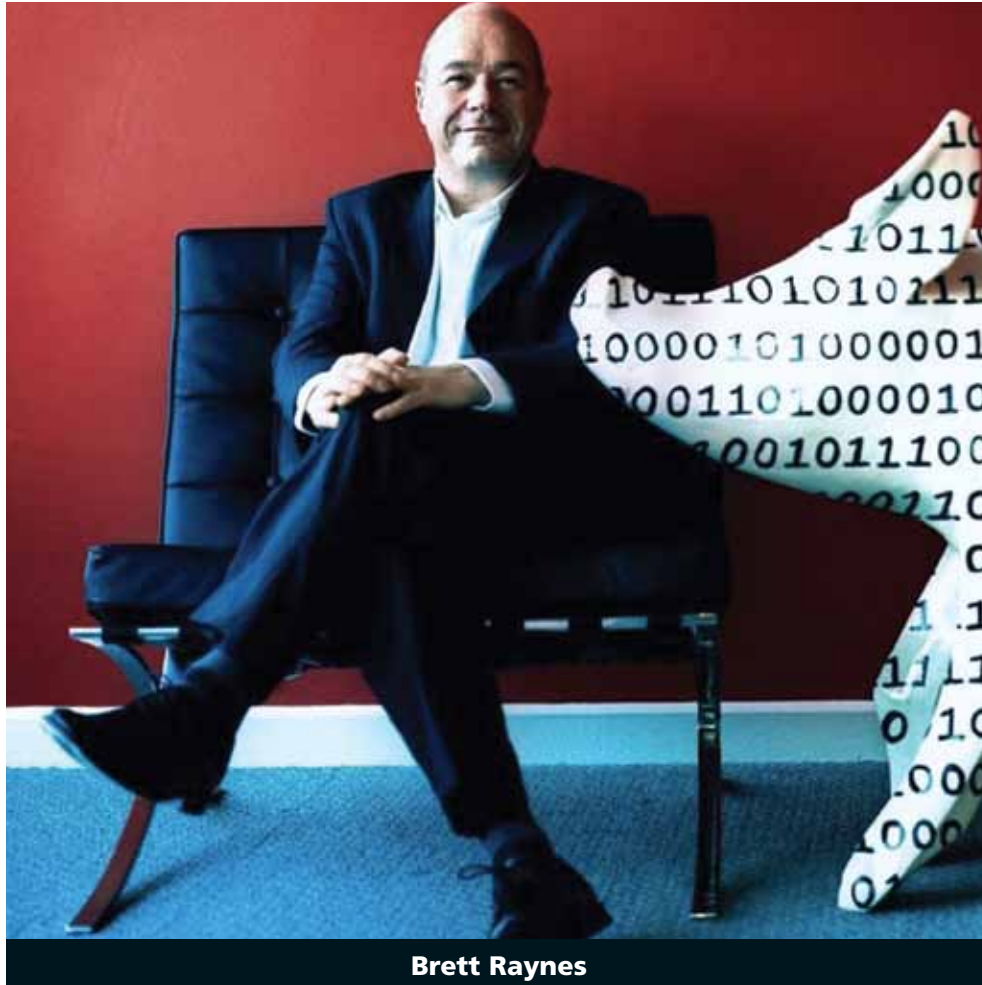
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Man with no limits thrive

In refusing to recognise personal limits, Cloud Direct CEO Brett Raynes's direction of travel is always going to be towards the top.

Raynes, a master of self-discipline, proves beyond doubt that human beings are born with extraordinary potential. So much so that if we were to apply the theory of Darwinian natural selection to forecasting the outcome of his strategic and personal regime, it is very likely that Cloud Direct will arrive somewhere at the top of the food chain. And the role of tinned mackerel in this scenario would not be insignificant. With a wry smile, Raynes admits that eating the fish for lunch every day is his greatest career achievement. But joking aside, this unwavering health regime is a piscatorial reflection of his strong mental attitude, determination and resilience, all key requirements to succeed in business.

"I like to test my self discipline and stamina," he stated. "I keep myself fit on a daily basis with cycling and running. In recent years I've wind surfed the coast of Brazil in a 500km 'down-winder', completed an Iron Man, cycled from John o' Groats to Land's End, and



Brett Raynes

possibly reached my edge finishing the Marathon des Sables, which is 156 miles across the Sahara Desert in extreme temperatures and contours. Discovery Channel calls it 'the toughest foot race on earth', and completing this challenge underpins my personal and business ethos that 'more is in you'. I believe that everyone can do more and be greater than they think possible. For me, the measure of that is the transformation that can happen for our customers and in the careers of our staff."

Raynes's brand of leadership is not embodied in one person, it is expressed through his company's staff and departments as an all-pervasive and thriving culture. "'More is in you'

sums up the ethos that permeates the business, from a personal development point of view and in how we can help our customers build better businesses," explained Raynes. "We have lots of company perks, sporty, foodie and social occasions, but we never take our eye off personal development. In everything we do I like to think we follow our five principles of mutuality, quality, efficiency, responsibility and freedom."

Cloud journey

Turning to matters of strategy, Raynes's watchwords 'cloud first' are also loaded with significance. "The move to the cloud is a journey, so it's important that we remain agile over time," he said. "For our customers, we want them to know that they're in

safe hands. Our original focus was on back-up, disaster recovery and general cloud services surrounding all areas of communications and infrastructure. But with our recent acquisitions our skills and capacity have sprinted ahead. We can now offer customers more depth and breadth of services alongside strong technical capabilities as well as on-premises support which we didn't offer before. We're now catering for more hybrid needs."

The lesson emerging from Raynes's passionate and deep-seated conviction in his motto 'more is in you' is that anything is truly possible if you put your mind to it. The watchwords also display a deep instinct for survival based on achieving long-term goals. "We want to hit the

£100 million mark in five years time, both through organic growth and our buy and build acquisition strategy," said Raynes. "We exited 2016 at £9 million and will hit £20 million during 2017. Our plan is to continue that pattern exponentially. We already have four more acquisitions in the pipeline."

Last month Cloud Direct bagged its fifth IT business in 20 months, snapping up Connect Support Services. The deal follows Cloud Direct's acquisition of AlwaysOn and brings 300 more customers to its base along with additional Microsoft skills in Azure, Office 365 and hosted desktop. Previous acquisitions include Redblade in July 2016, ihotdesk in December 2015 and Datel Business Systems in June 2015.

Cloud Direct now has a headcount of circa 170 staff based in Bath, Bracknell, London and Cape Town, South Africa. This shows how far the company has travelled since it was founded by Raynes in 2003 to make cloud technology accessible to small and mid-size organisations so they could grow and compete against the big guns by being more agile and more productive.

"In 2014, after 11 years demonstrating year-on-year growth, we decided the time was right to seek outside investment to accelerate our growth through acquisitions," noted Raynes. "At that point we secured private equity investment from Saracens rugby club owner Nigel Wray, along with Rob Giles and Jamie Brooke, as well as the West of England LEP Going for Growth fund and Santander Bank. Our two

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acquisitions just after the New Year were helped by a further £5 million investment from Beechbrook Capital."

Prior to setting up Cloud Direct, Raynes spent ten years founding and running technology businesses in the UK, France and Germany, one of which he sold to a NASDAQ quoted business. He holds degrees in engineering and marketing, while a Cranfield University Business Growth programme still informs his approach to business. "I continue to challenge myself and grow personally by studying Chinese or music, for example," added Raynes. "Perspective, creativity, adaptability and application are all important in growing and driving a business."

Leadership matters

Business leaders are obliged to lead, but how they lead is a matter of choice. Raynes's method, outlined above, is augmented by his ability to stay in touch with his inner font of ambition and drive, and to not allow a transient moment of massive achievement blind him to the need for keeping going. "As the cloud industry continues to mature we're aware that we need to grow and stay ahead of that curve to avoid being part of the 'squeezed middle', such as you see happening with many small to medium sized businesses," he added.

"We have three practice areas that centre solutions around what the customer needs on their journey to the cloud – backup with business continuity and security; front office productivity solutions including Office 365, Skype, Dynamics and SharePoint; and infrastructure solutions

Everyone can do more and be greater than they think possible. 'More is in you' sums up the ethos that permeates our business

including hosted desktops and applications. In each area we will continue to increase our capabilities."

Cloud Direct is a Microsoft Gold Cloud Solutions Provider for the small to mid-size market in hosting and Skype for Business, and Raynes hinted at what he sees as 'huge possibilities' in getting close to Microsoft. "We're making big strides in driving the Azure platform and Office 365, especially Skype for Business," added Raynes. "Having a partner like Microsoft with Azure and Office 365 steers our business. The cloud opportunity is immense. Azure alone is growing at 140 per cent per year."

Also capturing the imagination is the emergence of analytics, on which Raynes speaks with a convincing passion. "The ease with which a customer can gain insight into their own business using tools such as PowerBI is amazing," said Raynes. "The potential of machine learning and AI is also mind boggling. Practical applications for our customers are a little way off, but we're starting to

experiment. For example, combining voice-to-text engines with sentiment analysis techniques to predict the results of customer support calls. I am only just realising how our own know-how and automation can be captured in tools that drive down costs, improve productivity and ensure quality as we grow. Channel players who rely on lead flow from vendors or make important margin off licensing will struggle. They have to build solutions with their own IP attached."

Just a minute with Brett Raynes...

What talent do you wish you had? To sing like Dean Martin or Morrissey

What do you fear the most? Ridicule and failure, although less and less as I age

Industry bugbear? Most resellers tend to claim the same things. I wish they'd focus on how they could help transform a customer's business

Role models? Elon Musk and Jamie Oliver for being brave and creative, even knowing some failure surely awaits

Your strengths and what could you work on? My strong points are creativity and tenacity, but I need to work on my listening skills and I can be overly defensive

What could you not do without in your job? Tinned mackerel

If you weren't in IT what would you be doing? Scientific research

Biggest risk taken? Leaving the corporate world to start a business in IT

Top tip: Create IP and focus more narrowly. The specialist always wins

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Livingstone reveals the

Any organisation depends on the loyalty of its people, but rarely does loyalty exert its influence more strongly than in the teamwork shown by Glasgow-based Eureka Solutions.

If there is one thing that unites the people of Eureka Solutions it is rallying together in support of Managing Director Gillian Livingstone. Hence her gratitude to a team that displays loyalty, faith and encouragement in spades. "The unstinting support I have received from everyone in the company has reinforced my belief in myself and given me the confidence I need to rise to this great responsibility," she stated. "I do not have an extensive track record of top management, so the belief of others in the organisation that I could handle it was a huge boost."

Eureka Solutions was founded in 1996 by Gillian's father Alistair, who was a maths teacher, and after his daughter was made redundant while working for an accountancy firm he brought her into the business in December 2009. "I worked the telephones, learned sales and worked hard to get up to speed on the technical side," she commented. "I've been in my current role since October 2015 and my accountancy background means I can add value to my team and bring a measure of fiscal sense which helps the business."

Eureka Solutions began its commercial life at a time when technology was changing from DoS to Windows, and Alistair saw an opportunity to break into the market with Sage 200 as



Gillian Livingstone

a valuable business solution. Eureka then associated itself with NetSuite, a move Gillian describes as a 'gamble'. "NetSuite is a multi-national firm now and has just been taken over by Oracle. Back then it wasn't well known, but it was clear that many clients were beginning to look for cloud-based solutions which Sage at that time did not offer," she said.

"NetSuite was looking for partners and the reputation we had earned as an established partner with Sage was what attracted the vendor to us. It wasn't

an easy process. Getting to know NetSuite inside out was a steep learning curve. But we were acutely aware that we had to know it thoroughly before we could sell with integrity. The collaboration brought us into contact with bigger, more complex organisations and taught us how to deal with them."

Growth phase

Eureka Solutions currently has 50 staff and room for many more in its new premises which has been in occupation since June last year, a move that will ensure the company has the space

to meet anticipated growth. Eureka has increased turnover this financial year and Gillian expects to continue double digit growth over the long term, aiming for £3 million this year. "Our support team is currently dealing with 1,900 live contracts, we have Sage 200 in 150 sites and NetSuite in 50," she stated. "I anticipate NetSuite sales to overtake Sage 200 and, as a consequence, the client demographic will change to include a far greater proportion of much larger and more international organisations. We also have high expectations for a new

Sage Product, Sage Live, and our own new cloud offering called Cloud Data Exchange."

Eureka Solutions plans to launch Cloud Data Exchange this year in what Gillian says is a 'significant departure' for the company in terms of its business model. "It has also been a major investment as it was developed in-house," she said. "The solution will work with any software system and beta-testing results are encouraging. We have even brought in an in-house tester to make sure that Cloud Data Exchange hits the ground running."

Eureka effect

Organisations that are expanding require products and systems that will grow and develop alongside their trajectory. This is where the cloud, with its infinite scalability, really offers fit for purpose solutions, believes Gillian. "We deal with companies that operate worldwide, have geographically disparate subsidiaries and are forward thinking and ambitious," she added. "Cloud systems provide them with flexibility, reliability, performance, security and containable costs. Because of the trust we have established with Sage 200, we can introduce NetSuite as a natural progression.

"We have invested heavily in Cloud Data Exchange but expect to recoup that money within three to four years. After that it will be a clean and strong revenue stream. We do not intend to be box shifters. Instead, we are developing a subscription service that will smooth out revenue flow. We already have several clients waiting for launch and have engaged a graphic designer to create distinctive branding and a unique website. The launch will be backed by the full expertise of the marketing department."

Eureka Solutions' growth strategy will in large part be led by Andrew Gray, Marketing Director. He has 25 years of experience in communications, business development and operations, and his team of nine staff is a strong indicator of the scale of Eureka's ambition. "Within the foreseeable future Andrew's team will be proportionate to the growth we expect to experience," said Gillian. "We intend

We intend to associate ourselves with growing companies, futuristic enterprises with vision and ambition

to associate ourselves with growing companies, futuristic enterprises with vision and ambition. To this end, we are dealing closely with key influencers such as software vendors and consultancies. We are also, not surprisingly given my background, targeting the accountancy sector."

Although Eureka's HQ is in Scotland 70 per cent of its business is done in England, a factor that will probably lead to a new office opening in the south, most likely London. The extension of the company's national presence shows that it has come a long way since it was founded by Alistair, who in his daughter's words was 'hugely respected as a dynamic and visionary Managing Director'.

"Accepting his offer of a role in the company was a risky move," she added. "It was a complete and dramatic career change and I had no assurance that it would work out as well as it has. We now have more of a team-based approach with myself, Aileen Primrose as Sales Director and David Lindores as Technical Director forming the new core. My father provides an objective

and crucial overview of the market and emerging trends. I have good organisational capabilities, put things in place and get things done.

"The main lesson I have learnt is that when you are working in a family business you cannot take the work home with you. The temptation is always there to talk about the company, but it has to be resisted. I also learned when I first started with Eureka Solutions not to call the then Managing Director 'dad'.

Just a minute with Gillian Livingstone...

What talent do you wish you had? To sing

What do you fear the most? Failure, both business and personal

Industry wish: To have superfast broadband in every corner of the country

Three ideal dinner guests: Sir Alex Ferguson, to find out how he got the best out of people; Steve Jobs, to understand how he became so innovative; and Michelle Obama, to talk about her experience in the White House and the inspirational speeches she delivered

Role model: My father. He had the vision to build Eureka Solutions into a £3 million turnover, 50 employee company

How would you like to be remembered? By my staff, for allowing them to come forward and see the ideas they've had come to fruition

What possession could you not live without? My gym shoes. The gym is where I let off steam therefore my gym shoes are always in the car ready for a workout

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Sherwood's quest to ma

In setting up Burnley-based MSP Seriuin in 2003, Managing Director Justin Sherwood and co-founder Richard Lee were attempting to form a new type of ICT provider.

Every reasonable person accepts the core values contained within Seriuin's opening manifesto – to make a difference to businesses by helping them overcome their technical challenges – but few manage to infuse their business strategy with such energy and clarity of vision. “We wanted to do things better by offering the right fit while maintaining a focus on developing innovative solutions,” said Sherwood. “We have had a passion for technology since the days of the ZX Spectrum and Amstrad. Some may call us geeks, but our passion has been the driving force behind us going into the ICT industry.”

Sherwood was bold in rethinking Seriuin's core purpose, and with good reason he quickly realised that the company needed to move from being a micro break-fix operation to a fully managed service provider. “To make the change we invested heavily in systems and resources such as Autotask to manage our service delivery and ISO9001 and ITIL frameworks to demonstrate our high service standards,” explained Sherwood. “We then diversified and began offering software solutions as part of the mix, becoming more than just an IT service provider. As we grew, we realised comms and IT were converging so introduced telecoms services into our portfolio and welcomed Alan

Scully to the team as Director of Communications.”

To manage growth, Sherwood also recognised the need to re-set the structure of the business while being particularly sensitive to the implications of a transition from an owner-manager style company to having a management team in place to focus on the MSP strategy. “Our focus has been on implementing a management structure and developing a systemised approach to delivering our products and services,” he added. “Our current priority is growth. However, because the market is fragmented and we have such a diverse offering from telecoms to IT systems, with bespoke software development in between, our challenge is knowing where to focus our efforts and investment.”

Seriuin has already invested in human resources, improved processes, efficiencies and systems. This has enabled the directors to work strategically ‘on’ the business instead of ‘in’ it. “We also invested in developing our marketing and sales strategy,” added Sherwood. “This set our growth plan into motion.”

Seriuin's markets are diverse, mainly small and medium businesses with some larger enterprise level clients such as Betfred and Castle Metals. “We are growing our presence in the education sector and currently developing some



Justin Sherwood

offerings resulting from the digital transformation that is sweeping across the industry,” added Sherwood. “We are also working on gaining more medium-sized customers as our proposition is suited to that level of the market.”

On target

Sherwood noted that plans are in place to grow Seriuin's resource base to service revenue growth. The company currently has a headcount of 20, and turnover for year end October 2016 was £1.6 million with projected turnover this year of £2.3 million. “Our overall target is to reach £3 million next year,” stated Sherwood.

and competitive global economy, transforming businesses to embrace this is critical. It could be the next revolution.”

Sherwood has also invested heavily in remote management and monitoring as part of Seriuin's evolution from a break-fix company to a fully managed service provider. “This has allowed us to proactively service our customers' systems,” he commented. “We are alerted immediately to a potential issue and often solve the matter before impacting productivity. We are looking to evolve this into monitoring critical services and not just for binary up or down time.”

Seriuin's focus on innovation has been carried over to the realm of Business Intelligence and analytics with the creation of Intellistream for O2, which so far has been rolled out to 25 of its UK stores. “The next step is to take the concept of gathering retail data and enhance this by adding other streams of Big Data,” noted Sherwood. “This will be evolved into a platform for analytics that will ultimately provide deeper and more meaningful insights into performance and efficiencies.”

The only route to future proofing his business is to fully engage with what Sherwood believes to be the biggest industry trend for years – digital transformation. “Second to that is convergence

“We have also set our sights on an acquisition. It will be challenging to integrate the new team and maximise on the synergies. However, our investment in people and process should help us.”

Sherwood believes that these investments will give Seriuin a strong hand of cards. The company can now impose its presence in emerging markets and orchestrate a strategy around new areas of interest. “Our vision is to embrace machine learning and AI to improve efficiencies and increase autonomy,” explained Sherwood. “This sounds like science fiction, but the reality is that in an increasingly connected

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and commoditisation of IT and telecoms," he added. "Systems as a Service is paving the way for this and managed services can reduce the risk to outsourcing. The market is becoming services oriented and the next big revolution is IoT, Big Data and AI, connecting devices even further and consuming the data via systems that help us understand and garner intelligent insights.

"The major players are leading the curve here with the smaller service providers delivering these big epics to their SME customers in a meaningful and consultative way. We'll see an increase in market consolidation and I still believe there is room for a leading brand. We're confident that our offering will steer us and help us stand out in the marketplace."

Centre stage

Sherwood's desire to be centre stage has not been over stated in the content of this article so far, even though he displayed a flair for stage-work as a child. But when he lost his footing and fell off set as a young extra in the 1987 film *Allan Quatermain and the Lost City of Gold*, leading lady Sharon Stone bought him two ice creams to make things better. What a treat! Sherwood has since gone from acting with the 80s sex bomb film star to fulfilling the role of a current day rising star with a secure foothold on the comms stage where staying power is assured and success in new markets a stone's throw away.

Racing back again, this time to 2001, and Sherwood moved to the UK from Zimbabwe after completing

a digital electronics diploma and Microsoft certification. He began working for a computer company in Clitheroe, and a few years later decided he could do it better and approached Richard Lee who was working part-time while at university to see if he wanted to start-up a company.

"The rest is history," stated Sherwood. "My biggest personal achievement in my career has been the move from a technical role to a managerial leadership role within the business. To help me make the transition I completed a part-time MBA while managing Serium. It was a challenge and a huge achievement and couldn't have been done without the support of the team, family and friends. I'm pleased to say it's paid dividends as it helped develop my critical thinking and overall business strategy."

But nobody can legislate for hindsight, and looking back in the rear view mirror Sherwood sees that two elements of his early strategy might have been executed differently to accelerate growth. "I could have approached things with an objective viewpoint, applied some critical thinking and realised that there may well be better ways of doing something away from my own subjective opinions," he commented. "And looking for financial support at the start-up stage may have provided the resources we needed to adopt a faster growth strategy."

The difference now is that Sherwood is moving Serium along far more swiftly while riding the wave of convergence that is shifting

the market towards SIs and managed service providers as demand for integrated systems and services increases. "I relish getting businesses to think differently about ICT and to see it as a transformative value activity with a return," said Sherwood. "We all get excited when we see the value that technology can bring to our customers."

Just a minute with Justin Sherwood...

What talent do you wish you had? Software engineering

What do you fear the most? Losing what we've built and worked for tirelessly

Role models: Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and Warren Buffett for their business acumen, persistence, creativity and forward thinking

Your strengths and what could you work on? My strengths are my inquisitive nature. My main weaknesses are impatience and arithmetic

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? Architecture because it combines creativity with engineering, logic and structure

How would you like to be remembered? For driving positive change and innovation in business and technology

One example of something you have overcome: My fear and misperception that I wouldn't be able to achieve an academic degree

The biggest risk you have taken? Starting up Serium. I wanted to create innovative solutions for businesses and give them a platform for growth

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ShoreTel's UK cloud bid a

In launching Connect Cloud to the UK market ShoreTel has also shown us that it is already moving ahead of the cloud revolution and entering the post-digital 'age of experience', according to CEO Don Joos and EMEA Managing Director Adrian Hipkiss.

The leading role of UK partners in advancing ShoreTel's global expansion campaign was underscored last month when the vendor rolled out ShoreTel Connect Cloud and ShoreTel Connect Contact Centre for Cloud during two launch roadshows held in Manchester and London. The move signifies a big step forward in ShoreTel's transition from a maker of products to a globally focused software and services business, and follows the introduction of cloud-based solutions as a partner managed service to the UK in 2015.

ShoreTel Connect Cloud has been available to US customers for 16 months and according to Joos the time is right to take it into more theatres. "The launch is another step in the expansion of our hosted capabilities," stated Joos. "We have North America and the Australian market covered, but the launch of Connect Cloud in the UK is another starting point. From here we will expand these services into other countries."

Cloud focused resellers are well served by ShoreTel's data centre partner Rackspace and its private cloud, along with the end-to-end control exerted by ShoreTel which includes the connectivity infrastructure, thereby meeting customer demand for a framework of trust in technology and supplier partners. "Rackspace already



Don Joos

The transformation of our business is all about moving to the recurring revenue model and I expect that to continue accelerating. There is no looking back.

has a global footprint and as it builds out more capability in SDWAN we get to leverage those investments," added Joos. "We also control the relationship with the carriers that come into the data centres. The QoS has absolutely improved and there are big technological advancements on the way. Furthermore, security issues are less prohibitive, that's why the mid-market is adopting up to the mass."

Joos also introduced to the UK an expanded channel approach that has been tried and tested in the US, a retail commission model based on the same service as the reseller model. According to Hipkiss, a section of ShoreTel's partners displayed a sharp appetite to sell the vendor's contract and its price

to the client, so ShoreTel gave them what they wanted. "Developing this model is a strong indication of our commitment to the channel," he added.

Partner first strategy

The Connect Cloud launch was both pragmatic in terms of its timing and market focus and popular among partners with an eye to augment their portfolio and make the most of this new tool in the vendor's kit bag. It will help them to fulfil an upsurge in demand from customers (especially in the mid-market) who want to revise and modernise their communications strategy, a task made easier by the joined up nature of ShoreTel's primary comms solution Connect. "Connect has a single code base," explained

Hipkiss. "It enables us to offer three alternative deployment methodologies – on-site, hybrid and cloud. Partners in the UK have strongly adopted the Connect on-site solution, they have invested in skills, training and marketing. Their investment is immediately transferable because of the single code base and the single set of features and functionality."

The appetite for Connect Cloud among ShoreTel partners was swiftly exposed by the roadshows. "Our partner community is showing great interest in Cloud Connect and already we have strong engagement following high attendances at the launch events," commented Hipkiss. "Some partners wanted to sign up pre-launch and on the

spot, one partner even sold a Connect Cloud solution before the official UK roll out. This is a reflection of the reality in the market and the confidence partners have in our ability to deliver. We also have strong relationships with US-based cloud services distributors and they see an opportunity in the UK. It will be natural for us to extend those relationships."

A combination of ShoreTel's Cloud Connect launch and the firm's long-time presence in the mid-market has made the forecast a positive one for resellers and SIs. "The sweet spot for us is companies with less than 5,000 employees," stated Joos. "This is not a technical limitation, but a focus area from a go-to-market perspective. That's where the majority of companies sit, and that's where ShoreTel operates. As the mid-market advances into hosted, it moves towards ShoreTel."

The vendor's single code base displays coherency not just in technology but also strategy and leadership, a combination that breathes life into Joos's brand of business transformation which has advanced ShoreTel's revenues to a much wider recurring profile, notably in hosted. "In our September Q2 we passed an important inflection point where hosted revenue became greater than product revenue on a quarterly basis," he stated. "Hosted was 42 per cent of total revenue, but adding-in the support

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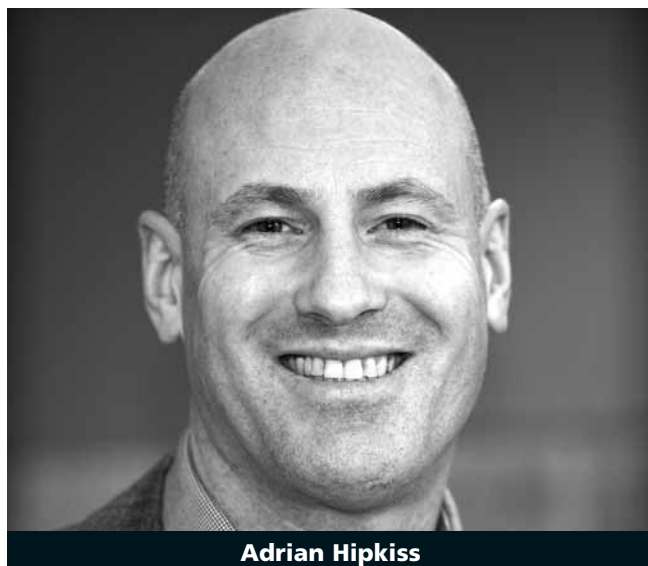
agreements, which are also recurring, takes us to 61 per cent. The transformation of our business is all about moving to the recurring revenue model and I expect that to continue accelerating. There is no looking back."

ShoreTel's dramatic forward advance needs a closer look to gain an understanding of what is driving growth and its trajectory towards becoming a cloud-based software business. "In terms of growth, I expect to see a step function every six months, whether that's more partners coming on board, new logos from a hosted perspective, or some of our existing installed base converting to hosted," explained Joos. "I see growth in two areas. One is the adoption that's occurring from a UK perspective, and there is an opportunity to attract more partners now that we have both delivery models, including those 'born in the cloud'. Our SaaS solution has open APIs, so I see SIs coming to us who, from a hosted standpoint, want to integrate services into a solution for their customers. We have already witnessed this in the American and Australian markets."

The rise of cloud services and their likely impact on the comms landscape is no longer debated. Talk of the cloud has passed from the realm of 'what if and when' to that of everyday discourse among not just the industry but also end user decision makers. The world is going that way, and so is ShoreTel. "The change in buying behaviour has been building and rapid acceleration is happening now," noted Joos. "For decision makers, the time frame required for

a return on their investment has changed. It used to be three to five years, now it's 18 to 24 months. They know technology is changing beyond recognition, and they want the continual flexibility of a hosted offering to ensure they keep pace with change. That's a big shift."

As the cloud revolution marches on, a process of adjustment is required by business leaders to rethink and realign their strategy. "Many organisations are evaluating their operations and identifying functions that can be outsourced," added Joos. "Security and QoS have dramatically improved, so companies are more receptive to outsourcing as a way to focus on core competencies. Their challenge is how to embed UC, flexible working and team working etc to improve the customer experience while becoming operationally efficient. Another driver is the high level of M&A activity. As companies merge the cost savings and synergies they look for include cost-effectively unifying disparate systems."



Adrian Hipkiss

Our partner community is showing great interest in Cloud Connect. Already we have strong engagement.

As the mid-market advances into hosted, it moves towards ShoreTel

Migration to the cloud is a widely accepted feature of the digital revolution, hastening the decline of on-premise hardware in fixed places of work. And as the edifice of conventional communications collapses all around us, traditional vendors unable to leave their past behind them are becoming disempowered. Not ShoreTel. In its journey from being a product company towards a software and services one, ShoreTel is on the back stage.

Transformation

"When I stepped into the CEO role in August 2013 we broke this transformation down into three phases – foundation, migration and acceleration," explained

Joos. "The first two are done, and our acceleration phase is driven by five factors – ongoing product releases, the geographic expansion of our hosted solution, scaling the channel, mid-market adoption and our installed base migration. We have four million seats and endpoints in our installed base to be converted, and because Connect is one product the migration is easy for us."

ShoreTel's transformation is another proof point that cloud technology is in the ascendancy and upending the comms market. But it doesn't stop there. The ensuing drift into the realm of 'experience' underlines that this technology is an enabler, not the headline act. Digitalisation has passed the peak, we are now heading for post-digital, an age where experience transcends the medium, which is reflected in how ShoreTel's stance is moving beyond communications towards innovation in interactions.

"We talk less about communications and more about interactions," explained Joos. "The term 'communications' has connotations of people-to-people, but people-to-machine and machine-to-machine is emerging. It's not about making communications simple, it's about how we, in our world, make these interactions simple. One example we have prototyped is a 'smart conference room'. I walk into the room, my primary device knows who I am, it knows the time of the meeting, autodials, and using beacon technology activates the projector because it knows I'm presenting. That's machine-to-machine. When I

talk about innovation of the experience, we're focused on the most common use cases. Hosted is half of our direction, the other half is how we improve the overall customer experience because they are buying a service, not a product. The experience is the sexy part, and we innovate to make it simple."

The digital revolution is riding roughshod over traditional technologies and business models and requires organisations to embed a smarter way of working which is echoed in the steps taken by ShoreTel to help partners deliver modern day solutions. "When making the transition from a product company to a services business it's not enough to simply introduce new releases into the marketplace," added Hipkiss. "ShoreTel's European organisation has been realigned to make us accountable for the end-to-end experience of our partners and customers. This extends to how partners are found by potential clients, so we have planned marketing forums to help them raise their profile, focusing on digital marketing and ways to nurture relationships with customers who want to benefit from UCaaS, voice, video, mobile, conferencing, messaging and contact centre communication services."

It would be folly for channel companies to turn their back on the digital transformation that is forcing organisations in nearly all industries and sectors to reassess their place in the evolving technology and business landscape. "Standing still isn't an option, and having the ability to continually rethink and reinvent is the new standard," added Joos. ■

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The smart wave arrives

The promised land of analytics and BI has emerged into market reality, according to Rita Sallam, Research Vice President at Gartner, who reveals encouraging market insights that provide context for channel players wanting to understand the demand drivers.

Following the highly optimistic predictions for BI and analytics software in recent years, the prospect comes into view that sky high forecasts may be true after all, with Gartner confirming that the value of the global market for BI and analytics will balloon to \$18.3 billion in 2017, an increase of 7.3 per cent on 2016. Even better, the market is forecast to grow to \$22.8 billion by the end of 2020. According to Gartner's assessment of the market, this is the age of 'modern' BI and analytics, with modernisation fuelling a rampant surge in demand that will outstrip the overall market, offsetting declines in traditional BI spending.

Sallam's references to BI and analytics are qualified by the prefix 'modern', signifying a break from previous technologies now deemed to be irrelevant. "The modern BI and analytics platform emerged in the last few years to meet new organisational requirements for accessibility, agility and deeper analytical insight, shifting the market from IT-led, system-of-record reporting to business-led, agile analytics including self-service," said Sallam.

As the analytics revolution starts to settle down, the market is expected to decelerate from 63.6 per cent growth in 2015 to a projected 19 per cent by 2020. Gartner believes this slowing effect is a reflection of data and analytics becoming mainstream. The market is growing in terms of seat expansion, but revenue will be dampened by pricing pressure, pointed out Sallam.

"Purchasing decisions continue to be influenced heavily by business executives and users who want more agility and the option for small personal and departmental deployments to prove success," she added. "Enterprise-friendly buying models have become more critical to successful deployments."

Gartner has identified the factors it believes are driving demand for modern BI and analytics. "While business users initially flocked to new modern tools because they could be used without IT assistance, the increased need for governance will serve as the catalyst for renewed IT engagement," noted Sallam. "Modern BI tools that support greater accessibility,



Rita Sallam

agility and analytical insight at the enterprise level will dominate new purchases."

Disruption

Vendors will also drive the next wave of market disruption, reckons Sallam. "The emergence of smart data discovery capabilities, machine learning and automation of the entire analytics workflow will drive a new flurry of buying, prompted by its potential value to reduce time to insights from advanced analytics and deliver them to a broader set of people across the enterprise," she added. "While this 'smart' wave is being driven by new innovative start-ups, traditional BI vendors that were slow to adjust to the current 'modern' wave are driving it in some cases."

Meanwhile, the need for complex datasets is driving investments in data preparation. Today, business users want to analyse

diverse, often large and more complex combinations of data sources and data models, faster than ever before. And the ability to rapidly prepare, clean, enrich and find trusted datasets in a more automated way becomes an important enabler of expanded use, according to Gartner.

"Extensibility and embeddability will also be key drivers of expanded use and value," emphasised Sallam. "Both internal users and customers will either use more automated tools or embed analytics in the applications they use in their context – or a combination of both. The ability to embed and extend analytics content will be a key enabler of more pervasive adoption and value from analytics."

Support for real-time events and streaming data will be another driver, as organisations increasingly leverage streaming data

generated by devices, sensors and people to make faster decisions. "Vendors need to invest in similar capabilities to offer buyers a single platform that combines real-time events and streaming data with other types of source data," commented Sallam.

Cloud deployments of BI and analytics platforms have the potential to reduce the cost of ownership and speed up the time to deployment. However, data gravity that still tilts to the majority of enterprise data residing on-premises continues to be a major inhibitor to adoption. But this reticence is abating and Gartner expects the majority of new licensing buying to be for cloud deployments by 2020.

"Marketplaces will create new opportunities for organisations to buy and sell analytic capabilities and speed time to insight," explained Sallam. "The availability of an active marketplace where buyers and sellers converge to exchange analytic applications, aggregated data sources, custom visualisations and algorithms is likely to generate increased interest in the BI and analytics space and fuel its future growth."

"Organisations will benefit from the new and innovative vendors continuing to emerge, as well as significant investment in innovation from large vendors and venture capital funded start-ups. They do, however, need to be careful to limit their technical debt that can occur when multiple stand alone solutions that demonstrate business value quickly turn into production deployments without adequate attention to design, implementation and support." ■

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Incentives play pivotal r



GAVIN SWEET
SIMETRIC

“ Our experience is that combining solid products, good user experience and delivery of promises gains the trust of channel partners and beats throw away incentives. If your service doesn't live up to expectations, customers brought in by incentives go elsewhere. So, we focus our time and energy creating unified telecoms services which solve business communication problems and less time on incentives. Yes, incentives play a part in the sales process – we offer free trials and introductory service periods which helps to win customers by de-risking and making commercials more attractive at the beginning of a contract - but they're not worth the effort if the rest of the business can't support the customer once they are on board. ”



DUNCAN WILKINSON
TMS

“ Sales incentives for channel partners have always been a key part of any channel strategy as far I'm concerned and especially those trips away from the office environment. Providing great products and service at competitive prices will be key, but differentiating with that trip to Vegas, skiing holiday in the Alps or luxury hotel in the Maldives can often tip the scales in your favour when it comes to winning business. It is often where long term business relationships are formed and can create a personal bond of friendship that helps navigate those moments of commercial conflict or challenge. ”



BARRY EDWARDS
SPLICECOM

“ From a UK manufacturer's perspective the clearest incentives are motivational ones that make employees not only feel valued but also empowered to bring change in the best interests of British based companies and like-minded companies overseas. For our employees, being able to influence and achieve the appropriate salary through their personal endeavours again empowers us all to have the drive and confidence to constantly develop and improve our product and service offerings as well as our own skills and performance. Having ownership (shares) in the company provides long term rewards for us all and is a very positive and popular incentive. ”



DEBORAH ROBERTSON
8X8

“ We're passionate about helping our channel partners grow and develop as we know our own success relies on them thriving. Our approach has always been to incentivise them by providing the best technology and support in the industry. We run a comprehensive partner programme for all our partners that includes the 8x8 Academy, our highly-valued two-day accreditation course. We recently added a joint marketing fund to the programme, to really help give our partners the edge, with access to funding, marketing collateral, support and resources. Rather than just giving them a financial handout, we work together to match marketing investment made by partners so that both parties reap the most benefit from it. ”

When company teams sit down for the Comms Dealer Sales and Marketing Awards finals luncheon at the Park Lane Hotel in London on May 4th, many will share a common attribute – the ability to run successful in house or partner incentive programmes.

Earning the prestige of being a finalist in the Awards will have been down to the sales made to either end-users or channel partners and in many cases, incentives will have played a pivotal role in that process.

So what are the fundamentals to running good incentives programmes and are they necessary?

To state the blindingly obvious, your own sales team or your partners' sales teams need to know the products you are taking to market well and will want to be rewarded for their efforts in doing so.

According to Dan Kelly, Sales & Marketing Director at Stratford upon Avon based Corporate Rewards, as far as channel incentives go, rewards are key to the relationship you have with your



SHAUN BODSWORTH
INFORM BILLING

“ Sales incentives are important to increase motivation and loyalty, improve performance and reward results. We tailor incentives to increase their impact and combine both monetary and non-monetary incentives, to avoid building a culture where money is the sole motivator. It is also important to consider and remove any potential barriers to sales success, preventing the incentives from having a de-motivational effect. Our incentives fully support the business' strategic objectives and reward company goals over those of individuals. Rather than solely paying commissions for sales, we spread it out and reward those expected to fulfil the resulting obligations too – in our case, those responsible for new customer implementations. Of course, these incentives can also be scaled as appropriate. ”



ALP KOSTEM
EXPONENTIAL-E

“ Sales incentives give every supplier a chance to reward good business, develop potential, highlight specific products and KPIs while at the same time winning hearts and minds. Last year's Winning Ways incentive was the first channel incentive from Exponential-e and it is certainly an activity we will be repeating. As well as all of the external benefits, it also gives our internal sales teams a boost and adds a little competitiveness as their accounts battle for prize winning places. Winning Ways offered a choice of prizes or vouchers, with most winners choosing vouchers. I would be wary of making any incentive mechanic too labour intensive for the participants. Simple, engaging and fun are the keywords for our channel incentives. ”

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Role in the sales process



PAUL BURN
NIMANS

“ Over the last few years I think some sales incentives have been scaled back a little. But they are always important. Good sales professionals are driven to earn money and take advantage of standard bonuses. But sales incentives are the extra on top, the cherry on the cake. I think the challenge these days is to be inventive and keep people’s attention. I’m always wary of those that are over a long period of time as they can run out of steam as people lose interest. Short and punchy timescales are easier to measure and see a definite sales impact. ”



CLIFFORD NORTON
CHANNEL TELECOM

“ Sales incentives play a key role in actively driving the productivity of our business. If you want your team to reach above and beyond expectation, smash targets and push harder to make your business successful, their efforts have to be rewarded in kind. Non-cash incentives have always been more beneficial for us. Events and entertainment evenings, not only provide a valuable reward but also an opportunity to strengthen relationships in a semi-social environment. The link between the value of reward and the input of work is the main consideration when setting out a sales incentive structure. If the level of work required is far greater than the perceived value, the incentive will not work. ”

partners and can tap in nicely to a channel partner’s aim to achieve success, along with the status that comes with it.

“Rewards on offer should be desirable for them to be fully effective. A night in a luxurious London hotel or a weekend away in mainland Europe, are more likely to get your teams excited.”

Kelly is also an advocate of Sales, Performance, Incentives, Fun days (SPIFs) which can be used to launch a product or rebrand. These can have benefits for both the supplier and the partner.

“The idea is for the supplier team to take over the partner’s sales floor for a day, as a way to keep the salesforce fully informed, motivated and energised to sell. The day can involve holding fun activities and competitions to reach set targets, as well as giving out product information and branded goodies.”

“SPIF days can have an immediate effect on results, but the added bonus is that they can have a positive impact on long-term results too.”



TIM HOLWAY
FIDELITY GROUP

“ Fidelity Group provides a generous commission plan to sustain long-term motivation, however for additional short-term growth on focal products, non-monetary sales incentives are usually most effective. However, whilst sales incentives can create buzz, businesses risk the rewards being seen as an entitlement rather than a motivator, and the sales person losing focus after they reach their target or the incentive ends. Another risk with short-term incentives is that participants could resort to a hard sell to meet their target, which can alienate customers and potentially damage the business reputation. Ultimately, we find that building loyal, trustworthy relationships with Fidelity Group customers, through delivering tailored solutions and excellent customer service, will increase sales through referral business. ”



ADAM CATHCART
NINE GROUP

“ A good incentive plan should bring a sales team together, working towards a common goal and creating a friendly atmosphere with healthy competition. Our incentives reward individual performance however we look to drive overachievement of the team’s target, which helps to create that unity. Incentive plans should also promote a desired behaviour, which is focused on improving future performance and quality of work. For example, incentivising building pipeline or the accuracy of admin tasks. We always want to make sure our stars are rewarded and happy however we are keen to set the parameters that will help turn the entire team into a productive sales unit, motivating average performers to push beyond their comfort zones. ”



JOHN PETT
CHESS

“ Incentives are essential, they set clearly defined targets and drive business. At Chess we offer various rewards and incentive schemes that add excitement and increase engagement. Partners have the chance to win exciting experiences, are provided with various training opportunities, attend relationship building events including regional roadshows, and new product launches. We also offer them weekly commission payments. Partners also benefit from other non-monetary schemes such as dedicated Account Managers and marketing, service and billing support, as well as an online portal to manage their customers, ensuring their business growth. These types of rewards make our partners feel valued. Setting measurable goals and understanding what motivates and attracts results should be the foundations of all incentive schemes. ”



STEVE GLAISTER
INVOSYS

“ Before a company launches an incentive, they need to understand that every loop hole has the potential to be exploited. You must be explicit, and have a full set of terms and conditions. (I am still waiting for a holiday in St Lucia from 1997!). Sales people are hungry yet customers are savvy in making sure the incentive works most effectively for them. For example, if you start an incentive on the 1st January one year, you will probably find that the following year customers will hold back in anticipation of another incentive starting on the next 1st January. If the incentive is pushing one particular product, then be aware that you will sell mostly that product for the term of the incentive. ”

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Adding value to M2M

Don't let a non-differentiating approach wreck your chances of capitalising on the high growth M2M market where the channel's ability to stand out from the crowd and add value will be pivotal to success, writes Bamboo Technology Group Managing Director Lorrin White.

Data is data – right? It's just binary signals sent over the air. How do you differentiate in a market when your core product is identical to the competition? Simple. You don't have to, because it's not identical. Not all data services are created equal, particularly in M2M connectivity, the latest telecoms opportunity where differentiation is key to long-term success.

Competition is heating up around the Internet of Things (IoT) with new entrants keen to secure their share of this emerging market. According to Juniper Research there will be 46 billion IoT devices within the next five years. That's a lot of M2M connections, and with it, a big opportunity to supply it. Now is the time for new M2M connectivity providers to take first-mover advantage in this emerging technology and stand out from the crowd. Here's how...

Pre-sales consultancy: M2M is more than just a pipe of data. It is the connectivity underpinning a product or service. And in a fast-moving

industry, this product or service may often be brand new to market. New use cases for M2M/IoT are being dreamed up all the time, from smart GPS-enabled padlocks to the latest smart home devices. It is therefore critical that the new service is built in partnership with the communications technology provider that will provide the connectivity. By leveraging their experience and expertise, IoT creators can avoid the costly mistake of launching something that is not fit-for-purpose or over engineered and not commercially viable.

Good network coverage: By definition, network coverage of any kind is a necessity for IoT. A device cannot be smart if it can't communicate with the outside world. Yet 'good' network coverage can be interpreted in many different ways. Does 'good' simply mean the connectivity provider uses the carrier that you ranked best for network coverage in one area for example? Or does it mean multi-network connectivity to ensure your customers' devices always have the best chance of being connected?



Lorrin White

Not all data services are created equal, especially in M2M connectivity

Does the contract cover global coverage or just the UK? Is 4G included, and if so, in which countries? Not all IoT devices need 4G but if the service in question is data hungry then this will be an important consideration for the potential IoT customer.

Network monitoring: Does your customer know how much data each of their devices are using in real time? Can they provision new SIMs from a control panel or stop data being sent to malfunctioning devices at the touch of a button? Extensive monitoring

and control features from platforms such as the Cisco Jasper IoT services platform are essential to protect the profitability and service levels of an IoT product or service.

Flexible pricing: Mobile handsets and call plans are largely used in the same way. Your customer may have heavy users and light users, but the core service requirements are the same. This is certainly not the case with IoT, where one-size-fits-all couldn't be further from the truth. One service offering simply isn't possible in such a diverse

and expanding ecosystem. A mobile security camera, for example, does not operate in the same way as a smart light switch. The amount of data it uses, its security requirements, power requirements etc are vastly different, so you cannot force the creators of these devices to use the same M2M packages or data bundles. Be flexible!

Values: Do your values as an M2M connectivity provider align with your customer? Are you a supplier or a partner in their eyes? How do you approach business? A relationship built on partnership and a shared mission is the only route to success in M2M. Whether they realise it or not, they are going into business with you.

While they can change their mobile phone provider without their customers knowing or even caring, the same cannot be said with M2M. This is especially true for specific M2M use cases where the service provider's SIM must be soldered directly to your device for security or resilience reasons, or in situations where the SIM might be in a device buried deep underground. The connectivity is an intrinsic part of the customer's IoT experience. Your service becomes their service, so ensure they know what they're letting themselves in for.

M2M is an exciting new era for the integration of telecommunications into IT services, but no two M2M services are created equal. If your customer ever tells you that data is data, put them right. People are just cells at the end of the day, but we're not all the same. ■

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PBX thrives in UC world

Market analysts mostly claim that the PBX is dying out, that business communications in the form of the enterprise PBX is continuously slipping. Not so. Market trends simply suggest that it may be time to reconsider the role of PBXs that function as true UC systems, and how it might be time to broaden out our definition of the term to reflect the PBX's extended capabilities, writes Paul Clarke, Regional Sales Manager UK&I, 3CX.

It's true that businesses are moving away from the traditional, proprietary PBX which has plagued offices around the world for much longer than was necessary. But a new wave of PBX technology is here. One that is IP-based and combines UC features that are becoming more desirable to IT and business decision makers. Just because the way we communicate is evolving, we needn't think that the PBX is any less needed or wanted in the modern workplace.

According to analysts, the PBX is going down and Unified Communications is on the rise. But what is Unified Communications and why is it considered to be in a completely different ball park to the PBX? For vendors like 3CX, our PBX is a UC system. They are one in the same. And moving forward, I think that we will see not only more consolidation amongst suppliers, but also amongst the different facets of what business communications is. The line between PBX and UC will become much more blurred. Perhaps we will be looking to coin a new term to describe this amalgamation.

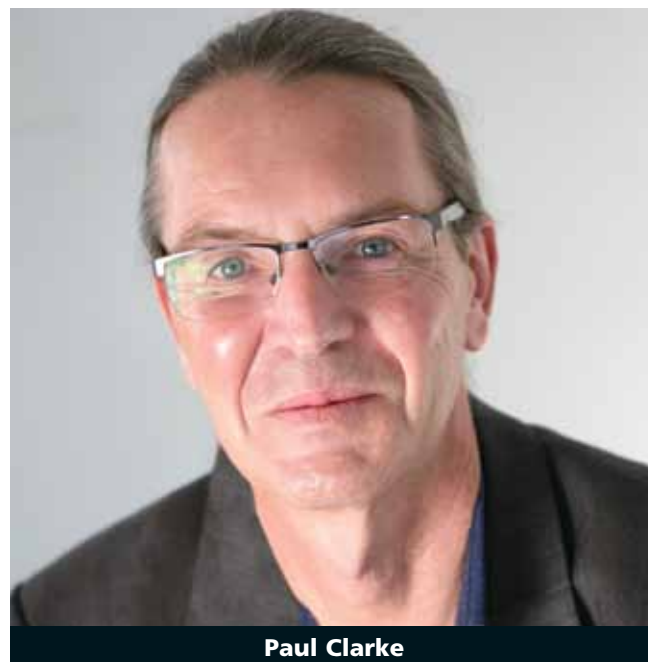
Video is not just a novelty
We're seeing that many businesses are upping their demands when it comes to what they expect in a

business communications solution. Particularly, features such as web conferencing are becoming an increasingly popular requirement (the global market is expected to reach \$3.9 billion by 2020). Since businesses are becoming more mobile, and they are now able to globalise their business activities, companies are now understanding and reaping the benefits of video conferencing.

In our own product alone we have seen that, over the past 12 months, usage of our video conferencing feature has increased by 500 per cent. This has been largely down to the fact that it has been completely integrated into the latest version of the phone system. Web/video conferencing is no longer an optional addition. It's there, ready to use for all employees and at no extra cost. Our PBX will always be our main focus, but it's these extra features that are making the new generation of software PBXs stand out. If this growth is anything to go by, then we can expect this to continue at huge rates.

The cloud is no longer on the horizon

Since the technologies surrounding the Internet, voice, video and more have evolved significantly in recent years, cloud communications are a more reliable and cost-



Paul Clarke

The line between PBX and UC will become far more blurred

effective solution than ever before. As these systems become increasingly simple to implement we're going to see cloud-based solutions become even more popular in the workplace. And where a cloud-based system used to be restricted in that the end user would be limited in the amount of control available to them, this is becoming a thing of the past.

Vendors are now offering solutions independent of a cloud supplier, leaving that decision up to the customer. Which means that they can easily set up their own PBX with a cloud

provider of their choice. This is why it's important that the PBX is offered up as a multi-platform solution. This will result in a much more cost-effective solution and, with vendors like 3CX, you can work as much as you want in the cloud. This is especially useful for companies with a significant number of remote workers that don't want to house large servers on-premise. In addition, being able to choose between deployment on either Windows or Linux means that the PBX can be run much more easily in the cloud or smaller appliances such as miniPCs.

All IP, all the time

We are also seeing a lot of movement towards an 'all IP initiative' in that many telecom providers are now offering an IP-based service on top of their ISDN network, with many looking to become completely IP-based in the near future. In the UK, this has helped 3CX to foster a strong relationship with leading telco BT. We can hope for similar partnerships in the future with the likes of Deutsche Telekom in Germany, for example, making the switch to an IP-based network. With developments like this coming from some of the world's top providers, it's hard to imagine that the IP PBX is on its way out.

The new generation of PBXs is bringing more features, more technology, more mobility and more flexibility. One main focus that 3CX has always had, that particularly pushes the boundaries of the traditional PBX, is its simplicity. Being easy to deploy and maintain is what sets apart a modern PBX from its old counterpart. With a consistent trend in the migration to cloud computing, customers are going to demand solutions that are even easier to get up and running, so it's safe to say that this is where a lot of development will be focused in the near future. ■

Report continues on page 44



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On UC, the channel has m

The job of the channel is to encourage greater adoption of Unified Communications in the market. Big strides have been taken in this direction, but does the channel's ability to truly maximise on UC potential match the size of the opportunity?

The story of UC is one of the most exhilarating in the history of modern business communications. It has changed everything and created a land of opportunity for the channel. Yet the strength of UC lies not in the solution nor its delivery as such, but in how it is adopted by users, in their desire to collaborate and use the technology as a place of congregation, combining various channels into an all encompassing collaborative hub. UC is, after all, for everyone, and should ideally create a sense of place for disparate office and mobile workers. But how many UC deployments lie virtually unused across the land?

UC's biggest handicap is simple – not enough people are using it, which can only constrain its effectiveness in delivering ROI to the customer. "Making UC



Adrian Hipkiss

The mid-market is the sweet spot where we see the greatest potential for growth.

work for a business requires more than just delivering a solution," said Rob Keenan, Head of Portfolio Management UK at Unify. "It requires a cultural change. Individuals need to understand how UC can help with real life business situations. Focusing on the technology will lead to failure, so concentrate instead on business challenges and, even more importantly, people."

True adoption is a big challenge. Many organisations plan to install a full UC suite but end up with basic voice functions and a plan to 'do it later'. "However, this is an opportunity for resellers to show customers how UC can benefit them in simple ways, enabling users to understand how the technology is a must-have, not a nice-to-have," added Keenan. "How UC is implemented and adopted must be determined by the customer, therefore knowledge about their requirements is a must."

In the early days of UC it ranked as an over-hyped innovation, but now it has found a firm place in the mid-market especially, observed Adrian Hipkiss, Managing Director EMEA, ShoreTel. "The mid-market is the sweet spot where we see the greatest potential for growth," he stated. "The channel is ideally positioned to help organisations of this size. Mid-market businesses



Rob Keenan

Making UC work for a business requires more than just delivering a solution. It requires a cultural change.

need more flexible, easy to use communications systems because this aligns with how they must be super-responsive to dynamic markets. While being able to collaborate with colleagues and interact with customers has become ever more critical, the systems to support this are too often fragmented and difficult to integrate. Customers want communications that are simple, require no special talent to use and can support staff and serve customers across multiple communications modes."

Mainstream

According to analyst firm IDC, 55 per cent of mid-sized companies plan to deploy some form of UC over the next 12 months. This proves that UC has entered the mainstream, and it is no accident that the rise of

UC has a similar trajectory to that of increasing levels of workplace mobility. "It's now become the norm for workers to operate from the best location that suits their work on any given day, whether that be from a client's office, on the move or at home," said Jon Seddon, Head of Product Management, GCI. "UC ties this all together and means people can collaborate with their colleagues and clients seamlessly from wherever they are. Modern working and UC go hand in hand."

He also believes that the biggest opportunity for UC is in the mid-market where businesses are trying to shrink their office footprint while reducing travel time and increasing collaboration and productivity among their employees. Therefore a UC solution and a business's

operational strategy should share the same identity and be reflected in the planning stages of devising a solution. In terms of setting and driving a UC strategy, there are two main challenges, pointed out Seddon.

"Firstly, integration with existing solutions," he explained. "Few customer sites are greenfield nor do they want to rip-and-replace what they have already, so in our view a UC partner needs extensive experience in making the old and the new work together until the customer can fully migrate. The second challenge is adoption. Ditching the desk phone is not for everyone, so a trusted partner will work with the customer to discover which end points will drive the quickest adoption and provide both on-premise and remote training in those critical early days."

Regardless of whether customers choose on-premise or cloud-based UC, providers should offer a full set of design workshops to capture their requirements and tailor the solution to meet their needs. "It's then important to work collaboratively during the roll out and be on hand to drive adoption," added Seddon.

Each individual business is unique. It therefore follows that the applications and components encompassed by UC will differ on a company by company



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much to cheer and go for

level, based upon what is relevant and useful to a particular organisation. This means that UC will be the interaction of some, or all of the following applications – voice, workforce mobility, messaging, analytics, conferencing, presence and IT convergence. “Workforce mobility, business analytics and call recording are all key drivers for sales of our UC platforms,” said Robin Hayman, Director of Marketing and Product Management, SpliceCom. “And coming back to basics, answering phone calls is still a business critical requirement for most businesses.”

Strategic alignment

UC is best delivered when aligned with the customer’s existing IT strategy, be that cloud, on-premise or any blend of the two. “A customer’s strategy will ultimately dictate where IT and voice applications reside,” added Hayman. “At present, the immediate future looks cloud shaped.”

In assessing UC delivered cloud solutions, Steve Tutt, Marketing Director at VanillalP, believes that we have past the early adopter stage. “Packages in the channel are becoming more advanced with resellers increasingly offering bespoke solutions rather than ‘one size fits all,’” he stated. “Importantly, customers are becoming more sophisticated. They understand the cloud and what it can do for their business.”

Hipkiss also reckons that the industry has reached a significant turning point where UC is moving into the cloud and becoming



Steve Tutt

Customers are more sophisticated. They understand the cloud and what it can do for their business.

a service. “There is little holding back this movement as business models are changing in ways that make cloud-based IT a prerequisite for doing business successfully,” he said. “There are some challenges that need to be addressed over security concerns, legacy app integrations and ensuring there is the infrastructure to assure a high quality of connectivity, but the opportunity for the channel is transformative. As a trusted technology partner, they can help their customers move communications into the cloud, while simultaneously transforming their own business model to become a UC cloud practice and service provider.”

ShoreTel recently conducted a survey of British businesses and uncovered a strong trend towards the cloud. Over half of the respondents are already using cloud-based communications services, and 38 per cent plan to migrate to UC in the cloud soon. “Cloud delivery of unified communications sits neatly alongside how customers are now consuming information technology

and communications as a service,” noted Hipkiss.

Today, the UK operates in a global, digital economy where important work gets done wherever and whenever. Without UC this just isn’t possible, a factor that is reflected in the results of ShoreTel’s survey. Unify’s Keenan also observes that the first wave of UC products have matured in the digital world. “We are now seeing a new generation of social collaboration tools take UC to the next level,” he commented. “Cloud is of huge interest, but one of the biggest shifts in UC has been the adoption of pay-as-you-go models. This makes the first step to using UC much more palatable and ensures a company feels in control of its communications.”

For the enterprise, UC means system integration. But for smaller businesses the service element makes this approach largely cost prohibitive. Ultimately, for smaller firms it’s their key business applications that need to be integrated with voice. That usually means Skype for Business, Outlook

and Office in a Microsoft environment. “Using alternative email applications, contact databases and presence detection etc, even if they can be easily deployed and work together in a far more integrated way, just isn’t an option,” said Hayman. “Smaller businesses require the same best-of-breed approach towards applications as taken by larger organisations, but the integration needs to be made easier. The transition to cloud-based applications has been a great help to UC here.”

For many companies, voice is still important, but when you include features that are integral to everyday business – such as conferencing or a one number service – it’s clear just how important UC has become. “It is key that organisations get the solution they need,” urged Keenan. “This means they have to understand the problem they wish to solve, not just adopt UC and hope it fits. A clear plan and an end objective is crucial.”

ShoreTel’s research also underlined the important role of the channel in



Jon Seddon

It’s now become the norm for workers to operate from the best location that suits their work.

helping organisations to plan their transition to UC in the cloud. “Our research shows that customers who are considering UC cloud value the support of their independent technology partner,” noted Hipkiss. “As the business models of customers change, it is natural that the business model of the channels is also transformed. They become more service-centric and need to consider new skills and capabilities to market themselves and sustain their edge as a cloud service provider.”

The key is to have a multi-channel UC solution where, if the phone stops ringing, the business is still operational. “The days of the telecoms system being a closed environment are probably over and integrations with CRM and other workplace systems are an opportunity for the channel to deploy smarter, higher value solutions for customers,” said Tutt.

“Another interesting trend is the changing nature of competition in the comms market. We live in a world where car manufacturers see Apple as a potential threat, which seems crazy. For so long we have watched established PBX vendors offer similar products and resellers compete directly with each other. Now, there are many more competitors going direct and bypassing the channel altogether. It will be interesting to see how this space evolves and what approach Google and Facebook among others will take. One thing is certain, constant product development and evolution is essential to staying viable and competitive in this market.” ■



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Empowered by Vertiv

When Emerson Network Power was acquired and relaunched as a private company with a new brand three months ago, at a stroke it became more empowered to take the long-term view when facing the challenges of emerging technological landscapes such as cloud computing and the underlying critical infrastructures.

Early last December investment firm Platinum Equity acquired Emerson Network Power in a \$4 billion-plus deal that also catalysed a rebrand and company name change to Vertiv. The move was billed as a fresh start for Vertiv and as an independent company it would operate with greater freedom to make longer term business strategy and investment decisions, be more agile and sharpen its focus on solutions for emerging markets such as cloud computing, mobile and IoT networks.

According to Giovanni Zanei, Vertiv's AC Power Product Marketing Director for EMEA, the firm's power protection products will continue to evolve in line with the rise of mission critical digital infrastructures, meeting growing demand for higher power ratings from larger scale data centres including the hyper-scale cloud ones. "They also require an increased level of scalability and modularity at both the data centre level right

down to the UPS unit level," observed Zanei. "UPS systems with a modular design are able to offer a number of key benefits for data centre operators, including improved efficiency levels.

"Modular designs also offer scalability, giving data centres the opportunity to increase the capacity of the UPS with the data centre load. This means that customers are able to initially purchase a smaller amount of UPS power and buy additional modules as the data centre grows and the load increases. As a result, capex expenditures are relatively low at the outset."

The rise of micro data centre architectures to cover the requirements of edge computing means that power protection becomes a key element embedded as part of the micro data centre infrastructure as a whole, pointed out Zanei, who signalled another UPS design shift towards a smaller footprint but without compromising on the unit's efficiency. "This has become more important for larger



Giovanni Zanei

We believe the industry needs further development in battery technology

UPS systems," he added. "Reflecting this trend, battery alternatives are emerging such as Lithium-ion (Li-ion) which offer an attractive 70 per cent less footprint than traditional VRLA. Li-ion's key advantage is its ability to pack more energy into a smaller space, saving on the footprint. Other benefits include their increased lifespan. They do not need to be replaced as often and most can tolerate higher operating temperatures while requiring less maintenance."

Vertiv has sales and service personnel in most major countries and 255 service centres worldwide with over 3,000 service field engineers and more than 400 technical support people. The company intends to

continue the development of its three phase UPS portfolio by working with key customers and plans to expand its capabilities in modular UPS technology.

Key trends

The market trends influencing Vertiv's product strategy are, as mentioned, the ongoing development of large hyper-scale data centre applications, and on the other end of the portfolio the emergence of micro data centre architectures and their power requirements. "Most importantly, embedded in our research and development we are always conscious of the various country legislation standards and making sure we provide the same product experience to our worldwide customers," noted Zanei.

Another important challenge facing the power protection industry where Zanei wants to see more positive progress is the slow development of battery technology. "There have been significant improvements in power electronics, but we still rely on batteries that use lead acid to get power," he explained. "Despite the recent emergence of Li-Ion we believe the industry needs further development in battery technology, along with enhancements to battery monitoring systems that will bring greater visibility on the health of batteries."

Developments in the UPS market present a number of opportunities for resellers, especially those that are able to offer value added services, specifically with system integration capabilities. "Customers are increasingly searching for resellers that operate as solution providers with the skills to offer not just one or a series of products, but a suite of products integrated together into a complete solution," commented Zanei. "As an example, customers are looking for one provider to offer power infrastructure enabled with monitoring tools and different battery solutions all integrated with switch gears."

Resellers wanting to plug into the power protection opportunities outlined in this article should focus not only on the volume of business but also the value, advised Zanei. "Resellers should consider providing these services as a complete and flexible offering which takes into consideration the key requirements of limited footprint, energy saving and ease of use." ■

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A man of principles

UCcert's Managing Director Darren O'Connor is as open and honest as he is fiercely competitive and pragmatic, which along with his customer-first approach is the guarantor of long-term success.



Darren O'Connor

I built UCcert from scratch, so I'm conscious of the way that I expect this business to perform, that means every single aspect of it

"On-premise still has its place in the market but our clients are seeing the advantages of moving to the cloud. I've closely followed the tech trends from IP telephony to collaboration to virtualisation and now into hosted, it's a constant journey. Cloud networking is an ever changing landscape. On a daily basis new ideas and new ways of working come about and if you don't keep up you are left behind, so I am always researching and looking into what's coming next and how I can advise my clients."

This strategic thought process led to the formation of another important

partnership, this time with Channel Telecom. "This came about two years ago," recalled O'Connor. "I was looking for a channel partner that could supply a hosted telephony solution plus data connectivity and Channel Telecom ticked the right boxes. There are many partners on the scene that claim to do the same, but for me it was also about the people."

Award win

UCcert capped last year with an award scoop that reflects its ambitions. The company picked up Channel Telecom's 'Fastest Growing Partner of the Year Award', and O'Connor attributed

this success in large part to his laser focus on giving customers what they want. "My priority is always my clients," he added. "It's vitally important to ensure that a client is happy and feels that they got what they asked for, so I listen to them and make sure that I develop my offerings to ensure I deliver what they expect and need. For example, we're seeing a big shift to the cloud so we will be focusing on our hosted propositions for the foreseeable future. I strongly believe in not diversifying too much otherwise you risk becoming a jack of all trades. We're proficient in networking and telephony so we'll always lead with these."

Although located in the south west of England UCcert works all over the UK and Europe, and its growth has delivered a dilemma that O'Connor hasn't yet fully resolved. "I'm getting to a point in the business now when I have to hand off some of the work to other people I trust and that I know will do a good job," he added. "However, it's still hard to let go. I need to work on relinquishing control and trusting that others can deliver on my promises. I built UCcert from scratch so I'm conscious of the way that I expect this business to perform, that means every single aspect of it."

As a man of impeccable principles and standards, O'Connor's promise to his customers and family is to 'do the best that I can in the most open and honest way'. "What more can anyone ask of me?", he added. "I'm a family man, so running my own business also gives me the drive to better myself and grow the company." ■

Just a minute with Darren O'Connor...

What talent do you wish you had? The ability to teleport

What do you fear the most? Failure

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I am the most competitive person I know. Don't play board games with me!

What could you not do without in your job? My laptop

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? DJ-ing on a sunny island

What possession could you not live without? My phone, it allows me to chat to my children every night wherever I am

Top tip for resellers: Push your partners on their knowledge of the products they're offering. You need to know they've got your back should you hit issues

How do you relax when not working? I have three young children so relaxing doesn't come into play

What is the biggest risk you have taken? Walking away from a full-time job and financial security to start up UCcert

What is your biggest strength? If I say I am going to do something, it gets done

O'Connor first got to grips with the fundamentals of networking during a five year stint in the Royal Signals. Soon after leaving the military he became a Cisco accredited engineer and set off on a path that would lead him to establish Calne-based UCcert in 2008. Prior to the company beginning its commercial life O'Connor had left full-time employment to become a contractor, picking up his own client base along the way. Most notably, O'Connor's first customer was Balfour Beatty, which, unsurprisingly, he rates as a major win, deploying an IP telephony solution and LAN across its key UK sites. "Things have grown leaps and bounds following my first customer," he said. "I haven't looked back since."

O'Connor sticks to what he knows and nailed his flag to Cisco, firstly as a registered partner then moving on to Select. UCcert serves customers in a range of sectors including education, public sector, gaming, financial, construction, retail and manufacturing. "We deliver converged network solutions to businesses but this year we'll be focusing solely on our hosted propositions," he explained.



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

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

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

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

exactly what we do. Every day we learn from each other, we compare services, we use training resources, we repurpose marketing ideas; by sharing our experiences and learnings we can all achieve a better outcome for our customers and that's what makes the channel great."

This year Tomlinson has welcomed the inclusion of four new categories namely:

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

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

"Those partner events we all love attending, with maybe a few too many glasses of fizz, are the work of dedicated marketing teams who want to add value to your businesses; the portals don't update themselves but are a rich and valuable source of content to help us sell and market our products. And we should never forget how important it is to develop and retain our talent by providing a fun and rewarding work environment. "Wouldn't it be great this year if we found those stories where we took a risk, moved out of our comfort zones to try something new and it paid



KCOM director Pete Tomlinson

off? Maybe recognition for the traditional comms reseller who's successfully moved into Cloud services; or for the brand that has changed their competitive focus, maybe from price to

experience; whatever we celebrate we want to make sure it's something we value and champion across our communities and something that we can collectively take pride and inspiration from.

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

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

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THIS YEAR'S CATEGORIES ...

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Garry Growns, Daisy Wholesale, sponsor, Vendor Channel Account Team of the Year

"The channel holds great importance for Daisy Wholesale. Firstly, it's all we're focused on, and secondly it should, in our view, 'own' the SMB market space. To help achieve this it's critical that the vendors step-up to comprehensively support the resellers involved. For that reason we're delighted to again be sponsoring the Vendor Channel Account Team of the Year. This award celebrates excellence within the channel, including outstanding sales efforts, amazing achievements and the strong relationships that have been built with clients. The Awards are the ideal platform for highlighting your capabilities, achievements and rewarding your 'super stars' in magnificent style. I really would encourage you all to enter – after all, if you don't shout about your successes, who will?"



Paul Gibbs, TelcoSwitch, sponsor, Best Company To Work For Award

"We're delighted to be sponsoring the Best Company to Work For award at this year's Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards. As a relatively new company, we're proud to be supporting an award which celebrates office culture and recognises those companies who are consciously making an effort to create an inspirational working environment for their employees. Our own success to date is down to the time we invest in our people and our partners and it's fantastic to see an award which recognises this kind of ethos. We wish the very best of luck to all the teams that enter and we look forward to celebrating their achievements on the day."



Paul Taylor, Voiceflex, sponsor, Reseller Best Marketing Campaign Award

"The Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards has grown tremendously in stature over the years, Voiceflex are proud to be involved as sponsors for the last few years as we feel it's very important to celebrate winning teams. Successful sales and marketing is all about securing business and creating a winning mentality within the team. It's a pleasure to present an award and see the sheer delight on the faces of the winners as it shows how much they care about what they have achieved and proving that they the 'best of the best'."



Barry Tuffs, Unify, sponsor, Best Apprentice Scheme Award

"Apprenticeship is an excellent way for the youth of today to get a head start in the field they want to work in. Each of the companies shortlisted in this category, will have made an incredible commitment to training and development - giving a very lucky group of talented young people a unique opportunity to enter the ICT industry. At Unify we are just as committed to help young, ambitious talent to develop into valuable thought leaders in the industry. In fact, we've just recently hired a team of fresh young talent who are being trained and skilled up, and who will become a vital part of our future growth strategy as we continue to focus on the channel in 2017 and beyond."



Debbie Robertson, 8x8, sponsor, Reseller Sales Team of the Year (£7.5m +) category

"We're delighted to be sponsoring the Comms Dealer Sales and Marketing Awards once again this year. The event is always a fantastic afternoon that celebrates the very best sales and marketing teams our industry has to offer. The awards have long been known for excellence in communications, whether rewarding vendor solutions, resellers, innovative technology or outstanding customer service. At 8x8, we know how important the channel is and value the unrivalled expertise of our partners. We know that without the strong channel relationships we've built over the years, we wouldn't be able to deliver our world class service. We'd like to wish everyone who's entered the best of luck and we're looking forward to celebrating your achievements in London."

Reseller Categories

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

Distributor Category

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

Vendor Category

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

Service Provider Category

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

Special Awards

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



Industry acts to combat t

In truth, the toll fraud question has been one of the most under-debated industry issues, but in recent times there has been an outbreak of common sense with the sector becoming more articulate in promoting coherent anti-fraud strategies that will help to remake the industry into its own image and gain back control.

ITSPA hopes that the industry and Government will be guided by its newly formed Cyber Crime Task Force, part of a campaign to raise the profile of telephony fraud with Government, the regulator and law enforcement. "We have had some constructive meetings," stated David Cargill, Chair of ITSPA's Operations Working Group. "ITSPA has also highlighted to policy makers that, for the past five and a half years, Ofcom has had the power to request communications providers to block telephone numbers and withhold out payments for frauds occurring in Europe. However, as far as ITSPA is aware, this power has only been used twice."

Instead of sitting on their hands, the Government, law enforcement and Ofcom must commit more resources to fighting this crime, urged Cargill. "Toll fraud is estimated to add around two per cent to users' bills," he added. "It is highly prevalent in states under suspicion of funding crime and, in some cases, terrorist activities."

ITSPA is encouraging Ofcom to use the power it holds regarding frauds that originate in Europe, and is also calling for Government to recognise telephony fraud more broadly, including measures around the

training and education of law enforcement and the public as part of the recently announced Cyber Security Strategy. "It is also essential that the Government works more closely with international governments, regulators and the ITU," stated Cargill. "Close international cooperation will be required to block out payments and finally end the crime. A further potential option for the industry is working with Internet service providers to block scanner traffic."

A survey of 1,000 businesses commissioned by an ITSPA member revealed that 27 per cent of those questioned had been the victim of a telephone hack over the past five years, resulting in the company being billed for calls their employees had not made. The average cost to each business was £12,000. The most common losses came from calls being made via a compromised PBX, calls made from elsewhere using SIP credentials that have been harvested, and calls made from VoIP accounts that have been set up using stolen credit card details. All of these result in losses of revenue for the customer and damage to the customer-supplier relationship.

According to Cargill, if more telecoms suppliers and users report fraud using ITSPA's



David Cargill

Close international cooperation will be required to block out payments and finally end the crime

Fraud Reporting Guidelines the issue will be given more attention and be considered a greater priority by the relevant law enforcement agencies. "Toll fraud can potentially become a thing of the past if security measures are followed by end users, scanning traffic is blocked at the national network or ISP level, and out payments for fraudulent calls are stopped," added Cargill.

This wish list would form the basis of a new order in comms that would see the high cost of toll fraud removed in the UK, currently estimated to be in the region of £953 million. Ben O'Leary, Revenue Assurance Manager at Gamma, agrees that it's the responsibility of all parties to do everything in their power to halt the ongoing cycle of fraud. "All parties need to accept a share in

the blame for high levels of fraud," he said. "While clearly the only person truly at fault is the perpetrator, all those involved can do more to limit the potential for, and mitigate, the impact of fraud."

"The regulator has announced that it sees UK revenue share fraud as coming under the AIT process, which is something the industry has been exercising for many years already. But it does not say anything on the subject of fraud across borders or the use of international call forwarding services which are an ever increasing concern in the industry. The Government should be involved in arranging cross-border consensus to put a stop to this flow of money."

The Risk & Assurance Group is currently supporting an initiative led by fraud expert David Morrow to use the Proceeds of Crime Act as a mechanism to prevent the flow of money, even if it would cross borders. "This would be a powerful tool to limit IRSF from UK-based phone systems and the whole industry should offer its support to see that to conclusion," added O'Leary. "This does not mean that law enforcement should stop trying to catch the perpetrators. It is after all a worldwide problem that affects calls arriving

coll fraud, but more to do

in the UK as well as those originating here. It's a joint responsibility."

Gamma has witnessed fraud across a large number of business customers. "The only type of fraud we see in our part of the market is revenue share fraud, either international or UK terminated, but through a number of different means," he explained. "The most common method of fraud seen is PBX hacking. Dial-through fraud is becoming less common as consumers become more wary of the security of voicemail.

"As long as there are insecure phone systems and revenue share generating phone services there will

always be scope for fraud. The goal we need to work towards is preventing it from being no consequence free money for those engaging in fraud. As businesses move towards online help desks, perhaps before long there will be no need for revenue generating numbers."

Fighting back

Voiceflex's brand of fraud prevention could be described as aggressive, notably because the company has itself been the victim of a crime to the tune of £25,000. "But the legal fees where £75,000," stated Sales Director Paul Taylor. "We decided it wouldn't happen on our platform again and implemented our fraud reporting tool

ABBA (Advanced Behaviour Based Analysis), a multi-level application to detect fraudulent activity and stop it at source.

"We still get hundreds of attacks a week, 90 per cent are stopped within our core application, the remaining 10 per cent via our second and third line defences. I keep being told this is an industry problem. Most SIP carriers have applications within the core to spot fraudulent activity and kill it there and then. I know it's harder with PSTN and ISDN, but perhaps when they are completely finished and we are all SIP or hosted the problem will be mostly removed. If the network and/or telephony application was locked down,

you could wipe off 60-70 per cent of the fraud."

Is gaining the upper hand over these criminals realistic? Tollring's Managing Director Tony Martino believes so, having also leveraged technology to good effect with the launch of its new real-time Credit and Fraud Management System (CFMS), which last month went live on BT Wholesale's Hosted Centrex platform. "Self-learning predictive analytics that review real-time trends and update dynamically help us to eliminate fraud before or as it happens," commented Martino.

"The issue is how loud can you shout about the problem of fraud when talking to

customers. Everyone wants to hear about incidents and how to prevent them, but at the same time no one is willing to talk about it. Education and awareness is needed but without scaring the end user. The customer needs to understand that fraud management is good for them, it offers a lower cost of ownership and greater flexibility. Using automated and self-learning technology empowers everyone in the food chain to play their part in controlling fraud. The tools need to devolve across partners so they can input and manage their customers closely, which promotes shared responsibility across the whole channel down to site level." ■

See page 54

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Clamp down on fraud

The once yawning gap between the criminal activities of telephony fraudsters and the comms industry's ability to combat them is narrowing fast. Among those rising up against the criminals that have plagued the sector for years is BT Wholesale which has taken steps to provide resellers with real-time fraud detection and protection on its hosted platform.

On toll fraud, the industry is getting real. But talking more openly about the issue is one thing, how to deal with it is another. Enter BT Wholesale which has followed an analytical strategy and mounted a campaign to combat and contain telephony fraud with the deployment of Tollring's new real-time Credit and Fraud Management System (CFMS) on its Wholesale Hosted Centrex (WHC) platform. The move shows that BT is focusing on the analytical capabilities within the network, customer data and trends, and taking a proactive stance by anticipating what might happen.

"With greater intelligence and analytics we can bring our resellers and their customers into the conversation earlier," said Dave Axam, Director of Hosted Communications at BT Wholesale. "Everyone can be made aware of threshold alerts, they can react faster and be proactive in communicating

with the customer. This is a differentiator and a confidence boost for end users. On education, we will be working with resellers to ensure they are comfortable about taking this message out to their customers. We also have a demo of the portal to show how easy and flexible it is to use."

Powerful tool

The CFMS monitors call trends, implements rules and triggers alerts to protect resellers and their customers from illegal usage and bill shock. The credit management part of the solution constrains legitimate spend in order to manage risky customers. "Fraud and credit management is a powerful combination," added Axam. "Each call must pass through four rigorous gates including a risk register of continents, countries and regions, a blacklisted destinations register, followed by rule profiling before adhering to spend limits."

Education is also key, noted Axam, who advocates an open and honest discussion



Dave Axam

with customers based on the remedies available to prevent and address potential attacks by fraudsters. "We can help resellers to show customers how to stop this kind of fraud," he explained. "Resellers need to have a good understanding of their customers' PABX estate and then help to undertake proper security procedures, otherwise they are leaving the door wide open. As a first line of defence, resellers and end customers need to look at what they can do to combat fraud. The most common occurrence of fraud is on the PABX. Equipment is either left vulnerable to a penetration attack due to passwords being left to admin, or they are accessed physically."

Axam believes that SIP credential fraud is less of an issue and the responsibility of service providers to ensure that fit for purpose security controls are in place. Having embedded Tollring's intelligence and analytics tools into the network for hosted communications, BT Wholesale, for its part,

is focused on eradicating fraud. "The intelligence gives our partners and their customers visibility of when fraud is occurring so they can stop it," added Axam. "By encouraging more education and applying intelligent analytics, providers can play a greater role in preventing fraud. But we need to ensure our new analytic tools are easy to use so more people use them and we all get better at preventing fraud."

Collective responsibility

Toll fraud remains a painful and emotive subject for customers, resellers and the industry, and Axam emphasised that the comms sector has a collective responsibility to do everything possible to wipe out this crime. Another weapon in the armoury is spend caps, a blunt and far from perfect tool. "From a reseller's perspective, the spend cap means there's never a big bill to be paid," said Axam. "But for the customer it means they might come in on a Monday morning and find that no phones are working. A great deal of

activity is then required to get everything working again. Putting caps on spend also means that the provider and customer acknowledge that fraud is likely to occur."

In response to industry efforts to fight back, the fraudsters are always looking for new opportunities. A recent issue with spend caps is that smart fraudsters have realised that they can get away with taking smaller amounts that don't hit the spend caps and set off alarms, pointed out Axam. "They can just keep repeating the small 'pick pocketing' calls and no one will notice," he added. "We have seen this pattern of traffic with an organisation in the hospitality trade. This is potentially the next wave of fraud and the hotel trade represents a big opportunity for fraudsters. This is where intelligent analysis is vital to spot such changes in patterns."

According to Axam, intelligent analytics is the only way to stop the next type of fraud, but the problem is that routes, destinations and numbers change – it's a dynamic and ever moving challenge. "Premium rates are a simple number set that can easily (and should) be blocked," he said. "You can keep blacklists but you are always looking for the next thing. You can also block known destinations but customers don't like to be limited. This is where analytics wins. It's dynamic enough to learn and adapt. If the volumes are beyond normal calling patterns you can give the customer the option to cut the traffic. The system is fluid and covers all the different elements and factors that will ultimately protect the end customer." ■

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Tollring restructures Unify brings in key CMO



Hilary Oliver, Chris Slater and Scott Ellis

TOLLRING'S growing presence in the cloud space has prompted the company to create a new role, hire staff and promote from within. The firm has expanded its partnerships with companies offering cloud services such as BT, Mitel and BroadSoft, and appointed Scott Ellis as Head of Cloud Sales, a new business development role. He will work with senior management to sell iCall Suite and iC360 to service providers, system integrators and VARs across the world.

Chris Slater has been appointed Head of Product and will focus

on delivering a strong product roadmap as the firm expands its analytics portfolio. And Hilary Oliver, who joined Tollring in 2012, has been promoted to Marketing Director, taking a seat on the Board.

Tony Martino, Managing Director, commented: "Both Scott and Chris have strong experience in call recording having spent several years at Enghouse Networks, formally CTI Group. We see them being able to add immediate value in supporting the business as we expand our partner reach."

ATOS brand Unify has enlisted channel supremo Paul Cunningham to the role of Chief Marketing Officer with responsibility for all of the vendor's marketing activities for



Paul Cunningham

its OpenScape and Circuit solution portfolios. He also joins the Unify Executive Committee.

Cunningham brings over 25 years experience in ICT marketing to the role having worked in a number of organisations including notable stints at Oracle, Westcon and SaaS start-ups. Prior to joining Unify he operated his own freelance consultancy.

CEO Jon Pritchard said: "Paul's expertise and leadership will help Unify build on its foundation of solutions and services to drive demand."

Cunningham added: "Unify, our partners and customers stand to benefit from Atos' digital transformation for enterprises, which will in turn inform our Circuit platform innovation and help sustain our market position with OpenScape."

Also on the move...



Kathleen Rogers

GLAMORGAN Telecom has called on the services of Gareth Rosser who joins the company as Head of Telemarketing. The move coincides with the promotion of Kathleen Rogers to Head of Network Services. Managing

Director Kelly Bolderson noted that the new appointments form part of the company's plan to boost revenue by £1 million year-on-year until 2018. She said: "Gareth is results-driven and will help us to deliver against our growth plans. Kathleen has developed skills in all aspects of billing and network services, and her customer service skills make her the perfect candidate for promotion."

A NEW dealer channel set up by Cloudsource Technologies is to be led by Mike Hayman, the incoming Dealer Development Director. The firm's



Mike Hayman

services include telephony, mobile, IT, energy and security, and resellers gain access to a bureau billing option, network connectivity ordering, revenue share, support and training. Hayman said: "I've spent

30 years in the telecoms industry as a dealer and have a good understanding of the challenges growing resellers face, and what they're looking for from a distributor. This experience will help me to listen and provide personalised support rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach."

Enterprising Exertis move



Kevin Matthews

THE appointment of Kevin Matthews by Exertis to the newly created role of Enterprise Sales Director signifies the distributor's growing interest and investment in bigger business. He reports to Sales and Commercial Director

UK&I Phil Brown. "Kevin has extensive sales experience in the channel particularly in the enterprise sector and has built strong business relationships with major accounts," said Brown.

Matthews moved from Fujitsu where he was UK Sales Director for the Technology Products Group responsible for implementing a new sales strategy and consolidating the number of distribution partners. Before joining Fujitsu Matthews spent 16 years at Hewlett-Packard, ultimately leading its enterprise channel business.

Matthews added: "My responsibilities include driving engagement with key value added resellers, and ensuring that sales opportunities are maximised with the Exertis' growing enterprise portfolio."

INCLARITY Communications has signalled the next phase of its partner strategy with the appointment of Fridolin Engel as Channel Manager. Engel joins from Chess where he was National Sales Manager for Partner Services responsible for the wholesale and dealer channels.

Vital recruits to bolster support



Brice Morrow, Ben Dean and Adam Oddy

WETHERBY-based Vital Technology Group has brought in four new members of staff to bolster its business development and account management teams. Ben Dean, Kieran Philipson and Brice Morrow join Vital's academy programme, while Adam Oddy brings 12 years experience in designing, delivering and supporting unified, hosted and mobile communications solutions for businesses. Lee Evans, Vital's founder, said: "We've bolstered our business development team as part of our plans to accelerate growth and double our turnover in the next financial year."



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