



Avaya will emerge stronger says UK chief
Ian MacRae p26

Virtual1 CEO realises Digital Service Provider vision p36



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Openreach urged to be all inclusive

BT AND Ofcom's deal to legally separate Openreach has opened a fresh debate on whether the Openreach Board will reflect the industry's wider aspirations.

SPECIAL REPORT

Openreach's Board sits within the BT Group and will set the operating plans and technologies to be deployed within a strategic and financial framework defined by BT.

But FCS CEO Chris Pateman has called on Openreach, Ofcom and the Government to create an inclusive governance structure that reflects the interests of all industry stakeholders.

"The Board has operational responsibility for the manage-

ment of Openreach's business," he said. "This is a good thing. However, it is not a Board that's able to raise money from anybody but BT, and on terms dictated by BT. This is a weakness in the Board's ability to truly plan and behave like the long-term steady payback player the industry needs."

Pateman credited Openreach CEO Clive Selley (pictured above) for making good progress in areas such as Ethernet provision but he claimed these advances could have been

achieved faster had Openreach not been held back by what he called 'BT corporate baggage'.

"We are seeing improvements," commented Pateman. "But this legal separation does little to address the drag of BT 'corporate-think'."

"Openreach will only truly deliver for the channel and fulfil its potential if it's the master of its own destiny, structured and managed as a utility company and completely structurally separate from BT." See page 42 for more industry reaction

3-23

Industry News
Catch up with events in comms

28

Business Matters
Comms sector trading update

38

Company Profile
How Peach empowers people

50

Case Study
Edinburgh's digital transformation

52

Market Report
IT resellers on call for hosted comms

61

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This month's movers and shakers

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

COMMS Dealer has long argued that IT resellers will be doing themselves a big favour by having a strong interest in what's happening within the comms sector. We have an audience of almost 7,800 data VARs among our requested readership, which may come as a surprise to some, putting Comms Dealer in a unique position to truly reflect

and serve the converging marketplace (for more readership information see our ABC stats on page 37).

It is now clear that the rise of cloud computing, which has enveloped both the data and voice channels, has created one market and one united Comms Dealer audience, all brought together by a shared interest in giving customers what they want. That means data resellers adding hosted voice to their portfolios, and traditional telecoms players getting to grips with data.

Nothing new in that. But what is new is the unprecedented level of interest from hosted VoIP providers wanting to contribute their perspectives in this month's special feature looking at how data VARs can, and should, exploit their 'voice' potential, which is a lot easier to do now compared to times past.

Hosted VoIP provider NFON chomped at the bit in the race to reach data resellers, building on its significant new partnership with IT distributor Westcoast, a move that we believe signals a turning point in bringing hosted voice to a much wider market (see page 52).

Another juncture was reached last month when Ofcom and BT got their heads together and came up with a deal to create a limited company out of Openreach, reminding us all that the provision of a future proof digital infrastructure is paramount for both voice and data resellers to truly reach their growth potential (see page 42 for industry reaction to the Openreach deal).

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Virtual1 rolls out network

BGF-backed Virtual1's launch of a national network repositions the firm as a UK-wide carrier and a supplier to the aggregator market with the power to compete directly for wholesale business against the Tier 1s.

The expansion of Virtual1's London fibre network will cover 180 metropolitan areas across the UK including Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The fully software defined network comprises 280 fibre exchanges with Virtual1 adding 212 to its existing network while FTTC will be available in a further 495.

The London-based cloud and connectivity service provider plans to double the size of the business within three years having embarked on a 12 month roll out process with orders starting to be taken this summer.

CEO Tom O'Hagan says the new network delivers innovation and flexibility to partners in a way not seen before.

"We are the first to release SDN as a platform for the channel, which with our smart automation will emphasise our differentiation," he said. "We can achieve this advantage because we are not hamstrung by legacy technology and infrastructure."

In December Virtual1 secured a £10m investment from BGF to spur the firm's growing infrastructure and channel ambitions. "We see it as a way to disrupt the market and empower the channel to help customers gain a competitive advantage," commented O'Hagan.

Full story on page 36

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WESTCON-Comstor's UC and Collaboration Practice hosted its 25th annual ski trip for 20 top channel partners in Cervinia, Italy. The group

included representatives from Capita IT Services, Maintel and Sabio. "The incentive continues to be Westcon's most popular partner activity," said John Richardson, Marketing Director UK&I. "Our partners strive all year to secure a place so we put a great deal of effort into making the trip a sensational experience."

NEWS ROUNDUP

Maintel's indirect and channel sales division, Partner Services, experienced 63% organic growth in 2016, making it the fastest growing part of the Maintel Group.

The group has over 400 technical and support staff operating in the UK.

Director of Maintel Partner Services Chris Bain commented: "In 2016 we worked with over 90 channel partners on thousands of end customer requirements in the UK and internationally. We can manage projects and guarantee SLAs across the globe."

Hotel Wi-Fi firm Airangel has secured a £1.7m funding package from Santander Corporate & Commercial to drive growth overseas.

Airangel has opened a new office in Dubai and is expanding across EMEA and Asia.

The cloud-based platform enables guests to access fast Wi-Fi connections while giving hoteliers and property owners data insights that help to personalise the guest experience. Airangel manages Wi-Fi connections in over 100,000 hotel rooms or apartments in 27 countries and has 18 million registered users.

Airangel CEO Dean Wilkinson stated: "In the digital age connectivity is central to the guest experience."

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COMMENT: RESIST TEMPTATION



Richard Carter

WHEN some people get behind the wheel of their cars the temptation to pick up their smartphones can be too irresistible to ignore, and this needs to change. According to various studies many motorists are addicted to their smartphones so the latest Government advice is to put them in the glove box out of sight.

Increased fines and points are quite rightly being used to enforce this and six points with a £200 fine will certainly go some way to reducing illegal use. However, it is undoubtedly true that there also needs to be a seed change in public opinion regarding the social unacceptability of texting and emailing while driving. Modern in-car entertainment systems provide a safe and easy way to make incoming and outgoing calls but for text messages and emails the text-to-voice technology is still a bit clunky.

This new legislation provides an ideal opportunity for resellers to accelerate their headset sales. We've already witnessed a significant spike in demand for Bluetooth enabled devices since the clampdown came into force at the beginning of March.

Richard Carter, Director of Channel Sales, Nimans

- For CEO Tom O'Hagan the launch of Virtual1's national network is more than the sum of its parts, it is a manifestation of his vision for the company to become a UK-wide channel-only wholesale Digital Service Provider (p36).
- The realisation of Edinburgh's digital vision shows how the power of partnerships overcame many unique challenges during the roll out of a pure fibre network across Scotland's iconic capital (p50).
- Cloud computing has enabled a new relationship between IT resellers and telephony to develop, epitomised by Westcoast's move into hosted voice in partnership with NFON UK. Here, NFON UK's Managing Director Rami Houbby outlines why the time is right for all IT resellers to 'find their voice' (p52).

Dadds takes tough stance on toll fraud



Dave Dadds

ON TOLL fraud, VanillaIP's stance is unequivocal. "It's time for SPs and Tier 1s to take responsibility rather than pass the buck to resellers and their clients," stated CEO Dave Dadds.

Backing up his words with actions Dadds announced that VanillaIP is introducing a Toll Fraud Guarantee. "The buck stops with us," he emphasised.

"This guarantee should give great comfort to resellers that are rightly concerned about dial through fraud.

"Industry figures show that this is a multi-million pound problem with single instances running into hundreds of thousands, even millions."

Dadds confirmed that VanillaIP fully supports initiatives from industry trade bodies including FCS and ITSPA, particularly around the stopping of fraudulent out payments. But service providers and Tier 1s must ultimately grab the bull by the horns, he believes.

"Our experience in the cloud space over the last 10 years with SIP trunking and hosted PBX has shaped our view that SIP trunking will always be inherently more susceptible to fraud because there are third party 'boxes' located on-site, all of

enables partners to allocate daily credit limits to the end user HPBX extension.

Using near real-time rating all call traffic for both 'in Flight' and completed calls is rated to calculate spend.

At 80% a warning email is sent and at 100% the extension is automatically blocked and existing calls disconnected.

"The guarantee itself is simple," explained Dadds. "The reseller will pay no more than 3x the User Daily Credit limit, or £50, whichever is the higher. This is because the reseller is in full control of credit limits."

which can be under the control of different parties and software revisions. For this reason we have excluded SIP trunking from our guarantee scheme."

The VanillaIP guarantee is based on the Uboss portal which

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Venus seized in Metronet's London move



Lee Perkins

LIVINGBRIDGE-backed Metronet (UK) has secured an immediate foothold in London's vibrant super-fast connectivity market following the acquisition of fibre network provider Venus Business Communications.

The deal follows Metronet (UK)'s £47.5m purchase of Internet infrastructure and hosting firm M247 last October.

The acquisition adds £7.8m revenues and advances Metronet (UK)'s ambitions to build a national platform with last mile control as well as a transit network across Europe.

The addition of Venus brings six new data centres to the Group's network that now connects to the primary UK data centre locations and 14 global Internet Exchanges.

The combined entity employs 230 people across six sites including Manchester, Newcastle, London and Bucharest, and supports almost 34,000 customers across 92 countries, delivering revenues of circa £50m.

Venus was founded in 2005 by Brian Iddon and Justin Keery and serves central London and the City with high speed fibre at up to 10 gigabit/sec.

Livingbridge first invested in Metronet (UK) in June 2014

as part of a £45m secondary buyout of the firm.

Follow on funding to support the Group's acquisition strategy and the investment in Venus has been made by the Livingbridge 5 fund.

Matthew Caffrey, Partner at Livingbridge, said: "This neatly complements Metronet's existing capabilities and will enable the business to build a wireless network in London on top of Venus' core transit and last mile fibre capability.

"Metronet's national services now include connectivity applications across the wireless and fibre spectrums as well as voice, security and hosting. We are excited about the Group's continued growth prospects."

Lee Perkins, Chief Executive at Metronet (UK), commented: "Venus has the same entrepreneurial and customer-centric culture as us, so I have no doubt that it will be an excellent fit with our business."

Brian Iddon, Director and founder of Venus, commented: "I have known Lee and the team for a number of years and feel that Metronet is the perfect fit for us as we look to build on the strong momentum we have generated to date."

NEWS ROUNDUP

To bolster its play in the high growth flash storage market HPE is to acquire Nimble Storage, the provider of predictive all-flash and hybrid-flash storage solutions.

HPE will pay \$12.50 per share in cash, representing a net cash purchase price of \$1bn. HPE will also assume or pay out Nimble's unvested equity awards with a value of circa \$200m at closing.

The overall flash market is estimated by analysts to be worth approximately \$15bn in 2016 and is expected to hit \$20bn by 2020, with the all-flash segment growing at a nearly 17% compound annual growth rate.

enet has stepped into the UK market following an agreement with SSE Enterprise Telecoms that enables the Ireland network operator to leverage dark fibre, carrier Ethernet and optical networking services across 13,700km of national network.

enet also gains access to 265-plus PoPs (with more expansion planned), 76 UK on-net commercial data centres and over 2,000 PoPs from other key market players.

This UK network deal is the latest in a series of investments undertaken by enet and its parent Granahan McCourt Capital.

Zen has almost doubled the number of its Ethernet enabled PoPs having installed its 400th in BT exchanges.

Zen's Technical Director for Network and Infrastructure Jon Bauer said: "Unbundling exchanges and migrating services on-net provides Zen with end-to-end control of the network. Following the roll out nearly 75% of our customers will now be on-net.

"We pay less money to other operators to use their networks, producing savings that we pass on to customers in the form of better products, more cost-effective solutions and investments in support."

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COMMENT: TIME TO OPEN MOBILE



Dave Dadds

WITH the cloud communication space becoming more about fixed and mobile convergence, it is now most important for reseller channels to have access to true wholesale mobile services. So with Ofcom now due to publish the Treasury's next great white hope for wringing money

out of telecoms – the new 5G spectrum auction – it's interesting to see the mobile market as others see us.

FCS chose some wide ranging questions for our latest poll of MP opinions, in a deliberate attempt to gauge how firmly the industry figures on their radar. FCS is the only organisation which sits across the whole business comms space, defending the interests of resellers from PMR radio to VoIP telephony. So perhaps we necessarily see the market from a rather technology agnostic viewpoint. Interestingly, so do MPs, by the looks of it.

We've been campaigning for years for greater wholesale access to mobile telephony products. At its simplest, we believe the channel – and hence the consumer – would be far better served if we enjoyed in the mobile space what we take for granted in fixed. That is, Openreach-style 'equivalence of inputs', rather than restrictive sole supplier agreements with whichever MNOs can be bothered to offer a wholesale access product.

Dods, the Parliamentary monitoring group, asked a weighted group of 80 MPs to comment on statements about the mobile market. Sixty one per cent said consumers would be better served if there was greater wholesale competition. The same percentage also thought consumers would be better served if there were more than four networks to choose from.

That's an encouraging and hopeful sign that at least we're not alone. The push for equivalence access in the mobile market is important for both UK resellers and UK Plc. Ofcom please take note!

Dave Dadds, Chairman, FCS

Wi-Fi critical in marketing

PRAGMA is urging resellers to change their sales paradigms and encourage their younger social media savvy sales people to start offering customers Wi-Fi analytics as a marketing tool.

The distributor has partnered with Netherlands-based company So WiFi, whose guest Wi-Fi solution intelligently gathers information on visitors and provides the data for customers to follow up on.

The solution is already finding traction in relevant vertical markets such as pubs and clubs, as reseller delegates at last month's Pragma partner conference confirmed.

"When young people walk into a pub they invariably log onto Facebook or Instagram, and often they are using their parents' devices," stated Chris Morrisey, MD of Lily Comms. "With So Wi-Fi you get all of their information.

"Most pub owners do not know how to market themselves or use social media effectively, but with So WiFi they get a user portal so, for example, they'll know in advance when it's a person's birthday and they can send them a happy birthday message, such as 'come back to the pub and celebrate'.



Daan Donders

"It's a different type of sale for us, but once you get your head around the concept it's a great opportunity, especially if you have younger or junior sales people who understand the power of social media."

Daan Donders, founder and CEO of So WiFi, which has rapidly grown a global footprint, commented: "We solve issues that many businesses have with social media and make it work for them.

"We are urging partners not to see it as a technical and complicated solution, but as a marketing tool that runs through Wi-Fi. We have achieved great traction with Pragma's channel in just a few months. We'll now get a lot bigger in the UK."

NEWS ROUNDUP

Entanet has migrated its line rental billing to Elevate, the cloud-based billing system from Strategic Imperatives.

"We built Elevate when we saw that the industry remains largely dependent on cumbersome systems that often affect growth and profitability," stated Tim Sayer, Head of Business Development at Strategic Imperatives.

"At Elevate's heart is usability and simplicity. The system is increasingly being adopted by CPs due to its real-time nature, ease of use and auto-scaling technology."

Core Telecom CEO Mahmood Mazhar has agreed a new sponsorship deal with Olympic GB Boxer Qais Ashfaq, including financial support and the use of a Mercedes GLA. Mazhar stated: "I fully respect how difficult it can be for many professional sports people to support themselves and my hope for Qais is to take this burden away and allow his talent to thrive."



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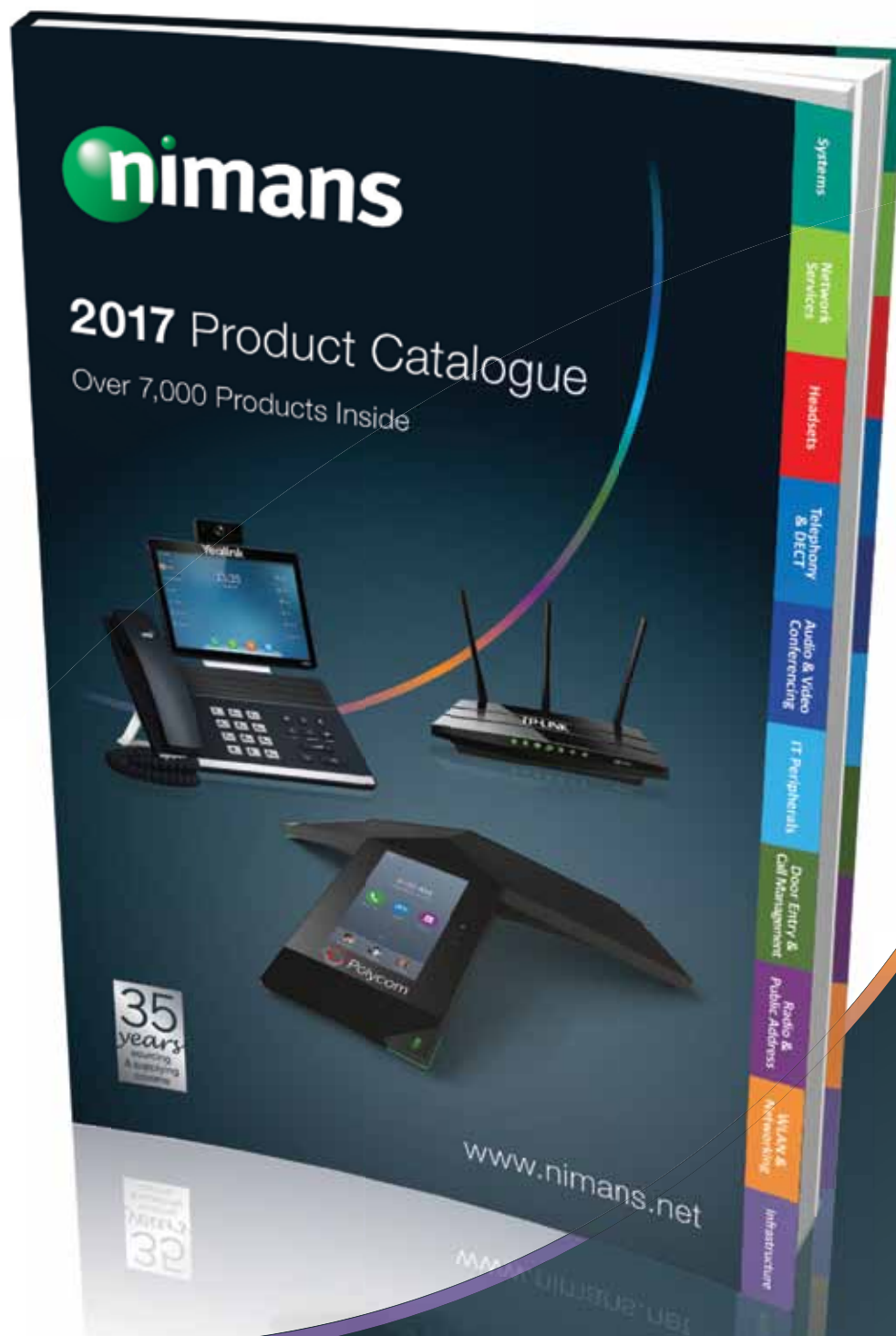
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COMMENT: TAKE A STEP BACK



Pete Tomlinson

IT'S that time of year when many of us will, once again, be well into our planning and budgeting cycles. How you frame peoples' thinking at this crucial time really matters. It's too easy to start by rolling forward the previous year's performance, then looking at how you can improve costs, increase

targets, flex headcount and create efficiencies. But before you do that, please take a step back.

Now is a great time to remind yourself of your strategic vision, what makes you special and what difference you want to create in the market over the coming financial year and beyond. Then, with this in mind, figure out how you can set the right trajectory and move with as much pace and agility towards that place as you and the team around you can humanly muster.

I'm not saying KPIs and financial metrics aren't important. They are critical, but I've also learnt it's vital not to lose sight of the purpose they serve. They are the tools that help support good decision making. They are waypoints on a journey to success, but they can never be the destination. Setting them should never be the starting point.

So what should be in those plans for the year ahead? Well, as our customers look at their own plans we can be sure that many of these will be underpinned by the technology and services the channel offers.

Connectivity will, of course, continue to be at the heart of this with ever increasing demands for speed, flexibly and, I believe, placing increasing value on service experience. So too will business applications and infrastructure that can improve the customer and colleague experience, such as security, SIP, Office 365 and cloud hosting. Finally, being a business people trust and are proud to be associated with will increasingly become a prerequisite of long-term success.

Pete Tomlinson, Director, KCOM

Exits not hit by UK Brexit

ANY telecoms or ICT business looking to sell in the next year or so will find a willing buyer despite uncertainty over Brexit.

That's the view of Evolution Capital business advisor Nick Blong who believes the M&A market will remain healthy for the rest of 2017.

Speaking at Evolution's breakfast seminar at The Ivy in London last month, he told reseller guests that 2017 GDP forecasts from both the IMF and the Bank of England had been upgraded but a downgrade was expected for 2018.

"The IMF's economic Chief Economist Maurice Obstfeld has said that reduced output, transactional costs and restriction of labour supplies due to Brexit will present a longer-term challenge for the UK," said Blong.

"But in a survey of PE and venture capital funders there is 94% confidence for the long-term future, and 97% expect to deploy the same rate of funds.

"These are the people putting money into the market which is important to sellers because there will be more buyers with more money, and they will increase the amount they'll be willing to pay.



Nick Blong

"The same survey said there is likely to be a burst of activity in some sectors, one of which is ICT. Whatever the state of the economy there is always going to be challenges and opportunities and you're always going to be in the same place as your competitors, so for a good profitable business there will always be an opportunity to sell.

"None of us can accurately predict the future, but from what we have seen 2017 looks like a good time to sell."

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Nuvola in top form for event

KEY vendor partners joined forces with Swallowfield-based Nuvola Distribution to host a partner update and golf event at the Forest of Arden hotel on 9th March.

Presentations from Nuvola, Alcatel-Lucent Enterprise, ShoreTel, Talari Networks, Ingate, NetConnect and Vurella put a spotlight on issues such as the value of a true end-to-end solution, cloud versus hybrid and CPE, margin in wallboards, contact centre and CRM integration, along with security.

Nuvola MD Michael Lloyd said: "The sessions were insightful, prompting fantastic feedback from our partners. It was also great to welcome on board new resellers who attended the event. We have some new vendors waiting in the wings and are actively recruiting resellers. Watch this space for more information on our next customer event in the summer."



Michael Lloyd

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COMMENT: SERVICE ON TAP



Charles Aylwin

THERE'S something big happening in April that will affect your customers, but it's likely you may not have heard about it. The Open Water initiative is due to come into effect, which will radically shake up the water utilities market. For the first time in nearly 30 years all businesses can choose their water provider,

rather than be obliged to use whoever operates in their local area. The Open Water initiative has put a bright spotlight on service levels in the water sector, and those water utility providers that don't offer exemplary levels of service risk customers leaving for competitors.

Customer service should never be underestimated. We know from our own research that 96 per cent of Brits say that they feel more loyal to a business that fixes a problem with good service over the phone, even if it caused the issue in the first place. In those instances when service isn't up to scratch, 41 per cent have taken their business elsewhere and a further 40 per cent have warned their family and friends against using a company.

This is where the channel can add real value. Engaging with these businesses and explaining how cloud telephony can improve their service is crucial, keeping customers happy and retaining their loyalty. Features like intelligent call routing and call analytics can be key to persuading businesses to adopt a communications cloud. These features can provide a great experience, directing callers to the most appropriate agent and ensuring that demand is anticipated in advance so staff are always available.

Although the Open Water initiative is business focused, it could open the floodgates for greater consumer choice in their water utility provider. This means competition in the water utility industry will increase, and the channel will be well placed to provide the tools for these companies to make sure their service is up to scratch.

Charles Aylwin, Director of Channel & Public Sector, 8x8

Rapport buy brings good vibes to Sabio

LYCEUM Capital-backed Sabio has bagged SaaS analysis specialist Rapport, extending its reach deeper into the customer experience management space.

"Adding Rapport to our portfolio will help Sabio to unlock more value for our customers while contributing directly to improvements in operational performance as well as lower Customer Effort scores," said Sabio's CEO Andy Roberts.

"This is also an important first step in Sabio's acquisition strategy as we look to strengthen our customer engagement proposition with adjacent technologies and solutions."

Rapport's SaaS software and analysis services provide insights into potential performance and process bottlenecks that might lead to poor customer experiences and lower conversion rates.

A dashboard delivers daily, weekly or monthly insights into KPIs, Customer Effort and First Call Resolution performance, while proactive Success Management analysis also helps organisations to optimise potential inbound call traffic issues.

Sabio's Vice President for Go-To-Market, Michael Andrews, commented: "We have



Andy Roberts

the ability to help our clients understand and quantify their customer experience by highlighting and ultimately eliminating repeat calls, failure demand, incorrect messages and out-of-hours contacts, all of which could potentially damage the brand experience.

"Having access to this level of granular data will prove valuable in terms of eliminating customer journey bottlenecks, while also giving our customers new insights into the performance of ongoing campaigns.

"Being able to monitor and report on all of the calls coming into a business will also prove invaluable for highly regulated organisations such as utilities that increasingly require an objective external view of their service performance."

The acquisition follows Lyceum Capital's recent investment in Sabio and is part of an ongoing acquisition plan to drive double digit growth.

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Energy business flowing for River

HULL based River Business Services has developed a reputation in North Yorkshire and beyond for offering a complete turn-key comms and IT service to its customer base and the addition of energy services to its portfolio was a natural progression for the company, as Managing Director Ashley Hunter explained.

"We partner with a wide array of telecoms and IT vendors allowing us to provide a full end-to-end solution. Our approach is consultative and we focus heavily on bespoke solutions and bespoke support. Now, having partnered with Fidelity Energy, we have become even more of a multi discipline business services company by being able to offer energy services to our clients.

"Energy is a complimentary service to add into our portfolio and, having previously explored the market, Fidelity's portal and commission structure suited us perfectly," he said.

Hunter was impressed with how Fidelity were positioned to quickly help River get started in the supply of energy services which he says can be a complicated yet highly lucrative business opportunity to address.

"Fidelity Energy provided some great white labelled collateral which helps us to convince customers that this is a serious addition to our service

portfolio which will genuinely save them money. The Fidelity portal is brilliant. It is easy to use and we have been able to upskill and educate our people to use it quickly and easily. They also help with the initial analysis and pricing position and we then usually manage the pitch and proposal.

"Energy is a complex and competitive marketplace, but there are clear prospects for new entrants into the market. I would rate this as a first-class opportunity for any reseller look to add value to their service operation.

"It's not a walk in the park to convince any company to switch energy suppliers as many customers claim to have an existing broker in place but, more often than not, they are willing to give us a chance to quote alongside their current arrangements."

And the margins in energy are very healthy, as Op Director Guy Hunter confirmed: "We have signed around 20 customers in the last six months, mostly in the education and manufacturing sectors, but commissions have been strong on around five of those so the return thus far has far exceeded any cost of sale.

"Any reseller thinking of entering the energy supply business should be aware that one energy deal could represent the same margin as a £200K telecoms deal!"



"We have signed around 20 customers in the last six months. Commissions have been strong so the return to date has far exceeded any cost of sale."

GUY HUNTER, Operations Director,
River Business Services

NEWS ROUNDUP

Jan du Plessis is to succeed Sir Mike Rake as Chairman of BT when he retires on November 1st.

Prior to taking over the role Plessis will join the Board as a Non-Exec' Director on June 1st. He has been Chairman of Rio Tinto since 2009 and also held a number of other senior Non-Exec' roles including Director and Chairman of SABMiller, and Director and Senior Independent Director of Marks & Spencer.

Previously he was Group Finance Director of Richmond and Chairman at British American Tobacco.

Vaioni Wholesale's link-up with Intelisys Global has delivered immediate results for sales partners now able to widen their initial connectivity conversation with customers to encompass, for example, higher value elements such as security.

The deal gives Intelisys Global's sales partners a route to Vaioni's range of carriers, access technologies, on-net or off-net connectivity and pricing options, along with its portfolio of network, voice and data centre solutions.

"The Intelisys Global technology services distributor model works well for Vaioni and, as a UK-based company, we see the relationship as an important enabler in supporting our international expansion," said Vaioni's MD Sachin Vaish.

Cradlepoint has secured an \$89m growth-stage investment led by TCV to fuel product initiatives in SDN, 5G wireless broadband and enterprise IoT.

"Cradlepoint has a strong foundation in cloud managed 4G LTE network solutions," said George Mulhern, CEO.

"The investment by TCV and its experience in guiding disruptive companies will allow us to capitalise on the opportunity as digitalisation drives WAN transformation."

Danwood in Apogee deal

APOGEE'S acquisition of document technology and managed print services provider Danwood creates one of the largest European players in its field with Group annual revenues propelled to over £250m.

The deal boosts Apogee's client base with the addition of over 10,000 retained customers and approximately 8,000 transactional customers.

The existing Apogee Board of Directors led by Joint CEOs Jason Collins and Robin Stanton-Gleaves will continue to manage the Group following the acquisition.

Collins said: "This acquisition provides us with the scale and reach to be a leading player in the European market for managed print services.

"Danwood has strengths that complement Apogee's offering and strategy, including a large client base of major corporate businesses, government and public sector organisations, and a strong service network that will increase the Group's coverage and capacity to support its clients across the UK and continental Europe."



Jason Collins

This is Apogee's fourth and largest acquisition since it secured an investment from Equistone Partners Europe, a pan-European, mid-market investor, in September 2016.

Additional strategic acquisitions completed by the Group in the past six months include Direct Business Systems, a provider of multi-functional copiers, printers, scanners and support services based in Glasgow; Hibernian Business Equipment, one of Ireland's main print management and managed print services providers; and CityDocs, a document outsource provider.

Apogee has said it will continue to make acquisitions to drive its growth in the UK and continental Europe.

Usage alert service offered by Bamboo

TELECOMS administrators and users have been given more control over their monthly spend following the launch of a customisable alert service by Bamboo Technology Group.

"Mobile network providers typically alert users once they reach 80% and 100% of their usage limits respectively," said Bamboo MD Lorrin White.

"The specific nature of the alert – such as the usage threshold that triggers the alert and how it is delivered etc – is often fixed by the network provider

and cannot be configured by the customer beyond turning the alert on or off.

"Most importantly, standard alerts such as these are only sent out to the end user when they have exceeded their allowance, but not to the bill payer (the mobile administrator).

"By enabling customers to tailor the alerts they receive to match their own needs, while ensuring the administrator is never out of the loop, Bamboo Technology Group is addressing all of these elements."

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Gamma posts strong results

GAMMA'S strong performance last year has been underscored by its results for year ended 31st December 2016, with the firm reporting revenues of £213.5m (2015: £191.8m), up 11.3%, and gross profits of £98.8m (2015: £82.3m), up 20%.

Gamma witnessed strong growth in its indirect business with gross profit increasing from £64.1m to £78.2m (+22%). The number of channel partners grew from 834 to 970 (+16%).

Wins in the direct business drove gross profit up from £18.2m to £20.6m (+13%). New customers include a large financial institution, Reed, OCS, City Electrical Factors, Nandos and St John Ambulance.

Cloud PBX and SIP trunking connections continue to grow with the number of installed SIP trunks up from 360,000 at 31st December 2015 to 511,000 one year later (a gain of +42%). The number of cloud PBX

users increased from 142,000 to 230,000 (+62%).

CEO Bob Falconer said: "We have seen no let up in demand for our strategic products of SIP trunking and cloud PBX, and we are particularly encouraged by the growing contribution from our data services following the investments we made to extend our network reach.

"Bringing a full MVNO into service in 2016 was a major engineering achievement. While it is still early days for our new mobile service it positions the business well for the future as we develop more converged fixed and mobile services.

"The public sector has also grown significantly with particular success with NHS Trusts, educational establishments and Government departments such as the Department of Communities and local Government for whom we are providing mobile services."

NEWS ROUNDUP

Avaya has entered into an asset purchase agreement with Extreme Networks for the sale of its Networking business for circa \$100m.

Extreme will serve as the primary bidder. Other interested parties have an opportunity to bid prior to a deadline set by the Bankruptcy Court.

Kevin Kennedy, CEO, stated: "The sale of our Networking business is the best path forward for all stakeholders. The possibility of Avaya Networking being part of a pure play networking company like Extreme Networks would allow greater opportunities for its products and services to thrive."

Ofcom's response last month to Openreach broadband installation delays was a record £42m fine, but according to Bamboo Technology MD Lorrin White there remains big questions over how quickly the UK's fixed line network can be improved.

"Openreach has agreed to meet Ofcom's demands to become a separate company and as a provider that works with Openreach every day we want it to succeed," she said.

"Openreach needs to commit everything it can to significant nationwide fibre investment. To do that it needs all the resources it can get."

Gamma has expanded its nationwide build-out programme to connect 18 additional BT exchanges to consume Ethernet directly from Openreach. This adds to the 19 launched in 2016.

David Doherty, Product Director, said: "This expansion allows Gamma to provide partners with competitively priced Ethernet services in key business locations."

Gamma recently onboarded TalkTalk to further expand its range and coverage for Ethernet connectivity to resellers, while underpinning Converged Private Networks, Gamma's MPLS proposition.

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THE 2017 edition of Nimans' free trade catalogue contains 484 pages and details over 7,000 products. A key feature of this year's publication is an expanded data infrastructure range along with new system developments and headset innovations including a convertible two-in-one Radius model.

Director of Channel Sales Richard Carter (pictured) commented: "In an age of digital media the trade catalogue still has a firm place at the heart of our business and remains popular as a reference point. It is affectionately known as the 'industry's bible' and this year we have a huge range of new products from traditional systems and data infrastructure to two-way radios and headsets."

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COMMENT: STRATEGIC TALK



Alex Tempest

LAST month, ARM announced that 100 billion chips had been shipped (half in the last four years) by various manufacturers that incorporate ARM designs. This is significant because ARM specialises in the low-powered microchips that kicked off a smartphone revolution and is now driving an Internet of Things (IoT) revolution. The acceleration of IoT is due to chips becoming much cheaper, smaller and less power

hungry. Now, all industries can benefit from connected devices, from manufacturers who can quickly add chips to their machinery to help track production, to farmers who can add chips to their cows to check on the movement of their herds. The real-life applications of connected devices are endless. So when will the IoT market mature? Going back to ARM and its 100 billion shipped chips, CEO Simon Segars wrote, 'Why not a trillion or more? That is our target, to see a trillion connected devices deployed over the next two decades'.

For some time now we've been discussing with our partners the insatiable demand for bandwidth, and IoT is a contributing factor. To stay one step ahead we are investing in both our core network and the access services to support this demand. SDN, NFV and ultrafast connectivity variants from G.fast to Dark Fibre are the progressive connectivity tools to handle this increased demand. They will offer greater capacity and greater elasticity to flex with a customer's needs.

For the channel, this means a strong future in the continuing migration of customers to higher bandwidth services. It also continues to create great disruptive opportunities to support customers with their cloud services and analytics needs.

Alex Tempest, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

Nimans warehouse expansion kicks off

A 50% YEAR-on-year increase in pallet volumes and order tonnage along with a broadening product range have prompted Manchester-based Nimans to embark on a programme of warehouse expansion, upping the current 36,000 sq ft capacity to almost 50,000 sq ft.

The distributor has enlisted construction company The Casey Group to undertake the work which is due for completion by October.

The requirement for more order processing space is reflected in Nimans's new trade catalogue that features over 8,000 products.

Chairman Julian Niman commented: "I started the company 36 years ago repairing CB radios from a limited space at my father's jewellery business.

"I first made a commitment to sign a long-term lease on our initial Broadway building on the outskirts of Manchester, then I made an even bigger commitment to build our current multi-million-pound headquarters at Agecroft. It's all about staying one step ahead of the game.

"The Nimans business continues to diversify and we sell all manner of communication and technology solutions from



Julian Niman (right) and Casey's MD Chris Casey

a simple cable clip through to a complete unified communications system, connectivity and

end points. The new warehouse expansion is a sign of our continued progression."

Acuity snares client contracts from 500

ACUITY Unified Communications has acquired the customer contracts of St Albans-based security firm 500 Ltd.

The company's fraud protection software portfolio provides security for mobiles and SIP trunking connectivity.

The deal also gives Acuity access to 500 Ltd's self-service provisioning portal.

John Dowbiggin, who is MD of Acuity Unified Communications, commented on the acquisition: "Cyber security is vital in today's business telecoms arena

and we want to ensure that those customers who require robust protection from cyber attacks – whether it be mobile or SIP connectivity – are covered to the FCS's Mark of Excellence Gold level."

500 Ltd MD Jonathan Rodwell added: "We can now focus on being a pure software house and offer service providers such as Acuity our provisioning portals."

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COMMENT: NETWORK MATTERS



Neil Wilson

I RECENTLY read an article about the retail sector and how it's becoming more extreme in nature to find success. Think cafés selling cereal, or Amazon Dash removing shopping from the shopping experience. It made me look to the stand out businesses in our industry and how it's often the ones that are laser focused on what they do best that succeed and grow.

Focus gives clarity in several forms. It's easy to identify new customers, to simply articulate what you are all about, and give your staff a philosophy that they can easily get behind. It keeps your portfolio streamlined and gives you the consistency to perfect the proposition.

Creating a niche for your products and services is critical when we consider how the channel adapts to the rapidly converging telco and IT markets. When you combine dwindling margins in traditional telephony with the threat from increasingly telco savvy IT specialists it presents both threats and opportunities.

Focus helps shape how the channel can address issues such as which products or services to launch in-house, which to facilitate through partners and which skills or services should be acquired.

One of the biggest dangers to maintaining focus comes as a company matures. Day-to-day tactical projects can easily take over and the vision becomes confused. When focus is lost, decisions get made on lower level factors like particular products or services that stretch a business in new directions where it may lack expertise, and shifts away from what it does best.

I have been fortunate enough to have joined an organisation with focus. There is a clear sense of who we are and what we do, making my job of articulating that to the channel refreshingly straightforward.

Neil Wilson, Product and Marketing Manager, Virtual1

Mid-market switch to cloud for Avaya

SENSING the big mid-market shift towards cloud adoption Avaya has targeted this high growth sector with the launch of new cloud solutions and signed ScanSource as a wholesale provider for cloud comms.

The cloud offering, which sits under the banner 'Powered by Avaya', enables channel partners to deliver the vendor's UC, contact centre and video conferencing solutions according to the deployment requirements of end users, whether on-premise, hybrid cloud or fully hosted.

Avaya is also working with wholesale distribution partners to deliver a complete cloud solution for partners including billing, provisioning and other back-end systems.

Partners have the option to host and maintain Avaya cloud services in their own data centres and sell directly to customers, wrapping additional services around the core product.

Powered by Avaya has already been rolled out in the UK by selected partners.

The UK's mid-sized businesses account for one third of private sector turnover, and added more jobs to the economy last year than smaller businesses and FTSE 350 companies



Ioan MacRae

is often overlooked with vendors either focusing on larger enterprise customers or providing solutions that don't deliver the scalability, resilience and flexibility mid-market customers are looking for."

In addressing the market ScanSource will provide reseller partners with cloud solutions Powered by IP Office.

MacRae added: "By combining with ScanSource, we can more effectively reach the indirect channel, enabling resellers to leverage our cloud-based solutions and create offerings that meet today's digital business needs." See page 26

combined, according to business advisory firm BDO. And the European cloud market is forecast to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 23.2%.

Avaya UK MD Ioan MacRae said: "The mid-market sector



DAISY Connect's trophy cabinet is home to two new gongs following a double award scoop, collecting O2's Digital Excellence Award and Customer Excellence Award 2017. Dave McGinn, MD of Daisy SMB Services, commented: "These awards will form the foundation of our strategy for Daisy Connect in this coming financial year. We are looking to acquire customers and other bases, and these awards demonstrate our capabilities."

SHORT CALL

Comms-care has added three more Microsoft competencies, taking its tally to eight Golds and four Silvers, making it the most highly accredited Microsoft channel-only service provider in the UK. Recent add-ons include two new competencies: Windows and Devices (Gold) and Collaboration and Content (Silver). The firm has also upgraded its competency in Cloud Productivity from Silver to Gold.

LA Micro ranked Hosted presence

FOLLOWING 45.09% international sales growth per annum over the last two financial years and international sales of over £9m in 2015-2016, LA Micro has been ranked at number 67 in The Sunday Times Lloyds SME Export Track 100.

The company has grown significantly since it began its commercial life in 2004, having quadrupled the size of its premises and tripled its workforce in the past four years, achieving a forecasted turnover of £24m in 2016-17.

LA Micro's founder and owner, David Bell, commented: "We have built our reputation for the service we provide through word-of-mouth, in turn attracting more business both domestically and internationally as customers become more aware of us and what we do."

The Lloyds SME Export Track 100 league table ranks Britain's top 100 small and medium-sized companies with the fastest growing international sales of between £5m and £25m in their last financial year.

CHANNEL Telecom's influence in the hosted telephony space is becoming more strongly felt following a buoyant six months that has brought in 50 new active Nimbus UC resellers (and rising) and the sale of well over 1,000 user licences.

A strong feature set, free Skype for Business integration, full-time monitoring of call quality and an attractive pricing structure have all helped to catch the imagination of new resellers according to Head of IP Voice Tim Nelson.

"A platform-wide deployment of RTCP-XR means that all calls using Polycom and Yealink handsets are routinely monitored," he said. "Calls over the last five days can be examined to see the phone's view of the quality of the audio and video. Calls are then given a Mean Opinion Score (MOS) based on parameters such as packet loss, delay and jitter."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

UC provider thevoicefactory (tvf) has opened a data centre in Sacramento, California, adding to its existing facility in Washington DC.

The two US data centres will initially serve the hospitality sector, covering the US, Canada, Mexico, Caribbean and South America. tvf said it plans to expand the solution into other verticals.

MD Paul Harrison noted: "The new data centre is part of our expansion to serve business we have already secured, and build for what we will gain in the near future."

Billing firm Union Street Technologies has set the dates for its upcoming 'Streets Ahead' roadshow that will provide a launchpad for a new product, demos, tips on best practices and the lowdown on upgrades to Union Street's cloud infrastructure (underpinned by Microsoft Azure) that hosts aBILlity.

The roadshow stops at Glasgow May 23rd, Newcastle May 24th, Bristol June 27th and London June 28th.

Head of Sales and Marketing Vincent Disneur said: "The roadshow is an opportunity for us to show our reseller partners the latest developments and how they can help partners to boost profitability and efficiencies."

The results of Polycom's global research into 'anywhere' working trends reveals that 98% of respondents think remote working boosts productivity, while 92% agree that video collaboration technology improves teamwork.

"We predicted that 2016 would be the 'year of video', and it's satisfying to know that people are seeing the benefits of working this way," said Jim Kruger, CMO of Polycom.

"Organisations that are able to offer flexible working practices and the right collaboration tools will be the winners in recruiting and retaining top talent."

Akixi gains greater market momentum

CRAWLEY-based Akixi's momentum and traction in the worldwide market shows no signs of slowing down according to MD Bart Delgado who this month spilled the beans on his comprehensive 2017 growth and product development plans.

Delgado revealed his strategic and product roadmap against a backdrop of a strengthening overseas presence in Europe, USA and the Caribbean, having accumulated 2,000 active client sites globally.

The company's upward trajectory is also reflected in its partnership with Gamma, a link-up that has introduced Akixi to over 500 Horizon reseller sites.

Just as positive is the outcome of a partnership with Dubber which has seen strong results following the launch of a call recording plug-in feature (a cloud-based scalable call recording service).

This year Akixi is set to build on 2016's successes with the roll out of new features including web services API integration, a must-have for customers wanting to take more control and programme the provisioning of administrative tasks in the Akixi reporting service.

"Using this new feature will significantly reduce the amount of time customers spend on performing routine tasks such as provisioning telephony servers, partitions, devices, ACD agents and application users," explained Delgado. "Previously, these were only accessible via the administration section of the Akixi application."

Other developments to look out for this year, pointed out Delgado, include the launch of a new-look user interface; a new smartphone application for Android and Apple devices; and an increase in data storage options to 12 months (currently three months is guaranteed).

"Akixi will guarantee a minimum of six months data storage,



Bart Delgado celebrates Akixi's CNA award win

offering greater data security and recovery for customers and end users," stated Delgado.

He is also working on enhanced group reporting that combines inbound and outbound traffic per group, along with additional features for the 'hunt group list' that will display calls to and from all group members and also calculate their call statistics.

This feature will also be added to large multi-site deployments and display call statistics for custom super-groups.

Continuing the reporting theme in Akixi's roadmap, the firm is gearing up to introduce reports that can be grouped by both BroadWorks GroupID and BroadWorks department.

"Adding this feature will provide additional useful infor-

mation for customers across all of their Akixi reports, and enable users to more easily manage, sort and filter extensions," explained Delgado.

Akixi began its commercial life in 2008 and has evolved into an award winning provider of hosted call management and call centre reporting services.

Last year Akixi collected the Comms National Award (CNA) for 'Best Call Management Solution' (see picture above).

Akixi was also a finalist in the Comms Business 'Independent Software Vendor 2016' category, and a finalist in the Gatwick Diamond Business Award for 'International Business of the Year 2016'.

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G9's best yet states Hansford

ICT suppliers can now offer their services through G-Cloud 9 (G9), the latest iteration of the G-Cloud framework which opens the door to public sector opportunities for cloud service providers of all sizes.

According to UKCloud's CEO Simon Hansford, G9 is 'the best iteration yet' with improvements coming from consultations carried out by the Government Digital Service and Crown Commercial Service.

Hansford's high expectations for the success of G9 are reflected in UKCloud's just launched channel recruitment campaign to cultivate greater collaboration with more partners on public sector business.

The company launched its partner programme in November 2016 and has so far given circa 120 partners a leg up onto the G-Cloud Framework. "We're committed to continuing this momentum via G-Cloud 9," stated Hansford.

He expects the improvements made to G9 to be the catalyst of more sales from a wider range of market sectors. He said buyers will be more receptive to a sharper emphasis on suppliers' security credentials and a slicker buying process through granular service categorisation, all helped along by simplified terms and conditions.

"IT companies wanting to break into the UK public sector marketplace must be familiar with, and overcome, specific requirements when it comes to providing assurance, connectivity and commercial governance," said Hansford.

To help ambitious IT suppliers break into the public sector UKCloud offers a G-Cloud 9 check list, a 'How to Submit' guide and a Q&A forum that provides guidance on achieving the required security credentials, and the best ways to address the security questions that form part of the G9 submission process.

Firstnet builds up

LEEDS-based Firstnet Solutions has added colocation, cloud platforms and disaster recovery to its services portfolio following the opening of its first purpose built data centre facility in the city.

A key feature of the launch is Firstnet's own cloud solution, powered by Nutanix and targeted primarily at SMEs.

MD David Cusworth commented: "The opportunity to expand and invest in this build-

ing to create a certified Tier III facility was too good to miss.

"Our customers now have access to the latest technology in managed services and a host of additional support, including office space with over 100 desks designed specifically for workplace recovery and relocation needs.

"We expect this data centre to create over 100 new jobs, providing an important source of local employment."



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Luminet ups channel play

WIRELESS ISP Luminet has enlisted channel builder Richard Jones to drive the rollout of its new partner programme launched last year.

He joins the company as Channel Development Manager and brings 16 years connectivity experience including notable stints at Uniworld, Abzorb and Genius Networks where he led partner engagement programmes that more than trebled reseller numbers.

This appointment reflects Luminet's sharpened focus on the channel and its intent to add substantial numbers to its existing 50-plus active partner base which ranges from multinational distributors to bespoke London-based IT companies.

Jones's primary task is to bed-in the processes for Luminet's new automated portal for wholesale and resellers and engage with new vertical service provider partners.

He will also strengthen the channel team to address the 350-plus potential partners who have recently engaged with Luminet, representing a potential doubling of ARR.

"Having worked in the channel for over a decade I am well versed in the issues faced by



Richard Jones

VARs today," he said. "As connectivity becomes increasingly commoditised they want and need vendors that enable them to differentiate, scale revenues and increase margins.

"We have connectivity and multi-cloud computing propositions tailored for the London market which represents half of the UK's telecoms revenue."

Luminet's new channel programme includes Fibre Air, also launched last year, which is a wireless business Internet service that can be installed in 10 working days and provides up to 1gb symmetrical broadband Internet connectivity.

Luminet CEO Sasha Williamson said: "For the last few years the priority has been product development and investment into our expanded network and compute asset base. Our focus is now on market execution."

Charity ski trip raises thousands

A FUND raising ski trip organised by Six Degrees Group has accumulated over £29k for WeSeeHope, a charity that provides support for children in southern and eastern Africa who have been orphaned or isolated by extreme poverty.

Hosted by Six Degrees Chairman Alastair Mills a group of 25 guests from the technology and finance sector headed to the slopes of Val Thorens, the highest resort in Europe, for the three day trip.



The annual event is organised as part of the company's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme, Six Degrees of Hope, which raises awareness and funds for WeSeeHope.

Mills said: "This is the third year we have run a charity ski trip and I am still blown away by the incredible generosity of those who join us."

Six Degrees has supported WeSeeHope since the company's foundation in 2011 and has so far raised over £445k through Six Degrees of Hope.

PBX in a jiffy with Express

CHANNEL-only comms provider 3CX has lifted the lid on PBX Express, a web-based wizard that enables users and resellers to set-up a PBX system in a cloud of their choice for free.

The solution is targeted at small firms that need a low cost but fully fledged cloud PBX.

An eight step process helps customers to create a new PBX installation hosted on Google Cloud, Amazon, OVH or any Openstack-based VPS provider.

End users have access to the same features, settings and management that is available with 3CX's existing on-premise and cloud versions.

"With the PBX Express tool resellers can set-up a dedicated instance of 3CX under their



Nick Galea

own account at one of the main cloud providers and fully manage it for the customer," said CEO Nick Galea. "3CX partners no longer need to invest in hardware and dedicated servers to set up a complex multi-tenant 3CX installation."



GAMMA leaders and partners took centre stage at the comms provider's theatre themed 2017 roadshow branded 'Much Ado About Gamma'. Over 600 partners descended on iconic theatre venues across the UK to catch up with Gamma's latest developments including a new partner marketing portal called Accelerate, along with Academy, an online training portal. Gamma also revealed this year's product releases including new cloud and converged services. Gamma MD Daryl Pile commented: "We've hit the ground running in 2017 with a quicker pace on development across the product portfolio."

RHM Telecommunications MD Nick Thomas welcomed Gamma's product development roadmap. "Horizon enhancements fill the gaps in areas such as hot desking and UC, enabling RHM to kick on with this product," he stated. "The planned launch of shrink-wrapped AWS through the Gamma portal is interesting for us as a traditional voice partner. It may enable us to have an easy entry into providing cloud computing. And the new marketing portal will be an asset in our marketing plans moving forward."

Previous themed roadshows have been hosted in stately homes, museums, universities and castles. This year's events were staged at the Theatre Royal in Glasgow (28th February), The Lowry in Manchester (1st March), The Hippodrome in Birmingham (7th March) and London's The Barbican (8th March).

Pictured above: Gamma CEO Bob Falconer takes the stage

Fast route to supplier choice

A NEW comparison website introduced by DMSL enables partners to more quickly compare and contrast the supplier and service provider options offered by the distributor.

The website adds a new dimension to DMSL's through-marketing process which it uses to generate new business leads for its network of partners.

Resellers can also present the service under their own name on a white label basis.

DMSL is operating a virtual sales team whereby each partner

has their own 0330 number with all calls routed to DMSL's sales staff who answer in the reseller's name before explaining the options to prospects.

In practice, straightforward orders are placed on the reseller's account while more complex ones will be passed on to the reseller.

"There is a multitude of options now and one of the challenges resellers have is trying to keep up-to-date with what's available," stated MD John Carter. "The website will

always have the latest information, making the sales process easier and helping resellers to sell more broadband, voice and mobile. DMSL's account team will be available to help resellers close the sale."

Carter also noted that DMSL will conduct a SEO campaign to drive traffic to the main site, and he urged resellers to run their own campaigns within their target markets.

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

WE'RE EXTENDING OUR REACH...



Palo Alto ties up LightCyber

8x8 Exsels in north quest



Mark McLaughlin

US SECURITY company Palo Alto Networks has wrapped up its \$105m all cash acquisition of cyber security firm LightCyber, the maker of automated analytics technology based on machine learning that identifies attacks according to behavioural anomalies inside the network.

“The LightCyber team’s vision to address the difficult task of identifying sophisticated attacks inside the network is aligned with our platform approach,” stated Mark McLaughlin, Chairman and CEO of Palo Alto Networks.

According to a report by the Ponemon Institute, when attackers find their way into a network there is an industry average dwell time of circa five months to discover their activity.

During that period, says the Ponemon Institute, an advanced attacker can initiate command and control, lateral movement and data exfiltration, leading to damage and loss of data.

Common approaches to this problem include third party log-based collection and analysis tools that are often prone to error, limited in visibility, lack important context and can be labour intensive.

But LightCyber uses machine learning techniques to protect against anomalous activities that are indicative of an attack.

“This behavioural attack detection capability complements the existing protections delivered by the Palo Alto Networks platform,” commented McLaughlin.

8X8 CONTINUES to make strong gains north of the border as it marches shoulder-to-shoulder with newly promoted Scottish Gold partner Exsel.

The Glasgow-based reseller joined forces with 8x8 one year ago and hit the ground running, putting in a sales performance that was rewarded last month with an elevation to Gold status in 8x8’s partner programme.

Exsel sold less than 50 hosted seats a month prior to its hook-up with 8x8, a partnership that within six months catalysed a sales boost that more than doubled revenues and registered an increase in ARPU.

In the full year since forming the partnership Exsel has gained 100-plus new customers including Loch Lomond Golf Club and the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland.

The partnership is expected to push Exsel towards its 30% annual revenue growth goal and 4,000 seat per annum target.

Tom McDonald, Exsel MD, said: “We’ve seen some strong results working with 8x8 since 2015 and we’re confident this latest step in our relationship will yield even greater rewards.”

Charles Aylwin, Director of Channel and Public Sector at



Tom McDonald

8x8, added: “Working with fast growing and motivated partners like Exsel is key to our strategy for growth.”

Gold partner status gives Exsel more sales support and greater access to marketing development funds, building on the 8x8 Academy and existing partner support.

Exsel has witnessed particular success in reselling 8x8’s Virtual Office, Virtual Contact Centre and EasyContactNow.

“8x8’s software is born in the cloud so end users can use any device without the need for third party add-ons,” added McDonald. “This is important as the growth of remote and flexible working means that most users expect to use the software on their phone.”

Two months ago Exsel Group won £0.5m backing from private equity company Coralinn LLP.

NEWS ROUNDUP

A flexible pay-as-you-go option offered by Nimans and Unify has been welcomed by resellers able to provide full OpenScope Business functionality based on a per-user-per-month licensing model.

“The solution provides the best of both worlds and offers resellers an entry into cloud-based technologies,” commented Marcus Yates, Unify Solutions Business Manager at Nimans.

The proposition scales up to 1,500 users and can be delivered as an on-premise server-based solution.

Agilitas has expanded its Cisco support services with the appointment of Mike Cummins as Cisco Technical Consultant. He joins from Cisco Gold Partner Logicalis where he was Strategic Development Director.

Support for Cisco has been Agilitas’ biggest growth area in the past year delivering a 400% increase in opportunities on the previous 12 months, with requests covering the UK, mainland Europe and the US.

“We are receiving unprecedented requests around Cisco UCS and networking support,” commented CEO Shaun Lynn. “With Mike on board we can significantly grow our offering.”



Toll Fraud Hits

£1.2 Billion Annually

Be Very Afraid!



NEWS ROUNDUP

VoIP Distributor ProVu and Cisco are to stage two reseller launch events in Birmingham and Glasgow next month. The events follow the Manchester and London launches where resellers got to grips with Cisco's latest multi-platform SIP phone range, the 7800 and 8800 series.

The ProVu and Cisco teams will be heading to The IET, Glasgow on 4th April and The IET, Birmingham on 6th April 2017.

ProVu's Sales Director Ian Godfrey said: "Orders for the new 7800 and 8800 series are already gaining momentum but we know there's still a number of resellers who are yet to discover the capabilities of this new range of multi-platform phones."

As the first wholesale distribution partner in the EU for Avaya's cloud solutions ScanSource linked up with the vendor to stage two 'ScanSource VaaS-t Powered by Avaya IP Office' workshops in Guildford and Bury.

UK MD for Avaya Ioan MacRae and Paul Emery, VP of ScanSource UK, addressed partners to demystify the cloud and outline the growth opportunities it represents.

Roadshow delegate Mark Stephens, Head of Group Services at Charterhouse Voice and Data, said: "Having attended the workshop Charterhouse Voice and Data is now ready to go to market with this cloud solution."

A digital ordering tool that removes the need for human interaction to create, modify and cease orders has been launched by Colt Technology Services as an addition to its On Demand portfolio.

Rajiv Datta, CTO, stated: "Colt's On Demand services portfolio enables customers to set up, scale up and scale down their voice network, minimising time-to-market by ordering Service Access Numbers in a few clicks."

Invosys adds Maintel rides hosted voice Azzurri wave



CALL management company Invosys has acquired VoIP platform developer Telux HD. The move sees the integration of Invosys's cloud-based Number Manager portal with Telux's open source cloud communications platform.

The Number Manager portal enables customers to configure, manage and monitor their call management solutions. The service will form part of a new channel offering called Invosys Hosted and incorporate cloud-based telephony.

"Instead of reselling hosted from one of the legacy suppliers we wanted to launch a hosted product to integrate with Number Manager," said Invosys CEO Rob Booth.

"Direct access to the owners and developers, swift development and support resolutions along with an open API that means easy and limitless integrations made Telux a clear fit for Invosys. The acquisition has allowed us to harness new technology and expand our wholesale channel."

Telux HD co-founder and MD Murray Leach commented: "We have invested heavily in developing our VoIP technology and we share Invosys's ambitious plans to capitalise on the impending changes to the voice market in the UK and beyond."

Invosys co-founder Peter Crooks added: "Invosys's wholesale channel is already experienced in hosted telephony, so we know our offering needs

to be commercially viable while including access to features and services not currently available from our competitors.

"With support from Telux we've created something in line with our philosophy of devising feature rich services that are simple to set up, easy to use and priced competitively.

"Ultimately, we believe that Invosys Hosted can shake the market up and become an important part of what we do."

Telux will remain at its Manchester offices and the two companies will continue to operate as separate entities.

Pictured above (l-r): Rob Booth, Murray Leach, Rosie Moth (Telux) and Peter Crooks.

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

MAINTEL'S acquisition of Azzurri in May 2016 helped to propel the MSP's revenues last year to £108.3m, up 114% on the previous year.

The group's core business, excluding Azzurri, notched up 1% organic growth year-on-year, mostly seen in H2 when Maintel bagged a number of big contract wins.

The group's adjusted profit before tax increased by 52% to £11.1m with recurring revenue rising to 73%.

Maintel also experienced a strong cash performance with operating cash flow of £10.6m and underlying cash conversion of 104% of adjusted EBITDA.

The group's managed service and technology division delivered a 62% increase in revenue to £64.1m, with managed services revenue up 45% year-on-year and technology sales up 88%, both benefiting from the Azzurri acquisition.

Azzurri also boosted Maintel's network services revenue which increased by 346%. The group also saw strong growth in cloud through its ICON Communicate proposition with the total number of seats for its hosted UC proposition growing 63% over the previous year.



Mobile revenue increased by 147% to £6.9m with gross margin rising to 49% (2015: 42%) and gross profit increasing from £1.2m to £3.4m over 2015.

Eddie Buxton, CEO, commented: "The highlight was the acquisition of Azzurri, supported by the robust performance of the core Maintel business in the second half of the year, demonstrating the strength of our diversified product portfolio and our ability to respond to changing market conditions.

"The combination of the enlarged customer base and the broader technological platform positions Maintel well for an exciting growth trajectory in the cloud environment.

"We look forward to 2017 with cautious optimism."

M2M whizz joins Pangea

M2M connectivity and solutions provider Pangea is set to strengthen its growth ambitions following the appointment of former Telefonica IoT head honcho Bernie McPhillips as Sales Director.

During his 11 year stint at Telefonica McPhillips worked as Head of Wholesale Partners and more recently spearheaded the operator's IoT Wholesale Partner Channel.

Pangea MD Dan Cunliffe said: "Bernie's understanding of the IoT market and his experience



of working with partners will be a key driver in creating new opportunities for Pangea and our partner channel."

According to Cunliffe Pangea has evolved into a 'global IoT ecosystem provider' generating a near six-fold increase in revenue

having recruited upwards of 80 partners.

"In an ever-expanding world of data everything should be connected, whether it's devices, appliances, vehicles – and perhaps most importantly, people," said Cunliffe.

McPhillips added: "Pangea's revenue growth and partner acquisition have exceeded the expectations for a start-up, underpinned by core channel-only brand values. I am excited by the opportunity to help drive Pangea to the next level."

Pragma hails Lanway's MD on selling up

NEWS ROUNDUP



Overall Reseller of the Year – Focus

PRAGMA recognised its star performing resellers at its annual awards dinner staged after the company's partner conference at The Belfry last month.

Top winners were Focus who picked up Overall Reseller of the Year, treble winner Lily Comms and Conceptunet which won Best New Reseller of the Year for securing one of the biggest enterprise wins of last year with Oxleas NHS Trust.

The winners were: iPECS Innovation Awards – Sirius

and Network Communications Group; New Reseller of the Year – Conceptunet; Phone-Link Reseller of the Year – Lily Comms; iCall Reseller of the Year – Lily Comms; Braxtel Contact Q Reseller of the Year – Yorkshire Telecom; So WiFi Reseller of the Year – BDR; Pragma Reseller of the Year Awards – Cloudsource Technologies, BDR, 5G and Lily Comms; Overall Reseller of the Year – Focus. **See p24 for the full conference report**



New Reseller of the Year – Conceptunet

SERIAL entrepreneur and former Lanway MD Vernon Yerkess, who played a key role in selling the IT services and supply business to Chess early last June, has urged exit hungry ICT businesses not to underestimate the work involved in the sale process.

"It's emotionally exhausting and the due diligence process is tough," said Yerkess speaking to guests at last month's exit educational seminars held in London and Manchester organised by M&A specialist Evolution Capital, which managed the Lanway sale.

Lifting the lid on the work involved in the sale, Yerkess told guests that the key to his successful outcome was the Strategic Review undertaken by Evolution at the outset which enabled them to match it with the right type of buyer.

"Based on the review Evolution told us what it thought the business was worth, high and low, and we ended up somewhere in the middle," said Yerkess. "The due diligence process was the hardest challenge. It consumes your life because it's your baby you're selling.

"It was Chess' 93rd acquisition in 10 years and the process



Vernon Yerkess

the company went through was templated, which meant in six weeks I knew everything that went on at Lanway in every nook and cranny. Eventually we completed the Shareholder Purchase Agreement. There was an issue with some of the add-backs and the balance sheet because cash in our sort of business is always up and down, but it was sorted it out.

"There have been no regrets and the former Lanway staff are enjoying life at Chess. We thought it was the right fit as we had a good idea where Chess could take the business and it has done it all before."

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

Arrow Business Communications has boosted its annual turnover to £26m and established a presence in the business energy sector following the acquisition of London-based Pulse Business Energy.

The deal is Arrow's eighth acquisition in seven years and enables it to offer an energy, telecoms and IT consultancy and service proposition.

Arrow MD Chris Russell stated: "We identified the energy market as an opportunity a while ago but wanted to partner with a company that has similar values."

For the second year running Chess Partner was the only distie to scoop the O2 Digital Excellence and O2 Customer Excellence Award at an event in London on March 9th where Chess Partner MD John Pett collected both gongs (pictured below centre).



Commenting on the win, Pett said: "We will continue to invest in our partners to help realise our goal of winning these awards for an unprecedented third consecutive year within distribution."

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Pragma's flexible vision

Channel only distributor Pragma has reinforced its commitment to its growing partner base by announcing a range of new products and support initiatives to address market disruption in the years ahead.

During the company's 'On Course for Success' partner conference held at the famous golf venue The Belfry last month, the Pragma team underlined the strength of its partnership with manufacturer Ericsson-LG (ELG) which aims to satisfy customer demands for on-premise, hybrid or cloud communications solutions and a seamless upgrade path across all three.

Ahed Alkhatib, VP of Global Sales at ELG Enterprise, told the 150-plus partners who attended that the success of last year's launch of ELG's iPECS Cloud solution, initially through Pragma's channel in the UK, had enabled partners to move into hefty mid-market opportunities and had helped Pragma achieve 30 per cent growth for the second year in succession. "The UK was a launch platform for iPECS Cloud and the growth has been astonishing," said Alkhatib. "Cloud is where the growth is and the applications and mobility sector is also growing. I would say that if you are not seeing this in your business, change your dynamic."

However, ELG and Pragma remain totally committed to on-premise applications too as Alkhatib confirmed.

"On-premise business will decline by one or two per cent by 2019 but it's still worth £5 billion dollars globally," he said. "There is now a fragmented approach to solutions – no one size fits all – and none of our competitors have the cloud, hybrid and on-premise solutions we have in our kit bag."

Alkhatib pledged ELG's continued investment in on-premise solutions while adopting a comprehensive cloud evolution programme giving partners the opportunity to address SME and mid-market opportunities via ELG's Virtual UCP private cloud solutions, which Pragma Sales and Marketing Director Will Morey described as a 'massive step forward for partners'. And picking



Bridgid Nzekwu

The conference was hosted by Channel 4 and ITN news presenter Bridgid Nzekwu.



Ahed Alkhatib

up on the flexibility theme, Morey said Pragma was perfectly placed to help resellers prioritise on the customer experience.

"Being digital is a challenge for you and your customers trying to adapt to new technologies," he told delegates. "You are seeing leads from social media and data is driving the decisions you are making every day. Flexibility enables us to compete and win. Some customers may want cloud, some will want on-premise, some will want a solution tailored to their needs and others will just want the cheapest. We can offer iPECS in the cupboard, in the data rack, in the cloud or anything in between. It's the same proposition. Cupboard to cloud is now at the heart of many reseller propositions.

"We are also delivering UC and mobility on top of our cloud solutions. Mobility and collaboration are key to any

The UK was a launch platform for iPECS Cloud and the growth has been astonishing

comms solution. Work is no longer a location. We can provide a consistent solution delivered on all mobile or desktop platforms. It's about access to data, knowledge and insight. It's not just about providing comms, it's about putting data at the fingertips to improve the customer experience. It's about analysing the touch points and enhancing the customer experience delivered through applications. We can integrate into these applications at a business

process level to create a stickier relationship."

This was the cue for Daan Donders, founder and CEO of new Pragma partner SO WIFI, to explain how partners can get any businesses with footfall involved with their customers via its high end Wi-Fi solution, which through social media gathers visitors' personal data including age, gender, email address, location and behaviour. "You'll get insights into exactly who your customers are and build contact lists of proven visitors faster than ever before. This is not conference waffle. Everyone in this room is delivering," he said.

At the Pragma Partner Awards finale Conceptunet secured the New Reseller of the Year Award for its private cloud deployment across 80 sites and 3,000 users for Oxleas Health Trust. Focus Group won overall Reseller of the Year. ■



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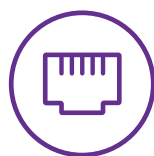
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MacRae: Avaya will emerge

Something is stirring in the wake of Avaya's Chapter 11 filing in January. Loyal partners are rallying, new products have been launched, investments and innovations continue at pace, distribution partnerships have been forged, and the confidence of UK Managing Director Ioan MacRae is soaring. If ever a vendor was on top of its game, this is it.

The contrast between MacRae's energised and resilient team and the industry's howling doom mongers shows how far Avaya has travelled from any sense of disruption, woe or uncertainty following its Chapter 11 filing. Just one month into Avaya's debt restructuring process MacRae, undaunted by the prospect, stepped into the UK leadership role with his eyes wide open. "I was well aware of the challenges but could also see the resilience of the business and the opportunity to emerge from the process stronger," he stated. "My first priority was to ensure that the 400-plus people who work in the UK for Avaya understood where we were as a business and to help them feel safe and secure in their role. Our team comes first, because when they are in a good place their confidence extends to our partners and customers."

The exaggerated reporting from elements of the channel press and the actions of some of Avaya's rivals in the market in response to its Chapter 11 filing ramped up a near-hysteria of uncertainty and doubt, leaving the vendor open to attack. "This prompted a number of key partners to quickly and strongly come out in support of Avaya and its future prospects," added MacRae. "We've had to accept that a process like

this will generate questions and, in some areas, concern. In the UK, our partners have been supportive and understanding. The Chapter 11 filing mainly relates to Avaya's operations in the US, so the impact on the UK is already limited. It's a balance sheet restructuring rather than an operational challenge, and we have vowed to be clear and open through the process."

MacRae and his team have worked hard to minimise disruption to the UK business by hiring talented people, investing in partners and maintaining research and development. "It is business as usual," he stated. "Our commitment to the channel in the UK and Europe is no secret. We recently formed a number of global partnerships and launched our 'Powered by Avaya' offering. It's understandable that some people have taken the opportunity to make a noise or promote themselves. We remain confident that the future is bright for Avaya and will continue to show that through our work."

Avaya is not weakened or failing. It will not topple and there will be no return to the drawing board, no capitulation or new incarnation. So for MacRae, now is the time to focus on achieving his primary goals. "I have three big priorities," he said. "Our UK team, our channel



Ioan MacRae

partners and our customers. We want to maintain our position in the market which means recruiting the best people while encouraging and developing our team internally. We want our team to be clearly visible to partners and customers. Working with our partners in the channel is central to our business, accounting for around 90 per cent of our revenue and I don't see that decreasing. In fact, I'd like to see that figure grow."

Avaya UK's current channel relationships extend across hospitality, healthcare, finance, insurance, retail, blue light services, central and local Government. Education

is a notable growth area illustrated by the vendor's work with Leeds Beckett University. "I want to improve on these partnerships by getting even more invested in the differentiators for these verticals," added MacRae. "That means dedicated teams and resources to build knowledge and strengthen existing expertise and relationships."

Tactical steps

The measure of Avaya's relationship with channel partners is how far it is able to help them sell services and solutions. Tactical steps have been taken in this area, but it boils down to making it as easy as possible to do

business. "We will ensure the team is well informed through the provision of more training and resources for our account managers who will be in regular contact with partners," said MacRae. "We will also offer customers new tools including self-service portals and the ability to share data.

"Regarding the portfolio, research and development remains critical to our future. Avaya maintains one of the highest levels of R&D investment among its peers, about 16 per cent of total revenue. Last year we introduced 16 new product solutions. Ultimately, it will always come down to

...rge stronger

ensuring you've got the right technology to sell."

Mobility and the rise of the Internet of Things are among the biggest drivers of change, believes MacRae. "This is the manifestation of a macro trend in how we all live, work and communicate," he added. "My teenage sons are part of a tech-junkie generation that have dozens of different tools and apps to communicate. We have to recognise this trend and ensure that we offer communication solutions that are aligned with what our customers expect today and in the future."

Cloud focus

MacRae also pointed to the increased adoption and evolution of cloud solutions. He said the biggest change in the Avaya UK business is the company's shift from hardware-based solutions towards software and services. "This reflects where we see the market going and how we can innovate and continue to build the best value," explained MacRae. "We are focused on developing high-end solutions such as our contact centre and cloud offerings which epitomise that shift. Many organisations are at different stages in their use of the cloud, which means we need to have solutions that support customers at any stage of their transition. It's a matter of ensuring we can make the constant updates and expansions that are necessary to keep up with the speed of doing business."

For SIs, noted MacRae, the challenge is keeping up with the competition. "Many resellers and SIs may, like Avaya, consider moving to software services, or

generally shift from capex to opex driven commercial models," he added. "There may be opportunities where vendors can become systems integrators in their own right, or for systems integrators to become solution developers."

Based on his past record, MacRae is the right man to chart Avaya UK's road forward. He entered the telecoms industry in 1997, hooked-in after buying a Nortel Norstar system for a business he set up in the middle east. "That was my first real exposure to telephony," he recalled. "I found it interesting! It was great fun learning about the features and how useful telephony can be in helping a business to run. My work took me back and forth between the UK and the middle east for the following 15 years. I set up services and solutions in the telecoms space and worked extensively with channel partners. Many of the people I worked with back then are still Avaya partners today."

MacRae joined Avaya in 2014 and became Mid-Market Director. He relished the opportunity to maintain business relationships formed over 20 years in the industry and displayed a talent for getting under the skin of channel businesses. "Understanding this market, how these businesses work and the challenges they face isn't something you can learn overnight," commented MacRae. "And having seen the technology evolve from a basic service to multi-network call centres and a true omni-channel experience has been invaluable to me."

"Before joining Avaya three years ago I already

had a great long-standing relationship with the company. I know that Avaya UK has one of the best, most loyal and hard working teams in the business, which was a pivotal deciding factor when I accepted this role. Our people are one of the main reasons we have staunch and durable relationships with our partners and customers, which provides a strong foundation for Avaya UK in the future."

Just a minute with loan MacRae...

What talent do you wish you had? To fly

Role model: My father. A loving man who has been successful in life

Your strengths and what could you work on? I am approachable and fair. However, I can be impatient as I like things to be done yesterday

What do you fear the most? Failure

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? Working with boats and living by the sea

How would you like to be remembered? As a decent bloke who enjoyed a laugh

One example of something you have overcome: I was very shy when young, but over time I have overcome this, especially with the need to present at events

Three ideal dinner guests? Welsh rugby referee Nigel Owens: He is the best in the world and would have some great stories; Nelson Mandela who was a true inspiration; and Barack Obama to understand what is really happening in this world

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Sector trading update

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

This quarter's trading highlights include public sector pressures for BT, good trading for several connectivity players (Exponential-e, Convergence, Virtual1, Metronet, FluidOne, MLL, WiFinity), and an insight into Daisy post the Alternative Networks deal. In somewhat of a shocking announcement, BT warned on profits due both to a far worse than expected fraud at its Italian unit, first announced at the second quarter results, and with new weakness in the UK public sector and international corporate markets.

The UK public sector weakness reflects a faster than expected wind down of previous lost contracts and a lack of new opportunities due to tighter central Government spending. The net effect is that FY16/17 EBITDA will be some £300m/4% lower at £7.6bn, with £175m from Italy and £125m from UK public sector and international corporate, with a far worse £600-700m/circa 20% FCF impact, with a knock-on 11-20% impact on FCF in FY17/18. The company is also reviewing the future of Global Services. BT's Italian fraud comes not long after an accounting fraud was unearthed at Redcentric.

Connectivity continues to be an attractive part

of the market for some, for example, network aggregators. We highlight results from: Convergence Group (pro forma revenues and EBITDA up 18% and 33% to £28.5m and £3.5m respectively, with organic growth of about 8% net of the January 2016 Networks First acquisition); Virtual1 (stable EBITDA of £0.9m on revenues up 39% at £17.4m); and FluidOne (formerly Fluidata – EBITDA doubling to £1.5m on revenues up 21% at £17.2m).

Turning to network operators, and Metronet reported EBITDA up 45% to £6.2m on revenues up 33% (all organic) to £21.4m. The subsequent October 2016 M247 deal has taken the company to a £15m EBITDA, £44m revenue run rate, with March's Venus deal boosting revenues by a further 13% and providing a London footprint.

Rising revenues

Exponential-e confirmed revenues and EBITDA up 24-27% to £96m and £18m respectively for the year to January 2017. MLL Telecom showed revenue growth at its highest since 2011, at 33%, to help lift revenues back above £10m for the first time since 2012, though EBITDA of £0.6m (up 78%) is still well below levels of prior years. Campus Wi-Fi provider Wifinity reported



Philip Carse

EBITDA up 18% to £3.0m on revenues up 24% at £6.8m.

Among quoted companies, Gamma detailed a typically strong 2016 with EBITDA up 21% to £34.2m on revenues up 11% at £213.5m, all organic and aided by SIP, CloudPBX etc, though headline pre-tax profits were down 4% at £21.6m due to 2015 containing the £5.7m ladder pricing settlement gain. The price of this growth was a 70% increase in capex to £19.6m, including success-driven CPE and major network upgrades/product development.

Meanwhile, Maintel has detailed its transformational 2016 which included the acquisition and integration of Azzurri. While the numbers (EBITDA of £12.6m on revenues of £108m, up 63% and 114% respectively) only include a part-year contribution from Azzurri, and are therefore not particularly representative, the most notable features

included a return to organic growth for the ex-Maintel business in the second half and an increase in the Azzurri synergy run rate from £4.6m to £5.0m, while the company has flagged a return to M&A. Including a full year of Azzurri, current consensus for 2017 is EBITDA of £17.9m on £136.7m of revenues.

The accounts to March 2016 for Daisy Group cover the year starting a couple of months after Daisy was taken private. However, they only give a partial view as Daisy subsequently acquired Phoenix IT in mid-July 2015, while the comparative prior year only included four months trading. For the record, the fiscal 2016 accounts show revenues, gross profit and EBITDA of £512m, £251m (49% margin) and £77m (15% margin) respectively. Taking into account a full year of Phoenix, the recent acquisition of Alternative Networks, Daisy is heading towards a £712m revenue

and £120m EBITDA run rate according to management.

This last quarter has seen the usual mix of private equity activity (Lyceum/Timico, BGF/Virtual1), strategic trade deals (GCI/Freedom, Adept/OurIT, Solar/Denwa and Cablecom/WarwickNet) as well as the bonkers valuation, £250m/100x revenues, spectrum driven 3UK acquisition of UK Broadband. Of the trade deals, GCI's acquisition of Freedom Comms is the most transformative, boosting revenues by about £18m, or just under a third. Aside from the financial impact, GCI management was keen to highlight Freedom's Skype for Business and public sector credentials. The CableCom/Warwick net deal added a new business park broadband string to CableCom's student accommodation focused ISP activities, boosting CableCom revenue and EBITDA by about £3.5m/10% and £0.5m/5% respectively.

Mixed performances

The Telecoms & Networks peer group saw another average quarter in share price terms, and with a 2.3% fall over the last year under performs versus 18-19% for the FTSE and Megabuyte universe. On a one-year view, the performance has been dragged down by BT (-25%), Redcentric (-55%), TalkTalk (-25%) and Kcom (-15%), while business communications providers lead the risers – Adept (+39%) Gamma (+15%) and Maintel (+44%).

IS Research publishes www.megabuyte.com, a company analysis and intelligence service covering over 400 public and private UK technology companies. philip.carse@megabuyte.com

FIVE MINUTES WITH ANDY PEYNADO, DIRECTOR, SELECT SERVICE TELECOMMUNICATIONS

How did you get into comms?

I trained and worked as an electrician. One day, while working up a ladder installing a light fitting, I realised that I was afraid of heights. I then applied for a job as a telephone apprentice and was accepted due to my electrical knowledge.

Tell us about your company

Select Service has been trading for over 18 years with the sales, supply and repair of Siemens ISDX/Realitis systems. We also repair Avaya, Cisco, Nortel, Mitel, Polycom, ShoreTel, Siemens and Unify handsets and conferencing units. Our market is anyone who has a phone, which is approximately 90 per cent of businesses. We aim to grow the company by 30 per cent which is a realistic target.

Your company culture?

We operate a basic and traditional culture: Early to work, do the work, test the work and go home. And if you get 10 minutes, have a break.

Your biggest opportunity?

Taking on a job to install a product we did not do, although I had knowledge. We have since grown in AV.

Your biggest achievement?

Overcoming the fear of having a business.

Name three ideal dinner guests

Richard Branson and Abraham Lincoln for conversations about how they became successful and where they came from. When their stories run dry I would look at, and listen to, Jennifer Lopez.

Lessons learnt

Take on and learn everything, as everything will be needed some day in your life.



Andy Peynado

If you could transform any area of the telecoms/IT industry what would it be?

Slow down the evolution and amalgamation of telecoms and IT.

Role model

Barack Obama. He has achieved something that was only considered a dream 20 years ago, and unimaginable 60-plus years ago.

What talent do you wish you had?

To play the piano.

What do you fear the most?

Apart from heights, technology. It's moving fast.

Tell us something about yourself we don't know

I'm a keen aquarist and also MC for events.

We all have strengths and weaknesses. What are your greatest strengths, and what could you work on?

My strength is listening, but I could work on better assessing the future and where things will be.

Name one thing you couldn't do without in your job

My staff.

One example of something you've overcome

Public speaking. Once you are confident in what you're doing and saying there's no fear.

What possession could you not live without?

My watch.

If you weren't in communications what would you be doing?

I'd be a councillor – not the political type, although they do need help.

The biggest risk you have taken and why?

Having a family. You never know what the next 60 years is going to be like.

How do you relax?

The health centre has everything you need.

Top tip for resellers

Boldly go where others fear to tread.



Hosted

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Elevate your margins...

Each year since the turn of the millennium, Margin in Voice & Data – known as ‘The Industry event of the Summer’ – has helped resellers addressing SME markets identify new avenues to profit and truly understand the changing ICT environment.

This year, MiVaD 17 returns to the breath-taking Forest of Arden Hotel complex in the heart of the Midlands and once again this 24-hour event promises a day of inspiration and exploration plus a ‘once a year’ opportunity for resellers to network with like-minded peers and business generators.

Split into three sessions, the event will comprise a morning thought leadership conference to help delegates get an understanding of the new Voice & Data landscape; an afternoon ‘managed meetings’ session where resellers can meet new supplier partners; and last but by no means least, a fun evening networking dinner.

All this is **COMPLETELY FREE** to *qualified reseller delegates so don’t miss out.

REGISTER now at www.margin-in-voice-data.com

**Margin in Voice & Data delegates must be directors of reseller business with a turnover below £3m*

This year the main theme of MiVaD 17 will focus on the shift to Cloud Communications, the new connectivity solutions driving this change and the value-added opportunities new business environments are creating for ICT resellers.

Speaker line-up



FIND YOUR WAY INTO THE CLOUD – GARY GOULD, SHORETEL

In his keynote, Gary Gould, EMEA Marketing Director at Unified Communications and Cloud Contact Centre vendor ShoreTel, will explain how delegates can get onto the pathway towards supplying Cloud Communications solutions via the new easily accessible ‘ShoreTel Connect Cloud Programme’.

He will also show shortcuts to net-new UC opportunities and explain how your sales people can identify customers keen to join up their communications infrastructure with minimum disruption and cost.



MARKETING TO MILLENNIALS – ANDY GRANT, BOWAN ARROW

Almost half (46 percent) of B2B buyers are Millennials and if you’re not marketing to this group, you need to reevaluate your strategy. In his session this year, Bowan Arrow Managing Director Andy Grant will explain how B2B buying decisions are happening and who is responsible for them. Andy will dispel the Millennial myths

of B2B marketing and demonstrate how best to address this audience of key decision makers in your target business accounts.



DEMYSIFYING THE M2M OPPORTUNITY – ANTON LE SAUX, ZEST 4

In his keynote, Anton Le Saux, Head of IoT & M2M at Zest4 will help to demystify M2M/ IoT in the channel and demonstrate how you can grow significant revenues by adding these technologies to your product portfolio. As part of his session he will show how Zest4 have helped their channel partners succeed in M2M; how they

have supported partners to win new customers and generate new long term revenues from their existing base.



GET ON THE SIP AND WebRTC JOURNEY – PAUL TAYLOR, VOICEFLEX

In his two-part keynote Paul Taylor, Sales Director at Voiceflex, will firstly look at the opportunities in selling SIP connectivity for CPE in advance of the ISDN switch off in 2025 plus SIP applications such as call recording, statistical analysis of usage, network topology etc. Paul will then lift the lid on WebRTC namely what it is, what

are the applications, how can you make money from the technology and its future development.



WILL CLOUD BUSINESS ADD VALUE? – ADAM ZOLDAN, KNIGHT CORPORATE FINANCE

In his presentation, Knight CF Director Adam Zoldan will give his annual overview of the M&A landscape, the trends and themes that have driven deals and his predictions for the coming year in the new Brexit economy. Adam will also look at the key factors that can influence the value

of your company especially as you add more cloud based business to your order book.

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VIRTUAL1

A NEW CONTENDER IN THE RING

Virtual1's cutting edge network
is expanding nationwide

Virtual1's expansion is set to disrupt the connectivity
market by introducing a true alternative wholesale
carrier to rival the big players

INSIDE:

EXTENDING OUR REACH Page 2

PACKING A PUNCH Page 2

OUR NETWORK COVERAGE Page 3

OUR PARTNERS Page 4



WE'RE EXTENDING OUR REACH

Virtual1's cutting edge network is expanding nationwide

WHO ARE VIRTUAL1?

Virtual1 are the UK's leading Digital Service Provider.

Working exclusively for the wholesale market, we operate the most advanced network in the UK.

Our world class infrastructure connects the critical digital services that our Partners use to deliver innovative solutions that make UK business work.



TOM O'HAGAN
CEO

BOXING CLEVER

We are very excited to announce the expansion of our network across the UK. With our coverage extending to 180 towns and cities, as well as further expansion in London, we are confident that we will be providing the largest and most advanced wholesale-only network in the UK.

From working closely with our Partners and understanding the challenges they face in their businesses, I saw the opportunity to disrupt the status quo in the connectivity market by introducing a true alternative wholesale carrier to market.

Our footprint has been designed specifically with the channel in mind, covering over 75% of UK business. We will be delivering a commercially competitive network, rich in functionality that puts our Partners in control of their solutions.

Tom O'Hagan



IT PACKS A PUNCH!

Not only is our network expanding nationwide, it is also fully software defined, putting our Partners in control

Aside from our increased scale, we have also made sure that our network is cutting edge. Our smart automation and software defined network puts us comfortably ahead of the competition. By placing automation at the heart of our business we are removing much of the complexity and overheads of running our network.

Furthermore, by delivering this functionality in 1Portal, our award winning customer interface, we are able to deliver this control

directly to our channel Partners. With up to 35 different features configurable in real-time, Partners will have much greater freedom to define the service levels that they want to deliver to their customers, without being hamstrung by a carrier's SLAs.



1Portal

VIRTUAL1'S EXPANDED NETWORK WILL PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE COVERAGE OF UK BUSINESSES



THE HIGHLIGHTS

180

METROS COVERED

280

FIBRE EXCHANGES

495

FTTC EXCHANGES

1/4

OF ALL UK CABINETS

35

DIFFERENT NETWORK FEATURES CONFIGURABLE ON 1PORTAL

685K

POSTCODES COVERED

This coverage will make Virtual1 the largest wholesale-only network in the UK



VIRTUAL1

WE'RE IN YOUR CORNER

As a wholesale only
network - our Partners
come first

Everything we do is Partner focused; from our network coverage and ready-made Partner ecosystem through to our smart automation; service levels and real-time quoting and ordering via 1Portal. All delivered by a highly motivated and knowledgeable team who are experts in the industry.

Moving forward

A ready made business ecosystem

It's more than a national network. We also provide private access to the very best, business-critical technology, ensuring that you can offer guaranteed levels of both performance and security.

Including the leading SIP, UC and Cloud providers, we can directly connect you to AWS, Microsoft Azure, Gamma, BT, Mitel, Shoretel and Avaya.

We enable our Partners to deliver complete solutions to their customers.



What does it mean for your business?

We deliver market leading commercials and coverage to our Partners which we combine with access to market leading tools such as 1Portal, and comprehensive pre-sales, service and marketing support.

We have the systems and people to help Partners take products to market quickly, design solutions which exceed expectations, deliver service which delights, and to ultimately drive new revenue.

WHAT OUR PARTNERS SAY:

From an independent survey of our customer base conducted at the end of 2016

96% level of satisfaction amongst senior contacts

96% say Virtual1 services represent good value for money

100% satisfaction with both 1Cloud and 1Portal

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Disruptive national network

For CEO Tom O'Hagan the roll out of Virtual1's national network is more than the sum of its parts, it is a manifestation of his vision for the company to become a UK-wide channel-only wholesale Digital Service Provider.



Tom O'Hagan

Virtual1's mid-term growth plan came to fruition this month with the launch of a national network, and its significance is impossible to escape. In launching the network O'Hagan turned agility into strategy to deliver innovation and flexibility to partners, and, if possible, prompt the wider channel to recognise the limitations of legacy infrastructure. The expansion of Virtual1's London fibre network will cover 180 metropolitan areas across the UK including Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The fully software defined network comprises 280 fibre exchanges with Virtual1 adding 212 to its existing network while FTTC will be available in a further 495.

Over 75 per cent of UK businesses will become on net and the total

infrastructure will cover more than 685,000 postcodes. The network is automated through 1Portal for all adds, moves and changes; and partners can apply configuration changes directly to their customers' solutions in real-time.

The network, says O'Hagan, repositions Virtual1 as a UK-wide carrier and a supplier to the aggregator market with the clout to compete directly for wholesale business against Tier 1 carriers. Following the launch O'Hagan plans to double the size of the business within three years having embarked on a 12 month roll out process with orders starting to be taken this summer. "Our wholesale-only model is not going to change, but we anticipate a new commercial structure to reward partners for increasing their volume of business," said O'Hagan.

He saw the opportunity to disrupt the market and deliver innovation to the channel over 12 months ago. "That's when this project really started," he stated. "We spent the last year looking for the right partner to support our growth plans. This led to our deal with the BGF (Business Growth Fund) in December. We couldn't have done it without their investment. We are already talking to our customer base as well as prospective new partners in the wider regions that have to date been underserved by the current vendors."

The network will roll out in a phased geographic approach and Virtual1 will focus on three key groups during this period: Existing partners in these areas will be contacted by Virtual1 as they come online and offered support to help them take

the enhanced proposition to their customer bases; awareness will be raised in the geographies where Virtual1 has a low density of partners with an intent to recruit more; and the company will look to provide Layer 2 services to other UK network providers and international carriers wanting to grow their UK footprint.

Partner support

"We have also geographically aligned our channel sales and accounts team to focus on specific regions and provide closer and tailored support in those defined geographies," explained O'Hagan. "They are responsible for helping existing partners as well as reaching out and growing our channel in those target regions."

O'Hagan's viewpoint on the 'inflexible' state of the traditional carrier supply

chain is predicated on the maxim that partners must have more central accessibility and control of their orders and the service they provide to customers, which demands an agile business model beyond the reach of the bigger players. An agile feature of Virtual1's new network is that it is software defined, which, says O'Hagan, opens a cornucopia of benefits for partners.

Over the last 18 months Virtual1 has focused on making its network fully software defined through its SDN platform. By introducing templates and standardisation across the network Virtual1 has given partners the access required to do many of the configuration changes that were traditionally out of their reach and undertaken only by the carrier. These include bandwidth changes and VLAN resizing or

work rolls out

QoS. "In giving partners access to perform these changes themselves in real-time they can define the SLAs they pass on to their customers and make it happen immediately," added O'Hagan. "Through our automation we expect to be highly competitive in areas where there has been little in the way of commercial competition. We know what pricing is available and how we can directly benefit our channel partners. We will also be creating a marketplace for higher bandwidth services which has traditionally been underserved."

According to O'Hagan, agility is 'absolutely Virtual1's advantage' when disrupting a market of large legacy network providers. "We are able to roll out our network in record time," he stated. "We are the first to release SDN as a platform for the channel, which with our smart automation will emphasise our differentiation. We can achieve this advantage because we are not hamstrung by legacy technology and infrastructure. The automation and SDN also means that we need far fewer resources to provision, deploy and manage a national network. This is a much smaller cost base versus our competitors and therefore the costs that we will take to the channel will be disruptive. The technology will empower our partners to enhance and differentiate their propositions to their customers."

Automation will bring to life the promise of software defined networks and handing control to partners, stated O'Hagan. "That's why we are not calling ourselves

We are something new with a dramatically different proposition. We're a Digital Service Provider

a carrier," he added. "We are something new with a dramatically different service proposition to the traditional players. We're a Digital Service Provider."

Vital infrastructure

Trends like data mining, analytics and SaaS are where O'Hagan sees the opportunity to provide the infrastructure that partners need to deliver innovation in these areas. "We have started to strike up partnerships with the likes of ShoreTel and Avaya (through ScanSource) where they are spinning up their solutions on our infrastructure," he added. "In our hyper-connected world, businesses are using a vast ecosystem of solutions and also connecting with customers in ways that weren't possible just a few years ago. Companies need an infrastructure to build those business models upon. That's our niche."

"Automation and interoperability are at the heart of making the future of business work and deliver real scalability. That's why we have been so fast to adopt both the technology and methodology. We see it as a way to disrupt the market and empower the channel

to help their customers gain a competitive advantage."

O'Hagan is long experienced in building channels having worked in the comms industry for 17 years. He started his career at PSINet, one of the first ISPs in the world which was ultimately acquired by Telstra where O'Hagan excelled and relocated to the US to set-up and run the firm's channel business. He returned to the UK in 2007 and quickly set about establishing Virtual1, selling his house to raise the funds required to build two points of presence that got the company going. O'Hagan operated his one-man business from his kitchen for 18 months before moving into an office and employing staff. The acquisition of the software company behind 1Portal was also a turning point and a key foundation of Virtual1's initial differentiation and automation strategy. Now, the company has a headcount of 80-plus, £21 million turnover and a trophy cabinet that houses various industry and business awards.

Observers of Virtual1's growth and progress to date know that O'Hagan's ambition should not be underrated. We have watched the company grow from the kitchen table from where he first served London towards national carrier status, and there is more to come. "Covering London proved that my long-term strategy was the right direction to go," he said. "The launch of the national network is a culmination of that vision and it will be a highly significant change to our business model which now more closely resembles a Digital Services Provider." ■



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Empowering people

Nothing appeals to customers more than an elite group of hand-picked customer-focused staff with total backing from their business leaders, according to Peach Technologies CEO Darren Scott-Healey.

Scott-Healey's philosophy on staff recruitment displays a natural genius for recognising candidates with high potential and nurturing their vital 'people-power' towards improving the performance of the business across all levels. His faith in smart recruitment and holistic management underpins an ambitious plan for Peach to become a reseller powerhouse generating between £30 million and 50 million within five years. Growth strategies like this require a fizzing pool of ambition to drive them, therefore Scott-Healey follows a policy of employing people with vitality and attitude.

So there was no real surprise when Peach Technologies invested £2.3 million in a new office done out to elevate the role of colourful and individual creativity within its four walls. The Whiteley-based headquarters, a 15,000 square foot working environment, is designed to encourage employees to maximise their career potential while acting as a fun and friendly place to work. The building features an oval jungle boardroom, a library quiet zone for

staff learning, a coffee shop meeting room, private working zones and 'chilled' working areas to encourage co-operation between departments. The team also has access to free breakfasts and fruit, with Xboxes and pool tables housed in an American diner style kitchen.

"We now have an innovative and creatively focused working environment that enables our workforce to be the best they can be," stated Scott-Healey. "We have dedicated areas for employees to think and collect their thoughts, to collaborate and to relax and unwind during their breaks. We offer a fun environment designed to empower all staff, but one that remains professional and focused on the goals of the business. We believe that focusing on our staff enables them to focus on our customers and business."

Digital-first

Scott-Healey has also invested in Peach Technologies' marketing department which has embarked on a 'digital-first' strategy that he says will enable the company to more effectively showcase its portfolio of products.



Darren Scott-Healey

We offer a fun environment designed to empower all staff, but one that remains professional and focused on the goals of the business

"Over the coming months our customers and future clients will see progressive changes in the way we communicate our brand and value propositions," he explained. "We are working on some exciting projects in terms of our communications and growth. We are also investing heavily in a re-shaped sales strategy led by our new Sales Director."

Rewinding the clock, Scott-Healey began his career in the late '80s as an installer of telex machines for Pure

Telecommunications. The firm moved into selling telephone systems when BT lost its monopoly. Scott-Healey thrived in this environment and became Technical Director at the age of 19 and Strategic Development Director at 27. Redstone acquired Pure in 2000 and Scott-Healey worked with Ian Brown (Peach Technologies' newly enlisted Chairman) for the first time. "I was Commercial Director of Redstone Systems before becoming Sales Director of Redstone PLC," Scott-

Healey recalled. "I have gained a broad wealth of knowledge and experience across all areas of business."

Scott-Healey and a number of colleagues established Logicom Systems in 2002, which was subsequently acquired by Daisy Group in 2006. "I then set-up Peach Telecom which was rebranded in 2015 to Peach Technologies," he explained. "The business began as a voice reseller but in 2014 we started to offer IT services after acquiring an IT company. We are now able to offer a holistic communications solution that ranges across telecoms, IT, cloud, networking, server solutions, digital offerings and connectivity such as Ethernet. Our markets vary from sector to sector but we're mainly focused on SMEs that employ between 20-250 staff. Customers see value in our approach. They are able to keep the management of services that are notoriously complicated with one company and have one point of contact."

In its first year of operation Peach generated £1.5 million revenues, growing to £5 million in year three and Scott-Healey is forecasting £10 million this year with the help of Brown who is focused on intensifying the company's organic and acquisition strategy – all supported by what Scott-Healey believes to be his biggest opportunity, 'the amazing people coming into our business'. "We are recruiting greatness," he stated. "These amazing minds present us with bags of opportunity, and Ian is a legend within our industry. I am excited that he is on board to help us steer the business in the right way." ■



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A new world of billing

Developments at Union Street Technologies show how billing services have become the linchpin for comms provider businesses of all sizes, according to Head of Sales and Marketing Vincent Disneur.

In billing, as with other technologies, what matters is investment aligned to strategic vision and Union Street ploughs an impressive £1 million each year into well planned R&D. It therefore has a good idea about how to deal with, and drive, market trends, with its influence most felt in the shift away from on-premise solutions to cloud-based delivery models.

“Union Street has embraced the cloud and is transforming its on-premise software delivery model to a cloud-based one, having invested R&D resource into developing a cloud proposition,” stated Disneur. “Powered by Microsoft’s Azure public cloud our hosted platform has been developed to offer elasticity in resources. Because of Azure’s flexible network infrastructure we’re able to instantly respond to increases in demand, proactively scaling up compute resource to manage capacity as required.”

Protecting data has never been more important or more challenging so Union Street built its platform from the ground up according to best practice for data security, delivering security levels comparable to those found in the financial sector. “We are

developing new products and services so that they can be leveraged around our hosted platform, ensuring they are cloud friendly, built on best practice and with a high focus on fault tolerance and data security,” said Disneur.

Last year the number of partners choosing to use Union Street’s Cloud Hosted Billing service exceeded those that chose to host aBILLity in their own environments. Almost all new partners opt to use the service. “It’s easy to see the appeal for CPs of cloud-based billing solutions,” added Disneur. “The ability to scale up resources, processing power and storage in times of peak demand lends itself well to billing environments. Cloud also offers mobility benefits as well as enhanced performance and availability. CPs are able to outsource the management of disaster recovery, data security, server maintenance and capacity at a cost-effective price point.”

Union Street still offers partners the choice of on-premise but, according to Disneur, deploying billing solutions in the cloud is ‘without doubt the way forward’. Another trend is the growing popularity of outsourcing the management of the billing platform, and



Vincent Disneur

Even larger CPs with dedicated billing personnel are opting to use Union Street’s bureau service

approximately a third of Union Street’s partners now use its bureau offering.

“Over the past year we’ve seen strong uptake of this service,” said Disneur. “Billing has become more complex and greater precision is required due to complicated pricing plans, inclusive usage, bundles, mobile tariffs etc. Mapping what’s been sold to what can be billed is more difficult and as a result many CPs in the SME space don’t have staff with the time, resources or expertise to effectively manage billing in-house. Even larger CPs with dedicated billing personnel are opting to use Union Street’s bureau service to manage much of the laborious work in the billing process.”

The increase in demand for its bureau service prompted Union Street to develop a web client for aBILLity. It features a streamlined invoice approval process so that partners can review and approve their invoices before they are dispatched.

Web client

“This is particularly useful for personnel who are involved in the approval process but for various reasons may spend time away from the office,” said Disneur. “The web client offers access to the most commonly used functionality the platform has to offer on any device with a web browser. We have tailored the available functionality to create a streamlined, uncluttered user experience with an enhanced user

interface that dynamically scales to fit whichever device it’s being viewed on.”

Billing platforms are evolving as a central point for back office integration and as a profit centre for CPs. The billing platform will usually be the core revenue generating software in the business and will most likely be the only software that’s been purpose built for use by CPs. It follows that integration should be structured around the billing platform to provide business process management between software packages across the business.

“Integration has been a key driver in the development of billing solutions,” observed Disneur. “A joined up back office solution based on best-of-breed software packages from various suppliers will deliver a host of benefits. These include a single point for data entry, reduced errors, up-to-date and synchronised data across all applications and a reduced workload for administrative staff. Naturally, this is creating ever increasing demand for integration and this demand is shaping the evolution of billing solutions.”

As well as the out-of-the-box integrations already developed Union Street is improving its API functionality for aBILLity to make it easier to integrate with third party back end systems, providing direct access to their services. Disneur added: “This will deliver significant benefits for our partners for quoting, ordering and provisioning of next generation network services, and feature enhanced options for configuring Ethernet services and supplementary services such as SIP and ISDN.” ■



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Openreach 'legal split'



LORRIN WHITE
BAMBOO TECHNOLOGY

“ It is the responsibility of network providers to work together with peers and ensure the new independent Openreach delivers real improvements to the industry. Openreach must double down on fibre investment if the UK is to remain competitive - especially post-Brexit. We look forward to hearing more from Openreach on its investment strategy and working with it to achieve a better service for all. ”



IAN FISHWICK
ADEPT

“ The key issue is that Openreach never had its own set of accounts because it wasn't a separate legal entity. Now there will be a clear set of financial results that show the profitability and cashflow generated by Openreach. In the last half year it was estimated that Openreach generated about 60% of all of BT's cash. This is important because many in the industry want to understand whether Openreach's cash was being used to upgrade UK infrastructure or pay for BT Sport rights for events such as The Champion's League. ”



BT's insignia will disappear



BOB FALCONER
GAMMA

“ I think this is a long awaited and welcome move forward. I agree with Sharon White that it should produce results far more quickly than a full structural separation would and of course it could be a step on the road to just that. Maybe I'm a natural optimist but it gives the CEO and board of Openreach a clear remit to get on with the job and not be distracted by BT Group requirements for cash of favour. The removal of the BT Logo from Openreach is more than just cosmetic. Customers that are not in our industry didn't understand the previous structure and the logo clearly gave the impression of a coherent group. All very welcome. ”



SIMON CATTERICK
QDOS

“ It could be argued that as Openreach's board was created by BT last year, and will have control over strategy, BT still calls the shots. BT's board will set the budget, although Openreach should be able to decide how to spend it. BT will still own the assets of the Openreach network, but the latter will manage them day-to-day. Openreach will be able to consult with customers such as Sky and TalkTalk on large-scale investments and it can have these conversations confidentially, without disclosing details to BT Group. Time will tell of course, but the legal separation of Openreach should improve competition and investment in Britain's broadband infrastructure. More money will go into the network, increasing the availability of ultrafast full-fibre broadband. ”

The independent sector has campaigned long and hard for BT to spin off Openreach in the hope that service levels will improve if the installation and maintenance giant is master of its own destiny.

In truth, although Ofcom has hailed this as a 'legal separation' it is not a fully autonomous arrangement, as BT's Openreach Board will continue to head up the company under a 'new governance agreement'.

This will mean the split won't take as much time to implement, with 32,000 employees moving over to Openreach under TUPE rules and, according to Ofcom, it will have the "smallest possible effect" on BT's pension scheme because the existing Crown Guarantee will be maintained for Openreach staff.

BT will however continue to provide Openreach's budget and can veto any CEO appointment if Ofcom approves the change.

"The new Openreach will be built to serve all its customers equally, working truly independently and taking investment decisions on behalf of the whole industry – not just BT," said Sharon White, Ofcom's energetic



ADRIAN BARNARD
ALPHABETA SOLUTIONS

“ The scale of the Italian debacle forced the BT Board's hand resulting in this sudden volte face. Whilst any progress with reform is welcome, this proposed 'separation' has a 'caught between two stools' look to it and its unsatisfactory for all other than BT Group (note the share price jump). The industry has not gained any real traction in this debate and UK Plc will not become a better connected (let alone 'Gig') economy as quick as it could were Openreach to be entirely separate and fully independent. It's time for those of us with influence in our industry to work together and make positive change a reality for all. ”



MARK CURTIS-WOOD
NIMANS

“ It's definitely a step in the right direction and little further forward but it's not what many people were hoping for. From an independent service provider's perspective, I just don't think it's enough. Going back right to the beginning, there are many who feel it should have been kept separate from the start. ”

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appear from Openreach service vehicles



FRASER FERGUSON
KUBENET

“ Smaller businesses in the UK deserve the same rights as consumers to reliable, cost effective and responsive services throughout the supply chain. Business demand for digital services, once the preserve of larger corporations, is now seeing small and medium companies looking for enterprise standard services. This has opened opportunities for mid-market providers like KubeNET to offer fully integrated services and therein lies the rub. Ofcom has for good reasons been obsessed with how Openreach has been handled by BT since the settlement of 2005, driven by the frustrations of the ‘big players’ like Vodafone, Virgin, SKY and TTB. And guess what - it is not just Openreach whose service levels, remain consistently frustrating! ”



MARK SAUNDERS
NINE WHOLESALE

“ A cautious welcome from me to this news and well done to FCS and others who have fought our corner here. Full separation was preferred, but the practical execution of that would have allowed BT to vacillate for many years, while service providers and customers continued to suffer. The devil may be in the detail, but I am mildly optimistic and let's face it, this can hardly be worse than the status quo, so all parties and Ofcom need to step up to the plate now and make this work. ”

Chief Executive who promises to monitor Openreach's performance going forwards.

“We welcome BT's decision to make these reforms, which means they can be implemented much more quickly. We will carefully monitor how the new Openreach performs, while continuing our work to improve the quality of service offered by all telecoms companies, she added”

This is not the full structural separation many channel leaders have called for, but it's a step in the right direction, as Simon Catterick CEO of QDOS Communications observed:

“The demand for data is increasing rapidly and the ageing network of copper wire needs to be updated. Whilst Openreach becoming a legally separate business within BT will have no impact on consumers for the foreseeable future, a separation in time should improve network speeds and availability.”

Broadly speaking, there is hope from our contributors that the split should herald a new age of better, more collaborative Openreach service, but scepticism remains because the bird still hasn't truly left the nest.



MARK CASEY
NEXUS IP

“ I'm sure the industry will welcome the news about the Openreach spin off, as long as the benefits are clear and tangible. It would have been better if there was more independence from BT, but equally they are an important component in providing the network. The appointment of the Openreach board will be an important aspect of the new company, as will their delegated powers of authority. I hope they will appoint strong Independent Non-Exec Directors to ensure that the only shareholder isn't allowed to over dictate the Openreach strategy, and delivery of same. Ultimately, the industry simply seeks to benefit from an efficient, cost effective and professional service that helps supports our customers' business growth. ”



DAVID POLLOCK
CHESS

“ Spinning Openreach into a BT subsidiary will not lead to an improvement in service as it continues to be in BT's best interest to deliver poor service to Openreach. BT knows that many customers believe that the only way to get good service through Openreach is to return to or stay a customer of BT Retail. Under investment and poor service by Openreach is a BT Retail customer retention strategy. The U.K. is ranked 23rd in the world for broadband speed despite being the 5th largest economy. Until Openreach is an independent company this won't improve! ”



CLIFFORD NORTON
CHANNEL TELECOM

“ While the industry seems to be focused on the belief that Openreach should be broken up, I wonder what the consequences of the split may look like for us on the ground. It seems to be mainly the larger companies who are pushing for the separation and we should each question the motives. Is it because they want better pricing for their businesses? A tiered pricing structure comes with an attached danger of rendering smaller companies uncompetitive. We need to all understand the downfalls as well as the positives that are produced by this new situation and approach with caution rather than be swept away with the idea that the grass is always greener. ”



ARON TEACHER
FIDELITY GROUP

“ This change effectively requires BT to build a firewall of sorts between itself and Openreach. As the split is not complete, the firewall has been breached 'from the start' as it has an inbuilt backdoor right back into BT. That said, a complete split of BT from Openreach would be the costliest option, which would not guarantee the improvement in delivery that the channel requires. It is particularly galling for the channel and the telecoms industry to see BT post massive profits for Openreach. The option to separate legally, as opposed to structurally, probably represents no more than a warning shot fired over BT's head and if significant improvements are not forthcoming, this will simply become another step on the journey to complete separation. ”

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Billing's higher status

In today's demanding and highly complex billing environment the ability to harness industry trends such as SaaS, integration and analytics has become a billing provider's rite of passage, according to Strategic Imperatives Managing Director Wail Sabbagh and Head of Business Development Tim Sayer.



Wail Sabbagh (left) and Tim Sayer

Forget low level features and cost. The evolution of billing systems is now driven by a complex array of requirements that keep software developers on their toes and CPs running away from a 'one system does it all' scenario towards best-of-breed systems. Therefore CRM, provisioning, ticket management and revenue assurance systems must easily communicate with the billing platform. "The drive for an enhanced user customer experience requires greater automation and more streamlined processes, and no single system is going to provide that," commented Sayer. "Resellers need strategic partners who have the knowledge and experience to deliver enhanced business processes and efficiencies. Just as resellers have shifted in recent years from selling kit into delivering solutions, billing vendors will need to be more consultative in their interactions."

SaaS, integration and analytics are re-shaping the face of billing. It is a case of adapt or die as the industry moves away from the

locally installed 'one system does it all' to best of breed integrated cloud applications. Secondary market drivers include usability, real-time analysis and fraud capabilities which are increasingly making the billing check list of many resellers. "The focus this year is to productise our investment in our analytics capabilities which will be seen by the channel as more of a revolution rather than an evolution," stated Sabbagh.

"We have been working with Amazon's Redshift, an elastic petabyte-scale data warehouse to introduce analytics functionality to the Elevate platform which in the past would have been beyond the reach of the majority of resellers and operators. Ultimately, if you are reacting to trends rather than anticipating and planning for them you are not giving customers the level of service they expect."

SaaS and integration have always formed part of Strategic Imperatives's core business and technology proposition. "There was no need for us to reengineer our offering for the cloud or to rework our platform to offer

APIs," commented Sabbagh. "Support for integration has driven our approach since we introduced SaaS into the channel in 2006. The majority of our customers are utilising our publicly exposed and documented API in some way.

Strategic focus

"Our focus and strategy therefore is very much targeted at aggregators and network operators where our familiarity of large scale projects, experience and mindset puts us in a position to consult on and deliver enterprise grade projects. From a systems and functionality point of view, this level of engagement means that our focus is driven much more by the need for high volume, concurrent processing and real-time analytics than by low level features."

Strategic Imperatives has supported this vision through the introduction of a set of interfaces and APIs to catalyse BSS and OSS integration. "This had an immediate impact on cost and the quality of our clients' operational capability by enabling full automation,"

added Sayer. "Our aim is to redefine billing as a strategic service delivered against strict SLAs rather than being the traditional software offering of yesteryear. The roll-out of Elevate has been successful with immediate and measurable benefits to our clients who have experienced a significant reduction in revenue leakage, faster product roll-out, reduced training costs and access to integration capabilities not available before. From the outset we wanted to reshape the billing landscape in terms functionality, usability, customer service and operating model. However, this is not a static goal therefore continued investment is needed to ensure that we extend our capabilities."

The evolution of billing providers from old style software companies to modern service providers will fundamentally change the relationship with the reseller community, believes Sabbagh. "Billing providers must demonstrate competence beyond what they are traditionally used to as they become accountable for new areas

such as disaster recovery, service monitoring, up time and on demand scalability," he explained. "In parallel, we will see the demise of purchasing applications, annual releases and multi-year commitment as the subscription model grows in popularity and takes hold."

Sabbagh also pointed to an evolution in the profile of resellers in the channel as they morph through acquisitions while sophisticated tech savvy new entrants emerge. "The dynamics are evolving beyond the traditional lines and calls mindset," he added. "This presents a fantastic opportunity for an agile and technically focused organisation such as Strategic Imperatives. I have no doubt that the billing landscape is fundamentally transforming into a modern cloud-based SLA driven service.

"The billing market is ripe for change and the signs are that this is happening now. While the move to a cloud and subscription-based model has been discussed in detail, some old fashioned concepts that still underpin the majority of billing systems are in need of urgent transformation. It is imperative that antiquated concepts such as closed systems, the bill run, batch processing and poor usability are archived firmly in the past. Perhaps the most contentious of these concepts is the monthly or weekly bill run which is more a side effect of historical technology limitations rather than a real business need. The future is a real-time, subscription-based customer billing model and many of the forward thinking operators are starting to head in that direction." ■

Leeds firm opens purpose-built state of the art data centre in the city, set to create 100 jobs

Firstnet, the Leeds based IT services provider, plans to create more than 100 jobs after opening its new multi-million-pound data centre in the city on March 7 2017 and its official launch event on April 6th. The purpose-built data centre, which is already operational enables Firstnet to extend its services portfolio to include managed hosting, cloud hosting, colocation services and more, all within its own fully managed, low carbon footprint data centre.

The datacentre will allow Firstnet to dramatically increase their capacity and capability: adding colocation, cloud platforms and disaster recovery to their portfolio of services, all from their single corporate umbrella.

The facility is a purpose-built data centre, rather than the conversion of an existing building. The data centre is carrier agnostic with multiple redundant connections in common with other leading UK data centres and also features multiple hardware failover, and



David and Angie Cusworth, co-owners of Firstnet, launch Firstnet Datacentre in Leeds.

enhanced levels of physical security. Firstnet's Leeds data centre will offer a level of service and quality which, following its planned upgrade to Tier III, will not be found elsewhere in the region.

Managing Director of Firstnet, David Cusworth, explained why his company had made such a significant investment

in the data centre, saying "The opportunity to expand and invest in this amazing purpose-built facility, and create Leeds' first certified Tier III data centre into the deal, was too good to miss. Our customers will now have access to the latest technology in managed services and a host of additional support, including office space with over 100 desks designed

specifically for workplace recovery and relocation needs."

Firstnet Solutions' modern, fully equipped data centre will join several existing data centres in Leeds in positioning the city as a 21st Century IT hub, and providing SMB's with essential data and IT services, complementing the city's existing data facilities. Firstnet's focus will be on serving the Reseller, SMB to corporate sectors.

Since its foundation in 2011, Firstnet has developed an enviable reputation for providing award winning IT services and solutions with a strong emphasis on delivering excellent customer service, this new data centre will enable Firstnet to offer new services and unparalleled additional benefits to its customers, initially focussing on serving Leeds and surrounding areas.

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Bodsworth on billing

Inform Billing greeted the dawn of 2017 with an almost ritual pledge to invest significantly in product development, ploughing in 45 per cent of total revenues this year, up five per cent on the past two years and on the back of doubled revenues over the same period. And according to Managing Director Shaun Bodsworth, the company's appetite to drive growth and gain greater market share has never been sharper.



Shaun Bodsworth

revenues will always be nervous about the scale of revenue reliant on one or two members of staff."

This is one reason why Bodsworth believes that the role of a billing software specialist will continue to evolve into that of a much needed solution provider. "We have always trained and supported resellers to become self-sufficient with their billing and increase control and visibility over their customer base," he commented. "But a clear trend can be seen in the growing number of resellers who recognise the value in adopting our bureau billing services."

At the very core of Derbyshire-based Inform Billing's company philosophy is a belief in the importance of independent billing propositions for resellers rather than network or aggregator provided options, which in conjunction with other market approaches taken by Bodsworth creates a safe pair of hands for businesses of all sizes. "Demand for our bureau services has continued to grow," stated Bodsworth. "More and more resellers of all sizes are happier to take advice and guidance from us and use our bureau billing team as an extension of their own. This is reflected in the fact that Inform Billing now provides a bureau service to over 70 customers. It's often the additional support and guidance that we provide that gives us the edge on our competition."

Bodsworth also noted an increase in the number of

IT providers expanding into voice resale with VoIP and SIP propositions. "But these new entrants often treat voice as a value-add rather than an additional profit stream," stated Bodsworth. "In time this may lead to an erosion of revenue and profit from telecoms, leading to a decline in service quality and investment. This is relevant to billing because we are closely involved in the delivery of the commercial contract – the tariffs. It can also impact on a billing partner's profitability where commercials are based on billing revenue."

Challenges

With the advent of SIP, Bodsworth is also seeing an increasing number of fledgling VoIP providers 'colliding' with the feature set that is available to them. He explained: "By this I mean that the broad functionality that is available in a hosted VoIP platform, such as number spoofing, and the ease in which this

can be switched on and off and transferred, is causing significant challenges to the billing industry because of the lack of traditional unique identifiers, or billing CLIs."

Cloud is also a big trend, with most of Inform Billing's customers opting for its cloud-hosted platform.

"Billing of cloud-based services is also starting to gather momentum," stated Bodsworth. "Collation of data relating to Infrastructure as a Service, such as hosted licensing and cloud backups, is challenging for the providers of those services, which in-turn has knock-on effects for resellers and their billing partners. We need to work together to facilitate the billing of cloud-based services by utilising the experience and maturity of the telecoms industry."

Against this backdrop, billing providers such as Inform Billing ensure that they are able to adapt their solutions

to other areas outside of traditional telecoms. "In some instances this is simply a case of terminology within our software to make it less specific, but at times requires further product development to accommodate these additional or alternative services," said Bodsworth.

Key role

The role of a billing provider has always been a combination of providing a software solution as well as training and support to maximise the feature set of the software. In recent times there has been shift towards 'Billing as a Service' whereby resellers, both small and large, are looking for a more outsourced service that is affordable and scalable.

"This can be for a variety of reasons," noted Bodsworth. "A small start-up reseller may purely want to focus on selling and technical support while an established reseller with significant

For many years one of the biggest headaches facing billing providers, resellers and more broadly the industry as a whole, is the way in which billing data is produced and understood. "As a member of the FCS Billing Group we have worked with our peers to encourage the standardisation of formats," commented Bodsworth.

"To some extent this has helped the industry. However, there are still different interpretations of the 'standardised' format and many providers still do their own thing.

"Over the longer-term Inform Billing will continue to evolve its service in-line with the needs of the telecoms industry, but we will also pursue opportunities that we identify outside of our traditional customer base where our skills and software can be transferred. For example, we already provide billing services to clients operating in the healthcare, security, hospitality and banking industries." ■

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Industry ready to acclaim

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DAN PROCTOR - HENRY HOWARD, SPONSOR BEST PARTNER PROGRAMME OF THE YEAR AWARD

"Henry Howard Finance are delighted to be sponsoring the 'Best Channel Partner Programme' for the first time at this year's Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards. It is important to recognise the hard work and achievements of the channel sales & marketing teams and initiatives that make the channel such a success. We look forward to networking, supporting and celebrating with our industry colleagues on the big day."



GARRY GROWNS – DAISY WHOLESALE SPONSOR, VENDOR CHANNEL ACCOUNT TEAM OF THE YEAR AWARD

"The channel holds great importance for Daisy Wholesale so we're delighted to again be sponsoring the Vendor Channel Account Team of the Year at the Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards. This award celebrates excellence within the channel, including outstanding sales efforts, amazing achievements and the strong relationships that have been built with clients. The Awards are the ideal platform for highlighting your capabilities, achievements and rewarding your 'super stars' in magnificent style."



PAUL GIBBS – TELCOSWITCH SPONSOR, BEST COMPANY TO WORK AWARD

"We're proud to be supporting an award which celebrates office culture and recognises those companies who are creating an inspirational working environment. Our own success to date is down to the time we invest in our people and our partners and it's fantastic to see an award which recognises this kind of ethos. We wish the very best of luck to all the teams that enter and we look forward to celebrating the achievements on the day."



JUSTIN BLAINE – NTA LTD SPONSOR, DISTRIBUTION CHANNEL ACCOUNT TEAM OF THE YEAR AWARD

"NTA is really pleased to have chosen to sponsor an award at the 2017 Comms Dealer Sales and Marketing Awards for the first time as it gives us a valuable platform to spotlight the company's extended portfolio and align our brand with industry winners. "Rewarding excellence in the hardworking channel sales and marketing community is close to our hearts and we would like to wish the finalists the very best of luck."



PAUL TAYLOR – VOICEFLEX SPONSOR, RESELLER BEST MARKETING CAMPAIGN AWARD

"The Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards has grown tremendously in stature over the years. Successful sales and marketing is all about securing business and creating a winning mentality within the team. It's a pleasure to present an award and see the sheer delight on the faces of the winners as it shows how much they care about what they have achieved and proving that they the 'best of the best'."



DEBBIE ROBERTSON – 8X8 – SPONSOR, RESELLER SALES TEAM OF THE YEAR (£5M +) AWARD

"The Comms Dealer Sales and Marketing Awards presentation luncheon is always a fantastic afternoon that celebrates the very best sales and marketing teams our industry has to offer. The awards have long been known for excellence in communications, whether rewarding vendor solutions, resellers, innovative technology or outstanding customer service. We'd like to wish the finalists the best of luck and we're looking forward to celebrating your achievements in London."



sales and marketing stars

THIS YEAR'S FINALISTS...

COMMS DEALER SALES & MARKETING AWARDS 2017 SHORTLIST



ANDY GRANT – BOWAN ARROW HOSPITALITY SPONSOR

"The Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards truly is a motivational industry event and the accolades don't just stop at the awards as the benefits for the finalists are felt across the entire year. The finalists celebrate their success with their colleagues and team mates which creates strong team bonds. Plus, the sales and marketing programmes featured always push the boundaries and explore new ways to meet customers and partner's needs."



BARRY TUFFS – UNIFY SPONSOR, BEST APPRENTICE SCHEME AWARD

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CLIFFORD NORTON – CHANNEL TELECOM SPONSOR, RESELLER SALES TEAM OF THE YEAR (UP TO £2.5M) AWARD

"The Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards offer a fantastic platform to recognise the hard work the Sales and Marketing teams put in towards making our businesses flourish. We feel that they are an important calendar event that rewards and honours our valued teams that work behind the scenes. We can't wait for the 2017 ceremony in May and the very best of luck to all the industry finalists."



VINCENT DISNEUR – UNION STREET SPONSOR, RESELLER SALES TEAM OF THE YEAR (UP TO £2.5M- £5M) AWARD

"There are few business environments as competitive as the telecoms channel. To stand out from the crowd requires the highest levels of professionalism, dedication and commitment. It is right that the efforts of our industry's top performing sales and marketing teams should be recognised in spectacular fashion and this is what makes the Comms Dealer Sales Awards such an important event in the industry calendar. The best of luck to all this year's finalists."

Reseller Sales Team of the Year up to £2.5m (small)

- City Talk Communications
- Cloudsource Technologies
- GHM Communications
- Loop Voice and Data
- Nexus IP
- Pure Telecom
- Solution IP
- TWL Voice and Data

Reseller Sales Team of the Year £2.5m- £5m (medium)

- Exsel Group
- Frontier Voice and Data
- Glamorgan Telecom
- Infinity Group

Reseller Sales Team of the Year £5m plus (large)

- Berry Telecom
- Focus Group
- NetConsult
- STL
- SW Comms

Reseller Best Marketing Campaign

- Cisilion
- IP Solutions
- Lily Comms
- Nexus IP
- Peach Technologies

Service Provider Channel Sales Team of the Year

- Agilitas
- Channel Telecom
- Daisy Wholesale
- New Star Networks
- Pangea

Service Provider Channel Marketing Team of the Year

- Agilitas
- Channel Telecom
- Fidelity Group

Service Provider Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year

- Agilitas
- Assembly Channel Services
- Channel Telecom
- Fidelity Group
- Pangea
- Plan.com
- Text Local
- Voiceflex

Distributor Channel Sales Team of the Year

- Nimans
- Pragma
- ProVu
- Siphon
- Zycko

Distributor Channel Marketing Team of the Year

- Pragma
- ProVu
- Nimans

Distributor Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year

- DMSL
- Pragma
- ProVu

Vendor Best Partner Programme

- Gamma
- Pangea
- Splice.com
- TelcoSwitch
- Teleware
- Tollring
- Unify

Vendor Channel Sales Team of the Year

- BT Wholesale
- Entanet
- Sennheiser
- TelcoSwitch
- Union Street
- Virtual1

Vendor Channel Marketing Team of the Year

- BT Wholesale
- Entanet
- Gamma
- Inform Billing

Vendor Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year

- Entanet
- TelcoSwitch
- Union Street
- Xarios Technologies

Best Partner/ Customer Event

- BT
- Channel Telecom
- Cisilion
- Fidelity Group
- Gamma
- NGC Networks
- Pragma

Best Partner/ Customer Portal

- Daisy Wholesale
- Entanet
- Fidelity Energy
- Gamma
- ICUK
- Plan.com
- ProVu
- Virtual1

Best Company to Work For

- Berry Telecom
- Complete IT
- Channel Telecom
- Chess
- Cisilion
- Entanet
- Exertis
- Lily Comms
- Peach Technologies
- Virtual1

Best Apprentice Scheme

- Boxx Communications
- BT
- Databarracks
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- Frontier Voice and Data
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Edinburgh goes digital

The realisation of Edinburgh's digital vision shows how the power of partnerships overcame many unique challenges during the roll out of a pure fibre network across Scotland's iconic capital. Here, James McClafferty, CityFibre's Development Lead for the region, provides an insight into how Edinburgh's digital transformation was achieved.

As CityFibre moves to open more of its metro networks to all providers, Edinburgh is emblematic of a city transformed by an investment in 150km of pure fibre infrastructure (and counting). It's an initial build that's been achieved through strong partnership with service providers and local Government and was all but complete in just nine months. It's also proved that even the challenges of hilly terrain, treasured cobbles and conservation need not stand in the way of a brand new fibre infrastructure build when the job is placed in the right hands.

The Gigabit City model touches more than just Edinburgh. "It's a movement that defines our founding business model, the city-by-city approach we've taken to become a credible national communications infrastructure alternative," said McClafferty. "We have 19 Gigabit Cities across the UK in total, including four in Scotland. Beyond that a further 23 metro networks are poised to join this new

generation of digitally unleashed urban areas."

Each Gigabit City launch is triggered hand-in-hand with at least one local 'anchor' partner. In the case of Edinburgh that partner was Scotland-based provider Commsworld which in turn was the chosen partner of CGI and the City of Edinburgh Council. Together, a vision to transform the digital future of an entire city has been realised through a pure fibre, modern network infrastructure build that now connects 324 public buildings including 130 schools and has already put affordable gigabit connectivity in reach of 7,000 businesses. As future extension continues, an estimated 17,000 businesses are set to benefit.

While Commsworld steered the network build based on its knowledge of business clusters and those most in need, a joint 'Gig-Up' Edinburgh campaign delivered over 300 pre-registrations from businesses keen to take advantage. The Council had its own sites to connect as well as some



James McClafferty

specific requirements of the new network, including resilient, gigabit capable connectivity for schools and rapid speed of deployment. "The council's existing contract was coming to an end so the project had to be completed at pace to a tight deadline," said McClafferty. "The build was not without attendant challenges either. A city so rich in heritage means conservation areas. Cobbles not only had to be lifted and reinstated but stored securely off-site. And there were periods, including the Edinburgh Festival, when the build was stopped so that roads could flow freely to support the influx of tourists."

Embarking on such an ambitious partnership is not without its risks to an anchor provider of any size, but Commsworld was more than up for the challenge,

leading significant parts of the relationship and going into the project with maximum commitment. In partnership with CityFibre, Commsworld not only secured the digital future of Edinburgh's rapidly growing technology sector and established financial services industry, but achieved it with respect for the heritage and people of one of the UK's most attractive cities.

Partnership

In return for its commitment and investment, Commsworld enjoyed a significant period of exclusive access to order over the new network, one that it used to reinforce its position as a true telecoms industry innovator (evidenced through its use of dark fibre to build differentiated solutions to serve Edinburgh's businesses). "From the outset though, everyone understood the Edinburgh network

would eventually need to serve tens of thousands of sites," added McClafferty. "To realise that goal we are now opening it up to all, giving the network the potential to grow to reach every nook and cranny of this iconic city. One day maybe we'll even serve gigabit speeds to families living in Edinburgh's historic tenements themselves!"

The doors to Edinburgh's new network are now wide open to all providers, together with a growing number of CityFibre's other Gigabit City networks (including neighbouring Aberdeen). Across each open CityFibre metro footprint providers can gain flexible access to tried and tested dark fibre provision as well as symmetrical, gigabit speed Internet services. On top of this is a range of dedicated Ethernet products soon to be launched.

More Gigabit Cities will be added to the pack too. Some will undoubtedly have a service provider as an anchor, others will come to life via a local council or a mobile network operator requirement and will be open to all providers from the outset. "Delivering a fully open access national fibre network is our next phase of evolution," commented McClafferty. "For CityFibre, it's now about balancing ongoing support for our founding partners with the desire to welcome new ones onboard. The more sites we connect together, the bigger our pure fibre network will grow and the faster we'll help to deliver the breadth of modern, pure fibre infrastructure that UK businesses so desperately need." ■



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Cloud puts IT resellers on call for hosted voice

Cloud computing has enabled a new relationship between IT resellers and telephony to develop, epitomised by Westcoast's move into hosted voice in partnership with NFON UK. Here, NFON UK's Managing Director Rami Houbby outlines why the time is right for all IT resellers to 'find their voice'.

The channel market has changed beyond recognition in the last ten years. IT has moved from hardware to software and the revenue opportunities have moved from big margins to ongoing annuity payments. Many IT resellers resisted the shift and they are regretting it now. The responsibility for this market shift lies squarely at the door of cloud computing. It's been a hard adjustment retraining staff and educating customers, but the battle has been won. The key question now is – what's next?

The next market disruptor

The answer is voice – namely cloud telephony. Previously the entry barrier into voice was extremely high as there was a high level of investment required. Cloud telephony is fundamentally different. Not only is it easy to deploy and maintain, it offers a huge number of benefits in terms of building customer loyalty and selling value added services.

The market opportunity is unprecedented. Illuma Research indicates that the cloud telephony segment is increasing by 50 per cent to 100 per cent year-on-year. Currently, five per cent of the UK business telecoms market is cloud-based and this is only going to increase, largely driven by customer demand. The fact is that customers just want one supplier for IT and communications.

Navigate the hurdles

Obviously, from a reseller perspective the priority is how easily the product can be sold. The key is communicating the benefits to customers. Firstly, there is the opex versus capex benefit as it's a subscription-based service. Plus it is fully scalable and can easily accommodate the changing dynamic of a business.

As hosted telephony is cloud-based it brings much simpler automated management, deployment and provisioning. And



Rami Houbby

there are huge operational efficiencies: Updates can be applied across the whole customer base, whereas an on-premise solution requires on-site updates, which mean delays and increased costs. Ultimately, cloud telephony is just another IT application running on the network.

Getting started couldn't be simpler as it's an out-of-the-box solution that resellers can easily train themselves on. To ensure success from the outset, preparation is key to ensure a seamless shift to cloud telephony. Customers want, need and deserve a seamless migration with no downtime when they move from their old setup to their new cloud system. To avoid this, it's all about documentation of the process and following

the installation guidelines correctly. The feedback we have had from IT resellers has been phenomenal. They usually start small with basic telephony offerings then move up and big. As their partnership level increases they can also benefit from our assistance with marketing, event co-sponsorship and lead generation.

Tips for making the shift

If you aren't already convinced to make the move to cloud telephony then it's worthwhile looking at what's happening in the distributor market. Distributors have a big role to play in helping IT resellers realise the shift to voice via cloud telephony, as they can aggregate multiple cloud services and offer them to their network of partners.

Westcoast is a great example of best practice and how the distributor industry is changing. In February we announced that Westcoast is adding our cloud telephony product portfolio to its range of cloud services, enabling its IT partners to make this seamless shift to voice. In their own words, 'cloud telephony perfectly complements our product set and company ethos, which is to be continually innovating and adding value'. There's no getting away from it – for IT resellers to survive and thrive they need to evolve their business to become a one-stop shop for all ICT needs for customers, and differentiate by having a consolidated product set and outstanding customer service.

To do this successfully requires the business to be a well oiled machine with automated processes and prepared off-the-shelf pre-packaged services that are easy for customers to order and deploy. There is no need to waste time and resources developing bespoke solutions. Service delivery is paramount and although cloud products are increasingly becoming simplified, resellers have that crucial role in bringing it all together for their customers to avoid interruption to their business, while having an excellent experience.

The present is cloud computing, the future is cloud telephony. The sooner that IT resellers make the shift, the sooner they can reap the rewards. ■

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Hosted telephony falls in

The existing skill sets displayed by IT resellers in networking and security and their trusted supplier status among customer bases is clear evidence of their potential to become disruptive providers of hosted telephony and Unified Communications.

Cloud computing has shifted telephony into the comfort zone of IT resellers and landed hosted comms into their laps. They're already skilled in talking about data and they understand the principles behind a customer's infrastructure and what is required to allow each component of a solution to work. "The IT partner will also understand the need for voice to be prioritised over a data circuit," said Andrew Smethurst, Head of Channel – UC at Gamma. "IT resellers only really need to think about how they can accommodate billing for voice calls. That is easily resolved with the many billing services available."

There is no sweeter spot than an IT reseller's existing customer base, believes Smethurst. Customers are becoming more demanding of their suppliers and their



Russell Horton

The skill sets required for data networking are similar between telecoms and IT.

solutions are getting more integrated. This plays into the hands of the IT reseller. "For customers that invest their trust in an IT reseller's ability to meet their IT and data requirements, it is only a small leap of faith to add voice to that solution," he added. "An IT reseller just needs to engage with their base and be consultative to sell all manner of bolt-on services. IT resellers are in the lead role for a customer's future comms consumption. They should aim to partner with a supplier that can complement their existing portfolio with a service that is easy to provision, support and maintain, and has the right billing options."

Elitetele.com has a traditional telecommunications background but its acquisition of two IT companies last year gave it an insight into the differences between telecoms and IT and how best to bring joined up solutions to market. "The skill sets required for data networking are similar between telecoms and IT, but traditional IT resellers typically don't have experience in ISDN, CPS, SIP or PBX," said Russell Horton, COO, Elitetele.com. "PBX in particular, when you get above the 25 seat space, requires strong skills and knowledge specific to the product manufacturer and in areas such as contact centres, hunt groups, night service, voice recording and PCI compliance."



Andrew Smethurst

IT resellers only really need to think about how they can accommodate billing for voice calls. That is easily resolved with the many billing services available.

Products such as Office 365, Skype and Azure are driving market demand and prompting more organisations to embark on cloud-first strategies. So resellers need to become experts in these areas to give best advice on how to integrate these with legacy investments, UC requirements, SIP and connectivity.

"In moving the PBX to the cloud the best fit for a client over 25 seats often won't be a multi-tenant platform, but a dedicated virtual server instance," added Horton. "This can have the benefits of being hosted in the cloud, charged on an opex basis with disaster recovery and back-up options built in, yet still be bespoke to the requirements of the client including integration to their CRM system."

Where IT resellers don't have experience of PBXs the 1-25 multi-tenant hosted PBX is the easiest way for them to enter the market, particularly if the client does not have complex call management requirements, noted Horton. Another entry point for IT resellers is integrating Skype for UC with a client's PBX system for the voice element. The main manufacturers have Skype integration in place and this brings into play the IT element of Skype without the complexities of full enterprise voice.

Single supplier

"Convergence of technologies is happening now," added Horton. "We have clients with the LAN and WAN shared for voice and data who want a single supplier to manage both. Clients are migrating towards the cloud both

for IT and UC but want a supplier who can advise them on how to integrate the two. Telephony players are recognising convergence and building or acquiring IT skills. If IT resellers don't partner or invest to add voice to their solution set then elements of their IT revenue will come under increasing competition."

Many forward looking IT resellers have been selling hosted voice for some time. But as the cloud becomes more established the adoption of UC in organisations of all sizes and across many different sectors is accelerating. For many of these organisations, their trusted IT reseller is the first port of call having most likely run their email and server for many years. "This gives them an advantage in discussing the merits of cloud telephony," emphasised Charles Aylwin, Director or Channel and Public Sector, 8x8. "Customers are likely to turn to their IT resellers in the first instance for all of their technical questions. Having built a good reputation within an organisation, IT resellers are well positioned to broaden their existing offering and help their customers take the next step."

If IT resellers are not offering UC to their end users, someone else will, warned Aylwin, who pointed out that competition comes from their IT reseller counterparts



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to the lap of IT resellers

and communications companies that are adding IT capabilities, which is a reflection of wider trends in the market. "Communications and IT is converging," added Aylwin. "At the bottom end of the market smartphones are commonplace and sophisticated consumer apps are increasingly filtering into the workplace. At the top end, however, the focus is on optimising the call centre environment and providing a common platform that delivers information to agents in real-time across multiple channels in a way that's clear and easy to understand. The underlying point here is that businesses are adopting convergence, looking for operational efficiency, greater flexibility and an improved working environment for their staff."

Aylwin also highlighted mobility, collaboration and data analytics as key areas of interest. "Customers realise the benefits because they improve business efficiency," he explained. "The convergence of communications and IT within the UC space makes it an easy conversation for traditional IT resellers to start with their customers. As an industry we have to talk to clients about the tangible business benefits. The good news is that technology is getting smarter and this is making it easier to demonstrate which products can solve which problems."

As more organisations become comfortable with accessing storage and computer power in the cloud they more readily consider cloud-based communications as an option. "Many IT resellers have already become



Charles Aylwin

The convergence of communications and IT within the UC space makes it an easy conversation for traditional IT resellers to start with their customers.

managed service providers around security and selling SaaS offerings," said Adrian Hipkiss, Managing Director for EMEA, ShoreTel. "This has entailed creating a service organisation ethos, skills base and infrastructure that's transferable to supporting cloud telephony. With cloud-based UC becoming a real trend in the market, IT resellers can be well placed to help integrate these services with other applications."

Market shift

IT resellers need to build out their capabilities and take advantage of a big shift in the market, believes Hipkiss, who cited new research to support his argument. "We surveyed British businesses earlier this year and found that almost 40 per cent were planning on transitioning to cloud-based UC," he explained. "Mid-market enterprises are looking for communications systems that flex with their business models, are more distributed and reliant on remote and flexible working. Cloud-based communications answers these requirements without the need for new capital expenditure."

Software as a service is reshaping the whole sector and the distinctions between resellers will continue to blur, pointed out Hipkiss. "The channel is becoming a managed service provider business model," he added. "That's going to be a challenge for partners who don't invest in new skills and form the right partnerships with vendors that have also woken up to how customers want a choice of cloud, on-premise and hybrid solutions."

As we have seen in this article, the advent of cloud computing has given the IT channel a way to completely sidestep many of the traditional barriers to offering voice. The most obvious change is the removal of the need for dedicated hardware. Not only can resellers and their customers significantly reduce the hardware cost of voice services, but resellers no longer need to invest in the skills and resources required to install, manage and support a complex hardware infrastructure for customers, according to Paul Clarke, Regional Manager UK & Ireland at

3CX. "Instead, a virtual PBX can offer voice services to organisations' existing softphones, or even PCs and smartphones by removing the need for companies to invest in additional hardware," he stated.

The major challenge for IT resellers, Clarke believes, is one of mindset. "Many customer organisations will be stuck in the traditional view of voice services as complex to install and expensive to run," he said. "As a result, the IT channel needs to be knowledgeable on the benefits of cloud telephony. Most importantly, it needs to focus on how cloud telephony is a complete break from the traditional hardware-based approach."

Demand factors

The market hot spots are businesses in industries experiencing rapid growth, as these organisations need to connect their expanding workforce, noted Clarke. "Cloud-based telephony enables these organisations to access additional lines simply and cheaply, giving the channel the perfect opening to suggest a cloud approach," he explained. "To generate additional revenues



Paul Clarke

IT resellers should see the provision of telephony services as a gateway to selling comprehensive UC solutions.

in the future, IT resellers should see the provision of telephony services as a gateway to selling comprehensive UC solutions that integrate telephony with other communication services such as instant messaging and video conferencing. Telephony is a basic requirement and therefore an easy sell, but the technology comes into its own when coupled with other communication channels as part of a wider unified communications solution."

Mike Rogerson, UK Business Development Manager at Akixi, re-emphasised that IT resellers are in a strong position because they already understand networks and security. "IT resellers have the skills and tools needed to investigate local network issues," he said. "This makes a compelling argument for them to sell and manage VoIP or SIP services along with the traditional IT support and networking options."

"IT resellers risk isolating themselves if they do not include a voice component. The biggest challenge for them is finding the right partner to work with for voice, and learning about a new hosted VoIP platform can take time. But everyone in any business needs the ability to communicate. IT resellers who do not offer this service to their customers will miss out on addressing the growing market for cloud telephony which is continuously developing. Hosted telephony enables IT resellers to provide their customers with a scalable subscription-based service with automated management, deployment and provisioning."

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March into UC territory

Traditional telecoms providers can do little to head off a growing number of advancing IT resellers who have got to grips with cloud telephony and UC, according to Steve Harris, EVP Unified Communications for Nuvias Group and SIPHON Managing Director.

The launch of the E5 Cloud PBX license pack by Microsoft has accelerated a step-change in the UK market towards the availability of a full UC solution via the IT reseller community, according to Harris. It has also prompted legacy voice PBX resellers to seriously consider adding Microsoft to their portfolio. "This looks set to bring legacy players into direct competition with IT resellers in their space," he said. "Ultimately, the emergence of genuine UC solutions available through a pure consumption model is blurring voice, video and IT. As a trend, this is driving all resellers to look at adding voice services to their portfolio to complement their other cloud services."

IT resellers should set out a strategy to sell full UC solutions rather than focusing on the voice element alone, believes Harris, as this is a space where there's already a prevalent group of traditional resellers and vendors. "It's when IT resellers combine the power of UC with their IT experience that they're able to take on the legacy voice resellers," he

commented. "By finding the right technology partner who can help lay the foundations to give them an early mover advantage IT resellers can tap into the more lucrative UC market and genuinely conquer the legacy competition."

Voice services have traditionally needed skilled technical engineers to be sent to a customer site to install, configure and support premise-based equipment, with any customisation being both difficult and expensive to achieve. "But the cloud has created a much more cost-effective and simplified delivery mechanism," noted Harris. "The focus is now on the user interface with voice being simply another application that's supported within a cloud environment. This has lowered the barriers to entry and encouraged many other organisations to consider adding voice services to their portfolio offering."

Harris also noted that IT resellers have already made significant progress in converting their business models from project-based revenues to recurring revenues. This is applicable



Steve Harris

IT resellers can tap into the UC market and conquer the legacy competition

to many of their IT products and applications as professional services and cloud subscription revenues replace large one-off perpetual license sales. "The other great advantage for IT resellers is that because they are not cannibalising any of their existing revenue streams it's less risky to be a disruptive force in the voice market," pointed out Harris. "With that comes an alluring commercial upside."

On the flip side, while it's convenient for emerging players to simply treat

voice as they would any other IT application, to oversimplify the comparison means they run the risk of underestimating the complexity involved in delivering voice services that meet user expectations. "As a real-time application voice is highly sensitive to packet delays that cause degradation in the quality of service," explained Harris. "In fact, the level of service engineering required and complexity involved in setting up say, hunt-groups, can lead to dissatisfaction if the actual usage

scenarios are overlooked during the planning and implementation phases.

"This is simply because the user is already familiar with these more sophisticated features in the system they're being migrated away from, and they expect parity when they move across to the cloud-based service. The best way for IT resellers to deliver customer-centric voice services is to avoid potential pitfalls by partnering with companies that can help them up-skill on voice, while supporting them in the delivery of a viable solution from which they can offer a tailored set of services."

Harris believes that distributors should focus on becoming end-to-end technology enablers for resellers, serving to underpin their offering from a product or service supply standpoint, right through each critical phase from design, migration and deployment, provisioning and technical support to service launch and beyond.

With the support of channel partners IT resellers can build on their strengths to master the more complex voice services. "They have the innate advantage of better understanding the concept of UC, simply because UC is delivered as an application to either desktop or mobile in the same way as many of their existing services," said Harris. "The most forward thinking cloud service providers and resellers are spending more time, money and effort on driving adoption of the UC applications. The market is changing rapidly and those who want to succeed need to move quickly."

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New channel for voice

IT resellers should waste no time in securing a slice of the cloud telephony market they ultimately helped to create, says Avner Peleg, Customer Development Director, hSo.

Cloud telephony products and services sit within the business software market created and served by IT resellers. Therefore it would be folly for IT providers to ignore what is happening under their noses in the hosted voice and UC space. Why? Because software-based voice products are their meat and drink. They are easy to implement, come with substantial business benefits, require low investment and are scalable. "Just a few years ago an IT reseller would think it barmy to offer voice," said Peleg. "Today, thanks to the cloud, the market has evolved and it's much easier for IT resellers to climb on the bandwagon."

Before installing hosted telephony all resellers should ensure that the customer's network is up to the challenge to avoid inconsistent user experiences. "The rise of cloud computing has placed heavy demands on Internet speeds and IT infrastructure," noted Peleg. "It's important to avoid the cheaper hosted voice services and make sure your supplier has got your back in terms of connectivity."

Once a cloud-based voice product is sold, resellers can add other services and become a 'partner of choice'

for later cloud investment. From back-up, disaster recovery, software-as-a-service and more, there is a host of IT products resellers can build on. "Cloud services are designed to be easy to use and simple to implement," commented Peleg. "Companies are thirsty for scalable products that are flexible enough to meet their demands and bring tangible business benefits."

These customer demands might include flexible working. Many employees now work from home, coffee shops and co-working spaces etc. "Companies need to manage remote workers via cloud-based phone products, keeping in touch with them when they're on the go," added Peleg. "Focusing on the benefits of hosted voice in a mobile-first world is a priority when pitching to prospects. The rise of flexible working has meant that the tools to communicate should be as good, if not better, as the ones employees have access to in the office."

Transformational

According to Peleg, we also need to take a serious look at the relationship between the Internet of Things (IoT) and hosted telephony. "Hosted voice has already changed the way people communicate. It made it seamless, multi-modal and



Avner Peleg

service product proposition that encourages customers to stay with them."

Another important consideration is that sales people within reseller businesses might need incentivising. "Cloud-based subscriptions are typically based on monthly payments, not one-off big ticket annual fees," added Peleg. "So the potential returns to a sales person from a cloud product could appear quite small when compared to an expensive IT suite. Suppliers might consider helping resellers in incentivising their own sales staff. What's more, resellers should consider working with suppliers that can offer both capex and opex models. Giving end customers the option of choosing between the two different systems can make or break the deal. If resellers show true flexibility regarding end user requirements they will be more likely to win the business."

Companies do not just want a cloud product, they also want an expert to advise them on how they can develop and grow their infrastructure. "Customers want a partner that can help them design and implement their own cloud migration path, someone that analyses each scenario uniquely and brings a unique solution to it," stated Peleg. "This may require resellers, distributors and sales people to up-skill and learn more about this side of IT so they can educate their customers. In short, resellers need to become Managed Service Providers offering a full suite of services, turning to their supplier partners for help when required."

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The market has evolved significantly and it's much easier for IT resellers to climb on the bandwagon

ultra-flexible," he explained. "Today, with cloud VoIP and UC a user can interact with other users and control multiple devices more efficiently. IoT will strengthen that ability. Many devices can already be controlled remotely. It's not a stretch any more to think that with IoT a company will be able to connect devices, business applications and smart products and do business much more productively. These are more reasons

for IT resellers to seriously consider the move to hosted voice. It's just the beginning of the IoT revolution."

Distributors have an important role to play in giving resellers a bigger slice of this pie, believes Peleg, who urges them to work with one main supplier partner. "This way resellers build a relationship with their partner, develop knowledge of each other's capabilities and gain mutual confidence in selling together," he commented. "So work with a supplier who can help to promote and bundle complementary services to support application performance. Resellers who offer a cloud-based telephony product but not additional services such as connectivity or monitoring should partner with a supplier that does provide these offerings. This will enable resellers to supply a full



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Time to act says Carter

For IT resellers, the scare stories about 'voice' belong in the distant past. Now, data VARs risk looking back and asking – what took us so long? Here, DMSL Managing Director John Carter urges IT resellers to follow their instinct and do what comes naturally.

Cloud telephony has been hailed as a brave new dawn for IT resellers but its adoption by data VARs should already be routine. "The advent of cloud computing has made selling voice easy," stated Carter. "We have widely available and affordable high speed broadband along with proven VoIP services and growing confidence in the cloud. IT resellers have not found it too complicated."

IT reseller businesses have an established B2B customer base and most of them won't yet have considered VoIP. "It's therefore an opportunity to introduce a new service that will reduce costs and enhance efficiency," added Carter. "It's an opportunity to add real value and drive customer loyalty and retention. IT resellers provide the network over which a voice service will run, so VoIP is just another IP-based service. Most IT resellers will have the technical acumen to understand the technology, implement and support it."

As well as earning good commissions on the initial sale IT resellers are empowered to drive recurring

revenue income as they build up their customer base. Invariably, customers who try hosted voice will subscribe to additional seats and functions, meaning that growth is sustained. "We work with resellers all over the UK and we're seeing phenomenal rates of interest in hosted voice," added Carter. "It's a great time to be moving into the market, secure new clients, offer added value and retain customers by making sure they don't get tempted to look at VoIP options on offer elsewhere."

Penetration levels among SMBs in particular is still low, noted Carter, who urged IT resellers to establish a presence on a regional basis or in a vertical market to more quickly grow their businesses. "It's key to take the first step as soon as possible," he added. "That's what's really important because the market is ready for hosted voice right now. By delaying their entry, IT resellers risk losing out on new business and losing customers."

"While VoIP has the potential to generate significant long-term revenues on its



John Carter

own there is the potential to offer mobile, UC, integration with CRM and other apps and additional more advanced services. Once IT resellers have taken their first steps the next ones will come naturally."

Partner support

Implementing any technology for the first time presents challenges so it's important for IT resellers to know that their supplier partner is there to help them along the way. "Generally, we find that IT resellers, especially those with good networking experience, take to it quickly," said Carter. "There may be one or two small technical issues to overcome, but most IT resellers are good at problem solving so they usually get along perfectly well after the first couple of installs."

In the IT channel, observed Carter, the clear trend is towards the cloud

and subscription-based business models. Hosted voice is a natural fit with that approach. "As more businesses start to ask for UC and integration with their mobiles, hosted voice is going to be an essential part of what they need," added Carter. "So it makes sense for IT resellers to add it into the mix as soon as possible."

There is a big risk of market rivals appearing on the scene to sell customers the benefits of hosted voice. That scenario could be the thin end of a wedge that leads to all kinds of cloud-based services being sold. "It makes sense to close that threat down now," added Carter. "It's perhaps even more of a risk to ignore the growth and profit potential."

Services are the future, so the sooner resellers start to move in that direction the better, emphasised Carter.

IT resellers have the technical acumen to understand hosted voice, implement and support it

"Voice will increasingly become a cloud-based service that's fully integrated with other digital systems and managed by a specialist services provider," added Carter. "Many resellers already call themselves MSPs because that's the direction of travel in the market."

"The whole digital transformation agenda is also driving us in this direction. It will be considered entirely normal for voice to be part of the complete joined-up fully integrated solution. Indeed, the recorded data from voice-based systems will be an important input to business analytics systems, so hosted telephony has an important role to play in the bigger picture."

"We also expect mobile integration and triple play offerings to become more important in the business market. Just as the lines between the different smart mobile devices have blurred, the lines between hosted voice and mobile services will become less defined. This will deliver good opportunities, and IT resellers should be particularly well suited to bring these technologies and services together." ■



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PEAC ramps up in ICT



Jeff Jones

PAN European Asset Company's (PEAC) hire of GE Capital UK's former technology sector sales leader Jeff Jones reflects its increasing investment in the ICT vendor finance market and signals its intention to wield a growing influence in the channel. To extend PEAC's leasing proposition deeper into the ICT space Jones will be supported by fellow new hire Peter Burcher who also moves from GE Capital where he was Account Manager.

"Jeff has a proven track record of delivering growth and innovation within this market which, combined with our ambitious proposition, will ensure our partners have access to financial tools that will support their growth," commented Julie Henehan, UK Sales Director. "Peter will manage a number of key relationships and his experience will also help to drive growth in this market."

Jones added: "Fresh financial products, a strong service culture and an ambitious management team will help PEAC to realise its potential as a primary leasing provider in the UK ICT market."

Henehan pointed out that the IT and telecoms channel has traditionally delivered low leasing penetration, but with a convincing passion she says that this inertia is about to animate with PEAC 'leading the leasing transformation'. "Today, more partners understand the importance of offering finance to customers who need technology to enhance their business performance," she said. "Our strategy is to drive for the same penetration levels achieved in other markets and the appointment of Jeff and Peter will help us to achieve our ambition."

Farrell hired by IPCortex



David Farrell

IPCORTEX is set to build on its partner numbers with the appointment of David Farrell to a new Business Development role. He brings over 10 years experience working with hosted service providers and resellers. "The IPCortex Service Provider Platform is growing 100 per cent year-on-year, driving our existing partners' recurring voice revenue and related services such as connectivity," stated Farrell. "Hosted comms is no longer just the remit of small businesses. Feature rich platforms and embedded comms are moving the conversation away from the dial tone."

CEO Rob Pickering added: "There's never been a better time for ISPs and existing ITSPs to re-evaluate their solutions and get more from hosted comms, whether it's increasing the size and spend of their average deployment or enabling new opportunities. David joins us at an exciting stage in this pivotal moment of our business and the market."

Also on the move...



Miguel Castro

BETA Distribution's appointment of Miguel Castro to the newly created role of Head of Solutions Architecture reflects the company's strengthening focus on supporting MSPs and VARs in the enterprise space. Castro brings 13 years experience

working in the IT industry and joins Beta from network storage vendor Infortrend where he was Technical Manager. Also recruited is Chris Moore as Head of Sales for the newly opened northern sales office in Leeds. He was previously Sales Manager at CMS Distribution where he worked for 19 years.

MIKE Ridgway has been appointed Commercial Director of Mobile at Elitetele.com having successfully completed an earn-out period that followed elite's acquisition of Qualitel Voice and Data in April 2014 where he was Managing Director.

Qualitel became Elitetele.com's mobile arm and under Ridgway's leadership the division generated significant growth, achieving £4 million



Mike Ridgway

revenue in the 14 months to July 2014, £4.3 million for the year to July 2015 and £6 million for the year to July 2016. Elitetele.com COO Russell Horton commented on the appointment: "Mike has successfully led growth in his division and is on track to double gross margin over the three years."

Alex Hendry joins Timico



Alex Hendry

TIMICO'S incoming Head of Commercial Alex Hendry joins the firm following a 14 year stint at Alternative Networks where he was Commercial and Pricing Director. Previous commercial positions include a spell at The Carphone Warehouse.

Hendry is now responsible for Timico's pricing, bid and supplier management, and he is tasked with building strong commercial governance.

"We will also focus on managing suppliers to make sure we're getting maximum value for money and support for our clients," said Hendry.

Simon Payne, Chief Commercial Officer at Timico, added: "Alex has an excellent track record having negotiated a number of deals with network operators that facilitated rapid and profitable growth of the customer base."

ANDREW Forster has joined Voiceflex as Channel Account Manager. He brings over 15 years experience in telecoms, business development and account management. Previous roles include Sales Director at CDI Comms and Regional Sales Manager at Aastra Telecoms UK.

Virtual1 brings in Mark Walker



Mark Walker

FORMER Alternative Networks and Solar Communications stalwart Mark Walker has joined Virtual1 as Head of Commercial. He brings 18 years industry experience and predicts 'big things' to come from Virtual1. "Having worked with Virtual1 on the other side of the fence it's great to join the company at such an exciting time in its development," he said. "Given the direction of the business I can see big things happening."

Magnus Batsvik-Miller, CFO, added: "Mark is a significant addition to the commercial team and we are looking forward to benefiting from his experience in the telecoms industry as Virtual1 looks to expand its operations."

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