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FluidOne pulls in West to lead ambitious channel campaign p30



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# Dowden to open Comms Vision '18

**MINISTER for Implementation Oliver Dowden CBE is to deliver the opening keynote at next month's Comms Vision Convention at Gleneagles Hotel.**

### SPECIAL REPORT

Dowden was appointed as Parliamentary Secretary at the Cabinet Office on 9th January this year and elected as the MP for Hertsmere in May 2015.

He is responsible for Government technology including the Government Digital Service, Infrastructure and Projects Authority and the Crown Commercial Service.

Dowden's keynote on November 7th will kick off a high calibre agenda that will give

delegates a strategic sense of what Digital Britain means to the channel following the Government's full fibre switchover plan which is expected to be mainly completed by 2030.

"To meet those timescales the Government has an essential part to play in helping to remove the roadblocks that hold our industry back," stated Neil Wilson, Head of Products & Marketing at Virtual11.

The Government intends to increase competition and investment in full fibre broadband,

create more commercial opportunities and make it easier and cheaper to roll out the infrastructure for 5G.

According to Government figures the UK has only 4% full fibre connections and lags behind many key competitors – Spain (71%), Portugal (89%) and France (28%).

Adam Williams, Head Of Direct Sales at KCOM, stated: "This is an exciting time for us to influence a digital strategy that will make the UK a global competitive force." See p40

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## EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

TO SAY that the UK comms sector is entering a 'transformational' new epoch – perhaps the most disruptive and auspicious in its history – would be to greatly understate the significance of comms infrastructure developments outlined in the Government's Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review (FTIR)

published in July. In a clear reflection of the industry's targeted shift away from legacy technology, telco giant BT has stated its intention to adopt a disruptive challenger brand position as the nation gears up for a full fibre and 5G future. Its message, now seen in bold type across the industry, is that the concept of Digital Britain is core to today's strategic thinking and extremely powerful and transformational, and now is the time to act appropriately. BT's change of tact turns traditional perceptions of the incumbent operator on their head. The move redefines the Group as an agile and disruptive contender as it seeks to nimbly evolve from its extant network infrastructure. It's symbolic of the new generation of connectivity provider.

The FTIR effectively levels the infrastructure provider playing field and clears the decks with an emphasis on full fibre and 5G, which plays straight into the hands of the altnets. But, ironically perhaps, Openreach has become the biggest altnet with its Fibre First approach and, it claims, the biggest posse of fibre broadband engineers in the UK (see page 4).

The changes we have witnessed at two of the biggest telco organisations – BT and Openreach – are mirrored by similar strategic repositionings industry-wide, and they send a clear message: We share a common goal, which is a full fibre and 5G future – and most, if not all comms and IT providers should consider a strategic rethink at this time. Small wonder 'Digital Britain, let's make it happen!', is the key theme at this year's Comms Vision Convention (see page 42).

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

# Solar snared by Wavenet

BEECH Tree Private Equity backed Wavenet has acquired Solar Communications Group for an undisclosed sum, significantly boosting its capabilities and presence in the UC market.

The deal adds on-premise engineering skills to Wavenet and accreditations in SD WAN and UC services. The group will now service nearly 10,000 UK business customers.

The deal comes soon after Wavenet refinanced its banking facilities and raised a £75m acquisition war chest.

Both companies have pursued a buy-and-build strategy, each acquiring four businesses and integrating them over the past two years.

Solar is a Mitel Platinum Partner, a Microsoft Silver Partner and a Summit Partner of Silver Peak.

"The combination of Wavenet and Solar brings the benefits of scale, broader geographic reach, a stronger management team and significant enhancements to the portfolio of services and solutions the group can offer customers," commented Wavenet CEO Bill Dawson.

Wavenet operates its own automated platform that provides cloud-based communica-



Bill Dawson

tion services to direct customers and resellers.

The company has a particular specialism in Cisco's BroadCloud solutions supported by a range of connectivity, security, cloud, voice and data offerings which it supplies on its own managed network.

"Solar has been successful in developing the platform, people and services required for growing the business," added Dawson. "This has accelerated its transition to a fully managed cloud service provider."

Solar CEO John Whitty will remain with the business and join the executive board. He stated: "Following 30 months of growing our business the time is right to take the next step and allow our customers to benefit from our joint capability and experience in the UC market."

## plan.com leads fast boomers

ISLE of Man-based plan.com was crowned the UK's fastest growing tech firm in The Sunday Times Hiscox Tech Track 100 league table last month.

The ranking measures the sales growth performance of private technology companies over the last three years.

plan.com also notched up the highest sales rise figure in the last ten years. It sells through a network of 650 partners across the UK which helped grow sales an average 364% over three years to £35.4m in 2017.

Commenting on the ranking co-founder Keith Curran enthused: "This is the combination of everything we've worked for over the past four years."

plan.com employs over 100 staff and is developing a new seven floor hi-tech HQ with living walls, suspended meeting pods and a roof-top bar.



Keith Curran



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COMMENT: SEEING IS BELIEVING



Richard Carter

A NEW era in communication is about to dawn following the UK's first live holographic call, casting doubt on the age-old adage that seeing really is believing. Vodafone conducted the ground-breaking call using 5G technology which is being hailed as a significant milestone in UK communications. The landmark event at its Manchester office featured

England and Manchester City Women's Football Captain Steph Houghton MBE. Using 5G technology Steph appeared as a live 3D hologram on stage in front of an audience at Vodafone's UK headquarters in Newbury.

Her hologram gave footballing tips to 11-year-old fans and demonstrated the exciting possibilities new technology can bring not just to sport but much wider applications, as the 5G bandwagon begins to build. The call follows the announcement in June this year that seven cities will become Vodafone 5G trial areas and that it will have 1,000 5G sites by 2020.

Exciting times are clearly ahead across the whole industry with the latest mobile-based technologies already inspiring a retail revolution. A new report from VoucherCodes.co.uk reveals that over half of retailers that have adopted mobile payment methods believe they encourage shoppers to spend more per transaction than they would do if they were using conventional payment methods. Other findings highlighted how 37 per cent of retailers confirmed that they had invested in Virtual Reality technology over the last 12 months, 38 per cent have already introduced virtual assistants and 53 per cent are planning on doing so. In addition, 44 per cent of retailers surveyed offer AI powered chatbots to help shoppers.

Who knows what's around the next corner or what will be thought of next, real or holographic.

Richard Carter, Channel Sales Director, Nimans

# 31,000 BT workers shift to Openreach

APPROXIMATELY 31,000 BT Group employees have moved to Openreach in what is thought to be the largest people transfer in UK corporate history under TUPE Regulations. The company hailed the transfer as the 'final major milestone' in creating a more independent legally separate business.

Openreach Chairman Mike McTighe stated: "Openreach now has its own board, greater strategic and operational independence, a separate brand and an independent workforce, and we're ambitious for the future."

"We've set out a clear plan to invest in new, more reliable future-proof broadband technology and we're in the middle of our largest ever recruitment drive for 3,500 engineers."

Openreach claims to now have the largest team of fibre broadband engineers in the country. "We're determined to continue spearheading the national roll out of next generation broadband networks," commented McTighe.

As part of its Fibre First strategy Openreach is planning to roll out full fibre broadband to three million households by the end of 2020 with an ambition to reach 10 million by 2025.



Mike McTighe

He also noted that BT Group and Openreach worked closely with partner unions to ensure a smooth transition of people, including a formal consultation

on the transfer with unions and employees since July.

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Circulation 01635 588 869

ISSN 1366-5243



Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations ABC total average circulation 15,525 (Jan-Dec 2017, 12,587 print, 2,938 digital)

**bpl.** | A BPL Business Publication

**BPL Limited**  
Highbridge House, 93-96 Oxford Road,  
Uxbridge, Middlesex, UB8 1LU, United Kingdom  
T: 01895 454542 F: 01895 454413

**Subscriptions**  
Subscription rates for 12 issues:  
UK, £65; Overseas: £80 (incl p&p)  
Back issues can be obtained:  
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# Chess targets TM Solutions



David Pollock

BILLING company TM Solutions (TMS), a long-time acquisition target for Chess ICT, has been snapped up by the Alderley Edge-based serial acquirer of 100-plus firms.

Chess founder and CEO David Pollock commented: "I've always been an admirer of the TMS business. We have aspired to acquire the company for a long time and waited for the opportunity."

Founder and Chairman of Abingdon-based TMS Suzanne Chappell is retiring while the existing team including

Operations Director Helen Booker will remain with the business post-acquisition.

TMS provides billing solutions, hosted voice and data connectivity solutions to a network of 112 channel partners. Its 'out of the box' managed billing solution supported by a WLR3 integration team provides a particular boost to Chess.

TMS was advised by channel M&A specialist firm Knight Corporate Finance.

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HATS off to ProVu's eight-strong team of runners who completed the Warrington English Half Marathon last month. The distributor teamed up with event hospitality sponsor Knight Corporate Finance and its Corporate Challenge for the second year. MD Darren Garland commented: "Despite stiff joints on Monday morning the team enjoyed the race. It's been a great way to keep each other motivated and create some friendly rivalry in the office."

## NEWS ROUNDUP

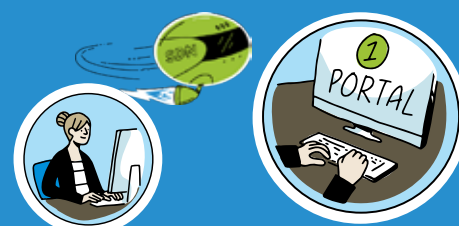
THE Community team at Premiership rugby club Exeter Chiefs has taken delivery of two vans courtesy of the club's main sponsor swcomms. The team collected the keys from swcomms' MD Brian Lodge and Commercial Director Jon Whiley at the comms provider's HQ. "We have supported the work of the community department since its inception," stated Whiley. "We understand the important contribution they make to promoting and supporting grassroots rugby. These vans ensure the team can easily visit schools, clubs and other organisations in our region to continue their terrific work."

DUBLIN-based MSP Trilogy Technologies Group, which also operates out of London, is poised for expansion following its acquisition of Zinopy Security. The deal strengthens Trilogy's managed security portfolio and adds risk management and consulting services. The enlarged group will generate 20m euros annual revenue with a 100-plus headcount. Zinopy was founded in 2010 following a management buyout at Entropy. In 2014 Trilogy acquired B2Lateral in central London, which gave the company a presence in the UK market for the first time.

FORMER Vodafone M2M whiz Jo Cracknell has joined Bamboo Technology Group as M2M Business Development Manager working with both channel and direct customers. She brings 30 years work experience in electrical engineering and knowhow in IoT. "Many of the bigger solution providers are focused on large scale companies, I want to focus on supporting SMEs and our partner channel in tapping into the power of the IoT," said Cracknell. "There is so much potential for M2M in both direct and partner channels."



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COMMENT: CHANNEL MATTERS



Nick Powell

WHEN launching a new brand into the channel, or a recognised brand into a new market, it's imperative to do your research and listen to what channel partners have to say, rather than shoehorn them into a preconceived agenda. For me, the focus should be on open conversations around improving the end-to-end experience for the partner

and their customers. Here are some of the main issues that I have found partners are most passionate about...

**Real account management:** At the centre of many conversations is the need to be listened to by a person who has the ability to get things done. Channel partners want to work with a business that genuinely listens and doesn't just demand new business.

**Real provisioning people:** The reputation of the channel partner depends on their quality of delivery. When a circuit order doesn't follow a happy path the partner is often left in the middle of a demanding customer and a support person that cannot resolve their issues.

**Fewer but better relationships:** With the plethora of network operators, a channel partner's initial reaction is that they don't want another operator. Yet, when you scratch the surface they do want to consolidate and settle on one or a few providers.

**Risk:** While industry consolidation creates opportunities partners are savvy to the commercial realities. Margin erosion at a carrier level can only go so far and large networks need continuous investment to support growing bandwidth demand and technology changes. Some big names are struggling to make these investments.

In summary, partner requirements have evolved so new and existing brands would benefit from reviewing their overall offering in terms of supporting their channel and partners' customers at every stage of their journey.

**Nick Powell, Sales Director, Sky Business Communications**

# Programme switches off

THE relevance and popularity of a key channel engagement model deployed by vendors has come into question following research by Canalys that identified a drop in the appeal of partner programmes among VARs.

The importance of IT vendor programmes to channel partners has fallen this year compared to 2016, according to Canalys which says just 77% of those surveyed rated partner programmes as important when evaluating vendor relationships, down from 94% two years ago.

Almost a tenth of respondents rated partner programmes as 'not at all important', while almost a quarter think they are 'lacking importance'.

Alex Smith, Senior Research Director at Canalys, said: "The results come as a warning to vendors that they must get partners aligned as the market faces disruption from cloud and digital technologies.

"Increasingly, the ball is in the channel's court. Partners have more levers to pull, they can provide more of their own services or make new technology vendor partnerships to meet specific opportunities.

"Meanwhile, vendors often alter programmes to reflect



Alex Smith

changes in partner business models and to spur loyalty, but such changes can have the consequence of increasing complexity, leading to frustration."

The two big negative issues impacting the status of vendor programmes were identified as their lack of consistency and over complexity in certifications and specialisations.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

THE joint venture between Sennheiser and William Demant, operating under the Sennheiser Communications brand, is to be curtailed as both parties seek to focus more sharply on their respective core market segments. The business areas of Enterprise Solutions and Gaming headsets will function as an independent business as part of the William Demant Group, while the business segment of Mobile Music headsets will become part of the Sennheiser Consumer business.

FOLLOWING the integration of acquired companies Annodata and Midshire Communications into Kyocera (UK) the company has appointed a new executive leadership team led by President and GM Hironoa Katsukura and CEO Rod Barthet.

CITYFIBRE has deployed a Software Defined Access operating system across its fibre networks following a tie up with Calix and the roll out of its AXOS platform. CityFibre says the move will see it emerge as an 'advanced-intelligence wholesale infrastructure company' capable of delivering parallel 10 Gbps connections with potential for speeds of up to 100 Gbps.

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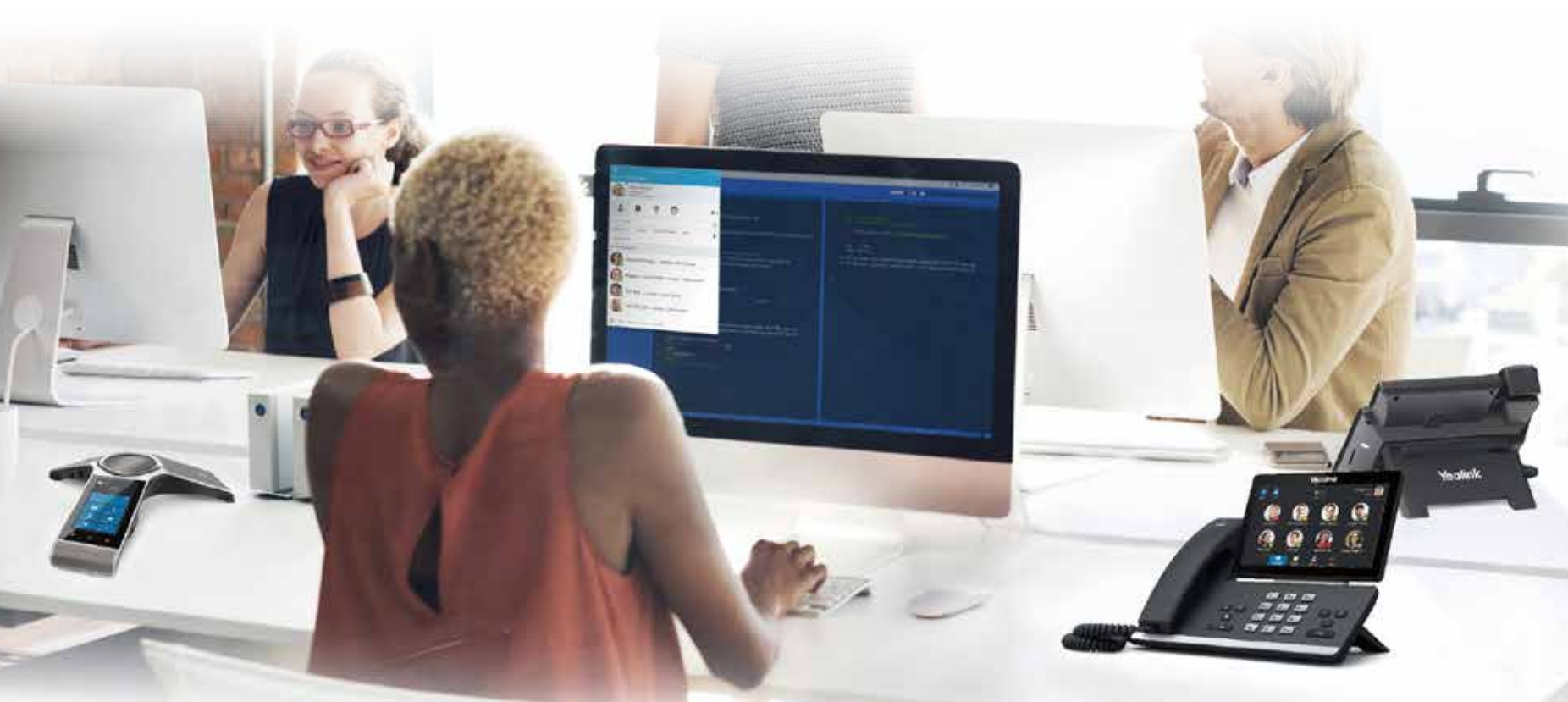
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# MTI CEO's on growth path

NEWS ROUNDUP



THIS year's Gamma Ball Rally staged last month smashed its fund raising target, taking the total amount raised for charities Action Through Enterprise and SpecialEffect to over £500k.

Commenting on the Brands Hatch to Marseille event Gamma MD Daryl Pile said: "Our aim was to bring the total amount raised in Gamma Ball history to £500k and we achieved this because of the channel's support and generosity. This year's rally has been our most successful yet."

Twenty five cars with a spending cap of £500 per vehicle took part in the rally which kicked off at Brands Hatch with the best dressed competition followed by some GBR style challenges and a charity gala dinner and the Auction of Promises. Ultimate Rally winner, Monsters Incom (pictured above), were closely followed by The SIPranos (Charterhouse Voice & Data) and in third place Spirit of the rally: Saturday Night Grease Brothers (Akixi).

Incom CEO David Hughes enthused: "We recognise the amount of effort that goes into organising this event and as such throw ourselves into it 100%. It offers an unforgettable experience and we've had a huge amount of fun taking part. But most importantly we feel honoured in helping to raise money for two well deserving charities."

MTI Technology's performance since its acquisition in January last year by PE investor Endless is reflected in positive results that show 20% growth in professional services and expansion in the security and data centre space.

In its financial results for the 16 month period ending March 2018 the Godalming-based EMC partner reported £94.5m revenues and an underlying EBITDA for the period of £2.2m, representing a year-on-year 12.4% increase.

"Since the Endless acquisition we've worked hard to build on our strengths and expand our service offerings," stated MTI CEO Scott Haddow.

"Combined with strategic investments in management, sales and marketing, this has enabled strong revenue growth in 2018 with security and professional services performing particularly well.

"We'll continue to invest in the team, build out our services portfolio and look for acquisitions that offer a strategic fit in the coming year."

Endless has invested in MTI's managed service portfolio including an expansion of its cloud-based services which led



Scott Haddow

to a Microsoft Cloud Solution Provider designation.

"We've made incremental but strategic investments over the last year, the costs of which have already been recovered as profits have remained stable," added Haddow.

In a separate statement MTI announced Pieter Knook as a Non-Exec' Director and Chairman. His experience includes an 18 year spell at Microsoft where he became one of its top 25 executives.

Knook also built a new software services venture for Vodafone Group, launching Vodafone 360. Other previous Vodafone roles include positions on the Strategy Board, Marketing Board, Ventures Board, CEO Council and Group Marketing Leadership Team.

PAN-European cyber security services provider Glasswall Solutions has closed a funding round of £15m to help expand across North America and extend operations in Europe. The funding raise was led by UK entrepreneur and philanthropist Michael Spencer through IPGL, his personal investment vehicle.

VODAFONE is to double the number of European cell sites in its 5G Narrowband Internet of Things (NB-IoT) network footprint by 2020. NB-IoT is Low Power Wide Area technology that provides connectivity to smart city apps like streetlights, healthcare monitors and wearable devices with the same security as 4G.

SANGOMA has completed the \$28m acquisition of Digium to create a circa \$100m business with a combined workforce of over 300 staff. "Sangoma and Digium have a long history of working together while also competing and have got to know each other well over the years," said Sangoma CEO Bill Wignall. Founder and Chairman of Digium Mark Spencer added: "I created Asterisk and Digium to be disruptive in the communications industry. Now it's time to take it to the next stage."

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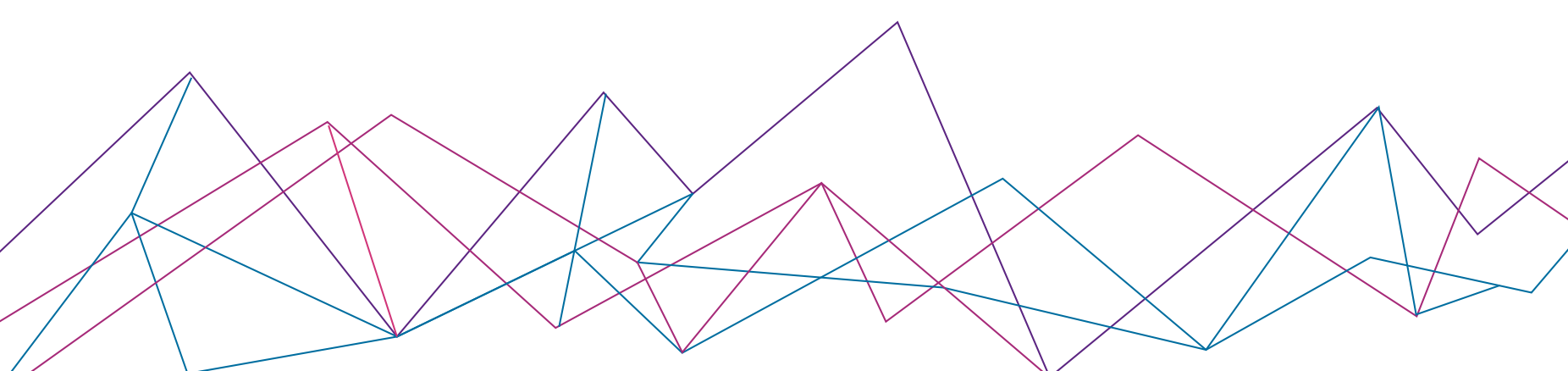






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# Vonage buys CC specialist

NEWS ROUNDUP

VONAGE is targeting the high growth cloud contact centre market with the intended acquisition of privately held NewVoiceMedia for \$350m in cash. Vonage's total addressable market is forecast by IDC to grow 60% over the coming four years to circa \$80bn of which \$9bn is attributed to future contact centre business.

"Vonage is acquiring a high growth software company that brings a cloud native contact centre solution that can be integrated with Vonage's existing assets," stated Sheila McGee-Smith, Principal Analyst at McGee-Smith Analytics.

The acquisition combines Vonage's UCaaS and CPaaS solutions with NewVoiceMedia's cloud contact centre offerings. The deal also adds 700-plus cus-

tomers (mainly mid-market and enterprise) including big names such as Adobe and Siemens and 400 staff. NewVoiceMedia will continue to be led by CEO Dennis Fois.

Vonage CEO Alan Masarek said: "This acquisition accelerates our growth strategy in cloud communications, strengthens our presence with global mid-market and enterprise clients, and deepens our integrations and key go-to-market relationships with CRM providers, especially Salesforce.com."

The deal is planned to close in the fourth quarter of 2018 and Vonage expects to realise annual run rate synergies of circa \$10m by year-end 2019.

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Alan Masarek

MILTON Keynes-based software developer IPCortex has shifted its channel recruitment drive up a gear with a new four tiered partner programme and the launch of a basic voice-only hosted comms package. "IPCortex Hosted Essentials responds to the current market conditions that show, for hosted, there is still a significant market demand for a handset-based voice-only capability," stated CEO Rob Pickering. "Hosted Essentials provides a one-click migration path for the whole company to the full IPCortex unified communications functionality when they are ready."

LITTLE differentiation between today's products and services and the rise of public cloud mass market providers could tempt MSPs to try and be all things to all men on a shoestring. With their resources over stretched they risk a race to the bottom and waning standards will be another inevitable outcome, according to the key theme at this year's Managed Services & Hosting Summit hosted by Comms Dealer sister company IT Europa. "Managed Services providers have to take some tough decisions in order to avoid being pulled in all directions," stated IT Europa Editor John Garratt.



INTERNATIONAL wheelchair tennis ace Gordon Reid has signed up with 9 Group as a brand ambassador. Reid is now the UK's most successful tennis player having won the Australian Open, Wimbledon and a singles gold medal at the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games.

Overall, he has won two singles and nine doubles Grand Slam titles adding his most recent doubles titles at the US Open and Wimbledon with partner Alfie Hewett. Gordon will be hoping to retain his current excellent form and collect more Grand Slam titles on his way to the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

His first appearance for 9 will be at the Comms Vision Convention next month at Gleneagles where he will share his recipe for success with delegates attending boardroom sessions at the event.

"We are delighted to have Gordon as part of our team," commented 9 CEO James Palmer. "He understands the passion, commitment and drive it takes for businesses to achieve their potential and then some. His attitude doesn't change when it comes to how he believes 9 should support partners." See page 44

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# A sign of the times: Taurus in Wildix link



Jonathan Sawyer

TAURUS Clearer Communication has reshaped its long-held product and service mould following a link up with WebRTC and UC&C vendor Wildix.

Until now nothing has tempted the Exeter-based reseller to augment its stable of voice vendor partners which has remained unchanged for 25 years.

In deciding to diversify his product and service operation Taurus Clearer Communication MD Jonathan Sawyer said two key determining factors swung the argument in favour of bringing the Wildix WebRTC solution into the mix – no complex integration issues with existing services and straightforward usage and deployment.

WebRTC enables users to collaborate via a web browser without the need to install any further applications.

“This has been no easy decision but the way people communicate has changed,” stated Sawyer. “It’s also about managing relationships with our existing vendors as we have worked with them for many years and need to ensure that our progression into a new relationship

does not impact on those, but complements our growth.”

According to Wildix UK Channel Manager Ian Rowan showing resellers a lead and collaborating on the creation of a growth plan will enable them to effectively adopt new comms technologies such as WebRTC.

“We have been talking with Taurus Clearer Communication for many months,” he explained. “With a company this size it’s no easy process to simply start selling a new solution.

“From sales through to provisioning and every step between it means training and support. Together we put in place a plan to ensure that the introduction of the product is successful.”

Taurus Clearer Communication operates its own UK wide data network along with Tier 3, BS7799 compliant data centres.

Richard Whybra, Technical Director at the company, added: “WebRTC is a great addition and like any network solution it’s reliant on reliable and secure end-to-end connectivity.”

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# High tech boost for the hard of hearing

## IoT central to future success

A MOBILE phone that improves the clarity of calls for the hard of hearing has been introduced by Manx Telecom in the Isle of Man.

A UK launch is planned for next year in partnership with BT once the technology is embedded in its EE network.

Called MT clearSound, and developed by Vannin Ventures, Manx Telecom's business incubator, with technology innovated by Goshawk Communications, the product is now a registered medical device and 90% of its trialists experienced clearer speech and greater call quality.

Manx Telecom is offering the product free to PayMonthly customers on its network.

"The technology behind the MT clearSound registered medical device is located within the network and requires no purchase or installation of specialist equipment by the user," commented Manx Telecom Chief Executive Officer Gary Lamb.

"A user completes a short online registration and a hearing assessment using any mobile phone on the Manx network, enabling MT clearSound to create a tailored individual hearing profile. This fine tunes all incoming and outgoing tele-



Gary Lamb

phone calls to meet the user's personal hearing needs."

At four years old Goshawk founder Matthew Turner suffered hearing loss.

Spurred by deafness he was determined to create a solution that ultimately led to MT clearSound, which is based on the algorithms of Professor Brian Moore of the University of Cambridge, who is known as one of the world's top authorities on auditory perception.

Turner commented: "I created a 'hearing aid in the sky' out of frustration with comms companies that did not understand people with hearing loss."

A number of medical and audiology experts have backed the product including Doctor Charles Stone, Senior Research Fellow in Audiology and Hearing Sciences at the University of Manchester, who worked with Goshawk and Manx Telecom on the technology.

Lamb commented: "MT clearSound will empower people suffering from moderate to severe hearing loss, indeed every mobile user seeking greater call clarity.

"The launch of MT clearSound in the UK next year has the potential to change the lives of millions of people."

FUTURE business success will depend heavily on IoT deployments, according to 58% of business leaders questioned for a new study by Vodafone.

Among businesses up to 49 employees, 41% believe IoT is vital for success, rising to 67% across large enterprises (2,500-plus employees).

Anne Sheehan, Enterprise Director, Vodafone UK, commented on the report's findings: "IoT can drive innovation and value within an organisation, helping it to achieve operational efficiencies, build more valuable relationships with its customers and facilitate entirely new business models.

"It offers all organisations a huge opportunity to thrive in

this digital age, and they must seize this opportunity now."

The findings of the research form part of a wider report into the digital journey undertaken by UK organisations.

It states that 79% of businesses rate digital transformation as a strategic priority, the benefits being better efficiency, an improved customer experience and competitiveness.

To drive their digital agenda forward 82% of businesses say investing in new technology is a priority. These technologies include real-time analytics, unified communications, Artificial Intelligence and Blockchain.

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Anne Sheehan

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NEWS ROUNDUP

PURDICOM has extended its reach into the mobility handset space following a distribution partnership with Ascom and a six figure order for a range of its workflow mobility handsets, smart phones and software. It's Purdicom's first venture beyond providing wireless solutions to its network of 1,300 channel partners from vendors such as Ruckus. Purdicom MD Hugh Garrod said: "Ascom's interoperability with wireless vendors was key to Purdicom. Ascom is also a Ruckus partner for its DECT and VoIP solutions."

IT RESELLERS seeking to offer their customers hosted voice and connectivity options have fallen under the gaze of V12 Telecom which aims to boost partner numbers by 20 within a year. The Swindon-based company hopes to tempt IT companies with its portfolio



of hosted voice, SIP and Internet access using Ethernet, FTTP and FTTC. MD

Charles Rickett (pictured) said: "We want to form more relationships with partners who are interested in unifying their communications for a more streamlined and seamless IT experience."

# VC firm eyes start-up app

THE founder of start-up comms provider Ascendia, which enables small firms to use a landline to manage mobile calls via an app called DropCall365, is to undertake a 10 week business growth course at Stanford University paid for by Y Combinator, a start-up incubator and VC firm in Silicon Valley which spotted high potential in Ascendia's new venture.

Adrian St Vaughan hopes the investment will provide a boost to his DropCall365 service which he dubs 'a business phone system in your pocket'.

DropCall365 is based on Simwood's platform which enables comms providers to develop new ideas into market-ready propositions which are then backed by the Bristol-based company's support team.

"Adrian has been a customer of ours for some time and always manages to innovate using our platform, whether it's using the Simwood API or blocking fraudsters using our honeypot data," stated Simwood MD Simon Woodhead. "The DropCall365 venture seems to be a hit and we're watching it with great interest."

The rationale behind DropCall365 is that many small busi-



Adrian St Vaughan

nesses lose clients because they only use a personal mobile for work, according to St Vaughan.

"That doesn't look professional, and many calls will divert to voicemail if the small business owner is engaged on other matters," he said.

To overcome this problem St Vaughan provides small firms and sole traders with a landline number and the app manages incoming calls, providing AI generated automated messages designed to answer common queries. Unresolved calls are forwarded to the business's mobile phone using their data plan. Outgoing mobile calls display the landline number.

"This technology is historically expensive and aimed at call centres," said St Vaughan. "Nobody thought about it from a small business viewpoint, especially for 20-30 calls a day."

# Parker named Masergy CEO

MASERGY CEO Chris MacFarland is to switch roles in December when he becomes Executive Chairman and Chief Technology Officer.

Moving into the CEO position is James Parker who brings over 20 years leadership experience in the technology sector across software and telecommunications including stints at Microsoft, CenturyLink and most recently Tata Communications.

"James is a seasoned executive in the technology sector," said MacFarland. "Our shared vision is for Masergy to become a \$1bn-plus company by outpacing our competition with product innovation and a focus on the customer experience."



James Parker

Parker stated: "Masergy's solutions help global enterprises to realise their digital ambitions. I will work closely with Chris and the leadership team to capitalise on the market opportunities in front of us."



A QUIZ night staged by Virtual1, the network operator's second such event, raised over £17k in aid of Restless Development, a charity that helps young people in Africa and Asia lead the development of their communities. More than 120 quiz-goers from 14 companies converged on The Balls Brothers in London where comedian, actor and presenter Rufus Hound (pictured) hosted the clash of general knowledge, with Virgin Media ultimately crowned quiz champions. Virtual1 has raised over £100k for Restless Development since mid-2016. CEO Tom O'Hagan enthused: "It's a fantastic feeling knowing that we are making a real difference to peoples' lives."

# Rainbow proves a safe bet



Lauren Toal and Stuart Carson

IRISH bookmaker Toals made a safe bet when it tasked Belfast-based Rainbow Communications to upgrade its telecoms network in a £500k deal.

Rainbow is replacing Toals' single landlines and traditional

broadband with a hosted phone system and MPLS network that will connect all Toals sites to its HQ in Belfast.

Toals Bookmakers currently has 50 locations across the six counties of Northern Ireland

and 262 staff. It has been a Rainbow client since 2014.

Toals Director Lauren Toal said: "We aim to make the most of any new technology available that will benefit our patrons and staff. This investment will drive efficiency and cost-effectiveness for Toals."

Rainbow Sales & Marketing Director Stuart Carson added: "The evolution of MPLS comes at a time when ISDN lines are becoming increasingly defunct, so it is imperative for organisations to be ahead of the game."



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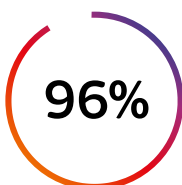
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# FluidOne develops SDN to deliver EoD

FLUIDONE'S investment in Software Defined Networking technology will be key to achieving CEO Russell Horton's five year goal to treble the size of the business, with a channel expansion strategy at the heart of his growth ambitions.

The data connectivity provider's in-house development team has created Ethernet on Demand (EoD) and to support its launch the London-based company has formed closer links with network partner Sky which rolled out its own channel Ethernet proposition last month.

Sky's network has availability in over 2,800 Ethernet exchanges and FluidOne's SDN functionality for Ethernet gives partners the ability to quote, order, manage and flex bandwidth up and down on demand in seconds using FluidOne's



Russell Horton

Dash Portal, part of Platform One, its national fibre network.

FluidOne has collaborated with Sky's Business Communications division for two years and the addition of SDN to Platform One's existing integration with Sky's carrier grade network enables it to offer

enhanced Ethernet services from Sky to customers and partners.

"The SDN layer will facilitate ongoing releases of distinctive Software Defined Network features over the coming year," stated Horton.

"Ethernet on Demand is particularly strong in industries that have variable or seasonal trading and operational performance across the year.

"Retail, hospitality, events, travel and education all see peak bandwidth needs in busy periods. During school term time, for example, Easter and Christmas for retailers or in the summer holidays for travel firms.

"EoD allows our partners to see their bandwidth utilisation and ramp up to meet these seasonal requirements and back down again to a steady state norm for the rest of the year."

# Popular apps used at work

A REPORT by Maintel suggests that consumer tools are becoming much more popular than many enterprise grade platforms, with a surprising number of workers preferring to use Snapchat or Facebook Messenger for work purposes.

According to the research, 24% say they want Snapchat to be approved by their employer, 19% Twitter, while 17% say they would like to use Facebook Messenger and FaceTime to communicate with colleagues, customers and partners.

Maintel CTO Rufus Grig stated: "Employers have a good reason for providing effective, safe and sanctioned communication tools at work. They want to maximise efficiency and productivity, reduce costs and travel, ensure compliance and optimise security. But when



Rufus Grig

employees fail to use these tools it's usually because the experience, compared to consumer platforms, can be poor.

"Blocking certain tools and mandating others is only part of the solution.

"Businesses must work closely with employees to understand their frustrations and select solutions to make these platforms more compelling."

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# Ford takes MD role as McMinn retires

MARSTON'S Telecoms MD Mike McMinn is to retire following a ten year stint in the role. He is replaced by Operations Director Tony Ford who joined the business last year as part of a succession plan.

McMinn's IT and telecoms career spans over 30 years during which time he featured twice in the CIO Top 100 ranking.

He joined Marston's as Group IT Director in 1997 and his influence on the business helped to transform it from a £250m turnover operation in 1996 to £900m in 2018.

McMinn played a founding role in creating Marston's



Mike McMinn

Telecoms to meet the needs of the PLC and target potential growth in other sectors.

"I am confident that Tony will maintain the vision, philosophy and momentum of the business and at the same time bring fresh ideas, skills and a great deal of experience to bear," stated McMinn.

Ford's 20 year tech experience encompasses specialisms in management, the Internet, Wi-Fi, WAN and LAN.

"Working with Mike is a career highlight and massive knowledge share for all of us," he commented.

"We will continue Mike's legacy as we lead the charge for innovation in our specialist sectors. In recent months the team has grown substantially to drive our ambitious vision for the future."

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Tony Ford

## NSN roadshows help partners fire up for greater wallet share

KEEPING partners engaged and up-to-date on the latest ICT customer opportunities was the thinking behind a series of successful roadshows run by channel service provider NSN.

Events held in Cardiff, Chesterfield and London gave partners across the UK the chance to meet and discuss prospects for widening customer engagement with the NSN team and its vendor partners including Gamma and MyPhones.

"We have re-engaged with over 50 resellers over the course of the roadshow programme," said CEO Mark Shraga.



NSN at the Imperial War Museum venue in London

"We operated each event on a speed dating process covering off subjects such as data and Software Defined Networks, hosted and mobile services and our own Platinum Partner mar-

keting support programme. This enabled our partners to get a real understanding of how to gain access to great wallet share and feel part of a wider team of channel specialists."

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# NFON set for stronger push into north UK



**Myles Leach**

NFON UK has extended its reach to the northern region with a new Manchester office.

The move is expected to significantly boost the pan-European cloud PBX provider's UK revenues which are already tracking at plus-25% over the past three years.

The office, located in Manchester Business Park, is the company's second UK base, adding to its London HQ. The regional operation facilitates closer collaboration with partners in the north who now have handy access to training facilities and localised distribution.

"We now have a foothold in the region," enthused NFON UK MD Myles Leach. "We already have a number of staff working and hot-desking in these offices and are on a recruitment drive for new team members.

"The market for cloud telephony is increasing at a rapid rate and much of this growth will be in the north."

Leach noted that in the UK cloud telephony penetration is circa 13% and expected to grow to approximately 27% in 2022.

"This is being fuelled by the rise in mobile working and investments that businesses are making in digital transformation," he commented.

"Moving to the Northern Powerhouse will catalyse our business to the next stage given the huge potential for growth in the region."

According to NFON's CEO and CFO, Hans Szymanski, the investment in a new regional office marks out the UK as a strategic priority.

"Cloud is boundless and organisations in the UK are ahead of the European curve when it comes to seeing the benefits of moving voice to the cloud," he said. "We see tremendous market opportunities in the north of the UK and the formation of this new regional office will enable our UK division to go from strength to strength."

NFON published its half year results on September 20th, reporting consolidated revenue of 20.6m euros.

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## NEWS ROUNDUP

ELITE is offering Openreach's OSA Filter Connect product to partners and wholesale customers. OSA Filter Connect provides scalable bandwidth from 10Gbps synchronous to 100Gbps synchronous without needing to regrade the fibre due to configuration limitations in the local exchange.

CLOUD data integration solutions vendor Talend has appointed Alan McFarlane as Partner Manager for the UK and Ireland. "Talend expects to see rapid take-up of its end-to-end Big Data and cloud integration solutions through the scale and reach that a value-based network of cloud-first channel partners can provide," he said.

CO-FOUNDER and MD of Cloud Distribution Scott Dobson has left the company. He is replaced by fellow co-founder Greg Harris while Adam Davison remains as Sales and Marketing Director. Harris said: "Almost a decade on from where he and I started, Scott's work with Cloud Distribution is done, and he's made the decision to move on to new ventures. Scott is a true entrepreneur and a start-up genius."

SSE Enterprise Telecoms has inked a fibre agreement with Three UK and O2 that centres around the use of SSE's fibre ring. Part of the network is located in the Thames Water waste water network which will enhance Three UK and O2's connectivity backhaul capabilities and facilitate further 4G and 5G deployment by connecting cell sites and masts. The agreement will see approximately 100 points of connectivity exit from the central London sewer network via two BT Exchanges. Three UK and O2 can operate their own Central London Area (CLA) network, while also accessing spare fibre ducts for future initiatives in London.

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# Time for a PBXIT plan

VanillaIP's response to its own research could hardly be clearer: With 80 per cent of the market still serviced by traditional PBXs they must be supported and shown a clear path to the cloud, concludes Iain Sinnott, Sales and Marketing Director, who reveals a new product and programme strategy that meets these pressing requirements.

**S**tanding tall and stubborn, traditional PBXs have not yet had their day and cloud migration lags far behind initial expectations. Defying all early projections, there was no cloud-driven crash-bang-wallop to disrupt traditional models as many thought probable, including VanillaIP which has this month responded to the stasis with the launch of a full range of SIP trunk products from basic ISDN replacements to more sophisticated user overlay propositions.

"In 2012 we didn't see the need to play a big role in the SIP trunk market," said Sinnott. "We expected businesses to recognise the cloud dividend and move to hosted PBX. Surprisingly, 90 per cent of the cloud solutions offered to the market were simplified PBX replacements rather than all-embracing flexible cloud solutions. This dynamic is fine for lines and calls players, but has not challenged the dominance of experienced

PBX resellers with strong pedigrees. With just six years to go until the total switch-off of PSTN services it became clear that we needed to support PBX and hybrid deployments in addition to our advanced cloud communications portfolio."

The rewards for migrating customers to a cloud environment are shown by the high valuations of tech resellers operating wholly in the cloud space. And every sensible report on such matters reaches this same conclusion: The argument is no longer just about cloud versus PBX, but which will build long-term value into a business. For diehard PBX resellers the consequence of sitting on their hands in the face of a cloud future would damage any prospect of a bountiful exit. According to Knight Corporate Finance Director Paul Billingham, a comms sector M&A specialist, unless a business is predominantly cloud it will not be attractive to a significant portion of today's



Iain Sinnott

## There was no crash-bang-wallop to disrupt traditional models as many expected

investment community. "They're interested in customer bases, revenue streams, easy centralisation and streamlining – not vans, spares, bricks and mortar," he said.

### Migration strategies

While talk of actual survival over the short-term may be exaggerated, non-cloud resellers are nonetheless toying with their future and livelihoods, believes Sinnott. However, a PBX-to-cloud transition pathway has to make sense to them, and VanillaIP says its new coherent migration strategy means a future avenue for PBX resellers is clearly defined and their cloud dilemma resolved. How? A fragmented approach to speeding up

cloud migration would never work, so VanillaIP has, in addition to the launch of SIP trunk options, introduced the PBXIT programme.

"The paradox for some resellers is that to realise the maximum return for a life's work they may be best served migrating their customers to cloud solutions," said Sinnott. "We are therefore launching the VanillaIP PBXIT programme which is structured to include commercial and physical support for traditional PBX resellers moving to the cloud. The duration of each project will be dictated by the reseller, but may be between three and five years depending on factors peculiar to each partner."

VanillaIP's cloud communications portfolio is configured to replicate and enhance the functionality of on-site PBXs via the Uboss portal through which resellers manage all services. "Whether traditional resellers are transitioning to sell, to reset their business for a revenue-based future or position themselves to be an acquirer in the M&A world, the PBXIT programme strengthens the hand of all parties," commented Sinnott.

The PBXIT support programme will also be available through VanillaIP resellers which, says Sinnott, may encourage local partnerships. "The increasing pace of mergers and acquisitions in our sector cannot be ignored, and having been involved in the mobile industry throughout the 1990s and early 2000s I would suggest this may be an excellent opportunity for successful and long-established resellers to fully capitalise on a lifetime's work," he commented.

Never a company to rely on sales of PBXs, VanillaIP started life as a staunch supporter of PBXIT having invested in a BroadSoft switch and the tools required to support the channel. "We remain heavily invested in that space but with a new mindset based mainly on our research that found 80 per cent of businesses still use a PBX," reaffirmed Sinnott. "We have evolved Uboss and the VanillaIP product portfolio to seamlessly support all current and future strategies, enabling resellers and their customers to review each requirement in isolation and select whichever solution is appropriate, all managed within one portal." ■

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# Daisy and fibre dominant

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

Corporate activity in UK Telecoms & Networks over the last quarter can best be summed up in two words: Daisy and fibre. In a flurry of developments Daisy canned a sale process in favour of a debt refinance, agreed with TalkTalk to end the £175m acquisition of the latter's direct B2B business, acquired two small add-ons (DV02 and Voice Mobile), while for good measure Daisy founder Matt Riley exited pan-European comms player Damovo to Eli Global.

The most likely consequence of Daisy's decision to opt for a debt refinance rather than sale to private equity is that it will be a less voracious buyer of UK comms and IT assets, as a new private equity owner would have probably targeted significant M&A led growth. Hence, in our view, we are more likely to see deals like the two smaller ones undertaken by Daisy rather than those of £100m-plus revenue peers.

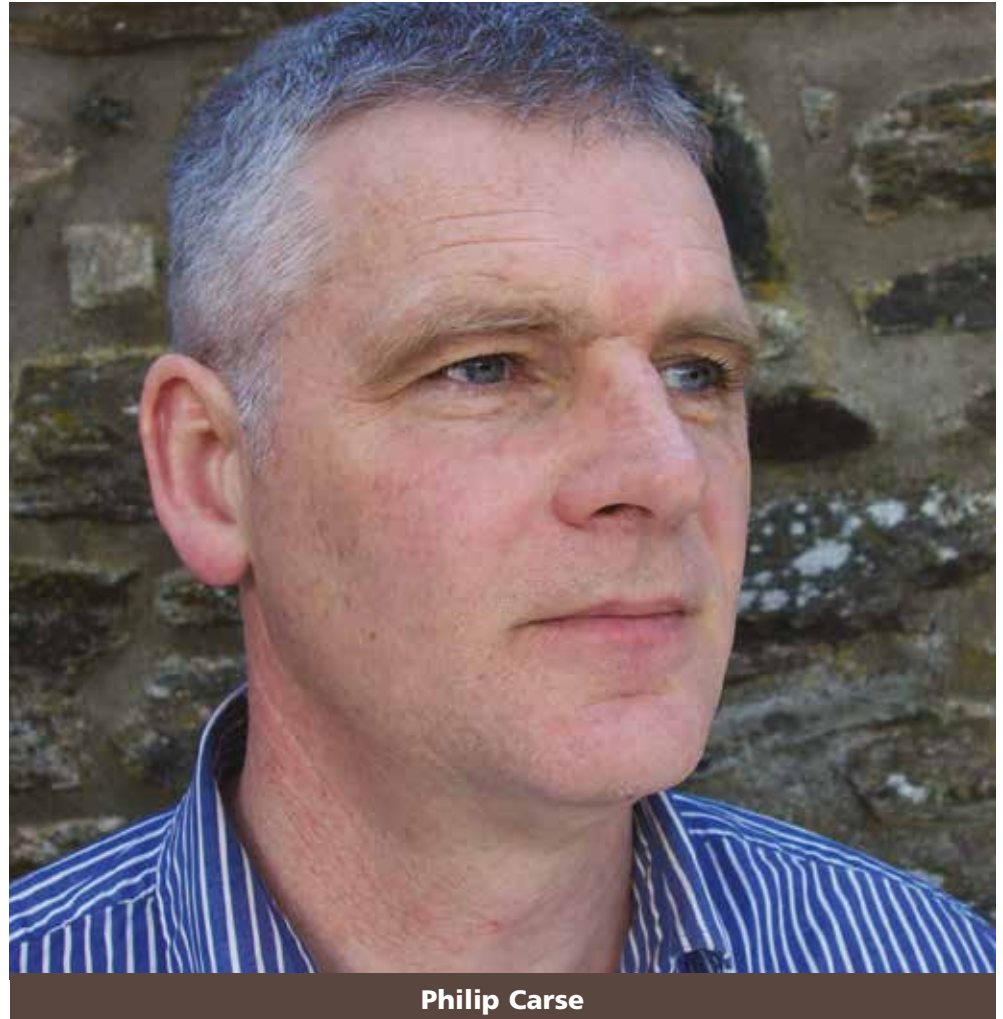
In fibre, money continues to be thrown at connectivity players, with Hyperoptic (£250m debt), Airband (£166m) and ITS (unspecified) receiving debt or equity funding. Other deals of note include acquisitions for Arrow (360 Solutions), Maintel (certain Atos UK customer contracts), Wavenet (Solar), Peach Technologies

(Taylor Made), IP Integration (Managed Networks) and Adept Telecom (Shift F7).

Somewhat coincidentally, this last quarter included results from four ISPs targeting niche mass accommodation units: Ask4 (revenues up 4% at £13.5m), CableCom/Glide (an M&A-assisted 57% growth to £43.3m), Optify (flat at £8.3m) and Wifinity (+28% to £8.8m). There were also results from two of the best funded fibre new entrants – Gigaclear (more than doubling to £7.4m) and Hyperoptic (+89% to £16.6m). More connectivity-related results have come from Zen Internet (+12% to £63.8m), euNetworks (+9% to 138.1m euros), Spitfire (+2.5% to £26.1m) and Sohonet (+29% to £18.1m).

Other results include disappointments from quoted KCOM (-9% to £301.9m), Redcentric (-4.4% to £100.0m) and Cloudcall (first half, up 31% to £4.1m versus 37% forecasts) plus continued progress for Arrow (M&A-assisted 19% to £28.2m), Adept (M&A-assisted 35% to £46.4m), Britannic (+7.6% to £14.4m), Gamma (first half, +11% to £263.6m) and Solar (an M&A assisted +37% to £20.3m, since acquired by Wavenet).

As usual, it was a tougher time for the big boys (BT, Virgin, Sky, TalkTalk,



Philip Carse

## The Telecoms & Networks peer group had another poor quarter in share price terms

Vodafone, O2 and 3UK), and we also review continued strong growth (20-30%) from US-listed UCaaS providers (RingCentral, 8x8 and Vonage) as well as leading CPaaS player Twilio (+54%). Vonage since announced the acquisition of UK-based contact centre specialist NewVoiceMedia for \$350m.

### Peer group performances

The Telecoms & Networks peer group had another poor quarter in share price terms with an 8% decline versus +1.6% for the Megabuyte All-Share, though it was in line with the FTSE All Share's -7%. The underperformance

is more marked on a 12 month view, down 9% versus the Megabuyte All-Share's +12% and the FTSE All-Share's -1.6%. The main culprits are TalkTalk (-40%), BT (-26%) and Vodafone (-18%), aided by Maintel (-14%), Telecom Plus (-9%) and Toople (-67%). In contrast, there were gains for LoopUp (+151%), Sky (+56%, on M&A), Gamma (+19%) and Adept (+15%). CityFibre exited the index following its take private by two infrastructure funds.

This underperformance is reflected in declining current year valuations at a time of

rising software valuations, though the difference between software (19.5x current year EBITDA) and ICT (13.3x EBITDA) has narrowed over the last quarter, but with Telecoms & Networks on a lowly 7.0x. Most of the quoted telco players are in the 6-10x current year EBITDA range, the outliers being BT (4.6x), Gamma and Telecom Plus (13.5-15x), and LoopUp (35x).

IS Research publishes [www.megabuyte.com](http://www.megabuyte.com), a company analysis and intelligence service covering over 600 public and private UK technology companies. [philip.carse@megabuyte.com](mailto:philip.carse@megabuyte.com)

# e Q3 activity

## COMPANY NEWS ROUND UP

### WIG raises funds for neutral-host networks

3i-backed Wireless Infrastructure Group (WIG) announced a £220m debt fund raise that will accelerate its investments into neutral-host, 5G-ready wireless infrastructure, with the new 12 year funding being provided by three investors and three banks. Meanwhile, accounts for the year to December 2017 reflect a continuation of recent trends with EBITDA up 7.1% to £21.8m on revenues up 13% (all organically) to £41.0m, with the EBITDA margin being diluted by a growing contribution from services. The one big change was an 80% increase in capex to £6.2m as the company invests in newer city networks.

### Chess makes billing move with TMS

Chess acquired Abingdon-based billing company TMS. We understand from Chess that aside from boosting its channel proposition TMS brings about £6.5m revenues, providing a handy uplift to an estimated run rate of about £115-120m, boosted in May by the acquisitions of Frontier Voice & Data and StoneHouse Logic. However, the EBITDA uplift will be lower given the wholesale nature of TMS, taking Chess to about a £17-18m EBITDA run rate.

### Babble Cloud starting to shake off IP Solutions past

Babble Cloud, the recently renamed hosted voice specialist previously known as IP Solutions, has released accounts to November 2017, leading up to the sale of the company from Livingbridge to LDC for £4.6m in October

2017 which crystallised a significant loss for Livingbridge. EBITDA losses halved to £0.3m on static revenues of £7.5m, but CEO Matthew Parker outlined a subsequent return to organic growth and profitability boosted by the £787k June 2018 acquisition of Direct Response Plus, as well as elaborating on medium term targets which suggest some significant M&A on the way.

### NFON seeks stronger second half

German-listed UCaaS provider NFON reported solid interims to June 2018 with revenues up 22% at 20.6m euros (with 80% recurring) at EBITDA breakeven, aided by 30% growth in seats to 222k and slight ARPU dilution to 10.05 euros per seat per month from a growing wholesale channel. An operating loss of 6.9m euros and operating cash outflows of 2.7m euros were primarily due to IPO-related costs, while capex rose 14% to 0.4m euros. After 50m euro IPO proceeds, period end net cash was 44.1m euros. UK revenues rose 24% to 2.9m euros at a 250k euro EBITDA loss. The company reiterated 2018 guidance of growth above 2017's 17% and 75-80% recurring revenues, though the current consensus of 26% growth will need a much stronger second half.

### Focus Group adds M&A to organic growth plans

Latest accounts to November 2017 for owner managed comms and IT provider Focus Group show continued strong growth, with EBITDA up 37% to £6.1m on revenues up 19% (estimated 16% organic) to £54.2m, driven

by services such as IaaS, data connectivity and cloud, and by operational efficiencies from a simpler corporate structure. On an update call, founder and CEO Chris Goodman and CFO James Fletcher revealed a new M&A strategy being funded by a new £25m bank facility.

### Maintel's mixed interims but positive outlook

Business comms and IT provider Maintel has reported a mixed set of interim 2018 results with EBITDA to June 2018 down 2% at £5.0m on revenues up 14% at £66.5m (estimated 3% decline), due to margin impacts from last year's Intrinsic acquisition and growth investments. However, the company is upbeat on the second half due to a strong order book and pipeline, aided by Avaya, cost cuts and underlying growth in managed services and ICON, which should result in a return to organic growth and significant EBITDA growth.

### Commsworld sets sights beyond Scotland

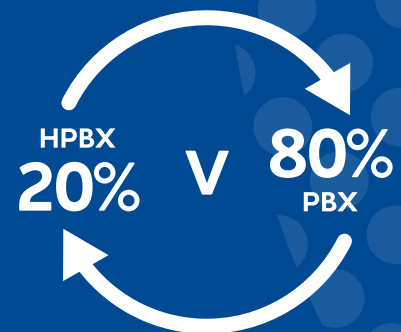
Owner-managed Scotland-based comms and network provider Commsworld has reported another strong growth year for calendar 2017 with EBITDA up 6% to £0.94m on revenues up 16% to £15.4m, aided by Scottish public sector contracts. In an update, Commercial Director Andy Arkle outlined Commsworld's growth strategy including a major network expansion outside Scotland, elaborated on May's £1.2m ECS acquisition, and detailed some strong growth figures for 2018 off the back of further Scottish public sector contracts. ■

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# Pragma: From distie to s

Pragma has cemented its position as one of the most successful comms industry start-ups and continues to gain ever more influence in the channel as an evolving service provider.

**P**ragma was launched in 2012 by the late David George, Managing Director Tim Brooks and Sales and Marketing Director Will Morey, all colleagues with 'previous' in comms distribution having worked together at Crane which was acquired by Westcon. "Many in the industry thought we were crazy to establish Pragma given the size and scale of our competition," noted Brooks.

West Sussex-based Pragma's primary vendor is Ericsson-LG and its proposition is based on a single family of products called iPECS, providing telephony and UC functionality to customers from two to 5,000 users. "iPECS can be cost-effectively deployed as an on-site, cloud or hybrid solution," stated Morey. "Therefore resellers don't have to carry multiple products to address each option, and they can offer their customer true choice and the ability to evolve their communication solution from on-premise to cloud as and when they choose, avoiding costly forklift upgrades.

"We recognised from the outset that cloud was key to our future success and started working with Ericsson-LG in 2013 to develop a cloud UC platform based on its iPECS UC solution set. Our cloud service was launched in February 2016 and has been a huge success, making Pragma the cloud 'poster child' for Ericsson-LG globally."

Pragma's main focus is the traditional voice reseller channel where it has experienced significant success helping resellers develop a cloud strategy. "Many voice resellers we meet don't like selling cloud as most SIP-based offerings are less featured and inflexible compared to the systems they are used to selling," added Brooks. "But iPECS Cloud is based on a true IP PBX platform and has all the features you expect of a system, yet with the advantages of a SaaS platform."

### Ongoing growth

Last month Pragma, which now has a 35 headcount, capped its sixth year of trading with annual revenues exceeding £8 million, representing 18 per cent growth on the previous year's sales. The company has achieved between 15 per cent and 25 per cent growth every year since its launch, and barring the first 12 months it has delivered a profit every year.

"We are committed to generating similar organic growth with a focus on increasing our annuity revenue through increased adoption of cloud services and associated applications," stated Morey. "We moved to our new purpose built headquarters in January this year, giving us three times more office and warehouse space than the previous location, enabling us to continue the growth curve we're on."



Tim Brooks and Will Morey

## We see ourselves as more of a service provider, albeit with a distribution capability

One notable feature of Pragma's growth pattern is that the number of trading resellers, approximately 120, has remained largely unchanged as the distributor increased annual revenues from £2 million to £8 million. "We do this by applying our energy and resources to the smallest number of resellers possible who have both the desire and capacity to grow," explained Brooks. "We also review the lower half of our reseller list regularly and close accounts if we have not achieved meaningful engagement with them, meaning we no longer need

to support them, and they no longer have access to the iPECS range. This allows us to selectively add new resellers without flooding the market, therefore our products are not over distributed and resellers can retain strong margins."

### Business model

The factors that are shaping the evolution of Pragma include a shift to a more service provider type business model and implementing the technology, systems and processes required to support this, such as billing, provisioning and portals.

Another key aspect of Pragma's proposition, noted Morey, is the deployment of field-based sales and support staff in reseller offices, providing sales, technical and marketing assistance face-to-face. "Many competitors rely on websites and call centres to engage resellers," he added.

Pragma is also leading the use of multiple channels to communicate with current and potential new resellers, including social media channels. Meanwhile, new technology areas firmly on Pragma's radar screen include



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native mobile integration with cloud, providing a unified communications platform for both fixed and mobile users; and desktop integration as comms platforms have to be integrated with customers' CRM, ERP and workflow applications in a digital transformation programme. Video and collaboration tools also need to be integrated.

## Key priorities

In planning for future growth Pragma has identified its immediate and longer-term priorities, including the formation of a management team to help take the business forward, further staff recruitment, and advancing its own digital transformation project to unify the numerous systems it acquired over the last six years into a cohesive and connected strategy.

Furthermore, maintaining close and collaborative relationships with vendors enables Pragma to influence their product strategies and roadmaps thereby ensuring its portfolio is relevant to resellers. "We see ourselves as more of a service provider, albeit with a distribution capability," stated Brooks. "Technology threats from mobile and collaboration providers means we need to build out our cloud UC platform to provide native mobile capability, collaboration tools, desktop integration and contact centre capabilities to remain relevant."

The big market trends of most interest to Pragma right now include the transition to cloud, noted Morey. And he cited the growing use of mobile phones within the office which can prompt people to question

the value or requirement for a desk phone. "Also, new collaboration tools such as Teams and Slack are being positioned as potential replacements for traditional communications platforms," he added.

Yet Pragma has witnessed its on-premise business continue to grow following the launch and strong take up of a cloud service. "We expected to see a modest decline in revenue and unit sales of our on-premise products as more of our resellers either offer customers the choice of how their UC service is delivered, or in some cases resellers now leading with cloud," commented Brooks. "However, due to a number of competitors in the on-premise space pulling back from or reducing their support for UK partners we have seen a wave of resellers move to iPECS due to the proposition and ongoing investment from Ericsson-LG in both cloud and on-premise based solutions."

## Award wins

The iPECS platform has been recognised at the CNA Awards for the last four years in a row, and Pragma received the Convergence Distributor of Year award in 2016. Ericsson-LG hailed Pragma as its Global Partner of the Year in 2014, 2016 and again in 2017. For good reason. "Over the last six years we've created a reseller channel that is a force to be reckoned with, embracing change, launching new products and adapting to an ever evolving world," explained Morey. "At the same time we've built many strong and lasting relationships as well as a real community feel across our channel."

Some of the most successful resellers in Pragma's channel have acquired IT support skills, allowing them to offer a more comprehensive ICT solution and support package, while at the same time removing the threat in these accounts from IT companies looking to win the comms business. "Resellers should position themselves as a digital transformation expert to ensure the customer views them as a strategic partner rather than a supplier that can be managed through a procurement process," commented Brooks.

## Choice matters

"We firmly believe that resellers will continue to be the dominant route to market for SMEs. Small business owners want to deal with people who they know and trust. We also think offering choice is key. For example, not forcing a customer to buy cloud or on-prem because that's the technology the reseller is most comfortable with. Resellers with suppliers that can offer a solution that addresses a broad range of deployment options within a single product set will have the best chance of winning, while at the same time keeping the costs of managing their portfolio and suppliers as low as possible."

This win-win scenario is reflected in Pragma's overall optimistic assessment of the market and its growing role in the partner channel. "The industry and our channel is strong, vibrant and dynamic, so there are always new opportunities and potential for growth," enthused Morey. "We've enjoyed working in the channel for many years and plan to continue for many more." ■



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# Fidelity Energy powers t

After hitting the ground running at Comms Vision just three years ago Fidelity Energy has powered past the £100 million TCV milestone thanks to a raft of rapidly maturing channel partnerships. Here, Managing Director John Haw explains the magic formula.



John Haw

**F**or many ICT resellers, adding energy services to their portfolio may be seen as a distraction from their core activities, but Haw believes the operations centre he has established, combined with the Ambolt partner portal perfected by Fidelity Energy's IT genius Howard Richards, means over 300 resellers will be selling energy services to customers by his third anniversary as Managing Director. "The last three years have gone in a flash, but we would not be where we are without

our amazing group of ICT partners," commented. "They are all entrepreneurial go-getters who identified the opportunity diversifying into energy brings and have embraced it successfully."

Fidelity Energy now has a broad church of channel partners across a broad range of businesses, noted Haw. "Our partners have signed up major sporting venues, housing associations, care home, hotels, restaurants etc, and on average we are securing 250 new customers a month, 90 per cent of

## You can't give a telecoms or IT reseller a portal and expect them to go out and become energy experts on their own

which are signed using our DocuSign platform."

### Mastermind

Fidelity Energy Chairman Simon Payne was the original mastermind behind the company's channel launch. Having already built and sold telecoms businesses

operated on a channel-only, profit share basis, Payne was convinced the supply of energy would fit seamlessly into the channel mould and his instinct was right. Many telecoms companies now have energy supply as a crucial part of the joined-up services they provide.

Focus Group, for example, has Focus Energy, Arrow recently acquired a broker to enter the space and the likes of Verastar, XLN, Telecoms Plus and Blizzard are long-term energy suppliers.

The timing of Haw's recruitment at the genesis of Fidelity Energy was perfectly timed. Having spent 10 years heading up Gamma's channel he knows how resellers tick and was undaunted by the challenge of persuading 'dyed in the wool' comms resellers to start selling a completely



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different set of products from an unfamiliar and complex industry. "The plan was to grow the number of channel partners and to get 30 key partners earning £10,000 each in commission," recalled Haw. "To do that we needed a rock solid operational proposition, the ability to scale sales without exponential headcount growth and a wider choice of suppliers.

## Game changer

"The back office is now complete and Ambolt is recognised as one of the best in the industry. It has been a game changer for us. By understanding telecoms businesses and just how tough they are on making sure the customer experience is right, we basically crafted the processes from scratch. This means the portal we have built prevents errors and ensures customers get a good experience. In addition, we support the channel from a sales perspective. You can't give a telecoms or IT reseller a portal and expect them to go out and become energy experts on their own. We support sales, marketing and we do that with real enthusiasm and a sense of fun."

Haw admits that not all resellers are taken with the idea of energy resale immediately until they understand how cash generative it can be. "As with anything new, there can be resistance," he stated. "If I had one pound for every time people used the same excuse not to sell hosted in the early days of that product, I would have enough for a very good lunch! It's fair to say that resellers adopt differing approaches. Some integrate the product into

the core business and use the current sales team to take it to market. Some hire a sales specialist to purely focus on the cross sell into the base. Others have set up entirely new businesses that leverage the current reseller brand. There is no right approach, it's tailoring the approach to the partner's needs, and our systems allow us to do that."

So, does Haw believe resellers can make more money selling energy than telecoms products and network solutions? "Well that's a question! I wouldn't expect anyone to believe me if I said yes, and in truth if

## We had our best month in August for channel: Incredible given the number of people on holiday

telco is already established in their business it would take some serious displacing," he said. "But it's easier to grow the energy business and there are no new overheads, so contribution wise it's a strong contender."

Haw has some heavy hitters alongside him to support his channel sales programme including co-founder Paul Havell, (former Sussex and Derbyshire bowler), James Benning (former Surrey and Leicestershire batsman) plus former UK international rower Sean Dixon. Such a pedigree has enabled the

company to secure some major clients such as Bath Rugby Club and the world famous Kia Oval but, as Sales Director Dixon stressed, for reseller partners more low hanging fruit has set many on the road to success in energy. "Without exception, every partner we work with could pick the phone up to 30 customers that they class as friends or close associates," added Haw. "Leveraging that relationship is simple, and as you really are helping them to save money it's an easy sell."

With 40 per cent growth last year and two billion kilowatts of energy now under management across its partner base, Fidelity Energy is poised for its next expansion project which Haw describes as another 'game changer'. "We are currently working on a massive project for a large client which encompasses a bespoke software portal for dealer management, an online B2B switching platform and an operational outsource to enable them to target their entire direct customer base," he explained.

With its credo to disrupt the ICT channel and create opportunities on the back of its portal technology and back office support, Fidelity Energy believes it has a bright future alongside its reseller partners regardless of energy market fluctuations. "The market is much harder than it was two years ago but our market understanding, systems and partner relationships more than make up for that," stated Haw. "We had our best month ever in August in the channel, which is incredible given the number of people away on holiday." ■

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illustrious Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

With past hosts including, Jimmy Nesbitt, Ronnie Corbett, Patrick Kielty, Rufus Hound, Hugh Dennis, Stephen K Amos, Michael McIntyre and Vernon Kay the entertainment as ever will be top drawer.

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## 9 MAKE IT A STRAIGHT SIX BY TAKING POLE POSITION AT NATIONAL AWARDS

This year's Comms National Awards, to be held at The Park Lane Hilton, London on Thursday 11th October, will be sponsored for the sixth successive year by leading service provider, 9 Group.

According to Marketing Director, Mark Saunders, there was not even a moment's debate around renewing the service provider's commitment to the event, which is the unquestioned highlight of the awards calendar.

"Last year was another memorable evening and it's wonderful to recall how welcome our brand ambassador, Josh Webster, was made to feel by everyone in the hall as he opened the event, ably supported by a hugely amusing host, James Nesbitt. Saunders believes the standard of award entries will improve once more, meaning the judges will again face the unenviable task of separating them.

"If you win one of these awards, you really can legitimately claim to be the very best at what you do and I look forward to seeing a healthy mixture of familiar and new faces on the podium this year.

"I hope the channel's top people will be there to enjoy the very best night out in our industry and will enter as many categories possible to showcase the incredible range of talent that this industry should so rightly boast about."

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## A WORD FROM OUR SPONSORS...

### Business Category

#### Justin Blaine

Channel Sales Manager  
NTA



"NTA is proud to yet again be a sponsor at this year's Comms National Awards. The awards are recognised as one of the most prestigious within in our industry and this year we are sponsoring the Business Awards Category. There are a number of new awards in this category including 'Best New Innovation' and 'Best Business Growth' to recognise enterprising and forward-thinking businesses in our community which we endorse wholeheartedly.

"All of the NTA staff would like to take this opportunity to wish all entrants in all categories the very best of luck. The CN Award finals night is a highlight of the industry calendar and we look forward to seeing channel friends and colleagues and celebrating success on the night."

### After Show Rockaoke Sponsor

#### Richard Thompson

Director of Partners  
TalkTalk Business



"It has been yet another exciting year for the Channel with lots to celebrate. The sector has seen a number of mergers and partnerships, (something that we are very strong advocates of here at TalkTalk Business.) that continues to make this such a buoyant market. This industry can be very complex, and I think we forget that at the end of the day our customers just want things to work. So, it's up to us to work collaboratively to unbundle the jungle that we call telecoms.

"I'm pleased that we are once again able to bring together friends that are now like family so we can celebrate each-others triumphs."

### Video Studio Sponsor

#### Mike Greening

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"Sky Business is proud to be sponsoring the highly anticipated Channel Network Awards. This annual event brings together the best in Channel and showcases some of the most innovative tech solutions of 2017/18. Sky is passionate about pioneering new possibilities for Channel partners and we are looking forward to welcoming the winners into the Sky Studio to find out more about their past successes and plans for the future.

"Every business nominated for an award has demonstrated a fabulous contribution to telecoms development and innovation and the CNAs is a celebration of these achievements. We would like to wish all nominees the best of luck, we will raise a glass to each and every one."

### Enterprise Reseller of the Year

#### Charles Aylwin

Director of Channel  
8x8



"At 8x8, we're delighted to be sponsoring the Comms National Awards again this year. The evening is always a great celebration of the best our industry has to offer. It's also a fantastic recognition of the true excellence in communications, whether rewarding vendor solutions, resellers, innovative technology or outstanding customer service. The channel is essential to the continued growth of our industry and at 8x8 we will continue our rapid expansion with the unrivalled expertise of our channel partners. We want to wish the best of luck to everyone that has entered and we're looking forward to celebrating on the night!"

### Network Category

#### Wail Sabbagh

Managing Director  
Strategic Imperatives



"Strategic Imperatives is the UK market leader in SaaS billing with our ground-breaking billing platform Elevate, as well as being highly regarded for fixed line provisioning with award-winning multi-carrier solutions for Local Loop Unbundling, WLR, Fibre and traditional broadband.

"That's why we are so pleased to be among other leaders of the channel in supporting the UK's No 1 awards programme and event. The Comms National Awards celebrate product and service quality in the channel which rings perfectly with our commitment to 'Elevate' partners to a new level of billing excellence. We congratulate all the finalists and look forward to celebrating success with them on October 11th."

### Reseller of the Year – SME

#### Garry Grown

Sales Director  
Daisy Wholesale



"Entering the prestigious Comms National Awards not only brings together great individuals and companies, whilst showcasing businesses' successes, it allows you to acknowledge the hard work, talent and determination of your teams. At Daisy Wholesale, we believe the SME sector has huge potential which is why we are proud to support our fantastic partners and the channel by sponsoring the SME Reseller of the Year category. This is your opportunity to reward the people that make your business a success, so grab it with both hands and get your entry in now."

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# FluidOne pulls in West

FluidOne has recruited KCOM Head of Channel Henry West as Channel Sales Director in a move that completes the data connectivity provider's leadership team as it seeks to fulfil aggressive growth ambitions.

Impressed by previous dealings with West FluidOne CEO Russell Horton set his sights on recruiting him as a key part of the company's five year plan to become a £75 million business. Horton, who took the CEO job in April, said at the time of his appointment: "When I was approached about the role I noted a lack of brand presence in the market, under investment in sales and marketing, particularly in the channel, but great potential for growth."

The company currently generates revenues of £27 million, has 100 staff and over 300 channel partners alongside a direct business that focuses on enterprise customers. Horton stated: "I was a customer of Henry's and he always impressed me with his commercial negotiations, integrity, honesty, high service ethos, drive and humour. He is well known and respected by the reseller community and we are lucky to have enticed him away from KCOM. Henry's appointment gives us a great blend of historic knowledge of the business, customers and products, along with external experience of scale, acquisitions and organic sales growth. The leadership team is now in place and

ready to drive our five year mission to treble in size."

West, who has 20 years channel experience under his belt, joins FluidOne this month following an 11 year stint at KCOM where he headed up the reseller channel leading a team that manages circa 600 partners. "I had a fantastic 13 years at KCOM working with a great team and building a successful channel business, so it was no easy decision to leave," he explained.

"However, when I met the FluidOne team for the first time their passion and determination to succeed and differentiate in the channel was huge. The opportunity to step up to director level and lead the channel strategy has always been on my agenda. I am confident that what we will achieve in the next five years at FluidOne will surpass my career expectations.

"We're already in a position to give the key players in the market a run for their money and there is so much more to come. One of my core objectives is to triple the business. No easy challenge, but the market is huge and most importantly FluidOne is channel-focused. In this we have clarity, direction and the full support of the whole business from operations to



Henry West

## The opportunity to step up to director level and lead the channel strategy has always been on my agenda

finance, sales and marketing, and our in-house software development team."

### Voice of the channel

While creating brands and scaling sales teams are important to any business, being the 'voice of the channel' at leadership meetings is critical, noted West, who relishes the opportunity to translate feedback from customers and partners into more meaningful strategic partnerships. "Why? To enable real growth," he stated. "This could be

simply finding ways to sell higher volumes of what our partners consume from us today, delivering operational benefits that enable our partners to serve their customers better and differentiate in this highly competitive market, or helping partners to enter new high growth markets – all of which are essential."

West is tasked with taking FluidOne's Platform One (its national fibre network) and Dash portal to the reseller market. Platform One interconnects the wholesale

services of 26 cloud service, data centre, mobile operator, broadband supplier, fixed line operator and telephony service providers into a common service network. And the company's in-house developed Dash portal enables partners to access and manage these aggregated services. "The portal is king," added West. "We hear it from customers all the time – 'give me choice, operational benefits and make it easy to consume and manage my services', they say. Having an in-house team of developers will ensure the portal continues to evolve at pace."

Such agility is key, noted West, not simply because the connectivity market is crowded – it's also moving fast and customer reliance on infrastructure is the *de facto* imperative occupying the minds of key providers. "In a cloud-centric on-demand world customers will need to connect to people, places, assets and things from many different origins, together and to the services they need," added West. "This is amplifying the need for quality, choice and flexibility. However, it's not all about Ethernet right now. We have also started to see demand for FTTP, G.fast, 4G and soon there will be 5G services in the mix.

"The high speed and commercial advantages these access technologies deliver enable FluidOne and our partners to address all aspects of the market together and in collaboration. I really enjoy the channel and creating long lasting relationships with customers and colleagues, while not forgetting to have some fun along the way and creating great memories." ■



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# Cloudcell ramps up growth plans with channel campaign

**W**inchester-based Cloudcell Technologies has successfully completed the first phase of its fast growth strategy and, says Managing Director Kevin Boyle, the company is poised to embark on a ramped up channel building campaign that marks the beginning of a new period in the Cloudcell journey towards becoming what he describes as 'the dominant force in enterprise grade connectivity'.

Boyle, a former Sales Director of prominent and fast growing reseller companies, decided to turn personal vision into strategy and create his own business, establishing Cloudcell Technologies three years ago in response to the convergence of connectivity and cloud-based services. The company quickly gained traction in its chosen markets and has witnessed notable success with blue chip organisations. The launch of Cloudcell Connect, an enterprise grade connectivity platform, into the construction sector was followed by a similar roll out to large marine vessels, the events industry and also to provide pre-Ethernet support for a number of channel partners.

"CloudcellConnect can be supplied to any location, urban or rural, on land or at sea," stated Boyle. "We are currently experiencing significant growth in the marine and construction sectors, in part driven by investments in raising



Kevin Boyle

**We are addressing the ever inherent and continuing issues with traditional forms of connectivity.**

awareness of our propositions in these key sectors, such as our participation in UK Construction Week this month. We are also running a free data promotion for new customers until the end of 2018."

**Technology focus areas**

Cloudcell's primary technology partners include Peplink, Panorama Antennas, Poynting Antennas, EAD, EE, Gamma and Daisy. New technology areas of particular interest to Boyle right now are in the migration of enterprise connectivity solutions to the cloud, such as cloud-based VPN concentrators. "We also spend time and resource on antenna expertise, focusing on the right hardware not only for the now but for the future," added Boyle. "For example, Peplink has a diverse product set for SD-WAN applications."

According to Boyle, overall messaging in the channel is looking 'tired', almost unchanged for ten years, he believes. "The time is ripe for disruptive forces to make their influence felt by introducing alternative solutions that create new revenue opportunities, like the latest in SD-WAN technologies," he stated.

"As an early adopter of SD-WAN we were among the first proponents of the technology's broad range of benefits, including hot failover, load balancing and more importantly bonding – using commodity WAN options without having to invest in dedicated, expensive Ethernet circuits or experience deployment delays. The advent of hosted VPN termination in the cloud is another significant game changer, eliminating hardware lead times and enabling a Connectivity-as-a-Service business model."

Having successfully launched his reseller proposition and experienced rapid traction with partner recruitment it soon became apparent to Boyle that he needed to invest in engaging and educating the channel. He commented: "Who in the channel hasn't experienced network issues or a failure to deliver on time with a traditional vendor? We are addressing the ever inherent and continuing issues with traditional forms of connectivity and maximising our reach by actively recruiting resellers."

ENERGY UPDATE  
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## Energy puts some power into Sprint



DIVERSIFICATION into the supply of energy services alongside Fidelity Energy is paying off in spades for Sprint Scotland.

Since being signed up as a reseller with Fidelity last year, the Kilmarnock based supplier of unified communications, mobiles, hosted telephony and IT support is now successfully selling energy to both current and new customers, as partner Kevin Fagan confirmed.

"We are addressing both. We inform our existing customers of the opportunity and whenever we meet new customers it forms part of a new conversation. Energy has been part of our portfolio since November 2017 and approximately 50% of our customers are now signed up. Also, with forward procurement we can continue to engage and renew our existing customer base." Fagan says working with the Fidelity Energy team has been seamless and their help has enabled Sprint Scotland to secure another revenue stream alongside its core ICT solutions business.

"The team at Fidelity Energy has been extremely helpful in getting us started. They respond quickly, and their internal account managers provide excellent ongoing support and training. They are always available to offer help and advice and they make it very simple to introduce and advise our customers without time consuming admin."

Sprint Scotland co-partner John Brown says customers like having energy services built into the company's portfolio and like the advantages of a 'one stop shop'. He is also delighted by how easy it has been to

sell energy especially into the vertical markets they serve.

"100% of our customers use electricity and they must buy it from somewhere, so it is a perfect opportunity for us. It is very easy to integrate, and customers appreciate the support we offer. Fidelity helps with quoting and contracts, which reduces our time spent on signing up deals. Basically, we can continue to serve our customers and offer an additional product that helps them save money so it's a win-win.

"Energy is relatively easy to sell. Customers can be surprised that rates are increasing, but in comparison to their renewal rates they understand we can offer a better deal and fix rates for longer periods than expected. Also, they are receptive to switching suppliers, especially in this current market and they're happy to discuss other options to save as much money as possible. Our customers trust the advice we give and appreciate it when we have negotiated better rates from a wide comparison.

"We are now successfully targeting housing associations. Fidelity Energy's EMS (Energy Management System) platform makes quoting these multi-sites very simple. After we have seen how easy and quick we can quote several sites, we set out to find more multi-sites and quote several meters quickly."

So, would Fagan recommend other ICT companies to add energy to their portfolio?

"For me it's a no brainer," he said. "We rate this opportunity very highly as it is creating fantastic new opportunities and recommendations from our customers which is a bonus."

"Fidelity Energy's EMS (Energy Management System) platform makes quoting these multi-sites very simple"

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# Ambition with a twist

Entrepreneurs are so often fuelled by all-consuming gas guzzling ambition, but not Mirus IT Solutions Managing Director Paul Tomlinson who's driving hard and fast on a mix of aspiration and contentment.



Paul Tomlinson

**A** long-held interest in technology brought a dose of inevitability to the direction of Tomlinson's career journey which began with an engineering role for a small Milton Keynes-based IT provider. Spurred by bigger ideas he went on to launch his first business, an IT support operation, before co-founding Mirus IT in 2002 as a provider of IT support for local SMEs. "The plan was to keep things relatively small but over the years we've added a comms company and a managed print business to the group," he said. "Our key vendors now include Microsoft, Gamma, Datto, Mimecast and Olivetti."

Mirus secured a presence in the managed print sector with the acquisition of Leighton Buzzard business 2r Systems in June last year. The deal boosted Mirus's revenues to circa £10m and headcount to 100-plus.

"This acquisition was a major change for us," said Tomlinson. "We recognised the need to provide high margin services to our customers and by acquiring an existing provider it gave us a larger client base to sell our current services into."

#### Growth strategy

Tomlinson aims to complete an acquisition every two years so long as a right-fit prospect appears on the radar screen. The security space is a likely target given his view that Mirus's turnover could double if he cracks into augmenting his portfolio with cyber security services. "Providing we can complete our acquisitions and continue the organic growth we've undertaken we'll generate circa £15 million revenues with around £11 million recurring revenue within five years," stated Tomlinson. "But if things happen with security it could be a very different story."

This outlook reflects the strong top line growth experienced by Mirus in its early years. "But then the world changed and we moved away from large technology projects to monthly services which had a positive impact on our recurring revenue," noted Tomlinson. "However, introducing hosted VoIP and mobile telephony was something new and different."

"My background is predominantly in IT services so the introduction of data connections was a simple enough change. Not the same experience with mobiles. I still struggle with the direct model competing against the reseller channel. In most other areas there's a clear approach to engaging with the end user, but with mobiles we're just in a big fight."

Tomlinson has higher hopes in voice and will sharpen

his focus on Office 365 integration as well as addressing opportunities in the provision of security services. "We have a plan to tackle these areas and will always keep our eyes open for new solutions that would benefit customers and maximise our margins," he commented. "The migration away from on-premises phone systems is also something we're keeping a close eye on as we've got solutions that can help with the transition to cloud environments. Traditional box shifters need to look at this trend and start aligning services to their products to ensure customers get the most from their purchase. There will be less demand for a product shifting approach and a growing expectation from customers that an ICT solution should deliver real value and make an impact on their organisation."

Vaulting ambition, like a hard and fast growth target, is an overrated concept in Tomlinson's book. Instead, ambition tempered by contentment is the running theme. "We're privately owned so don't need to worry too much about pushing for aggressive growth plans," commented Tomlinson. "Mirus is doing very well and the culture within the business is the best it's ever been, so we've got some conservative targets of adding around £1 million per annum turnover in the group with circa 75 per cent of that being from recurring services. I love what we're doing right now and am proud of the exceptional team I have around me. If we just keep up the great work we do and don't hit those financial milestones I'll still be a happy man." ■

#### Just a minute with Paul Tomlinson...

**Role models:** My management team: They've all got different qualities which I respect and admire greatly

**What talent do you wish you had?** To sing

**What do you fear the most?** Things that are outside my control

**In hindsight:** I'd have focused more on quality of service in the early days

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I'm working at becoming a qualified Mountain Leader

**Top tip for resellers:** Collaborate: We should share ideas and grow together rather than always compete

**Your greatest strength and what could you work on?** I'm a good people person and can read others well, but sometimes underestimate the time it takes to bring change, forgetting people need time to alter habits and behaviours

**Name one thing you couldn't do without in your job:** My Outlook calendar

**What's the best piece of advice you have ever been given?** Not to overreact to normal challenges in business. Now I'm more comfortable just working through these

**If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing?** Leading people up and down mountains

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** My nan who is a very funny Irish lady, Shane MacGowan for music and Oliver Reed to liven things up

**How would you like to be remembered?** As a great father to my children and a firm but fair leader



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# The drive to Digital Britain:

**B**efore he was transferred to sort out the NHS (good luck with that!), Matt Hancock was Minister for Digital and just under a year ago gave a speech to the Broadband Stakeholder Group Conference.

In that speech he said he was forever being harangued by people about the quality and resilience of their broadband. One was none other than British astronaut Tim Peake, who complained about connectivity on the international space station. Hancock's answer was: "Tim, for next time you're up there, I'm sure one of our ambitious Altnets can help".

Now, Hancock was obviously saying this with tongue firmly in cheek, but there was a hidden message there which he expanded upon later. "I will be on the side of the challenger, helping in every way I can to deliver fair competition and a level playing field. I meant it then, I mean it now. And I am delighted the Altnets are going from strength to strength".

He was of course referring to the likes of City Fibre and TalkTalk who, unburdened by regulation, are leading the charge to a full fibre future for the UK.

At this year's Comms Vision Convention at Gleneagles, under a 'Digital Britain' theme, delegates from the UK's leading comms providers will get the chance to hear from leaders of these companies, and others like them, which are investing in full fibre connectivity alongside or in competition with Openreach, to deliver the bandwidth customers are demanding.

At the time of writing, we were hoping a senior representative from Westminster will be available to attend and explain to our industry how the British Government is supporting private firms to help connect 15 million premises to full fibre by 2025 and 5G coverage countrywide by 2027, goals set out in its recently published 'Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review'.

Cash and looser regulation is promised but it seems reliability on private sector innovation and drive remains to the fore.



LAUREN MCMANUS  
DAISY WHOLESALE

**DOES UK NETWORK DELIVERY RUN ON A LEVEL FIELD?**

Regulation has enabled a more level playing field, but further work is required to ensure this continues and that more competition is encouraged.

**ARE CUSTOMERS DEMANDING GREATER BANDWIDTH?**

There is definitely a demand for greater bandwidth. but it's not just bandwidth that's important. In the business world, response times (data latency) and service availability are both extremely important.

**CAN THE PRIVATE SECTOR DELIVER DIGITAL BRITAIN?**

A combination of investment from both public and private sector is required. Private sector alone would mean investment would most likely focus on the quickest ROI, leaving densely populated areas behind.

**WHY WILL IT TAKE SO LONG?**

The cost to build out networks is significant, and particularly in rural areas, ROI takes longer. Increased market competition, removing unnecessary red tape and more government loans/investment to network providers and local authorities (particularly in areas where ROI makes investment less commercially attractive) to build out networks would accelerate the programme.



JAMES WARNER  
GLIDE

**DOES UK NETWORK DELIVERY RUN ON A LEVEL FIELD?**

Businesses in many areas and those who cannot afford leased lines have been neglected by service providers and are battling slow connections. This could exacerbate economic divides and hold back regional development.

**ARE CUSTOMERS DEMANDING GREATER BANDWIDTH?**

An increasing majority of businesses want to be able to move to cloud based solutions like AWS, Office365 and VoIP, which naturally requires both extra bandwidth and greater reliability.

**CAN THE PRIVATE SECTOR DELIVER DIGITAL BRITAIN?**

Full fibre deployment requires hefty investment and the private sector cannot bear this cost alone - Government must support consumers and businesses in the meantime and work with alternative network providers to overcome the state we find ourselves in.

**WHY WILL IT TAKE SO LONG?**

Right now, installation of FTTP is too expensive to deploy for many businesses. Schemes, such as the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme will undoubtedly play a part in democratising access to full fibre.



ANTONY BLACK  
WAVENET

**DOES UK NETWORK DELIVERY RUN ON A LEVEL FIELD?**

No, resellers can only sell what's available to them. While Ofcom has announced full fibre services will be rolled out in the UK by 2033, Openreach is yet to confirm the specifics.

**ARE CUSTOMERS DEMANDING GREATER BANDWIDTH?**

Customer conversation has evolved and now each solution we sell is cloud-based. Therefore, bandwidth and connectivity reliability is more critical than ever for Wavenet Wholesale customers.

**CAN THE PRIVATE SECTOR DELIVER DIGITAL BRITAIN?**

Yes, however digitalising Britain is partly reliant on commercial viability for the network providers. Some geographic areas are in danger of falling between the gaps and a preventative solution is required.

**WHY WILL IT TAKE SO LONG?**

Investment is key and currently Openreach isn't driving the market hard enough. Consumers are driving demand, but Ofcom must initiate the rollout. The reseller community is working to ensure customers are digitally ready with cloud-based solutions, but fulfilment can only happen in the future and higher bandwidth is crucial.



MIKE NUDD  
INCLARITY

**DOES UK NETWORK DELIVERY RUN ON A LEVEL FIELD?**

The UK's current network provision may not be entirely level, but I believe it's as level as it has ever been. Now that independent managed connectivity providers such as Virtual1 are establishing their own direct presence in exchanges across the country, as one of their partners, Inclarity can now compete directly with the biggest players in the market.

**ARE CUSTOMERS DEMANDING GREATER BANDWIDTH?**

As a hosted UC provider, we are primarily concerned with supporting only voice and video communications. Our channels are mainly focused on small businesses who do not have significant bandwidth needs in this regard.

**CAN THE PRIVATE SECTOR DELIVER DIGITAL BRITAIN?**

Different individual businesses face different challenges and have quite different digital requirements. It is clear though that leading service providers in the private sector have a better understanding of the latest technologies than many decision makers in the public sector.

**WHY WILL IT TAKE SO LONG?**

No comment!



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# who's really at the wheel?



STEPHEN MCINTYRE  
NIMANS

#### DOES UK NETWORK DELIVERY RUN ON A LEVEL FIELD?

In general, it's a competitive market with more customers having access to on-net services. Bandwidth is growing and prices are falling, but it's not all about price, it's the wrap around services guaranteeing resilience and support which are a necessity.

#### ARE CUSTOMERS DEMANDING GREATER BANDWIDTH?

There's more and more bandwidth required to perform ever more complex and data hungry tasks. Applications are growing in an always-on, always-connected world. The lines between 4G and fixed connectivity continue to blur.

#### CAN THE PRIVATE SECTOR DELIVER DIGITAL BRITAIN?

The Government's Gigabit voucher scheme is currently providing a great incentive particularly for SME's and consumers, with tangible help on hand. Digital Britain is happening.

#### WHY WILL IT TAKE SO LONG?

Political, legal and investment factors delay progress – 5G has been hampered by Ofcom licencing and spectrum auction delays. 5G ready devices will become available in 2019 which will hopefully speed up the race for networks to release their 5G offerings.



DAN CUNLIFFE  
PANGEA

#### DOES UK NETWORK DELIVERY RUN ON A LEVEL FIELD?

From a mobile perspective, no—it's clear that certain networks are more proficient than others in terms of speed and quality. The divide is real, and measurable through coverage changes across the UK.

#### ARE CUSTOMERS DEMANDING GREATER BANDWIDTH?

HD Video conferencing and screen sharing is now as commonplace as dialling into a conference bridge. And users are quick to notice a quality drop; being knocked down to Edge or 3G triggers an emotional response. In these cases, high bandwidth is as important as ever.

#### CAN THE PRIVATE SECTOR DELIVER DIGITAL BRITAIN?

Definitely. With less people required to sign off ideas, the private sector is more flexible and quicker to make decisions than the public sector, and the presence of competition means digital solutions are pushed to be the best they can be.

#### WHY WILL IT TAKE SO LONG?

Operators will want to secure ROI from 4G before burning a new path, and mass market device providers like Apple and Samsung can't bring out 5G devices before operators are ready—it's a chicken-and-egg situation.



NICK POWELL  
SKY

#### DOES UK NETWORK DELIVERY RUN ON A LEVEL FIELD?

Everyone likes to take a swipe at the traditional infrastructure providers and some of that is justified, some not so. The playing field is level but requires significant investment.

#### ARE CUSTOMERS DEMANDING GREATER BANDWIDTH?

Our customers come to us specifically for higher bandwidth Ethernet solutions.

The challenge of getting fibre to premises is only the start and then network operators will need to scale their infrastructures by 5, 10, 100 times.

#### CAN THE PRIVATE SECTOR DELIVER DIGITAL BRITAIN?

The private sector will always deliver where it is economically viable to do so. The relationship between Public Sector and Private will be what enables the more challenging areas that don't offer the desired return.

#### WHY WILL IT TAKE SO LONG?

It's important that this is done well with the correct planning and engagement in place. We want to see the key players working collaboratively to speed delivery up. Demand is there now, and delays cost businesses significantly.



RICHARD THOMPSON  
TALKTALK BUSINESS

#### DOES UK NETWORK DELIVERY RUN ON A LEVEL FIELD?

The UK market contains a myriad of network providers, each with different levels of coverage and capability. TTB is well placed to leverage its scale and proven heritage in providing great value connectivity.

#### ARE CUSTOMERS DEMANDING GREATER BANDWIDTH?

We have seen an exponential increase in the demand for higher bandwidth services. In part this will be driven by customers looking to future proof; but the adoption of cloud-based applications is certainly fuelling the need for more bandwidth.

#### CAN THE PRIVATE SECTOR DELIVER DIGITAL BRITAIN?

The private sector will always be the catalyst for change, but greater government backing is required. Collectively we need a real focus on how we drive infrastructure and get the 'plumbing' right.

#### WHY WILL IT TAKE SO LONG?

The economics of delivering full fibre are challenging. This has cultivated pockets of coverage delivered through niche, sub scale players. As the supply chain matures, capital investment and government support increases.



NEIL WILSON  
VIRTUAL1

#### DOES UK NETWORK DELIVERY RUN ON A LEVEL FIELD?

We are getting closer, having another infrastructure player emerge is good for everyone, it raises the game all round. Duct and pole access is another step forward and will also present more opportunities for disruption.

#### ARE CUSTOMERS DEMANDING GREATER BANDWIDTH?

At a wholesale level we have seen a marked increase in connectivity demands, for example 50% of our 1Gb circuits are already being sold at full capacity now.

#### CAN THE PRIVATE SECTOR DELIVER DIGITAL BRITAIN?

If we want to make up ground on the rest of the world and be a true digital leader in those timescales, the government has an essential part to play to help remove the roadblocks that hold our industry back.

#### WHY WILL IT TAKE SO LONG?

The biggest challenge I see is getting connectivity in the ground fast enough. Driving forward Duct and Pole is our next challenge, particularly in more remote areas where they is yet to be diverse suppliers.



ADAM WILLIAMS  
KCOM

#### DOES UK NETWORK DELIVERY RUN ON A LEVEL FIELD?

Currently, no. The challenges of bringing high speed internet to remote locations is well documented and it goes beyond the rural/urban divide. The Government has set out a bold vision, but it has to be industry led.

#### ARE CUSTOMERS DEMANDING GREATER BANDWIDTH?

We have great insight, with Hull leading as the superfast capital of Europe. Demand is there; it enables our customers to run the overlay services of their choice.

#### CAN THE PRIVATE SECTOR DELIVER DIGITAL BRITAIN?

We're moving in the right direction; new legislation will bring this to the forefront of everyone's mind and it's actually a really exciting time for us to influence a digital strategy that will make the UK a global competitive force.

#### WHY WILL IT TAKE SO LONG?

There are realities we can't ignore like the cost of roll-out. We have a responsibility to show the model works and demonstrate there will be a clear return on investment.

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# Legacy to leading edge

Of course the migration from legacy to leading edge in the comms industry poses challenges, but it also creates a range of new opportunities and may be easier achieved than first thought, according to Patrick Joggerst, Executive Vice President of Business Development for Ribbon Communications.

**O**n considering the important matter of legacy modernisation and integration in the comms industry many good reasons to upgrade to real-time communications (RTC) networks and platforms quickly emerge into common sense. The digital revolution is accelerating and IP-based services are disrupting how consumers and businesses communicate and engage. From mobile applications to omnichannel customer service, from web-centric e-commerce solutions to 'everything as a service' delivered via the cloud, the world is changing – and telecom carriers and enterprises understand they must modernise to remain or become market leaders, according to Joggerst.

"Once digital transformational projects get underway, contending with legacy technologies and infrastructure is one of the biggest obstacles they face," he stated. "But the good news is that there is no need to rip-and-replace legacy phone systems to

leverage software-driven RTC advantages."

He noted that the migration to OTT voice and other messaging apps has sounded the death knell for fixed landlines, but despite the revolution enterprises cannot quickly abandon switched access. "CSPs understand this and are providing paths to transformation which allow for uninterrupted services even as they move their large enterprise customers into virtualised, software defined services," added Joggerst. "The incentives to modernise, besides productivity gains and easier ways to stay connected with customers, are clear and tangible. While businesses continue to rely on the PSTN for mission critical applications in addition to voice – including alarm systems, auto dialers, ATMs and PoS terminals – the cost of maintaining PSTN and IP networks is considerable from capital, operational and facilities perspectives."

While the PSTN may be largely depreciated with little impact on capital budget, it does however impact the



Patrick Joggerst

## There are ways to transform the network, applications and cloud services away from traditional architectures without breaking the bank

operational budget. "IP softswitches consume one tenth to one quarter of both data centre space and power," added Joggerst. "Network operators and large enterprises are well aware of the savings in space and power that IP offers, along with improved network flexibility and ease of configuration and management. Furthermore, IP soft switches generate 25 per cent of the emissions produced by TDM switches, resulting in tax breaks and helping operators achieve their environmental improvement goals."

Less space for IP means a lot more than cost savings,

pointed out Joggerst. It means square footage can be repurposed as data centre space for critical IT revenue streams including content hosting, outsourcing and cloud services.

### Development ecosystem

"For both CSPs and large enterprises building new IP application revenue streams, IP platforms and approaches dramatically shorten, simplify and expand the development ecosystem as more revenue is being generated by IT solutions than traditional network access," said Joggerst. "While the transition to IP is a strategic must-do there are ways to transform the

network, applications and cloud-delivered services away from traditional architectures without breaking the bank."

In implementing a solid business and technical game plan enterprises can address legacy systems early in the digital transformation process and leverage existing assets, keep value from trusted longstanding relationships with customers and build new solutions based on a flexible enterprise architecture (such as micro-services technology).

Here is Ribbon's *forte*. It provides open, software driven, virtualised and modernised infrastructure RTC solutions, while also moving up the stack into the application layer with its Kandy Communications Platform as a Service (CPaaS). The company gives some of the largest CSPs in the world a leg up to transforming their networks, which in turn enables them to help enterprises modernise the way they engage with an increasingly digital world in terms of planning, budgeting for and rolling out pure IP environments.

"By leveraging Cloud Communications as a Service (CCaaS), Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS), embedded communications – for example voice, video and chat built into web and business applications – and other beneficial innovations, comms service providers and the enterprises they serve can improve service to their customers, while saving money given the higher margins generated by software defined RTC, along with lower total cost of ownership," said Joggerst. ■



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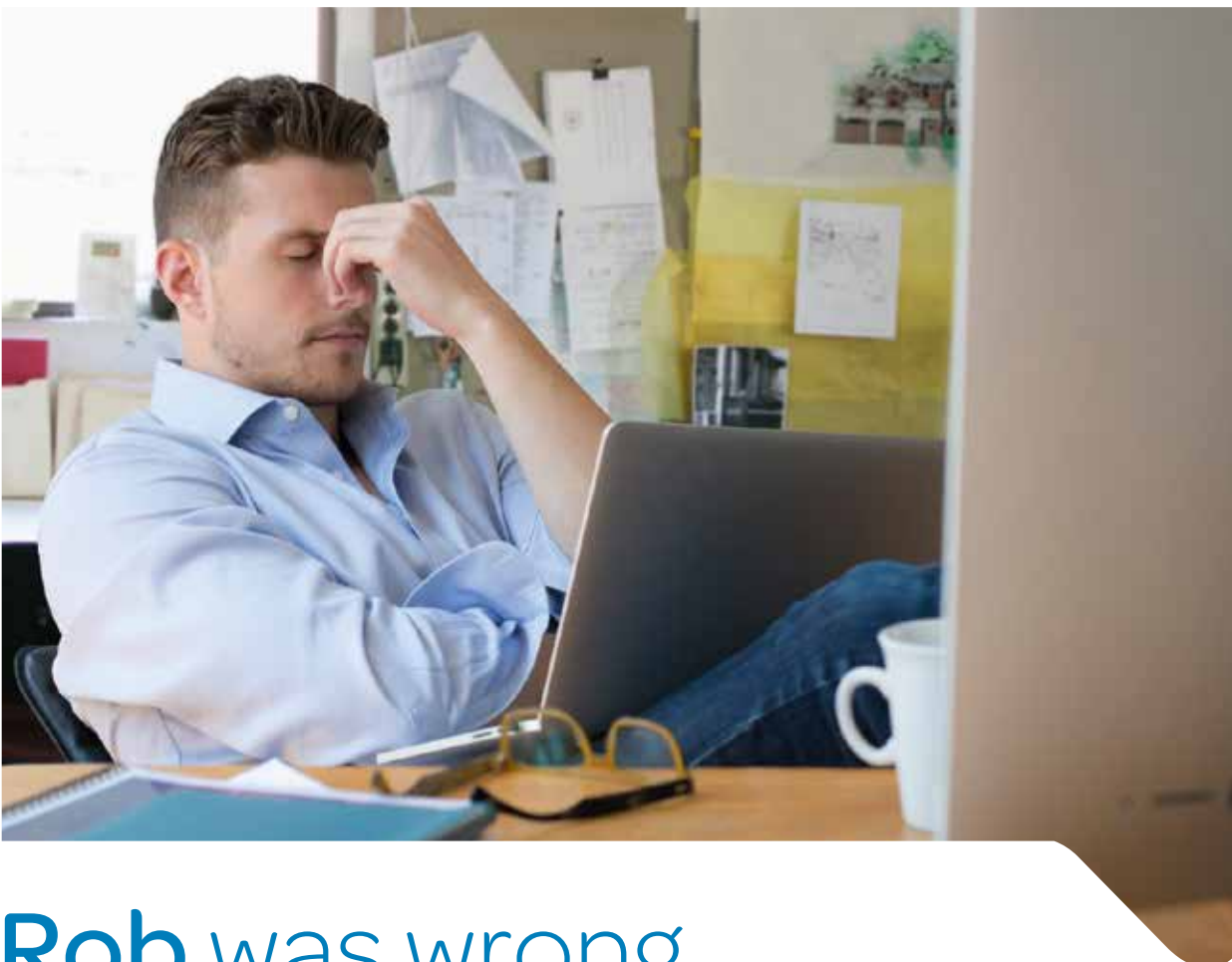
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# Drivers of innovation

For whom does the comms channel speak? For end users of course, and more than ever their voice is heard loudest in centres of technological innovation.

Innovation is far less spurred by technology advances for their own sake than the voice of the customer, its volume cranked up by how they want to engage and interact with businesses, noted Tollring CEO Tony Martino. And a sharpening focus on the customer experience as a differentiator means that reporting and interaction management has assumed a greater and more significant role, he says.

"Furthermore, a lack of differentiation in the hosted UC marketplace has prompted the channel to look at analytics to add value and engage with customers in a consultative way," he said. "And advances in big data and speech analytics mean that we can analyse more areas of customer interaction in greater depth. Omnichannel is a key area for development which will be augmented with machine learning."

Nor is that all: The cloud, web and subscription economy is also changing the way that businesses want to consume technology. "We are seeing greater uptake of UC and customer analytics tools delivered via the cloud," added Martino. "Accessibility is key. Cloud AI services will unlock more and more valuable customer

data. The combination of UC propositions on VoIP networks and the improved accessibility of machine learning and AI tools makes for exciting developments."

Tollring is investing more in R&D than ever before in its history and expects to double resources and strengthen its global reach. "The challenge with this is architecting our product for scale, which includes ensuring that varying customer requirements can be engineered in, in a controlled way," noted Martino. "Simple, low overhead deployment is key."

Today, most think of omnichannel interaction and reporting as a multi-channel environment. Looking ahead, the growth of voice control, AI and intelligent 'things' will continue to blur the edges and create a truly integrated environment, believes Phil Reynolds, CTO at Oak Innovation. "Customer interaction will become less dependent on screen interfaces with reporting and analysis elevated from siloed quantitative information to qualitative business intelligence," he commented.

"Currently, cloud benefits are predominately derived from shared infrastructure. This gives rise to improved flexibility, better security and simplified support.



Phil Reynolds

## We ensure that the voice of the customer is heard in development meetings

We believe this is just the beginning of the cloud journey. The real benefits will be derived from a smart choice of infrastructure and partnership to deliver a wide range of cost-effective capabilities leveraging advanced technologies like sentiment analysis."

### Integration

In the near term, noted Reynolds, interface development continues to be a focus for Oak. "By fitting with the customer's chosen IT frameworks, our channel partners can address a wider range of opportunities and differentiate through capabilities like CRM integration and payment automation," he added. "Increasingly, our applications will be cloud-based and use a mobile-first approach

in keeping with global technology trends. Expect native mobile applications and virtual/augmented reality where a more immersive experience will lead to higher adoption.

"Oak's management team have placed more emphasis on understanding market trends, thought leadership and innovation. We ensure that the 'voice of the customer' is heard through a monthly development meeting attended by sales and marketing. We have a tough job balancing innovation with day-to-day field requirements and the delivery of quality software through a combination of in-house resource and partnership. The adoption of agile software development has helped to speed things

up and improve quality. Looking ahead, new delivery mechanisms will facilitate more frequent feature updates."

Long gone are the days when customers just wanted to contact their product or service provider by phone, observed Colin Gill, Product Manager at Akixi. "Of course, simply offering additional new communication channels will not provide a successful solution on its own," he said. "Just as with calls, it is as important as ever to analyse the utilisation and effectiveness of each new communication channel as a whole. Our focus is to deliver omnichannel analytics to the mainstream."

His near and long-term objectives are not only providing analytics for the ever-changing communication channels, with current trends moving towards a more mobile workforce, but to continue to make it easier for users to access and operate Akixi while on the move from mobile devices. "Our wallboard app launched in 2018 was the start of this initiative," added Gill.

Listening to the people who actually interact with a product is key to its success, noted Gill. "The requirement for us to capture feedback from all users, plus the size of company we now are, prompted us to develop a new feedback initiative that will allow end users and channel partners to directly feedback ideas anonymously to us, and to vote and comment on those ideas," he explained. "Innovation at Akixi is driven by the need to deliver a relevant and reliable service that delivers value for money and just works." ■



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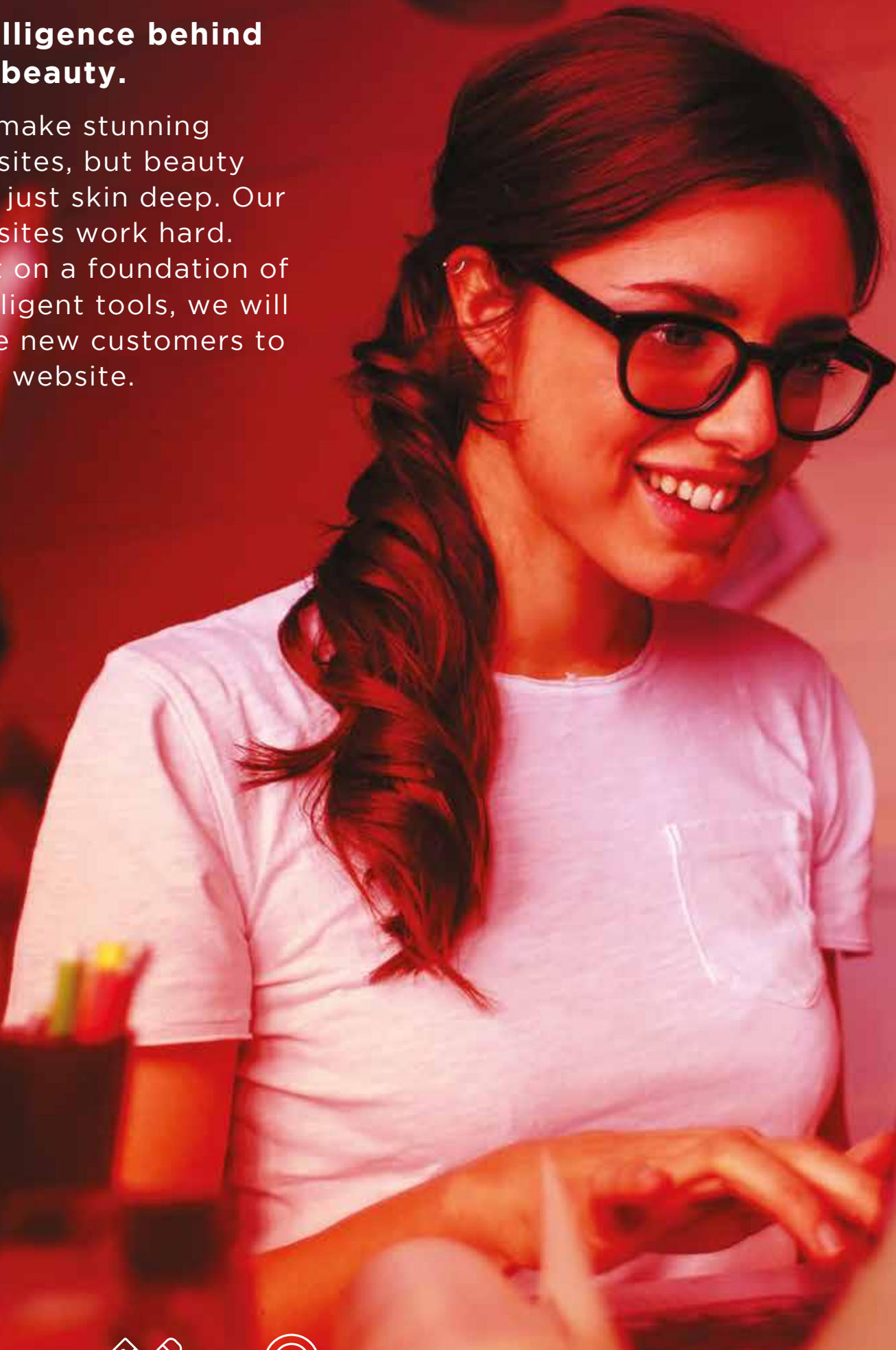
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# High calibre keynoters

## set for Comms Vision

Comms Dealer has announced a high calibre line-up of keynoters and industry thought leaders for this year's Comms Vision Convention (7-9th November, Gleneagles Hotel), which will reflect one of the biggest triggers of change ever seen in the comms and IT sector following the Government's Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review (FTIR) published in July which set out a national long-term digital strategy for the UK.

**C**omms Vision 2018 will explore the new realities of Digital Britain, their potential impact on the channel and how to take the lead as the migration to full fibre and all-IP continues to disrupt traditional models. With the concept of Digital Britain emerging into market reality former President of Virgin Galactic and Richard Branson's 'right-hand man' Will Whitehorn will inspire Comms Vision delegates to reach for the stars on the road to an all-IP world; while an illuminating session from legendary Athletics coach Frank Dick OBE will aim to put Comms Vision delegates on track to win the race to Digital Britain.

The comms channel now faces an important question as we seek to uncover the full implications of digitalisation: What's next? With momentum building around Digital Britain what will the technology ecosystem look like and how will partner/customer relationships be held together? Furthermore, from which technology areas will business growth be generated and how will our day-to-day working relationship with technology evolve? These are some of the questions Tom Cheesewright, Applied Futurist and founder of Book of the Future, will answer as he applies true foresight to unravelling these challenging future problems and building strategies for sustainable success. Also, economist, Harvard lecturer, politician and broadcaster Ed Balls has been confirmed as after dinner speaker at the Comms Vision gala evening on November 8th.

In their exclusive on-stage interviews leading lights from Platinum sponsors 9 Group, BT Wholesale, CityFibre-Entanet, Gamma and TalkTalk Business will offer high level insights as we seek to answer today's big industry questions. "The dominant challenge and opportunity today is the transition from legacy networks and traditional comms technologies as the UK drives towards a full fibre and 5G future," said Comms Vision Content Lead Stuart Gilroy. "In embracing the Government's FTIR and drive for Digital Britain new ways to innovate and adapt will be required across all comms sector categories. For IT and comms service providers a full understanding of the imperatives, challenges and opportunities they face is vital to stay ahead.

### Digital strategies

"We will also consider why channel players need a digital strategy and discuss the core strategic components and elements that will have the most positive impact on capturing value and future business success. This year's Comms Vision Convention will provide Chief Executives and Managing Directors at the helm of ICT reseller businesses, MSPs, SIs and VARs with an understanding of the developing infrastructure, voice and data ecosystem, and enable them to take the strategic action required to prepare their organisations to thrive on the pathway to Digital Britain. Now is the time for business leaders in the channel to make their mark."

**Comms Vision 2018 update continues on pages 42, 44-47**

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

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# Planning Digital Britain

Next month's Comms Vision Convention (7-9th November, Gleneagles Hotel) is set to drive the Digital Britain agenda with a stand-out conference line-up.

## Day One: Wednesday 7th November 2018

13.05-13.30pm

**Conference opening keynote and interview: Oliver Dowden CBE, Parliamentary Secretary (Minister for Implementation)**

13.30-14.00pm

**Interview: Alex Tempest, Managing Director, BT Wholesale**  
**Beyond legacy: Delivering transformation in Digital Britain**

The appointment of Alex Tempest as BT Wholesale's Managing Director earlier this year reflects the changing face of BT's channel organisation and its acceleration from 'elder statesman' to 'challenger brand'. In her Comms Vision interview Alex will reveal how BT Wholesale is emerging as a disruptive force that's challenging the status quo while supporting and engaging the channel to prepare for the big shift to all-IP and Digital Britain.

14.00-14.30pm

**Keynote: Will Whitehorn**  
**Reaching for the stars in Digital Britain**

Will Whitehorn, former President of Virgin Galactic, Virgin Brand Development Director and Richard Branson's 'right-hand man' has a habit for driving industry disruption. In his Comms Vision keynote Will aligns his disruptive leadership experience to the revolution in communications technology, and lays down the markers for realising innovation and opportunity through strategic planning as Digital Britain moves from concept to reality.

14.30-15.00pm

**Interview: Andrew Taylor, CEO, Gamma**  
**The transition to Digital Britain: What next for the channel?**

In his Comms Vision interview Gamma CEO Andrew Taylor will discuss how the drivers of Digital Britain are influencing Gamma and business leaders in the comms channel. And in reflecting on his own digital strategy Andrew will signpost how Gamma's objectives align with the future direction of the communications sector. He will also consider the channel's future role in Digital Britain and the

practical actions he will engage to ensure long-term success for both Gamma and partners, as he seeks to capture value from existing and new products and more integrated channel partnerships.

## Day Two: Thursday 8th November 2018

10.00-10.30am

**Keynote and interview: Tom Cheesewright, Applied Futurist**  
**Are you future-ready as we move into Digital Britain?**

The comms channel faces an important question as we seek to uncover the full implications of digitalisation: What's next? As momentum builds around Digital Britain what will the technology ecosystem look like and how will partner/customer relationships be held together? From which technology areas will business growth be generated and how will our day-to-day working relationship with technology evolve? These are some of the questions Tom Cheesewright, Applied Futurist and founder of Book of the Future, will answer as he applies true foresight to unravelling these challenging future problems and building strategies for sustainable success.

10.30-11.00am

**Interview: Kristine Olson-Chapman, Managing Director, TalkTalk Business**  
**Is Britain's infrastructure ready for an all-digital future?**

At a time of massive disruption we interview Kristine to explore how technology and innovation is reshaping the digital landscape, and how the channel should prepare for the biggest connectivity change in more than a generation – and seize the opportunities on offer.

11.00-11.30am

**Interview: Mark Collins, Director of Strategy and Public Affairs CityFibre and Elsa Chen, CEO, Entanet**  
**Building Digital Britain: Meeting the challenges and creating value**

Full fibre and 5G are the single most important drivers of Digital Britain but without the right

incentives, regulatory framework and competitive environment the UK's communications infrastructure rebuild will falter. In their Comms Vision interview Elsa and Mark consider the core challenges posed by the Government's digital strategy and how they should be met; and explore the optimistic prospects for proactive resellers wanting to play an important role in the nationwide roll out of full fibre, ensuring the UK goes the digital distance.

14.00-14.30pm

**Interview: James Palmer, CEO, 9 Group**  
**Demystifying Digital Britain**

In his Comms Vision interview 9 Group CEO James Palmer will look to demystify what Digital Britain means for the leaders of channel partners and their business customers. James will examine how recent shifts in buying behaviour, connectivity infrastructure and flexible working styles are simplified by distilling what customers really want into three key elements and ensuring that emerging technologies supplement an existing product portfolio. To add value in each of these areas there is a clear opportunity to succeed in the converged comms and IT market.

14.30-15.00 pm

**Keynote: Frank Dick OBE**  
**Winning the race to Digital Britain**

Crossing the winning line first in the race to Digital Britain will mean reworking aspects of your business, perhaps most importantly individual and team performances. As Digital Britain unfolds, meeting the challenges and opportunities with a 'people strategy' and development programme is crucial. In his keynote address legendary athletics coach Frank Dick OBE will share his experience and research into individual success and achievement which, as the British Athletics Federation's Director of Coaching, put athletes such as Daley Thompson, Steve Ovett and Sebastian Coe on track to European, Olympic and world honours. ■

(See pages 44-47 for more Comms Vision updates)

**Comms Vision places are by invitation: Please register your interest to attend at [www.commsvision.com](http://www.commsvision.com)**

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# Integrated Communications for a Smarter Workforce

Integration. It's a term we are finding increasingly popular in the business software and communications market. Allowing businesses to take the conventional workplace and change it into an interactive and collaborative space that enables teams to engage in a more interconnected way is proving a huge benefit to employers.



Looking at the evidence, there is an average increase of 36-48% in productivity and quality of work when interaction management solutions are employed and resellers are benefiting from providing solutions that can be customized and combined to provide an all-encompassing and truly unified, communications experience.

## Increasing Workflow Efficiency by Managing Communication

Interaction management is at the very heart of unified communications (UC). By enabling teams to collaborate in a myriad of ways, there is a greater scale of efficiency that can be achieved. Features like presence, audio and video conferencing, instant messaging, fax to email, screen sharing and more mean there are more ways to communicate than ever before. 3CX provides all of this and more in one simple licensing structure, which means their full potential is realized at a low price point compared to other options.

## In-built, Custom and Personalized Integrations

Businesses need software to tackle all the problems faced by a modern workforce and no one provider can hope to tackle it all. Integration is the answer to this. Different software products have to work seamlessly with each other, enabling greater levels of efficiency and productivity by avoiding the need to switch between apps or perform

tasks manually. As development of integrations between systems improves, the barriers for teams to adopt new systems are breaking down. Synchronization between apps is no longer a novelty, or difficult to implement task; it is now expected in the modern corporate world.

With a software solution like 3CX, integrations are key to the value proposition. The power of 3CX lends

3CX a growing capacity to provide more compatibilities to customers.

## Your PBX, Your Way

3CX has always gone above and beyond standard PBX solutions, providing a product that boosts productivity and efficiency within the work-space. With this in mind, it is only natural that 3CX would seamlessly integrate with all major CRMs including Salesforce, Zendesk, Nutshell, Freshdesk, Zoho and the



itself for a true UC experience. Whether your customer is a hotel looking for a phone system to integrate with their PMS system, such as Protel or Micros-Fidelio, or needs flawless compatibility with a CRM, 3CX has the plugins and APIs available to make integration quick, easy and a joy to work with.

The constant development of new partnerships with app developers and CRM system providers gives

newly added Microsoft Dynamics. This gives teams using 3CX the ability to take full advantage of these industry leading CRM systems and vice versa.

What's more, 3CX allows you to create customized integrations for your customers when their preferred system isn't in the list of supported applications. Administrators can create their own integrations easily using 3CX's scripting module. With

3CX's PRO edition, the integration feature can be used to install a new integration with a few simple clicks. 3CX strives to make its system and integration with other systems as seamless and straightforward as possible.

## Out of the Box Integration with Even More Apps

As growth continues in the UC industry, 3CX continues to expand our integrations by supporting more business applications than ever before. Out of the box integrations as well as a scriptable interface, makes it easy to integrate the phone system with any CRM. And we have made it easy to deploy network-wide and to conduct maintenance centrally, which means less time taken away from IT administrators. Server-side integration enables administrators to perform necessary configuration with just a few clicks from the management console; no need for changes in the app for individual extensions.

## Quality Reporting for Better Use of Resources

Reporting functions have come along way for UC solutions. With software like 3CX there is a whole host of reporting features to better track customer engagement and the efficiency of phone calls. These advancing aspects of the UC industry are driving the innovation and building stronger and more well connected workforces.

Tracking the usage of time for businesses like call centers, or those

that have a heavy focus on customer satisfaction, is integral to keeping operations running smoothly. 3CX includes inbuilt call center features for enhanced call management and reporting. Available in the Pro and Enterprise editions, the 3CX call center module helps customers achieve improved first contact resolution rates with features like call queuing and recording, Call Flow Designer, wallboard, switchboard and more. This powerful module for call center management enables customers to direct manpower and resources where they are most needed, getting calls answered rapidly by the right agent.

Being able to track the usage of UC systems and optimize teams by seeing where productivity can be reworked and improved is something that 3CX customers are taking advantage of more and more with our reporting functionalities. And productivity gets a huge boost from 3CX's partnerships with the wealth of 3rd party apps that 3CX tests against and develops integrations for. This combined with the various features that cover all aspects of team communication is one of the reasons that customers keep returning to 3CX and why our global presence continues to expand.

**Become a 3CX Partner Today**  
[www.3CX.com](http://www.3CX.com)

# The rise of Digital Britain

## the comms channel

What should we all make of the challenges and opportunities bursting from the swing-doors of Digital Britain? Enter 9 Group CEO James Palmer (Platinum sponsor) who is on a mission to demystify the upcoming all-digital revolution.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the channel will have to find a way for Digital Britain to be demystified. That is the only plausible way to marry strategy with market reality, according to Palmer. But how to achieve this with today's market shifts is for many a baffling prospect, he believes. "The welcome improvements in connectivity bandwidth, ubiquity and reliability is facilitating the deployment of emerging new technologies and a raft of new applications and solutions," he stated. "But how do we make all this digestible for partners and customers? There is a role for service providers to both promote and de-hype expectations around full fibre and 5G capabilities and timescales, so that customers can make informed decisions and be better served immediately and for a longer period as these new technologies become viable."

While the Government's commitment to create an all digital future is welcome, much more thought needs to be given to how that can be achieved most effectively, believes Palmer. "Government and Ofcom are key stakeholders in this journey so must provide the right framework to allow innovative and nimble operators to thrive," commented Palmer. "We are all aware of the challenges around certain areas including number porting and last mile delivery. However, the post-WLR world could open the door for many new operators to enter the market and develop and deploy new services less onerously than the current large incumbents. Exciting possibilities abound if this proves to be the case."

Palmer's demystifying approach to Digital Britain is intended to clear the complex air round the various

possibilities and unknowns that come with an all-digital future. He applies the same approach to understanding how customers should be engaged in the digital world. "Buyers are getting younger and far more interested in technology," he stated. "We are already seeing this in the VoIP arena where customers are specifically asking for options like mobile apps and collaboration solutions. These are no longer an optional extra but essential to secure the sale. Along with changes in buying behaviour are flexible working arrangements – most notably those arising from purchasers being super-informed by the availability of information and reviews online – which creates new challenges for service providers to address."

### Partnerships of the future

Digital Britain is the channel's chance to build new propositions and relationships, believes Palmer, as the industry will need to work together in the national interest. "In delivering Digital Britain partnerships will be crucial," he stated. "Those with the skills to provide the planning and the underlying infrastructure will need to work with others who have the sales and marketing experience. Also key is the prioritisation of a seamless process for customers to transfer any comms or IT service to their chosen provider to encourage choice and competition. Service providers should rely on outstanding customer service, high level engagement and personalised relationship management, and less on contractual handcuffs to build value in their own businesses."

There has to be a move back from the notion of handcuffing customers as conventional modes of operation cannot be squared with what's coming,

**Government and Ofcom must provide the right framework to allow innovative and nimble operators to thrive**

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# n and what it means for

reiterated Palmer. "The communications sector has moved on rapidly since the original 2009 Digital Britain report which formed the basis of the Digital Economy Act 2010, and while the themes remain broadly the same customer expectations have grown as digital continues to rise in importance in both business and personal lives," added Palmer.

### Key targets

"Full fibre by 2033 is a fantastic goal. Once each UK property has access to huge bandwidth the digital economy can truly be delivered. The UK is a small island and while over 80 per cent of residents live in urban environments, delivering fibre to the final 20 per cent who are more rurally based will be important. There must be incentives in place not to put these areas at a disadvantage for either businesses or people, while at the same time look at the overbuild of multiple competing networks in urban areas. Whichever network delivers fibre to a specific area or site, the option to choose the supplier is important so there is no 'one choice' scenario and competition can flourish."



In one parallel area after another new technology roll outs will require resellers to be more agile and adaptive if they are to have more than a modicum of potency in emerging markets like 5G and the IoT. "As with any stride forward in connectivity 5G will bring a new wave of technology to further transform the mobile experience," noted Palmer. "The emergence of low powered connectivity solutions will make IoT deployment much more cost-effective, so we are going to see a far more connected world. The opportunity here for the channel is massive as selling these solutions is far more consultative and the margins a lot higher. Any savvy channel partner should be preparing an IoT strategy now while the market is still in its infancy. While the opportunities are immense, the

fast moving nature of the market will mean agility is a key attribute. Being responsive and agile in the way we engage is a continual challenge and increasing the personalisation of these responses is also going to be a differentiator for our business moving forwards."

Palmer's expertise lies primarily in understanding the market, cutting through the noise, sensing the direction of travel and creating deals and opportunities. "Customer engagement will be paramount and we don't need GDPR legislation to alert us to the fact that customers want to choose who they listen to and how they interact with our business," he commented. "This provides an unprecedented opportunity for those with the right skills and product set to challenge and improve how customers operate, allowing more flexibility and more granular purchasing of services tailored to each opportunity. Strong, effective channel partnerships are critical to providing the seamless end-to-end service that customers demand. The challenge we all face is equipping ourselves with technical insight and knowledge and articulating this in ways that are meaningful to our customers."

As Digital Britain appears on the horizon channel businesses that are unprepared are likely to wane while the digital-ready gain ever more market influence and traction. "Reacting positively to change and challenges requires a winning combination of investment and innovation," noted Palmer. "Our market is changing in a spectacular and explosive manner which is brilliant news for us all as it presents lots of new opportunities. Change is inevitable so don't bury your head in the sand. Instead, work with the very smartest people, listen to advice and seek guidance, then layer on your own creativity. Most importantly, when you write or envisage your business plan, put the customer at the start, in the middle and at the end. In fact, just put the customer viewpoint and experience everywhere." ■

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**Our market is changing in a spectacular and explosive manner which is brilliant news for us all**

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# From competition to collaboration

## dominates the agenda

The message from the Government's Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review (FTIR) is glaring, says TalkTalk Business Director of Partners Richard Thompson (Platinum sponsor), who also champions the dominant issue in the comms sector at present – Digital Britain and the roll out of full fibre.

**T**he full fibre issue continues to divide the UK from more progressive digital front runners on the continent. But for how long? As a wave of Government driven full fibre-ism sweeps across the nation efforts to close the digital divide will call for levels of competition and collaboration not seen before in the industry. According to Thompson the FTIR is 'unashamedly pro-competition' and the fibre roll out will be market-led. But as the FTIR promotes and nurtures a new era of competition it could also usher in a period of close collaboration between competitors which not long ago was deemed unthinkable. "This is a significant change for UK digital infrastructure but will connect up more businesses and homes faster than just one provider could achieve," commented Thompson. "Collaboration between competitors to tackle common industry barriers will be needed."

The Government's target to roll out full fibre by 2033 is ambitious, believes Thompson, but consultation between industry and Government has already paid off with customers being presented better options. "During the review process we asked the Government to remove some of the barriers telcos face when trying to build, which will be essential if we are to reach these targets," commented Thompson. "Early wins are changes to the law on wayleaves which make it easier for connectivity suppliers to get permission to build; as well as streamlining the rules around closing roads for digging and a commitment to duct and pole access. These steps should make it quicker and cheaper for companies to invest in full fibre. It is only competition at scale that will

deliver more investment and these changes will make it easier and cheaper for companies other than Openreach to build networks. The race to full fibre is critical. Now is the time to invest and take action on full fibre."

The demand for faster broadband speeds and 'all you can eat' bandwidth shows no sign of slowing down, and investors have spotted long-term investment opportunities in the UK and are spending big money to accelerate the roll out of full fibre. "However, the UK is woefully behind in the FTTP space in comparison to our neighbouring countries," commented Thompson. "Introductions like G.Fast will help to sustain the hunger for higher bandwidth. But as technologies continue to develop the requirement for speed and bandwidth will only intensify, and the varying speeds, performance and availability across new access variants will bring increasing complexity. Channel partners need to navigate this and insulate their customers from the confusion. Our position is to make new access variants available in a ubiquitous way that is simple to understand."

### Key trends

As well as ever growing demand for greater bandwidth, end user behavioural changes such as limited attention spans is also a key trend picked up by TalkTalk Business, to which it applies some significance. "There is an expectation for training to be delivered in three minutes and news to be less than 100 characters," explained Thompson. "Therefore our focus is much more customer centric to ensure we are meeting the trending needs of customers and adapting to this

**The race to full fibre is critical. Now is the time to invest and take action**

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# Collaboration: Digital Britain

transient behaviour. Customer satisfaction should be the primary measure of success, and in the new digital world service and training models must transform."

Many channel players will be in need of a digital reinvention, claimed Thompson, rather than continue to operate as simple 'product creators'. This significant point was underscored during TalkTalk Business's latest Partner Summit where digital transformation and cloud migration were hotly debated subjects. "While the majority of the channel is aware that the market is changing, the real surprise lies in the speed of change," commented Thompson. "Industry researcher Ovum calculates that by the end of this year 80 per cent of businesses will be dependent on the cloud. But many don't realise they already have a presence in the cloud."

#### Education matters

"We recently conducted our own research with SME customers. Only 48 per cent of respondents claim to be already using cloud technology. But when prompted about their use of particular cloud-based apps or tools like Office 365 or Dropbox the response jumped to 72 per cent, so there is much work to be done in educating customers. It's the role of partners in the channel to do this and act as digital experts. Businesses can't make this transition without support. Only three per cent of respondents in our survey said that they would be comfortable in approaching cloud migration directly. That represents a fantastic opportunity for the channel."

TalkTalk Business's research study shows how the channel is key to driving the adoption of digital innovations and experiences, affirmed Thompson, who also noted that the channel needs to think like a systems integrator and demonstrate to the end user how they add value. "Products and services are increasingly pre-packaged today and the value is more in how you enable and educate customers about which solution is best for their business," he added. "People need to be at the

heart of the technological journey, so the comms sector needs to be more customer centric rather than IT focused. People, processes, systems and customer engagement should be re-engineered. End users do not want to be told to 'call this number for X product', they want a path of least resistance to implementing new products and services, and connectivity is the core enabler of their digital experience and foundation of new technologies such as AI and Machine Learning."



Advances in Machine Learning will soon bring about human-machine hybrid workforces, believes Thompson, but only if businesses leverage technology to its full potential. "This is why training and education will be key for successful mass adoption," he added.

"We have transformed ways of working within TalkTalk, most notably with the opening of our state-of-the-art office, Soapworks, in Salford last year. Office 365, robotics and automation are all key in driving greater efficiency and improving the customer experience.

We're also using Big Data to reduce churn and understand Customer Lifetime Value. We will package these learnings to share with our partners."

"If you demonstrate how new tools will improve your workforce's productivity and work experience, they are much more likely to embrace it. Robotic processes have saved our operations teams 200 hours per week. The technology has removed layers of administrative work, allowing staff to focus on interactions with customers. We involved our people from the outset, asking which elements of their jobs were time consuming, repetitive and stopped them from adding value to customers. This not only identified which elements to automate, it made us more efficient, increased morale and enhanced our customers' service experience. In Digital Britain the combination of technology and staff buy-in will be what matters. It's about making sure you deliver a quality and reliable service that works underpinned by a future proofed full fibre infrastructure." ■

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**The UK is woefully behind in the FTTP space compared to other countries**

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# Doherty goes digital



Elaine Doherty

ELAINE Doherty is to spearhead a £110m project to roll out digital infrastructure in Edinburgh and Stirling. Her appointment by CityFibre as City Development Manager is part of CityFibre's plan to bring full fibre connectivity to one million UK homes and businesses by 2021 in partnership with Vodafone.

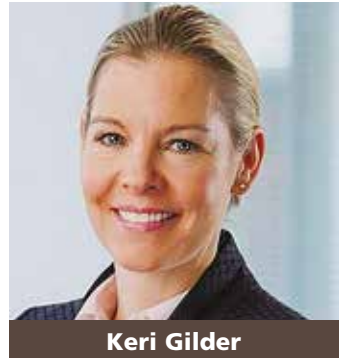
Doherty will be the local point of contact for all city stakeholders and brings more than 25 years experience

in the telecoms industry including senior leadership roles at Motorola Global Handsets, Logica and most recently Director of Marketing, Sales and IT for Scottish travel operator Rabbie's Trail Burners. "Digital infrastructure is going to play a crucial role in growing Scotland's economy," said Doherty. "The benefits of full fibre connectivity are massive, not only to businesses but also residents."

CityFibre Commercial Director Rob Hamlin said: "Elaine ticked all the boxes of what we were looking for in terms of a City Development Manager. She has first-hand experience of both Edinburgh and Stirling and knowledge of the telecoms industry and how it is continuing to evolve."

# Gilder hired as Colt CCO

FORMER Ciena Communications sales leader and EMEA VP & General Manager Keri Gilder has joined Colt as Chief Commercial Officer. She said: "Colt recently became a truly global business, launching into the US market, and I am looking forward to taking Colt's current trajectory and accelerating it over the coming months."



Keri Gilder

CEO Carl Grivner added: "Keri's global sales experience and customer knowledge will ensure we continue to challenge the marketplace. Keri has a track record of leading global sales organisations and working closely with partners across the wider digital ecosystem."

Gilder also has a background as an engineer and network architect and is credited with founding a global internal networking initiative at Ciena which aimed to encourage diversity through motivating and inspiring women at all levels.

## Also on the move...



Rob Tomlin

**EX-TECH** Data Advanced Solutions Managing Director for UK&I Rob Tomlin has joined Dell EMC as UK&I Channel VP & GM. He replaces Sarah Shields who was recently appointed as EMEA VP of Channel Enterprise Europe. "Rob's appointment

comes at an exciting time as the Dell EMC partner programme gets firmly into its stride 20 months after its official launch," said Michael Collins, SVP, Channel, Dell EMC EMEA. "More and more partners are joining our programme, contributing to double digit growth across all of our strategic lines of business in the UK and Ireland."

**FOLLOWING** an 18 month stint working as a consultant to Red Box Alison Young has been appointed COO of the business. She brings over 15 years experience working in the technology and financial services sectors.



Alison Young

In 2003 Young established a compliance consultancy and online training company that she sold to Focus Solutions in 2008. She also provided consultancy services

to Standard Life and Hewlett Packard. CEO Richard Stevenson stated: "Alison's expertise and experience will be invaluable as we continue to focus on capturing, securing and maximising the value of voice communications for our customers."

# Yates moves to Voiceflex



Marcus Yates

**NORTHERN**-based Voiceflex partners are to be supported by incoming Channel Account Manager for the region Marcus Yates who moved from Nimans where he was Business

Manager for comms vendor accounts including NEC and Unify. Yates's previous experience also includes an eight year spell as Northern UK Channel Manager for Alcatel.

Voiceflex Sales & Marketing Director Paul Taylor said: "We are in exciting times and it is key that we provide our partners with assistance and knowledge to ensure they can exploit the opportunities available with our existing products and new applications. Marcus's experience and knowledge will be invaluable to help our partners exploit these opportunities."

**LENOVO'S** snoop on Smart Technologies MD Jane Ashworth will provide a boost to partner relations and strengthen its play in the education market, according to UK&I GM Preben Fjeld. "Jane's strong background will energise relationships with partners in the UK and Ireland," he said. Ashworth brings 20-plus years industry experience including senior positions at a number of major blue chip organisations including HP, Sony and most recently education sector specialist Smart Technologies.

# Yealink UK sets up support unit



The Yealink UK team

**YEALINK** UK has ramped up its channel growth ambitions with a new support team working under the leadership of UK chief Joe Casari. Joining the team are Channel Business Development Manager Lee Fletcher, Video Conferencing Services Business Development Manager Chris Hopkins, Customer Services Administrator Sue Greenlees and Marketing Manager Nichola Clayton. "There is huge potential to grow the Yealink business in the UK and Ireland," said Casari. "We have put the foundations in to make sure we have a strong go-to-market strategy. We will be focusing on the two key areas of end points and video conferencing."



## Partner Service

*The Clark's nutcracker disperses the seeds of the whitebark pine, helping it to grow, while the pine provides a vital source of food for the bird – together, the two form the perfect partnership.*



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