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McCahill turns dial on key D&I strategies p26



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Comms People

This month's movers and shakers



Positive outlook on strong results

THE value of the channel was brought into sharp focus last month when Digital Wholesale Solutions (DWS) posted a 14% hike in organic revenue to £320.1m while adjusted EBITDA grew to £63.3m with 19.8% margin to March 2022.

SPECIAL REPORT

Despite UK economic upheaval DWS reports that its 14% growth has been maintained with £176m revenues in the six months to 30 September 2022.

Under the leadership of Chief Executive Officer Terry O'Brien (pictured above) DWS has maximised on investment from private equity giant Inflexion to deliver almost 20% margin on growing revenues in the SME space.

O'Brien puts the success down to the growing preference for UK small businesses to acquire and manage technology through trusted expert resellers.

"Our growth shows the strength, resilience and agility of the partner channel which continues to win market share by demonstrating that it is best placed to help small businesses get the most from their technology," he commented.

Significant capital investment in the period included

major advancements of DWS' technology platform and new product developments in mobile data applications, fibre, IP connectivity, cyber security and cloud services.

"We have delivered a strong set of results and are seeing continued momentum with organic growth this year," said O'Brien.

"This underlines how small businesses in the UK continue to invest in technology and innovation despite the economic headwinds."

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

WELCOME to the first issue of Comms Dealer in 2023. Even better, it's certain there'll be 11 more this year, but not so clear-cut is what and who will feature on these pages. We do of course plan and publish an editorial calendar that provides, to an extent,

a content pathway through the months ahead. But, truth is that, as we all know, the industry is fast moving and we tend to keep all content topical where possible.

So the best laid plans may at times fall by the wayside as we align closely with the primary and fluid month-by-month themes. For example, our interviews and profiles in the main are linked to recent company news. And we closely follow the broader topical issues impacting leaders in the sector such as D&I and sustainability, as well as business and growth strategy, among many other up-to-date content streams. In essence we're flexible and that keeps us relevant, yet still connected to the lines of thinking that underpinned the editorial calendar created before the year even started.

The same approach may be beneficial if applied to wider business strategy. For example, the 2025 writing is on the wall. It's a big fixed theme in the industry calendar, but how you get there, the avenues and approaches you choose may take multifarious directions according to your own strategy and inclination. There is no prescribed route to the PSTN switch off. Nor should there be. It's the individual journeys underpinned by innate flexibility that keep us nimble and relevant to a particular audience, and creates all important differentiation simply by being your 'unique' best. So we wish you a happy and flexible new year.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

• A KEY priority for all business leaders in 2023 is to identify the factors that enhance the value of their organisation, and more than ever, value creation requires a fresh perspective, according to a new channel study entitled the Business Growth and M&A Outlook 2023 research report. See page 8

BT unites biz units in cost cutting bid

IN A PRAGMATIC and major move to deliver rapid and sustainable cost reduction BT Group has consolidated its Global and Enterprise divisions into a single B2B unit called BT Business, including wholesale.

The restructure follows poor quarterly revenue performances from the divisions and in early November CEO Philip Jansen revealed that BT was increasing its cost savings target from £2.5bn to £3bn by the end of financial year 2025.

BT hopes that the mammoth revamp will create greater simplicity, remove duplication, boost performances and deliver annualised cost savings of at least £100m by the end of FY25 through the rationalisation of management teams, support functions, product portfolios and systems.

Jansen cited the inflationary environment, including high energy prices, as a catalyst for additional action on costs, including job losses, to maintain the cash flow needed to support network investments.

Following the restructure BT Group is split into three customer facing units made up of Consumer, the new BT Business unit and Openreach.



Philip Jansen

From 1st January BT Business will be led by Bas Burger, the former CEO of BT's Global unit now tasked with driving the combined business back to growth. BT Enterprise CEO Rob Shuter is stepping down.

Jansen said: "BT Business will bring the Group's com-

bined assets, products, capabilities and brand to the service of our 1.2 million business customers. We remain laser focused on modernising and simplifying BT Group."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

THE Aston Martin Aramco Cognizant Formula One Team will rely on data connectivity provided by Voip Unlimited following a multi-year deal to connect up the team factory currently under construction at Silverstone and due for completion in early 2023. The facility will house the organisation's full F1 team across 37,000 square metres in three buildings including a wind tunnel. Voip Unlimited



has been a supplier to the F1 industry for some time and was therefore the 'logical choice', according to Clare Lansley, the F1 team's CIO. "Voip Unlimited recognises the demands and challenges of F1 teams," she stated. Voip Unlimited MD Mark Pillow (pictured above) commented: "To facilitate the efficient transmission of data for everything from telematics, performance and logistics as well as on-site monitoring and manufacturing, we delivered 100% resilience connectivity via multiple fibre paths."

Techgiant spells out big plans

COMMS consultancy Techgiant Workplace aims to achieve up to £30m revenues within five years based on what the start-up claims is a more 'holistic' approach to solution provision supported by a strong team and global vendor partnerships.

Spearheaded by 19-year-old CEO Oliver Taylor, who is backed by his comms veteran father Ian Taylor, Techgiant plans to quickly spice up a 'lack lustre' ICT market from its London HQ.

"There is a blandness in parts of the industry where some tech products more as commodities rather than pieces of a jigsaw which bind together to support a customer's holistic and unified vision for change," stated Taylor junior.

"We want to help organisations get this right for the long-term, rather than sell services purely as a sticking plaster to keep the lights on."



Ian and Oliver Taylor

MSP Flotek's on Cloud9ine



Done deal: Jay Ball (centre right) with Phillip Emmanuel

MSP Flotek's expansion bid across the Welsh and south west markets continued last month with the acquisition of Swansea-based Cloud9ine Communications, it's third transaction in six months.

The deal bolsters Flotek's telecoms play with a larger engineering team and adds capabilities around Wi-Fi, data cabling, CCTV and AV.

Cloud9ine began life in 2018 and is on the NHS Framework as an approved supplier for Data Cabling Networks and a HM Government Approved G-Cloud Supplier.

Cloud9ine founder and MD Phillip Emmanuel becomes Group Telecom Director.

Flotek Group CEO Jay Ball stated: "The role of companies such as Cloud9ine was highlighted during the pandemic, ensuring the NHS and other

public sector organisations stayed connected and operated efficiently while under unprecedented strain."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

AUGUST Equity-backed MSP Air IT's acquisition tally has hit double figures following a brace of purchases, this time Silverbug and Scoria, taking it to over 400 employees and more than 2,200 clients (a tenfold increase since its initial investment in 2020). Air IT CEO James Steventon stated: "Silverbug and Scoria share our approach and culture and bring additional knowledge, skills and experience." August Equity Partner Mehul Patel commented: "We invested in Air IT to support its mission to become the largest IT service partner for UK SMEs, and we continue to scale and augment the business." Air IT has posted organic growth of 33%.

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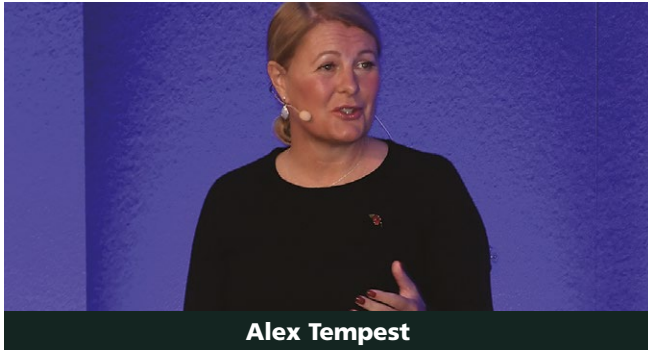
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C-RAN goes live in Leeds



Alex Tempest

A C-RAN tech trial has kicked off in Leeds following a pilot scheme led by BT Wholesale.

The 5G technology will serve as a proof of concept for future developments which could include individual street works or fitted in existing street furniture such as lamp posts or CCTV to deliver a 5G signal.

C-RAN uses cloud technology to support 5G connectivity meaning it can be fitted into a range of different units.

The first units installed in Leeds city centre will allow BT to track how the infrastructure improves access in the area.

As well as enabling local customers to access faster and

more reliable speeds on their mobile devices, improved 5G connectivity could in the long-term be used to provide a platform for the city to access other community and business developments such as the creation of virtual classrooms, air quality and pollution monitoring.

The infrastructure is currently being used by the EE and Three networks.

BT Wholesale MD Alex Tempest said: "This trial represents another step in transforming connectivity for the future and will help us better understand how 5G can best be delivered to meet the demands of the country."

NEWS ROUNDUP

THE City of Edinburgh Council's bid to create a smart city has taken big strides forward following the implementation of a City Operations Centre by IoT specialist North as part of a £2.6m contract. Scott McEwan, acting CEO at North, said: "The City of Edinburgh Council is making transformational steps to becoming a smart city and its forward thinking approach to the adoption of IoT solutions will accelerate its ambition."

HUDDERSFIELD-based Internet of Things specialist Alliot Technologies is providing NB-IoT connectivity across the UK following an official link up with Vodafone that enables the distributor to become a one-stop shop. Alliot Technologies can now provision and integrate the billing of Vodafone's NB-IoT connectivity with its existing hardware portfolio to deliver a full end-to-end solution. Alliot Technologies MD Darren Garland commented: "We are seeing more NB-IoT devices hit the market and our new agreement with Vodafone allows us to significantly boost our offering."

Viegli's VT launch removes headset margin roadblock

VIEGLI claims to have removed a headset margin roadblock with the exclusive UK and Ireland reseller-only launch of the VT range.

"Resellers can struggle to make decent margins on headsets in the UK," stated Viegli MD Robert Nunn. "More often than not end users point out they can buy the proposed products cheaper online.

"In this common scenario there is no option for resellers other than to get their clients to buy directly off Amazon where headsets can be cheaper than the trade or suggested sell price."



Robert Nunn

According to Nunn the VT brand and its mid-market pricing will not be discount-

ed online and he noted that resellers trialling the range have given a thumbs up.

The VT brand began life in 2005 and is sold globally via distribution partners in the Americas, Asia, certain European regions, and now the UK via Viegli which is providing reseller branded marketing packs alongside its channel-only promise.

Nunn is expecting 100-plus resellers to attend a launch webinar on January 10th.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

COMMSWORLD is to provide improved Internet connectivity to 110 schools in the Northumberland region including tech-poor rural primaries. The schools will gain access to speeds of up to 1Gb along with enhanced security. Commsworld Group Sales Director Steve Wood commented: "Our service will pave the way for a significant enhancement of capacity, resilience and security in schools so that they can gain access to digital resources."

HAVING significantly strengthened and aligned its strategy and portfolio during 2022 Mitel enters its 50th year fitter than ever, according to President and CEO Tarun Loomba. "Mitel's go-to-market approach and portfolio have never been better suited to address the needs of organisations today and tomorrow," he claimed, citing the combination of platforms, APIs and partnerships as key to the success of the vendor's growth ambitions. "Flexible solutions and sustained customer lifecycle management set the stage for a successful 2023," commented Loomba.

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Martino eyes 2023 trends

INTENSIFYING market competition will spur channel firms to secure and bolster greater differentiation this year, according to Tollring CEO Tony Martino.

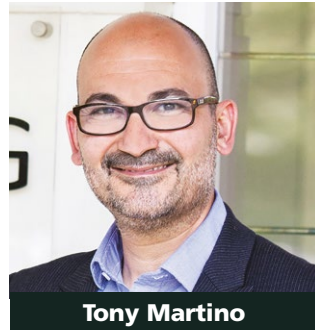
"With the growth of virtual MSPs, where customers can buy wholesale services from almost anywhere, it is no longer good enough to have telecoms-only services in a product portfolio," he warned.

"Added to this, Microsoft Teams is now a service provider in its own right, so channel players must remain relevant to how people want to use services and Teams integration is vital."

Martino also cited analytics as a major market defining factor in 2023.

"With everything in the cloud, analytics is becoming critical to leveraging the intelligence within an organisation and delivering actionable insights," he added.

"Service providers and telcos that have established analytics strategies will be well positioned to capitalise on the large addressable markets of customer experience, CCaaS and collaboration analytics, all segments that are benefitting from the shift to hybrid work and work from anywhere.



Tony Martino

"The ICT reseller channel will need to ensure that it can deliver the right level of capabilities and value across a customer's whole organisation."

Against this backdrop, customer attitudes and expectations have also evolved and opened up business transformation opportunities for the channel, observed Martino. "Many are looking for ways to transform and improve the efficiency and productivity of their organisations," he added.

"They are looking to leverage cloud-based technology to break down the silos between departments and increase their overall efficiency and improve customer experience.

"The fact that these technologies and their components are now far easier to access will drive many of the transformation initiatives in 2023."

Telecoms tech gets big boost

RESEARCH and development on next-generation 5G and 6G wireless technology and telecoms security has been significantly boosted by a £110m Government investment.

The package includes a new UK Telecoms Lab in the west midlands where mobile network operators, suppliers and academics can research and test the security, resilience and performance of their 5G and 6G network technology.

The University of York, Bristol and Surrey each receive a share of £28m to team up with telcos including Nokia, Ericsson and Samsung to design and build networks of the future.

Furthermore, a new partnership with the Republic of Korea aims to accelerate the deployment of Open RAN and associated technologies.

The project will receive more than £3m to focus on the power efficiency of emerging technical equipment.

Digital Secretary Michelle Donelan commented: "The funding will also turbocharge our work to strengthen telecoms supply chains so we are no longer reliant on a handful of companies to develop and maintain our 5G networks."

NEWS ROUNDUP

A MOBILE contract won by Barclay Communications from Cambridge University in January 2021 has been extended. The deal delivered £3m revenue and helped Barclay Comms to create more jobs in customer service and technical support. The extension sees Barclay Comms continue to provide connectivity to the University of Cambridge's 31 constituent colleges and 150 departments.

IN ITS 25th year of operation Snom signed up 33 new reseller and distributor partners in 2022. UK Channel Manager Lee Underwood commented: "We're seeing increased interest in IP telephony as a communications tool. The impending ISDN switch off and demand for flexible working post-pandemic makes the need for these solutions more pressing."

ERICSSON'S IoT Accelerator and Connected Vehicle Cloud businesses have been transferred to Aeris Communications. Ericsson will hold a minority stake in the new Aeris. The combination of Aeris and Ericsson's IoT platforms will connect over 100 million IoT devices worldwide, covering 190 countries.

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Freshen up growth plans

A key priority of business leaders in 2023 is to identify the factors that enhance the value of their organisation – and more than ever, value creation requires a fresh perspective, according to a new channel study undertaken by Comms Dealer in association with Knight Corporate Finance (the Business Growth and M&A Outlook 2023 research report).

The intention of the paper is to determine a better understanding of the dynamics that influence business growth planning and identify ways to improve long-term strategy.

The report found that the need to regularly reassess growth strategies has never been so strong – because strategy-as-usual, or having no strategy at all, will not mitigate the evolving challenges and threats facing channel organisations nor take into account impactful change

in areas such as sustainability, purpose, technology innovation and industry transformation.

But of the 84 per cent of business leaders who said they are committed to strategic growth, over three quarters of them have no plans to revamp their strategy. “It is critical to have a growth mindset with a willingness to strategically evolve aligned to ongoing change,” said report author Stuart Gilroy.

Strategic priorities

The report also points to value-building priorities related to strategic planning, the talent shortage, M&A, non-financial factors, to name a few. “The strong association between strategy and growth suggests it’s time for business leaders to break the cycle and take a harder look at the fit between their current planning, the evolving marketplace and long-term goals,”

Key statistics...

- Of the 84 per cent of business leaders committed to strategic growth, 69 per cent have no plans to revisit their strategy.
- Over 40 per cent of respondents have cemented a deals strategy, while almost 30 per cent are considering M&A to augment their growth strategy.
- 80 per cent of respondents think they have a good idea of what their business is worth. But over 20 per cent do not know the benchmark value of their primary asset.
- Nearly 31 per cent of respondents do not have an exit strategy
- Seventy six per cent say a mixture of financial and non-financial metrics is the main driver of future business value creation.
- If the cost of acquiring per customer organically was equal to by acquisition, over 70 per cent prefer the organic route.

commented Gilroy. “For example, over 30 per cent of respondents do not have an exit strategy.

“Furthermore, as business leaders in the comms sector are likely to be juggling more competing priorities this year, those with differentiating capabilities, an updated and aligned

growth strategy, and who embrace change, nurture non-financial levers, harness shifts in the market and think differently, are likely to be among the winners and secure their future.” ■

The full report can be downloaded at – <https://www.comms-dealer.com/insights/business-growth-and-ma-outlook-2023>

Channel Forecast Insight Session: Maximising the journey to all-IP

Preparing for the 2025 PSTN shutdown and overcoming the challenges of stop-sell is a channel priority that’s growing in importance by the day. But to capitalise on the opportunities in front of us channel businesses need to deploy the right strategies and tools available to them to the full.

And with greater uncertainty around the economy and no clear pathway to the switch-off itself, this insight session will explore the readiness and vulnerability of organisations at this time, both channel and end user, and ask whether enough is being done to maximise the UK’s journey to all-IP.

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Edge pushes boundaries

Edge ecosystems, 5G and hybrid cloud will be the key drivers of infrastructure change in 2023, says Pulsant's Technology Director Mike Hoy.

The development of UK-wide edge computing platforms will continue to shift the way businesses operate and improve the quality of life for millions of people living outside the main metropolitan areas, claims Hoy. "It's already starting to transform content delivery, virtual reality, real-time advertising and even remote healthcare," he stated.

According to Hoy, ecosystems will power UK business to the edge – and as the year progresses, organisations engaged in major projects such as smart cities or industrial IoT implementations will seek out ecosystems over a single-vendor approach. "Their dependence on data means these projects will require edge computing for advances such as intelligent, interactive transport systems, remote, AI-powered live video analysis, or highly automated and complex manufacturing," he said.

"In each case, organisations will want access to more than just a data centre. They will want edge expertise and an ecosystem of companies with a specialist understanding of use cases and specific types of connectivity and backhaul. And they will want to avoid being totally reliant on a single vendor. More than one view and multiple

options are necessary so organisations can maximise performance and resilience while keeping a lid on costs."

Mobile edge computing ecosystems, for example, will facilitate faster and more flexible deployment of location-based services, along with content delivery applications. "Many sectors such as logistics will adopt an ecosystem-based approach," added Hoy. "Gartner predicts 25 per cent of supply chain decisions will be made across intelligent edge ecosystems by the end of 2025. Supply chains will be more dynamic and cover larger networks where data and decisions originate at the edge from operators, machines, sensors and devices."

Applications focused on real-time and aggregated data analytics need connectivity that has either low jitter, loss and lag or has dedicated high bandwidth. "The telcos have been first movers in this market with 5G, but carrier fibre delivers waves that are more dependable," said Hoy. "MECs (multi-access edge computing environments) provide IT services, compute and cloud access but this will soon give way to sliced radio networks or shared services at the metropolitan level. There are already live use cases in the transport and energy



Mike Hoy

Organisations want edge expertise and an ecosystem of companies with a specialist understanding of use cases and specific types of connectivity and backhaul

sectors, but large scale adoption will follow once edge infrastructure platforms have fully developed their low latency connectivity, high-speed backhaul to the public cloud and local computing capabilities."

Expectations will likely grow as businesses see how the rollout of 5G mobile connectivity enables transformational changes in efficiency. In many sectors, high capacity and high bandwidth 5G opens the door to analytics-driven automation and digital twin modelling, regardless of location. "Businesses looking to implement these technologies will want to benefit from direct connectivity to the world's top cloud providers at the same time as processing

data locally to achieve the right level of latency and cost optimisation," added Hoy. "Organisations will seek simplicity in cloud connectivity partnerships to avoid the complexity of using different exchanges and third party networks."

Hybrid cloud growth

According to Hoy, hybrid cloud is poised to grow even faster in 2023. The global hybrid cloud market was valued at \$85 billion in 2021 and Statista forecasts it to grow to \$262 billion in 2027. "There are good reasons behind this growth," stated Hoy. "Hybrid architectures can be notoriously complex and costly to operate, but the advent of next-generation cloud management platforms is removing many of these drawbacks."

"Organisations with hybrid cloud architectures combine the best of the public or private clouds and on-premises data centres. They benefit from more cost control, faster application deployment and the ability to manage workloads centrally while extending advanced orchestration capabilities to the edge."

"With new toolsets they can manage all their environments from a single interface and gain a full understanding of performance. Instead of watching costs rack up with no gain in performance, this is a year when more organisations will switch between environments according to their own requirements, rather than the cloud provider's." ■

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Surfing the sea changes

Many of today's successful telecoms leaders honed their sales skills in the high-octane environments of high street phone shops back in the nineties. Chief among them is Coolwave Communications Commercial Director Ronan Higgins who deftly adapts the firm's as-a-service propositions to the shifting sales landscape.

Higgins cut his milk teeth in telecoms selling Nokias and Motorolas and the experience quickly determined his future career path. "It's where it all started for me," he recalled. "Working in a phone shop on the high street back in the day made me realise how much I enjoyed sales and gave me the push to delve deeper into the industry. I've kept the same excitement and energy for our industry which drives my passion for Coolwave and everything we're about."

Higgins then moved into B2B sales for mobile, fixed voice and broadband, before becoming a Channel Partner Sales Manager, then Sales Director at Imagine Communications Group. In 2011 he became Coolwave's Commercial Director and a decade on still gets a buzz from negotiating deals. "I'm still enjoying it to this day," he enthused. "The market

is constantly changing which makes it an exciting time to be in telecoms."

Founded in 1998, Coolwave Communications is a voice and messaging specialist and now operates across the globe with a presence in Amsterdam, Dublin, Frankfurt, London and Singapore. Its parent company, the Imagine Group, is a 5G-ready fixed broadband network operator that has provided metropolitan and rural broadband services in Ireland since 2002. The company is backed by Brookfield Asset Management, a global asset manager with over \$385 billion in assets.

Higgins says his company's raison d'être is to make it simple and efficient for carriers, OTT players, CPaaS and XaaS providers to expand their voice and messaging capabilities with tailored solutions. "Our relationships with global operators and



Ronan Higgins

resellers enable us to deliver multiple services across all continents," he explained. "We bridge the gap between the traditional world of voice and messaging and the next generation of platforms, OTT services and applications."

Transformation

Higgins has seen and managed many sea changes in Coolwave but none as challenging or rewarding as the shift to 'as a service' solutions. "The biggest change for us over the last few years has been our digital transformation and making the move from more traditional telecoms services to a much wider scope of solutions," he commented. "We've partnered with experts across the industry to grow globally and extend our offerings for customers with SMS (A2P, P2A and RCS), two-way voice and messaging, and enabling telephony for Anything as a Service (XaaS) solutions like UCaaS, CPaaS and CCaaS."

Higgins is also mindful of the evolving needs of partner

customers in fluctuating market conditions following the Covid-19 pandemic. "Hybrid working is here to stay so we're developing our portfolio and looking at new partnerships," he added.

In terms of future developments and creating new revenue streams for partners, Higgins believes there is 'massive' growth potential in IoT and the provision of eSIMs. "The eSIM is surging in popularity so we'll be ensuring we can enable the success of these for our customers and their end users globally," he said.

Higgins works with a growing cohort of MSP partners and has a simple message to those seeking to continue building value. "Customers want better experiences without exhaustive costs," he stated. "For MSPs, the key is to stay agile, pivot quickly and follow the market while keeping services bespoke. User experience needs to be a focal point in evolving solutions – while keeping everything simple." ■

Just a minute with Ronan Higgins...

Role models: My parents and my wife Mairead who are always there to support and encourage me no matter what.

Your main strength and what could you work on? I have a 'lead and follow' mentality, depending on the situation. I'm also not afraid to take advice. My biggest weakness is probably not being able to fully switch my brain off.

If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing? Sales and working with people has always been my strength, so definitely still in sales.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know:

I have run six marathons over the years, with my last one being in 2017. There might be another one left in the tank!

One example of something you have overcome: Learning from my mistakes. They call it experience for a reason.

Biggest risk you have taken: Leaving college early. The thrill of work and the strive for success was too enticing.

Best piece of advice you have been given: Make sure everyone gets a fair slice of the cake. Empathy is a huge quality to have and breeds success within people.

Name three ideal dinner guests:

George Best, I'm an avid Man Utd supporter; Peter Kay, he has my type of humour; and Marilyn Monroe, who wouldn't want Marilyn over for dinner!

What do you fear the most?

Seeing my kids grow up so quickly. It would be nice to slow time down.

How do you relax? Going for a jog or socialising.

Top tip: Partnerships: There is no need to climb the same mountain that so many have already scaled, and you can learn a thing or two along the way.

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Women give fresh Mint a

Reseller start-up Mint Technology South has secured over 30 customers since it started trading just five months ago with a female-only sales team. We caught up with Director Lindsey Godden to explore how her fledgling business aims to set an example for other aspiring women in the channel.

At the outset, Godden, 32, makes it clear that her policy is not sexist nor carved in stone: She maintains the female centric workplace she has engineered has worked for her and her board partners during the formative months of the business. "Having managed both men and women at previous companies, there was something about having an all-female sales team that really made me proud," she enthused. "Historically, sales people in STEM companies are mostly men. There is something about being a woman in a male dominated environment that just works for us. But that's not to say that the next employee on the MTS payroll won't be a man. We just want to show how powerful women in business can be."

"I am a huge advocate of employing based on experience, and not race, gender or background. Given the length of time I have

worked with my sales team executives Sascha Ross and Shelley Shaw, the way we sell has adapted to increase sales and customer relationships in a way that works for us."

Godden believes it's still tough for women to overcome unconscious bias and preconceptions that 'men know technology better' and pulls no punches in her desire to smash down glass ceilings. "Speaking from experience, women must work incredibly hard to get deals," she added. "It's tough being a young woman sat in a board room of several men, telling them why they should listen to you about their technology needs and why they should trust your knowledge over the three male sales representatives that have been in before you."

"We must know more about our products, industry and company than others which means training courses, evening reading, looking at LinkedIn articles in your spare time and retaining



Lindsey Godden

There is something about being a woman in a male dominated environment that just works for us

everything that gets thrown your way. The women in my team are just as motivated as me to prove that we win our business based on us being the best choice for the customer, not because we smiled sweetly and fluttered our eyelashes." Godden aims to secure 500 customers in five years and

on that journey wants to encourage other women to stop disregarding a career in technology. "STEM is a great industry to work in, regardless of what gender you are," she added. "You get to work in an ever-changing environment that presses you to continue learning in an industry

where even competitors support one another.

"When I first started in ICT, I was one of the only women I knew that had a sales role in technology. That dynamic does seem to have changed over the last few years and, while we are still greatly outnumbered, I think



flying start

more women are interested in getting into technology-based roles. This is helping to close the gender gap but there's still a long way to go. If I can encourage women to consider a career in one of the best industries out there, then I am absolutely going to do so."

Strong backing

MTS is a separate company spun out of Birmingham-based Mint Technology owned by Jon Dunn and Damon Smith – they and Godden are shareholders.

If I can encourage women to consider a career in one of the best industries out there, then I am absolutely going to do so

"While the day-to-day running of MTS is down to me, we use their support and billing team while we grow and get to a stage where we can justify employing our own full-time staff to sit in these rolls at our office in Aylesbury," said Godden.

She learned her ICT sales and customer service skills at Citytalk Communications where she was inspired to set up her own business. "Working in an office with only four other people meant that I overheard conversations around engineering," she commented. "I understood how to fix problems sitting next to a support team member and I would look over the shoulder of the guy doing the provisioning

while talking to him about an upcoming order. Without realising, I was absorbing the range of skills I needed to run a small business."

MTS primarily deals with the SME market, upgrading technology from traditional telephone lines and broadband circuits to VoIP and the latest technology. Key tech partners are Daisy Distribution and Pragma. With their support Godden plans to sign up nine new customers a month and her long-term aim is to hit 500 within five years using a traditional sales strategy.

"Every little win is a step in the right direction for us," she added. "Every new customer, whether big or small, makes a difference when you are building something from nothing, so whilst there have been no major milestones, we are working hard and growing steadily in the way that we want – including getting out there and knocking on doors! It's so much harder to say no to a smiling face than it is to a voice at the end of the phone.

"From a staff morale point of view, getting out in the fresh air, having some friendly competition as to who can book the most appointments and meeting for a team lunch to discuss how the day is going helps keep everyone motivated. We like making friends with customers and the more we can speak to them and help the easier this becomes. Ultimately, the friendlier your team are, the harder potential customers find it to say no." ■

Just a minute with Godden...

Role model: My dad: An amazing parent and a successful businessman who started from nothing and taught me that if you work hard, it will happen for you.

Key advice to start-up entrepreneurs: Write some core values when you start and stick to them. Don't let success change the underlying values of your business and how you want your staff and customers to be treated.

What's the biggest risk you have taken: Leaving a very stable job with a large telecoms company to create a start up.

One example of something you have overcome: Having been very anti-running my whole adult life (because I hate it), last year I completed the London Marathon. Possibly the most challenging thing I have ever done!

What talent do you wish you had? To sing. Less so for myself, more for the poor people that ever get in a car with me!

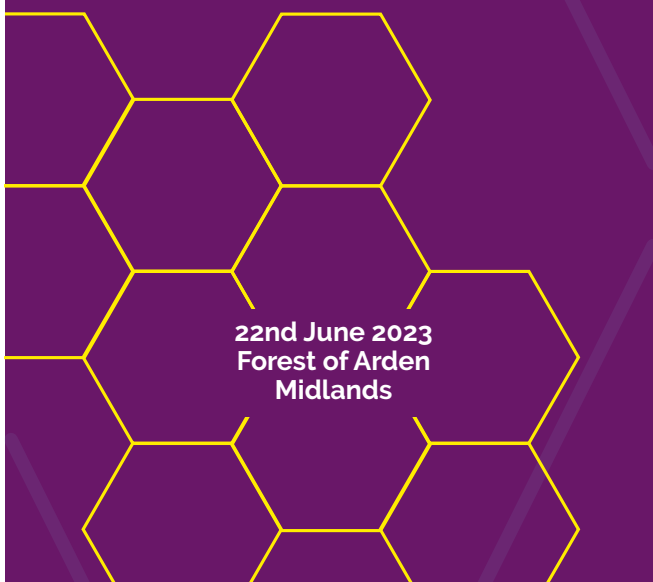
Name one thing you could not do without in your job: The support from both my business partners in the Midlands and my amazing team in Aylesbury. Their confidence and encouragement get me through the hard days. I don't think they will ever know how grateful I am for their help.

What possession could you not live without? Obviously my phone... purely because I work in telecoms, and nothing to do with online shopping or social media.

Industry bugbear? The typecasting that the STEM industry is most suitable for men. I have had my fair share of derogatory comments over the years!

How do you relax? Simple... wine.

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Channel key to X.Comm's

Greater emphasis on building a strong reseller channel, and becoming an all-embracing hosted comms provider supported by an engineering pedigree, will lead the way for X.Comms' partner growth ambitions, according to founder and CEO John Dowbiggin.

Sector experience is of course an important factor in facilitating the development of channel growth ambitions, but few business leaders have the breadth and depth of experience as Dowbiggin, who has an impressive 35 years experience working in the telecoms industry. Prior to setting up X.Comm he was Managing Director at AboveNet UK, turning the company from near bankruptcy into a thriving managed IP/fibre optical service provider based in the City of London, now part of Zayo Group.

He was previously VP for IP Solutions at Cable & Wireless UK & Ireland, joining the company through its acquisition of Internet Network Services, one of the UK's largest Tier 1 ISPs where he was National Sales Director. Before that he was Director, South East Region for Telewest Communications (now Virgin Media), which at the time was the UK's largest telecommunications, cable TV and ISP.

X.Comm has been trading since 1987 and operates through the SIP Trunking Services, X.Comm, LineBroker and Acuity Unified Communications trading names to ensure its range of products are correctly positioned in the marketplace. "We are a full-service provider offering telecommunications and Internet related communications services to the mid to upper SME market and lower corporate," said Dowbiggin. "We specialise in integrated UC services, networking and other cloud-based technologies."

The company operates from a number of data centres and works with key technology partners including Cisco, Microsoft, Ping Identity, Asterisk, Loway, Swivel Secure, Juniper and Pulse Secure. "As the market moves closer to being entirely cloud-based, with the PSTN/ISDN switch off in December 2025, we are evolving to ensure we provide the latest services for our customers, but at the same time we



John Dowbiggin

As the market moves closer to being entirely IP-based, resellers need to ensure they have a watertight partnership with a hosted telephony company

have taken a strategic approach to growth," explained Dowbiggin. "The acquisition of cyber secure SIP trunking business 500 Ltd, for example, enabled us to acquire its reseller channel customer base together with the self-service provisioning portal. It also added Fraud Mitigation which protects customers from the financial and legal consequences of toll fraud on SIP."

Security matters

The fraud protection software portfolio delivers security for mobiles and SIP connectivity, while meeting the suite of

telecoms service standards defined by the Federation of Communication Services. As well as resellers, the acquisition delivered what is now known as the SIP Trunking Services Portal (STS Portal) into the portfolio, enabling resellers to self-provision services including hosted seats and SIP trunks (many of which are 3CX resellers). "We provide the white labelled billing on their behalf," added Dowbiggin. "STS is a reseller model and the portal and platform provide resellers with an alternative to the mainstream suppliers out there."

X.Comm's first major milestone was the deployment of its own hosted platforms in 2012 removing any reliance on third parties. "We then brought on board a major UK PLC, quickly followed by a major public utility," added Dowbiggin. "In 2016 we acquired the customer related IT and telecommunications trading assets of The Integral Group which increased our portfolio in the IT support services we provide."

In recent years average customer sizes have ranged between 50 and 250 users

growth plans

with sales pipelines showing a continued increase in average customer size. "Our expertise in Wide Area Networking and use of high end Cisco and Cisco Meraki equipment has seen an increase in larger customers wanting networking solutions," said Dowbiggin. "Going forward, growth will be organic and, if possible, via acquisition. We have around 20 employees mainly within our engineering department. We are always looking for companies that have a good fit in our organisation should we acquire them."

Key acquisitions

More recently the business acquired X.Communications which specialises in Government and large corporation security solutions, including MFA, and LineBroker, one of the UK's larger better known leased line price comparison sites. "We culminated two years of work and became ISO 27001 and ISO 9001 accredited," said Dowbiggin. "These accreditations mean we can work with larger organisations that require their supply chain to be accredited."

Dowbiggin continues to focus on the core product of hosted telephony services and through previous acquisitions he is now looking to push security products including MFA. "The entire UK is moving to IP-based telephony," he said. "A lot of potential customers have already had some experience of hosted services, so they are better informed and more knowledgeable. That means they have higher expectations. As the market moves closer and closer to being entirely

IP-based, resellers need to ensure they have a watertight partnership with a hosted telephony company. Partners that can deliver a spectrum of services provide a consistent approach."

Dowbiggin believes that X.comm, through its SIP Trunk Services reseller brand, can meet these demands, especially as a number of partners already sell a range of products supported by the company. "The core product of hosted telephony has always led our business, with enhancements along the way," he stated. "Our Wide Area Networking offering has also grown.

"However, development is key to our success and as we launch ourselves on the ZoHo Marketplace with our own developed integration to ZoHo, together with our work in doing the same for NetSuite CRM, we see opportunities with larger clients that want full hosted telephony integration with their CRM systems."

Biggest opportunity

According to Dowbiggin, the PSTN/ISDN switch off in 2025 and the move to all-IP is the biggest opportunity the comms market has witnessed for a long time. "We see our customer base via reseller partners growing quickly due to the PSTN switch off," he said. "We want to do more with resellers and are already seeing large numbers of SIP trunks being added by partners via our self-service portal. We would expect to win our fair share of this market shift through our reseller base, providing them with support in what is likely to become a very busy period." ■

Just a minute with John Dowbiggin...

Your main strength and what could you work on? As a strength, not much phases me these days, but maybe that is also a weakness.

If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing? Running a bar on a beach in Ibiza.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know:

I white water rafted over the Shotover Canyon in New Zealand, a grade 3-5, so pretty scary.

Three ideal dinner guests: Ricki Gervais, Margaret Thatcher and Barack Obama: I want to know what makes (made) them tick.

One example of something you have overcome: I once had a fear of flying but took flying lessons. Now I am fine with it – provided I'm in the cockpit.

In hindsight: I'd have set up my own business sooner. I spent too long working in large corporate telecoms companies.

Best piece of advice you have been given? The harder you work the luckier you get.

Biggest career achievement: Turning Abovenet UK from near bankruptcy into a multi-million pound business.

What talent do you wish you had? To grow wings and fly to avoid the M25.

The biggest risk you have taken? Black water rafting. I had to crawl through tunnels hundreds of feet underground that were only 12 inches high and half filled with flowing water. Never again!

How do you relax? With a Bombay Sapphire G&T!

What could you not do without in your job? Café Nero and almond croissants.

Top tip: Get as close as possible to your upstream hosted provider and secure your SIP trunks from fraud.

Big boost for refurb

Supply chain issues and the rise of ESG programmes will continue to provide a boost to the circular economy and refurbished IT market, according to ETB Technologies Managing Director Nick Stapleton.



Nick Stapleton

As we move into 2023, those looking to make new IT purchases will continue to be impacted by the same supply chain challenges we saw last year resulting from the war in Ukraine, Brexit and the ongoing semiconductor crisis, believes Stapleton. "We don't expect this to ease for at least six to 12 months," he stated. "The upshot has been a boost to those in the circular economy – particularly the refurbished IT sector. More organisations have considered how they can continue their digital transformation programmes without delay, so have looked at new sources to improve or upgrade their IT infrastructure."

Stapleton has witnessed this trend first hand, pointing out that ETB Technologies has experienced a 44 per cent increase in new customer spending from 2021-22 as more organisations realise the product quality and availability within the sector.

"We expect this trend to continue as more businesses see how they can benefit directly from refurbished enterprise IT equipment," he commented. "Parallel to this, we expect to see a continued focus on quality and standards, not only for the hardware supplied, but for the service experience too."

Another factor that will boost the refurbished IT market is the increased profile of ESG programmes, observed Stapleton. "While the societal impact has always been an area of focus for businesses, the reskinning of ESG to become a governance related topic has correlated with environmental awareness becoming a board level issue," he added. "This is resulting in more financing coming into the industry from green investors; and while we have already seen some consolidation by large IT distributors, we would expect to see more over the coming year as distributors buy up others focused on areas like recycling."

Demand for skills

Continued growth around the sector will also require a stream of skilled employees to meet market demand. "Looking outside of the box and engaging with young people in schools and colleges must happen," added Stapleton. "The recruitment marketplace is also likely to be boosted through entrants to the market coming from some of the big US-based tech businesses which are streamlining their teams." ■

'A balanced board is just

President of CGI's UK and Australia operations Tara McGeehan addresses the key issue of improving diversity in the boardroom, and why the debate about more women in leadership positions has moved on from proving the case to building on advances already made.

How important is it for businesses to have diverse boardrooms?

Any room that has a diverse group of people is stronger for it. Whether it's a lab or a board room, we need to ensure there are strong female voices along the whole business chain. Only by having a diverse presence throughout a project lifecycle, or a business's infrastructure, can you ensure that innovation and creativity are being given a fair chance through different perspectives. Furthermore, the tech industry is constantly evolving and transforming, and I firmly believe the boardroom should reflect this to keep up with competitors and ensure innovation of thought.

How are you taking a lead on the issue of increasing female representation at the top in your business?

We do a lot to encourage women to join and stay in the tech workforce – from encouraging girls still in

school to spark a passion for STEM topics, to creating flexible environments that support experienced women with families to continue their careers without fear of imbalance. As an industry, we need to be more aware of the issues women face throughout their life to effectively support and nurture them.

A study this year found that more than a million women with menopausal symptoms are under pressure to quit their jobs because they are not getting the support they need. This is a shocking figure and risks the industry losing out on an incredible pool of experienced talent.

CGI has several diversity networks where colleagues can collaborate and have open and transparent conversations with one another, and one of our most popular is the menopause network. Not only is this a space where members can share tips on vital working practices, but they can share



Tara McGeehan

Diversity is more than a buzzword – it's an essential component of any business. Without it you risk stale ideas and falling behind

these key findings with the rest of the business. This means they are creating awareness and shining a light on something many of their male colleagues may be unaware of.

What other initiatives do you participate in to help increase the presence of women on boards?

In today's world, more organisations should consider programmes like the networks I've discussed as a business obligation rather

than a nice-to-have. If you want to truly be inclusive you must break biases, you have to empower employees, and you have to give them the tools to make the change they need, rather than the change you perceive. From a day-to-day stance, we work hard to ensure that women are given the tools to support themselves. Men and women often have very different needs, so making sure that both groups are being given a fair platform to shine is vital. Doing this could be as

simple as creating a flexible environment and ensuring measurement is on outputs rather than hours spent in an office environment.

We have also launched a shadow board which is a diverse group of CGI members who discuss the same topics alongside the CGI Cabinet to see if they reach the same conclusions. This gives us a well-rounded perspective from people of all backgrounds to foster trust at all levels at CGI.

common sense'

What are the objectives of these efforts?

The biggest objective of these programmes is to create an even playing field to ensure we have an environment where anyone can prosper and thrive. Diversity is more than a buzzword – it's an

The goal should be setting up a framework to make sure women can succeed and move up the corporate ladder without impediment

essential component of any business. Without it you risk stale ideas and falling behind.

What more action needs to be taken to boost the number of women on boards?

Accountability is vital when it comes to accelerating the pace of women in tech. This means identifying where the industry has gone wrong and acting to fix errors and gaps. As a sector, we need to keep having serious discussions around subjects like the gender pay gap and we should be holding each other to account. Having a balanced board is just common sense and we should all want this outcome.

What barriers have you identified to having more women on boards?

Identifying talent that is the right fit for positions on boards is one thing, but helping them to get ready to be on a board and to see the benefit for themselves and the wider organisation of being on the board can be a bigger challenge. Nobody wants to be a lone voice or

just make up the numbers and this can impact the desire of women to put themselves forward for board roles.

CGI is keen to encourage all members to reach the level in the organisation that is best for them, offering mentoring and coaching that helps to overcome any lack of confidence. We have a vibrant Women's Network too where our future board leaders can network with the current board members

to discuss the roles and challenges.

What cultural considerations should be taken into account?

It is important to consider that a hurdle some women encounter is returning to work after maternity leave or a career break. Suppose employees are offered support before, during and after parental leave in the form of remote training – in that case they can return to the business feeling confident with any recent developments in their space. Providing training courses for women while on maternity leave is a key part of our diversity and inclusion strategy at CGI UK, and it's helped prevent employees from feeling out of the loop or unneeded when they return (which of course is never the case).

Research suggests that for a group to have an impact on decision making it needs to form 30 per cent of the whole. Do you agree?

It can be risky to put a number on diversity as you run the chance of

treating it as a goal to be met rather than surpassed. Ultimately, we all have different life backgrounds and experiences which offer unique perspectives, and we should be looking to leverage that experience. The goal should be setting up a framework to make sure women can succeed and move up the corporate ladder without impediment.

How can ambitious women influence their own ability to reach a board level position?

The journey I took to get to where I am today was not planned, so it's difficult to say you should pick a path and stick to it, especially as the tech industry is fluid. Ultimately, we need to champion one another. Women who have succeeded in opening doors need to make sure those doors remain open to the women coming up behind them. Also, embrace your curiosity and commit to lifelong learning. In tech, the skills and tools we need to work are always shifting. It's vital to stay on top of these advancements by adapting and keeping your skills current. So sign up for classes, listen to podcasts, go to networking events and ask questions.

Has the comms sector made progress on increasing diversity at leadership level?

There has been a real push in the sector to grow the diverse talent pool, but as I've said before this is a journey without a destination. There is always more we can do, and more we should be doing. As long as we have that mentality driving us we will see even greater numbers of diverse talent leading the industry in the next ten, 20 and 30 years. ■

THE RECRUITMENT COLUMN

neoci

The 'R Word'



Darrol Stevens and Ollie Benn

The dreaded 'R Word' is all we seem to see right now, but it doesn't always have to be so negative. Randomly, we've decided to give our run down of the top 5 "R words" to kick off 2023!

Top of our list is... RECESSION

The unspeakable word, almost as unspeakable as Lord Voldemort. Lots of people fear this word and rightly so, it usually spells a huge shift in confidence, if we aren't careful the whole economy will spiral out of control. Or is that the what the press wants us to believe?

In times of recession, the strongest businesses can use it as an opportunity for exponential growth, gaining clients from their competitors that are not in such a strong position.

Closely in second place is... REDUNDANCY

We've seen it already in the telco industry, the big players in the UC market have shed a number of staff. The 'Covid boom' meant huge investment into sales and support teams, the crazy part is that although the UC deployment was expedited, business as a whole held its breath so there was a lower uptake in net new business, the pipeline froze with a hugely extended sales cycle. Did the Covid boom provide false economy, after all it was replacing what was already there, why the need to try a land grab and pay inflated

salaries to attract the best talent?...

3rd spot goes to... RESTRUCTURE

Acquisition has led to several restructures across telco, investment has been huge due to the confidence created when the industry rose through the pandemic. Restructure and consolidation allow time for processes to be implemented, these are the companies that will absolutely thrive in a recession.

Hot on the tail is... RISK

An economic downturn will unfortunately see a number of businesses struggle, for others, including neoci, it is seen as the ideal time to capitalise on becoming a master in what you do. Whether that is owning a niche or creating a new and compelling offering to your customers by taking a risk the rewards could follow.

And finally... RECRUITMENT

As neoci are a telecoms specialist recruiter, we had to include this! There will be the opportunity to recruit some great people off the back of a downturn. It's not all doom and gloom, there will be so many opportunities to thrive and grow. A shift to a less candidate driven market can allow you to attract the best talent and ultimately enhance your business and drive growth.

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CEO on 2023 priorities



Simon Crawley-Trice

In scanning the tech horizon for 2023 Six Degrees CEO Simon Crawley-Trice has identified the key issues that he says should be top of mind for all channel bosses this year.

In what Crawley-Trice says will be a challenging 12 months for the tech industry and end users he foresees more of the same in terms of security focused headlines, but the nature of the news could reflect broader issues. "There is no sign that the overall volume or impact of cyber attacks will decrease this year," he commented. "But attack strategies are certain to evolve with cyber criminals becoming more varied in who they target, instead of focusing primarily on the enterprise level. In 2023 we're likely to see organisations of virtually any size being breached."

One of the particular problems this creates is that, in general, organisations are still not built to respond effectively to attacks, particularly mid-market and smaller organisations. "There needs to be greater emphasis on proactive, preventative measures," said Crawley-Trice. "At the same time, organisations need to raise their game around remediation and communication, particularly at a board and regulatory level. This is where many mid-market organisations still struggle, so will likely emerge as a bigger theme this year."

Maximising the role that technology can play in helping organisations beat the recession is also

a top priority. "Given the challenging economic outlook 2023 is likely to be less about pure tech innovation and more about using technology to adapt to customer needs," added Crawley-Trice. "Unfortunately, without this mindset and tech investment strategy organisations will not have the agility to adapt to a recession. Some will struggle to match competitors that have built tech infrastructure and services as an enabler that maximises efficiency.

Organisations everywhere talk about being agile, but 2023 will really put their technology capabilities to the test

And those who can use technology to deliver better business insights, such as customer analytics, will be much better positioned to make informed decisions about where to increase or decrease their costs. Organisations everywhere talk about being agile, but 2023 will really put their technology capabilities to the test."

That said, there will be more investment in technology-led

automation to help maximise operational efficiencies, observed Crawley-Trice. "Organisations that can automate key processes to optimise cash-to-revenue will be strongly placed to meet whatever challenges 2023 brings," he added.

Reassessing partner value

Against this backdrop technology organisations across the channel ecosystem will be looking closely at the value and impact of their partnerships in 2023, believes Crawley-Trice. "Working with like-minded complementary organisations will be essential for quickly bringing new products and services to market this year," he commented. "Partnerships will also give technology organisations the ability to bolster their offerings and create new revenue streams to meet the challenges of a shrinking economy.

"This is also linked to the ongoing issues created by the widespread talent shortage across the technology industry. The risk for organisations that don't focus on recruitment, retention and strong partnerships is they won't have the expertise to deliver the digital transformation that many organisations will be prioritising in 2023."

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Maguire: Never waste a good recession

Against the backdrop of rapid macroeconomic meltdowns the most successful business leaders will throw caution to the wind and turn volatility to their advantage, according to Auxilion CEO Philip Maguire.

Maguire continues to show high optimism despite the uncertain economy. In fact, 'never waste a good recession' has always been his personal mantra. "I've used recessions consistently to evolve the business, pivot, leverage innovation and make significant changes," he stated. "Recessions have catalysed major milestones in our development, particularly the 2008 crash which sparked the inception of Auxilion."

Harnessing economic instability to your advantage means ramping up the possibilities of having an entrepreneurial spirit, which in Maguire's early career was not immediately obvious. He left college in the mid-80s and qualified as an electrical electronic engineer, first working for a valve manufacturer focusing on process control and automation using machine coding. He developed a deep knowledge around processes, workflows, machinery and plant automation, but to achieve a more rounded skill set Maguire completed an MBA which gave him the financial, marketing and leadership experience

to become a managing director at 28. "I spent three years working for Elequip Process systems in the UK and came back to Ireland in 1995," stated Maguire. "During those three years I concluded that I was an entrepreneur and wanted to be my own boss."

Working as a self-employed contractor with digital equipment Maguire developed an understanding of the IT sector and in 1997 set up IT Alliance to run and manage DEC executive on behalf of Digital Ireland on a full outsource basis.

"I experienced numerous recessions with IT Alliance, the first being at the end of 2001 with the dot-com crash," recalled Maguire. "I decided to really invest in a white label model and after the financial crashes of 2008 set up a SMB offering using our enterprise capability around managed services. That was the original concept for Auxilion which launched in 2012."

The new company developed software that ran and managed remote pods and working environments for small clients using a multi-tenanted approach. "During this period we also



Philip Maguire

We've taken risks and used recessions to our advantage, but partnerships have kept us informed of customer expectations, helped us co-create and evolve our portfolio, diversify and grow

established our Sheffield office which leveraged the capabilities of our health services management team," added Maguire. "This team grew into our Managed Services Centre of Excellence."

Auxilion also has offices in Dublin, Belfast and

Warrington, employs 500 people and plans to increase its UK workforce by 60 over the next two years. Also, Auxilion is looking to acquire a mid-tier IT service provider as part of a £15 million expansion into the UK. "The UK market is ten times larger than in Ireland, so the potential for us is huge,"

stated Maguire. "We're looking for a partner that can support our existing cyber security or modern workplace offering. Hybrid cloud, modern workplace and managed services strategies continue to dominate."

"We see increased interest in automation, process

good recession

optimisation and governance as being central to the successful implementation of these strategies. Process automation is a major focus as partners seek ways to increase efficiencies and facilitate growth particularly in the context of recessionary pressures. Many

The UK market is ten times larger than in Ireland, so the potential for us is huge

organisations will be trying to do more with less, and some digital transformation projects are failing due to poor governance, costing organisations millions every year."

Part of Auxilion's multi-million investment will go towards creating an innovation hub at the Services Centre of Excellence in Sheffield, expanding its floor space by 60 per cent and growing its team. In other expansion news, early last year Auxilion announced it was on course to grow revenues by 25 per cent by the end of 2022, compared to 2021, taking revenues beyond £40 million. "We're anticipating more significant growth this year," confirmed Maguire.

Lesson learnt...

A HUGE early lesson was the importance of detailed monthly accounting. I nearly lost everything in 2001 because I was doing quarterly reviews and accounts. I'd overstretched the business – you can see that happening now with some major companies – and did not react quickly enough to the dot-com crash. A monthly rather than quarterly focus allows you to make corrections and adjustments quickly. I also learned that, in a recession, the best approach is to cut hard, cut once and cut from the top. Be clear on your strategy and communicate clearly. It's a difficult process but sometimes unavoidable.

Although Auxilion began with a white-label partnership model it became clear to Maguire that there was great merit in broadening out into a direct play. "Our focus on leveraging enterprise capabilities and cloud experience with Azure on the SMB sector preceded a move

back to our strengths in the corporate and enterprise space," he explained. "As with anything, time is often key. We had some large scale contracts with the NHS finishing up in the north of England. We had a fantastic

team there and I decided to redeploy them into the Sheffield office and build out our Service Operation Centre. This location has gone from strength to strength and we're currently doubling our capacity there."

Snowballed

Auxilion started to build a direct customer base following a big managed services partnership with Mainstream Renewable Power, which is still a customer a decade later. "It began to snowball from there," added Maguire. "We secured a series of big wins with large clients which drove major growth and moved our focus to go after more scale partners which was a successful pivot."

Auxilion's key technology partners are Microsoft, HPE and Service Now, which underpin a long-term growth strategy. "We have a programme for continuous improvement focused on the future of managed services, looking to introduce more automation while leveraging the tools and technologies that we have at our disposal," explained Maguire.

"It's a process of continuous improvement – evolution not revolution. We're not simply a project supplier and we won't 'transform' a business – we'll grow it together over time and at the right pace. We help customers govern and control the journey, and we implement and support before, during and after. You have to understand the value proposition and measure the value that has been delivered. That's the key for us – it's how we operate and how we partner."

That's why Maguire attributes the mainstay of Auxilion's growth to long-term partnerships, which he says is in the firm's DNA. "When you operate an indirect white-label business, success comes from an ability to partner and have honest and meaningful relationships," he commented.

"This experience has helped us to maintain decades-long strategic partnerships. I'm still working with partners and customers who've been with us since I launched the company 25 years ago. We've taken risks and leveraged recessions to our advantage – but partnerships have kept us aligned to customer expectations, helped us to co-create, evolve our portfolio, diversify and grow." ■



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Jola's diversity project

Making tech careers in high demand among female talent is a tough task that Jola's Chief Marketing Officer Cherie Howlett has sought to address via gender inclusive strategies.

The focus on creating leadership opportunities for high potential women and accelerating their development is getting sharper, and Howlett's objective is to raise awareness, inspire and demonstrate how small changes can make a big difference to the quality of female candidates being recruited and the success of organisations in the channel.

"I sat on the board at Jola for over eight years and was the only female board member," she stated. "I like to think I brought a new dimension to the team and some complementary skills. Board discussions were always inclusive and a female marketing perspective from a detail-orientated person was often useful in decision making."

The annual Female FTSE Board Report revealed UK FTSE 350 boards have made progress on gender diversity, but there are still few women in senior leadership positions. "I have worked in ICT and channel for most of my career and find it exciting and challenging, but the issue is that not enough female graduates view ICT as an

attractive career for women," said Howlett. "It will take time to see real change. We need to inspire young women to pursue careers in technology and support and mentor them into senior positions. We need to make sure we are flexible in our approach so we don't lose people along the way. If we remove barriers there is nothing stopping us."

Howlett believes that being a female on the board sends a positive message to other women in the organisation, that there is no glass ceiling and that it is possible to progress to more senior positions. "If you can see someone similar to yourself doing the job you want in the future, it makes the goal seem more achievable and you can often gain a mentor to help you learn the skills to be able to get there," she added.

According to Deloitte, gender diversity in UK board rooms is lagging behind European counterparts with only one in five board room seats held by women. But the Jola board has learned that it's not enough to have female representation, you have to make sure decisions are not made



Cherie Howlett

I like to think I brought a new dimension to the team and some complementary skills

without everyone's input. It follows that Jola is not specifically focused on hiring more women. It is against positive discrimination.

Inclusive approach

"Some people interpret 'diversity strategy' as a reason to recruit females to senior positions, not because they are the best candidate, but to hit a quota," observed Howlett. "Our approach is to accommodate the best qualified, but the pool we recruit from needs to be more diverse. We need more experienced women with great track records in board positions who can add something extra."

To this end Jola has put in place official training and development schemes as

well as unofficial mentoring programmes. The company encourages networking and personal development sessions with organisations such as Reframe and Women in Tech. It has established work experience schemes, apprenticeships, sandwich year placements, graduate training, and advertises roles internally so women have an opportunity to progress inter-departmentally. "We also encourage and pay for our staff to gain qualifications to progress within Jola," added Howlett.

She champions a number of initiatives to remove the barriers some women face working in the channel, such as work-from-anywhere and part-time hours. "This has helped mums working from

home, doing school drop-off and pick-ups, attending parent evenings, school productions, sports days and taking kids to after-school clubs," she added. "It has also allowed mums to be at home to look after ill children and relatives, while being focused on the needs of Jola, our sales team and partners during working hours."

As we can see, it's also about being an attractive company to work for, so Jola has introduced EMI schemes and employee benefits that Howlett says competes with larger organisations offering flexible working and a gender diverse culture. "We changed the way we recruited to remove the barriers of specific qualifications and experience, and focused on finding smart people who share the same values as the Jola team," added Howlett.

"There is no quick fix. We need to increase the number of experienced candidates to recruit from, and the more we can influence young people to reach their potential, the better the recruitment pool will be for us when they are ready to start work."

It is noteworthy, pointed out Howlett, that when Jola was looking for a Non-Executive Director no female candidates were put forward for consideration. "If we want more women on boards we may need to grow our own and build connections to those likely to hire future board positions to make sure we are shortlisted for consideration," commented Howlett. "With the right team around you, there is an opportunity to be heard and influence, even if you are the only female." ■

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McCahill turns dial on key

ANS Group's first Chief People Officer (CPO) Toria McCahill joined the MSP from Comparison Technologies last summer, a fellow tech business in the Inflexion Private Equity portfolio. Here, she discusses how diversity and inclusion will play an ever growing role in shaping ANS's people strategy, and shares insights into how female representation in comms sector boardrooms can be increased.

McCahill's appointment puts diversity and inclusion more under the spotlight as ANS seeks to deliver a fresh strategy that moves the dial on fostering female talent. "When it comes to our people initiatives and incentives we're not here to do BAU," she stated. "My passion is diversity in all its forms, to build diverse and high-performing teams, enabling people to develop and grow their careers."

McCahill has a background in finance and M&A but made the switch to HR more than a decade ago. She has held senior roles at Samsung, Dentsu and Dixons Carphone Warehouse; and her career experience has given her a deep understanding of

commercial strategy and how it links to people strategy, especially attracting, retaining and engaging the right people through an inclusive culture. "One of the ways we promote diversity is through various EDI groups," added McCahill. "A person's identity is about more than their gender, and it's important for us to create an environment where everyone can be themselves."

She explained that the Women in ANS group is about bringing a community of women together to share experiences and to network. "It's a neutral space where women have the opportunity to talk to and learn from those in different roles and business areas who they might not otherwise have regular access to," added



Toria McCahill

When it comes to our people initiatives and incentives we're not here to do BAU

McCahill. "It's about being inspired and having great role models, as well as finding common ground and supporting each other with shared challenges."

Tomorrow's leaders

Alongside the Women in ANS group the company is developing a Future Leaders programme which looks closely at how to nurture female leaders and ensures they have access to coaching and mentoring. "Sometimes women can be reluctant to

push themselves forward for leadership positions," said McCahill. "That could be due to a lack of confidence in their ability, concerns about managing other caring responsibilities or misconceptions about the behaviours required of leaders."

"We may need to proactively search out the great women in our organisations and push them forward, as they're not always as good as men at self-promotion."

This programme makes sure we're not missing out on amazing potential female leaders who won't necessarily put themselves out there."

McCahill urged senior business people to make use of their wider networks to open up opportunities for others. "I'm working with the CEO of another Inflexion partner, and through networks like these we can ensure we've got a pool of mentors for females at all levels, and in

y D&I strategies

different industries, to help people grow their breadth of experience," she said.

"Taking a longer-term view, we work with a number of local schools and colleges, meeting young people and engaging with young women in particular to inspire them

We're at a pivotal point and must continue to shine a spotlight on not only gender inequality, but also other under-represented groups – and acknowledge that there's a long way still to go

about what a career in tech can offer. We provide routes into the sector via our apprenticeship scheme and are working on the launch of a new graduate scheme."

Among other initiatives designed to help increase the presence of women on boards ANS, alongside a number of other businesses, is working with the Tech Talent Charter on a project to address the lack of diversity in the tech industry. "I recently attended an event as part of this project at the House of Commons to work directly with Government and policymakers on the lack of diversity in tech board rooms, and what we can do to really push that forward and make sure it's high on the agenda," commented McCahill.

She believes that more action needs to be taken to boost the number of women on boards, and that it's everyone's responsibility, not just womens', to boost diversity at the most senior level. "If you want your business to be diverse your exec team has to be behind it otherwise you're fighting a losing battle," commented McCahill. "I feel fortunate at ANS that the rest of the board have bought into increasing diversity and that as a woman on the board I have an equal voice. But there's a long way to go across the industry before diversity is unanimously seen as a priority.

"It's about looking at everything through a diverse lens and considering everyone. We need to make sure that everything

from our culture, our benefits, our events and our communications really reflect the 30 per cent of females in the business and take into account women who might be considering a career with us."

Flexibility

As part of this approach ANS encourages hybrid, remote and flexible working, while offering an attractive office environment for those who want it. "This is about supporting different lifestyles and different people, whether they're men or women, have a family or are single," said McCahill.

She says the onus is not on ambitious women influencing their own ability to reach a board level position, rather

how a business inspires and supports young females to grow into top level roles. "It's important to try and be a role model and to demonstrate true leadership behaviours as a female," noted McCahill. "I was lucky to have brilliant support and coaching around me, so I want to pass that on to give other females the confidence that they can do it too."

Key juncture

Has the ICT sector in general made progress in recent years on increasing diversity at leadership level? "I've been in tech for a long time now," said McCahill. "In the first tech business I joined we had just four per cent female representation in the entire company. There has been some brilliant progress, but not enough in my view. We're now at a pivotal point and must continue to shine a spotlight on the issue – not only on gender inequality, but also other under-represented groups – and acknowledge that there's a long way still to go.

"We might not see true parity for another 20 years, but if we start early by getting into schools and inspiring everyone towards careers in tech, in the future we'll see a better balance in the sector. Then it's about making sure people have the right support in place to help them grow and move into those leadership positions.

"We've also got to think about our children and our children's children. We've got to make sure that the opportunities are there for them, but also do our part in inspiring the young women of today to join the industry – so it doesn't remain so male dominated." ■

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New vision opens up

With a challenging new year ahead, leaders of reseller organisations may be turning their thoughts to different solutions that could give them an edge with customer relationships and provide healthy margins. Digital Vision from BT Wholesale’s innovations unit could just be the answer.

Let’s create a scenario: You already have a customer in the retail space, you’ve probably sold them everything you can telecoms wise, and you need to wow them with something special. Something that could substantially and positively give them a commercial advantage without breaking the bank. The discussion could then go something like this:

- Salesperson: Do you have an existing CCTV network covering your space? Customer: Yes.
- Salesperson: Do you have the means to quickly analyse the data those cameras have captured. Customer: Not really, they’re just for security.
- Salesperson: Are your security team alerted if a person in a specific area is carrying a suspicious bag? Customer: No.
- Salesperson: Can you build a heat map from the CCTV data that shows you the area in your outlet where people gather most, so you

can place your best offers there? Customer: No.

- Salesperson: I believe we have a solution for you...

Ok, that’s the best case scenario and the discussion could go in another direction. But whatever transpires, customers with large spaces to manage will undoubtedly see the potential Digital Vision claims to offer.

Let’s look at another example – an event venue: According to BT Wholesale, Digital Vision outputs can be integrated into many different systems such as digital signage, thereby informing fans of different sized queues at concessions inside the venue concourse or the number of car parking places still available. And one more – a Vodka bottling plant: BT Wholesale says Digital Vision can have AI analysis included ‘out of the box’ ready programmed to analyse the amount of vodka in each bottle on the production line,



Jon Cooper

rejecting any bottle that is not correctly filled.

Key benefits

Presenting BT Wholesale’s case for advanced video analytics in the channel is Indirect Sales Manager of the innovations unit Jon Cooper, who hones in on five key benefits Digital Vision can offer reseller customers. “Number one is optimising operations,” he stated. “The ability, using anonymised data, to intelligently analyse people, traffic and objects will simply and quickly make customers more efficient.

“Number two is safety: Imagine a bio-tech business or health unit where protective clothing is obligatory. Digital Vision can be programmed to sound an alarm immediately if a person is not wearing the correct gear. Number

The increasing availability of 4G and 5G means resellers could potentially bundle Digital Vision into a mobile communications solution and, as Cooper maintains, customers do not need the latest CCTV set-ups to employ the solution and it is totally secure.

“Digital Vision can quickly and easily integrate with existing cameras, whether analogue or digital, with or without a video management system and analyses real-time video feeds for specific events,” he explained. “It then produces meta data from those images to be used for post-analysis. It uses primarily an on-prem, simple Graphics Processing Unit which easily integrates into a customer LAN, so all data is kept secure on premises.

“As 5G increases its penetration, resellers will be able to offer more powerful and sophisticated image analysis. It also avoids costly rewiring, so customers have both the performance and the freedom to configure monitoring as needs evolve.”

Digital Vision, which has been developed by BT Wholesale’s innovations unit in a collaboration with French ICT giant Atos, was unveiled at the company’s latest Partner Plus event staged at The Shard in London in November and was demonstrated ‘live’, creating considerable interest. ■

COMMENT...

IN AN INCREASINGLY competitive market, thinking outside the standard telecoms box could put channel players into new realms of profitability. The core technology behind Digital Vision is not entirely new but condensed into a fully customisable plug-and-play solution for customers it now represents a new opportunity for forward thinking resellers willing to grasp it.

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Learn from Xperience

A strategy shift sees Xperience sharpen its market leadership ambitions following investment from Bowmark to fund organic and acquisitive expansion. Here, Chief Executive Iain O’Kane provides a strategic update.

Considered to be one to watch, Lisburn headquartered MSP Xperience has embarked on an expansion campaign fuelled by investment from mid-market private equity firm Bowmark Capital. The move is the latest in a string of developments that helped prepare the business for perhaps its most ambitious growth phase. “Bowmark’s track record in our sector and its understanding of what we are seeking to achieve made it a natural partner,” said O’Kane. “Our vision is to grow Xperience into one of the UK’s leading managed IT service providers and we are working with Bowmark to achieve that goal.”

Xperience’s partnership with Bowmark will facilitate organic and acquisitive growth, and catalyse the rapid expansion of services in high demand areas such as cyber security based on solution consultancy. “We aim to have an intimate knowledge of our existing clients and spend a lot of time getting to know prospective ones,” added O’Kane. “There is a good feedback loop between

our commercial teams, Central Applications Office and CTO to understand what clients want and to get ahead with solutions. Technical pre-sales is vital.

“With the ongoing drive towards digital transformation, the widespread adoption of cloud services and the increasing challenge of cyber threats, more and more SMEs are seeking a strategic IT partner that can provide an integrated business solution. As a Microsoft Gold Partner, Xperience offers a managed service that enables customers to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their businesses.”

With offices in Lisburn, Bury St Edmunds, Glasgow, Peterborough and St Neots, Xperience supports over 800 small and medium-sized companies and employs more than 170 people, and is targeting 2023 revenues of £25 million (currently £22 million) and a headcount boost to 200 by the end of the year. Its client base is primarily SMEs with a sweet spot in the 50-plus user space, often with multi-site connectivity. “Cyber is our



Iain O’Kane

most recent offering which has huge growth potential, however we are enjoying double digit growth in other areas too,” stated O’Kane. “MIT cloud and business apps are the other pillars underpinning our solutions.”

Strong pedigree

Xperience was founded in 1969 by three professors from local (Northern Ireland) universities, and has been an IBM business and Pegasus partner from the 1980s. It was in 1998 that O’Kane joined the business with a remit to provide Y2K consultancy to its SME base. He became a board director in 2002 and following an MBO in 2009 the company began to shift its focus towards private cloud and the MS solutions stack. “The MBO gave us renewed energy and focus,” stated O’Kane, who

graduated from Liverpool John Moores University with a degree in Business Info Systems 32 years ago.

In 2011 Xperience acquired to get into virtualisation and cloud, and the following year entered the UK through acquisition. Following various restructures O’Kane became the majority shareholder in 2016, and a Chairman was appointed in 2019. Fast forward to today, and the big trends of most interest to O’Kane are cyber security, business continuity, business intelligence and the wider use of business applications. “We will continue to focus on organic and inorganic growth,” he added. “There is no reason why we can’t continue our current trajectory and have a strong DT business that has doubled in size again, with an even greater geographic reach.” ■

Just a minute with Iain O’Kane...

Role models: Everyone I work with. Each individual brings something different to the business. I often listen to them and learn a lot.

Your main strength and what could you work on? My key strength is always wanting to better myself, our people and the business – and embracing change. But I have to work at being patient: Sometimes I process things too quickly and form a view too early on.

If you weren’t in ICT what would you be doing?

Probably an architect or engineer as I love maths.

Tell us something about yourself we don’t know:

I’m currently learning to ride a motorcycle at the ripe old age of 52.

One example of something you have (nearly) overcome:

I jumped out of an aeroplane with a parachute to overcome my fear of heights. It didn’t work.

Biggest risk you have taken:

Becoming majority shareholder and introducing debt to the business.

It was well within our reach but risky from a personal perspective.

Lesson learnt: To respond rather than react (which I did when I was a lot younger!).

Industry bugbear:

Software licencing is a very complex area.

How do you relax? I’m a retired triathlete and still enjoy swimming, cycling and running.

Biggest career achievement:

In the last 18 months we completed two acquisitions and secured investment from Bowmark Capital.

Best piece of advice you have been given: Surround yourself with people who are better than you.

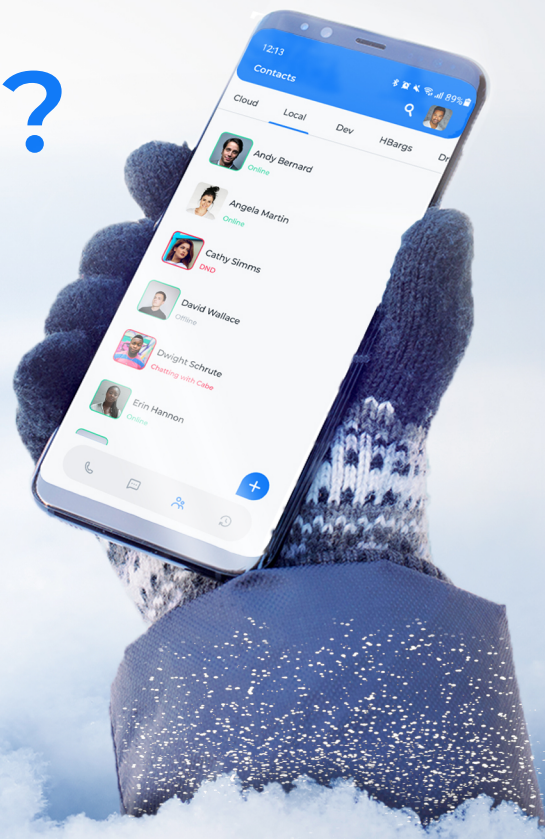
Top tip: Always add value where possible and differentiate.

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Channel Forecast Editorial Round Tables 2023

In the Comms Dealer round table sessions, ICT vendors can share their insights on the key challenges, strategies and technologies that channel partners will need to adopt in order to thrive in 2023 and beyond. The content of these high-level discussions will form a key part of our 2023 editorial calendar and provide a fantastic blend of editorial content in Comms Dealer magazine, online and via social media with the release of a series of 'Video Shorts' highlighting the key points/questions from the discussion.

Programme for 2023

- 2025: Maximising the journey to all-IP.
- Full fibre adoption: Removing the road blocks to full scale fibre take-up.
- How will Next Generation Networks create new prospects for the channel?
- Inclusion and diversity: Benchmarking D&I progress and what more needs to be done.
- Sustainability: Addressing sustainability challenges on the road to Net Zero.
- Unravelling the growing staff welfare and preferences dilemma.

Join the debate!

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

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Canny channel ready to tackle a tumultuous 2023

A year ago, we ran a Kaleidoscope titled “2022 aspirations: Setting out strategy in the era of uncertainty.”

Whilst it would’ve taken a naive business leader to assume the world would regain equilibrium over the past twelve months, few might have guessed the raft of challenges they would be forced to face.

UK plc is staring into 2023 amidst a cost of living crisis, war on the continent and the continued economic fallout of the pandemic, however, a battle hardened and ever-optimistic channel remains positive.

Shrewd operators plan to turn risk to reward and capitalise on a rising tide of new technologies that will define the UK’s response to the year ahead.

We asked our contributors to look forward into 2023 and shed light on the following:

- Their business aspirations for the coming year
- The top trends they believe will dominate the industry
- The best opportunities for businesses to maximise on
- Their key strategy and focus for the year ahead.



CHRISTIAN BLEAKLEY
FIRSTCOM EUROPE

“The combined impact of Covid, Brexit, conflict in Europe, the cost-of-living crisis and climate change has meant that there is no “business as usual” anymore. Our own industry, telecommunications, has changed beyond all recognition both in structure and how our customers communicate. Our tools for communicating have never been better, yet loneliness and isolation are increasing. My vision for 2023 is to make business more personal. We want to be the telecom partner where every customer contact is a positive experience, where customers ring us and expect to talk to someone who will listen and help. Where local knowledge matters and selling is based as much on features and benefits and personal relationships as it is on price. The high-water mark of the monolithic and remote corporation has passed, the next generation of successful business leaders will seize this opportunity.”



TIM MERCER
VAPOUR

“At a recent event I was struck by how flat the room was. The industry is preparing itself for a tough year, particularly when it comes to the economic climate and the impact that will have on client projects. For us, the focus will be looking at how we deliver more value to customers, further our consultative stance to ensure optimal cloud adoption and transformation projects, engage with the market generally, and continue to effectively interact with staff in the permanent world of hybrid working. I’m proud of the reputation we’ve carved for ourselves in the industry, particularly when it comes to the personality and authenticity of our brand, and this will be integral to our story in 2023. In the wider space I think we’ll see more automation project deliveries in SMEs, network security by design will

become an even bigger topic, and the public versus private cloud debate will remain in sharp focus.”



MARK PILLOW
VOIP UNLIMITED

“Over the years, we’ve seen the race to offer voice services at the lowest cost run its course. Instead, we want our partners in a different race – a race of growth and impact within their customers’ operations. Voxone, our new all-encompassing UC solution, is a key part of that strategy, offering all the functionality businesses need without having to keep upping the price, which tends to lead to customer pushback. Instead, Voxone is priced as a single tier that provides all the functionality, while protecting strong margins for partners. We’re also laser-focused on reducing complexity for our customers and partners, even as we bring new products like Voice-over-Satellite into the market. Our professional services and technical teams are ready to take on the tough challenges

end-users face, and we take those in our stride so our partners can reap the rewards of a genuinely satisfied customer.”



ROB SIMS
ELITE GROUP

“2023 looks to be a challenging year for the whole of the UK, however, it won’t be without opportunities for channel. With the first stop sell restrictions from the PSTN switch off starting this means providers need to make serious moves to support customers in the transition. With the plethora of alternative services now available this means customers have the widest choice of products to future-proof their business. The undoubted push for value for money, aka cheaper prices from customers as the economy slows, will create both opportunities and threats. Those businesses that focus on quality not just price will be best placed to succeed by demonstrating the benefits, not just the cost. Elite will continue to provide its multi-product solutions – UC, tech,

security, mobile & IoT that add value and reduce complexity, helping our customers to maximise their productivity and profitability.”



MIKE VAN BUNNENS
COMMS 365

“We’re looking to 2023 with a genuine sense of optimism and positivity. Yes, the last 12 months have been trying for nearly every business – even the channel – but as chip shortages dissipate, we anticipate massive growth across our IoT end-user bases. This will primarily be driven by operations focusing on finding cost efficiencies. Not only in terms of utility bills and being smarter with their energy usage, but also working in tandem with broader digital transformational strategies, to develop more agile operations where data informs every key decision. And we’ll only get there by delivering the support our partners need. So, with a renewed focus on sales enablement and updated partner programme, we’re ready to drive growth within our partners’ businesses and ensure that as many UK

operations as possible can realise the financial, as well as social, benefits of a truly transformational IoT solution.”



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DAN DAVIES
MAINTEL

"As we approach 2023, Maintel will look to continue delivering on the excellent growth we've seen in Cloud Communications. We will also accelerate the growth in our connectivity and network security offerings, maximise on the opportunity that the big PTSN stop sell and switch off brings, and complement our existing network and cloud security offering with managed Cyber Security services. The trend toward public cloud unified comms, collaboration and customer experience services will continue, but with hybrid integration to both on premise and strong private cloud offerings still being a vital piece of the puzzle required to complete these solutions for organisations with more complex requirements. The drive to multi-cloud environments is also set to continue, which in turn will continue to fuel the demand for managed cloud networking, powered by SD-WAN and SASE

based technologies, complemented by the expertise needed to assist organisations in protecting themselves against the ever-growing threat of cybercrime."



ELIZABETH SPARROW
BLABBERMOUTH
MARKETING

"While the channel's internal understanding of transitioning to All-IP and the 2025 switch-off is at an all-time high, more work still needs to be done to educate end-user businesses about its impact. The proof being there are still millions of ISDN lines still live! Not only should this be a part of all regular discussions resellers have with current customers, but prospects should be educated through the sales journey too. Not only priming them for more product-specific conversations, but also proving the reseller's credibility by considering the prospect's long-term success as well. This is where effective marketing, leveraging personalised messaging and automation, ensures optimum lead generation without taking time away from more targeted, account-based efforts. We've also found that Calls to Action (in emails for example) that direct prospects to book a specific time are far more effective than linking to 'contact us' pages on websites!"

opportunities than it is finding solutions for your customers. In the eye of the storm, business leaders want the support and advice of companies they trust."



CRAIG PATTERSON
ARYAKA

"Initially a steppingstone in returning to the office, we expect hybrid work environments to not only endure, but flourish. Though, many organisations still haven't developed the foundations from which to build a secure and reliable WAN to facilitate hybrid working effectively. In our constantly connected workplace from anywhere, whether international or UK-based with multiple sites, enterprises need to put additional resources into protecting their network from threats, whether direct (like cyberattacks) or peripheral (such as infrastructure faults or outages). A converged SD-WAN and SASE ecosystem, that puts zero trust at its heart, is the key transformational tool for end-users – and to secure the ever-expanding enterprise threat perimeter! Delivering solutions to these challenges has massive benefits for reseller partners too, providing an opportunity to increase margins by managing those services alongside established upsell roadmaps that have been tried, tested, and honed by our partners, to maximise buy-in."

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PHILIP MAGUIRE
AUXILION

"Growth. That's the big focus. We've publicly stated our ambitions to acquire a company in the UK and that's something we'll be prioritising on. We're focused on further investing in the UK market and leveraging the incredible talent here. In term of a recession, we've been in this position before, so we know that cost control, change management and managing spending will be key priorities for organisations. We expect a huge focus across the industry on transformation programmes that maximise efficiencies, particularly around process improvement. Companies will need to leverage their assets and existing technology effectively to ensure that they're getting ROI and adding value through their services. Ultimately, businesses want a partner that understands their strategic objectives. It's less about finding

opportunities than it is finding solutions for your customers. In the eye of the storm, business leaders want the support and advice of companies they trust."



DAVID WARDELL
EVOKE

"Leadership teams have recognised that in 2023 the 'working harder' mantra must be replaced by 'smarter working' strategies. The industry is moving on from a focus on MS Teams and CRM/PMS integration, to conversations around the convergence of data technologies. SQL access, Power BI, Tableau and the like are increasingly dominating strategic reviews. We are also witnessing an exponential growth in chatbot development in a wide range of areas, most notably ChatGPT in the marketing space. Key will be alliances with the right partners and progressive technologies as increasing developer time is dedicated to maximising the opportunities offered by open API's. 2023 will be all about 'out with the old and in with the new'. And as for my personal aspirations?

Well, I would like to take as many 'bumps out of the road' as I can for my clients, colleagues, family and friends."



SOHINI RAITHATHA
REDSQUID

"Redsquid's aspirations for 2023 are the extended development of our technologies that are a part of our overall strategy as an MSP with a focus on security. We'll also have a big focus on the ISDN and PSTN switch off and migrating both new and existing customers onto future proof and efficient technology, along with the full fibre roll out. Information about the switch off is still too low, and the opportunity to support businesses through this transition is enormous. We continue to see an upward trend of organisations investing in their cyber security, as stakeholders face the serious risks of facing a breach. To overcome the increase in cyber-attacks, we are developing solutions in-house, such as Redsquid Cyber/Kill, to provide our customers with the XDR, SOC and SIEM technologies that will make them secure and bring peace of mind. Solutions we continue to invest in, so we can keep making a difference."

SIEM technologies that will make them secure and bring peace of mind. Solutions we continue to invest in, so we can keep making a difference."



AARON FOX
TELXL

"TelXL's aspirations for 2023 are to see an accelerated delivery of CCaaS solutions to SMEs through our growing network of channel partners. Economic pressures mean businesses everywhere will seek to do more and for less. Primarily, this means having the right technology at the right price to enable businesses to offer exceptional experience for their customers. It also, and just as importantly, ensures the chosen technology is implemented and leveraged correctly. In the coming year, TelXL will focus on driving customer experience for customers in the SME space through empowerment of its partners to deliver against differing needs. A part of that agility will see availability of a complimentary platform for UCaaS resellers, providing natural overlay to augment UCaaS systems with progressive and accessible CCaaS functionality. TelXL will also continue to answer the growing need for flexible and easy-to-implement solutions in an underserved SME market."

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PHILIPPE DU FOU
INTERMEDIA

"Hybrid work is here to stay. As companies around the world contend with economic uncertainty whilst adjusting to more permanent hybrid work operating models, the opportunity for partners to deliver the tools that enable business users to collaborate and communicate from wherever work is happening is profound. We also see customers asking for a combined solution for UC with CC, therefore the market prefers vendors who can provide a consolidated offering. We see channel partners and vendors being acquired or going bankrupt. Make sure you choose a vendor that is there for the long term and can provide a solution available globally. Our key strategy for 2023 is to continue to partner with the UK channel as our sole means of going to market and making sure the channel has everything they need to delight their customers while growing their own futures."

channel has everything they need to delight their customers while growing their own futures."

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Channel urged to grasp th

2022 was a busy and challenging year for ICT providers but it's no time to rest on one's laurels, writes Gavin Jones, BT Wholesale's Channel Partners Director, who says it's full steam ahead for the channel towards all-IP and 5G technology transformation.

The channel is known for being resilient, and though it faced a range of obstacles in 2022, including supply chain issues, inflation and the ongoing effects of Brexit (to name but a few), it's been an incredible year for growth. That said, partners and resellers will be looking to understand what they might face over the coming year, what solutions are on the horizon, and how they can boost their bottom line during 2023 and beyond. While the next 12 months will not be without its challenges, there is also much to look forward to. Indeed, a key focus for the channel going into 2023 will be preparing for the 2025 PSTN switch-off, as well as embracing the potential of 5G technologies.

The push for all-IP

Businesses of all sizes must prepare for the shift to all-IP – the biggest upgrade in national infrastructure for well over three decades. It's an incredible opportunity for partners to support customers' transformation

to digital connectivity and IP-based solutions.

Organisations that have already switched are one step ahead, able to take advantage of an ever-growing range of digital services and technologies. But, while digital adoption is accelerating, it's still not at the level it needs to be – and time is ticking. Constant education will be required to encourage partners and their customers to switch sooner rather than later.

For one, there is a lot of industry jargon surrounding the switch-off – PSTN, ISDN, VoIP, and even all-IP could well be phrases that people are struggling to understand. What's more, businesses may not be aware of just how many of their devices need to be migrated. All this can be de-motivating. Providing the content for partners to learn and grow, as well as materials for them to educate customers is crucial.

We really are at a watershed moment, and the time to act is now. There's a need,



Gavin Jones

We really are at a watershed moment, and the time to act is now

too, for resellers to expand their portfolios and ensure their customers' networks are suitably future-proofed in advance of the switch-off. Channel players need to understand, audit, migrate and implement the right technologies. Indeed, the right combination of products and services will supercharge channel partners.

Championing collaboration

With the UK in recession and businesses everywhere looking to reduce costs,

channel partners need to evolve their customer relationships to be more consultative and focused on needs. More than anything, the focus should be on collaboration. After all, the strength of the channel is in its partnerships.

Channel partners need to ensure they're able to cater for their customers at whatever point in their all-IP journey they find themselves. Whether it's supporting with initial migration, or

implementing innovative solutions, this is a chance to show customers what their move to all-IP could look like over the next two, five or 10 years and, by doing so, lock in their long-term relationship.

Realising the value of 5G

The transition to all-IP isn't exclusive to fixed connectivity, of course. 5G will empower businesses to become more agile and flexible, give consumers more choice in how they work, and allow

the moment Friend joins Focus

for faster connectivity. Over the next 12 months its many benefits will further boost the ability of channel partners to support their customers' all-IP requirements. 5G has now been deployed in nearly all major towns

While digital adoption is accelerating, it's still not at the level it needs to be – and time is ticking

and cities across the UK, bringing hyper connectivity to businesses across the country.

This ongoing roll-out will prove truly transformational over the next few years, with analysis by PwC suggesting that the productivity and efficiency gains enabled by 5G will add £43 billion to UK GDP by 2030. But to date, its benefits have not been fully realised. Devices, business applications and working environments haven't changed at the same pace as investment in the 5G network itself.

It's important, too, that businesses don't focus just on mobile. There is further opportunity in 5G and IoT, for instance. BT recently partnered with Belfast Harbour to build the UK's first 5G private network to demonstrate the potential 5G technology has for real-life applications within businesses. What's more, channel partners are seeing the importance of full convergence across both fixed and mobile to give

their customers greater choice and flexibility in their connectivity. And this will be the foundation for driving value from that network investment. By finding sweet spots such as these – between 5G and IoT, and between fixed and mobile – channel partners can create a genuinely attractive enterprise offering.

More considerations

Enabling customers to prepare for the PSTN switch-off and maximise the potential of 5G technology will undoubtedly be top priorities for channel partners this year, but there are other considerations. Despite their concerns around rising costs, the question of sustainability will still be high on the agenda for many organisations, and which channel partners can help address with the right technologies and guidance.

There will hopefully be continued progress toward realising the value of greater diversity and inclusion as a core business strategy, too. By recognising that both customers and colleagues have diverse needs and intersecting identities, the channel must continue to address bias and champion differences within the industry.

2022 was a challenging year for the channel, with global events proving that we live in increasingly uncertain times. We do know, though, that the year ahead is going to be a time of great transformation, and channel partners should be excited by – and prepared for – the opportunities to innovate that it presents. ■



Charlene Friend

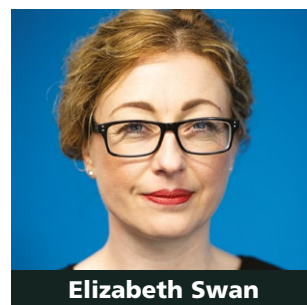
FOCUS Group has appointed Charlene Friend as Chief Financial Officer. She has a track record of driving organic growth and M&A and moves from the public sector division of consulting firm Kantar. Her prior roles also include a stint as CFO of Acosta Europe and Commercial Finance Director of Nasdaq-listed Monotype.

Focus Group also promoted Technical Director Vicki Rishbeth as Chief Technology Officer with UK-wide responsibility for the integration of technology and operational systems, software development, IT and strategic product management across the group. In another top level move Focus Sales Director Rhys Bailey has become Chief Revenue Officer.

CEO Barney Taylor said: "Our executive leadership team continues to evolve and is focused on putting our people first, preparing Focus Group for scale and continuing the high growth trajectory of the last few years." Focus Group now employs over 800 staff in various UK offices and serves more than 27,000 businesses.

Also on the move...

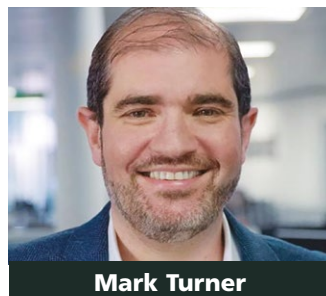
MANAGED IT service provider Razorblue has increased female representation on its board with the appointment of Elizabeth Swan as Finance Director. She brings 20 years industry experience. "Having worked in larger corporates the experience I can bring is applying the knowledge of how finance operates in larger companies and employing those best practices here," said Swan. "There are lots of projects we can undertake to ensure our finance systems are equipped to deal with growth in terms of making financial processes more efficient, quicker and with less manual processing. Having experience of delivering finance projects will be invaluable towards making those improvements." Razorblue plans to boost its 160-plus headcount by at least 25 this year.



Elizabeth Swan

FORMER telecoms industry European VP of Enterprise Andy Harris has been named Chief Commercial Officer of Chester le Street-based ITPS. "We've set challenging targets and made changes to power the sales team and accelerate growth," he stated. Chief Executive Simon Newton commented: "Andy brings almost three decades of experience in driving revenue and improving profitability in our industry and target markets, which will be key to achieving long-term goals."

PULSANT'S incoming Chief Commercial Officer Mark Turner brings pan-European experience across cloud, infrastructure and data centres following notable stints at Claranet, T-Systems International and MCI. "UK demand for edge



Mark Turner

computing, hybrid cloud services and colocation is taking off in a big way," he said. "The edge computing opportunity is huge and Pulsant has the geographical spread and range of partnerships to deliver hybrid services to customers' front doors." His appointment follows Ben Cranham's instatement as Chief Operating Officer last October and a series of strategic investments in Pulsant's edge platform.

VEEAM Software has pulled in Larissa Crandall as Vice President of Global Channel and Alliances. She brings experience in transforming global partner ecosystems having worked for security, networking and cloud vendors including Gigamon, Scalr and Kaspersky Labs. CRO John Jester commented: "Larissa has a track record of leading programmes and extended teams based on collaboration, alignment and mutual strategy." Veeam has 35,000-plus technology partners, resellers, service providers and alliance partners.



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