



Sky Business chief  
vows to raise  
channel bar p8

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This month's movers and shakers



# 3CX counteracts 'massive attack'

**3CX has promised full transparency into efforts to get to the bottom of what CEO Nick Galea described as a 'massive security attack'.**

### SPECIAL REPORT

Responding to a malicious actor exploiting a vulnerability in several versions of 3CX's desktop app Galea (pictured) said: "We faced a massive security attack head on. As too have our partners and product resellers. Despite this they've stood shoulder to shoulder with 3CX, facing what we face."

"Our highest priority is to be transparent in sharing details on what actions we are taking in response to this incident."

3CX appointed cybersecurity firm Mandiant 'to get to the very heart of the matter' and introduced an action plan following the investigation.

"It's about using all of the information to strengthen our policies, practices and technology against future attacks," added Galea.

Jamie Ward, CEO of 3CX partner Gradwell, stated: "Let's remember this could have happened to anyone. Much bigger names and institutions have been compromised in the past

by bad actors. But it has been sad to see competitors using this as a stick to beat 3CX, and us by association. Some of the behaviour has been shameful."

3CX is offering 15% cash-back credit for 2023 sales in response to support given by partners following the security attack. The company has also reduced 2023 partner targets and extended the expiration dates for all paid subscriptions by three months. "In monetary terms it's worth millions," added Galea.

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## EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

IS OFCOM'S influence doomed by a comms sector that ignores its edicts? Broadband providers in effect flushed down the loo Ofcom's deadline last month to introduce a one touch process that enables residential customers to only contact their new company

to switch, a system that some big providers already deploy. But broadband switching among other providers remains more complex despite Ofcom's intent to bring in a more streamlined approach. With barely veiled angst Christina Luna-Esteban, Ofcom's Director of Telecoms Consumer Protection, said: "The industry has had plenty of warning, plenty of time and plenty of support to get this done."

True, Ofcom first floated the idea in 2019. So what happened? Some might argue that there is no shared vision across industry – which means a lack of leadership at regulation level. This also suggests that certain providers don't take deadlines seriously unless it's a customer project deadline. Either way – it's embarrassing for the regulator which is forever called on to step up to the mark on key matters. Having woken up to this issue, Ofcom has now introduced 'enforcement action' which is long overdue.

This episode follows another missed deadline last month – the withdrawal of analogue services from Salisbury and Mildenhall (now pushed back to October). In response, and like Ofcom, Openreach introduced enforcement actions when it became clear that the PSTN switch-off pilot deadlines would not be met.

On current form, the sector's capacity for meeting industry deadlines appears to be flakey. Which tees up an even bigger question: Does the 2025 switch-off give the regulator and industry a chance to redeem themselves? It's a tough one to call... but what it is crystal clear is that enforcement actions taken before the event, rather than shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted, shows the kind of leadership and foresight needed by the industry.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

# Multi-cloud key to growth says Halpin

IN A BUSINESS update Yorkshire-based IT services and comms company CloudCoCo has reaffirmed its intention to become a multi-cloud player as it eyes £100m turnover.

The company currently has 140 employees, 1,000-plus customers and £25m revenue.

Founder and CEO Mark Halpin said: "As we push ahead on our next chapter of growth it's important we become truly cloud agnostic. That's how we'll unlock the productivity, security, configurability and efficiency benefits UK businesses are hungry for."

As part of its long-term strategy CloudCoCo has appointed Lee Thatcher as Head of Cloud and Innovation. He brings almost 20 years tech experience, eight in senior cloud positions and joins from technology business Tieva.

CloudCoCo's objective to put the network at the 'heart of multi-cloud transformations' has been fuelled by an exclusive partnership with digital innovation specialist Abstract Tech. CloudCoco has also entered into a strategic agreement with

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Mark Halpin

**As we push ahead on our next chapter of growth it's important we become truly cloud agnostic.**

Ingram Micro UK for the supply of Microsoft Azure and other cloud services.

Under the agreement CloudCoCo will migrate its cloud business to Ingram Micro Cloud Marketplace to offer vendor cloud solutions such as Microsoft Azure, AWS and Google GCP.

"The partnership with Abstract means we'll have the technical means and resource to compete with some of the biggest players in our space,

enabling us to secure larger and longer deals with complex, multi-site organisations across the UK," added Halpin.

Since its inception, CloudCoCo has grown organically and by acquisition, having reversed into Adept4 plc in 2019 and acquired More Computers, IDE Connect and Systems Assurance into the organisation.

The company is headquartered in Leeds, with regional offices in Sheffield, Warrington and Bournemouth.

## Paving the way for a neuro diverse workforce

How far is neuro diversity a 'forgotten child' in the D&I conversation? Why is it important to consider neurodiversity? Why do we need to amplify the neurodiversity message?

To what extent does neurodiversity represent a pool of untapped tech talent? What are the various challenges facing channel businesses wanting to embark on a neuro diverse recruitment campaign? And which support strategies/programmes

work best to overcome them? Is it an over statement to say that neurodiversity can provide a competitive advantage? As part of a company's bigger 'purpose', is helping disadvantaged, routinely ignored neuro diverse people simply the right, moral, thing to do?

All these questions and more will be covered in our next 'Channel Forecast' editorial round table session.

### Join the debate!

To participate in this editorial round table contact **Heather Miles** on **01895 454405** or [hmiles@bpl-business.com](mailto:hmiles@bpl-business.com) for full details.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

DAISY is closing in on a £5.4m cash deal to acquire Bradford-based ECSC. The transaction would sharpen Daisy's focus on cyber security and provide a boost to its Cyber & Operational Resilience Division. The deal will also deliver cross-selling opportunities into Daisy's wider managed service customer base. In financial year 2021 ECSC generated revenue of £6.1m. Daisy CEO Neil Thompson stated: "The skill sets the ECSC team bring will enhance the IT services we provide to our customers."

FOLLOWING Adept Technology's acquisition by Wavenet in February (a watershed transaction that created a £200m revenue group), Adept founder and Director Ian Fishwick has stepped down along with the rest of the board 20 years after he founded the business. Fishwick led Adept's flotation on the London Stock Exchange in 2006 and under his leadership the company completed 42 acquisitions. Fishwick commented: "It is the end of an era and a remarkable journey. It started with me in a spare bedroom and it ended with a circa £100m transaction. I hope our story provides inspiration for another generation of entrepreneurs."

## BCM One pounces on Pure IP

US-BASED BCM One's global reach has been extended following the acquisition of Pure IP, which provides compliant PSTN replacement services in 47 countries and number availability in 137 countries.

Pure IP is one of the original launch partners for Microsoft Operator Connect which strengthens BCM One's Microsoft Teams credentials.

BCM One CEO Geoff Bloss said: "The global infrastructure and flexibility to design both Operator Connect and Direct Routing solutions reinforces our position as a next generation communications and managed services provider. Additionally, Pure IP's international footprint enables us to extend our platform of services to customers worldwide."

Pure IP CEO Gary Forrest added: "The BCM One and Pure IP portfolios are complementary and provide a proposition to address the changing needs of businesses around the world."

Pure IP is BCM One's ninth acquisition, adding office locations in the UK and New Zealand, and a ninth US office in San Francisco.

The deal is expected to close this month.

# Ofcom slams switch delay

OFCOM has launched an industry-wide enforcement programme following the failure of broadband providers to implement simpler switching by a regulatory deadline of April 3rd.

In a statement Ofcom said it has been closely monitoring industry's progress in implementing the changes and has been putting pressure on providers to meet their requirements.

"Industry has had plenty of warning, plenty of time and plenty of support to get this done," said Cristina Luna-Esteban, Ofcom's Director of Telecoms Consumer Protection.

"It's extremely disappointing and frustrating and providers have let their customers down.

"We take compliance with our rules very seriously and have launched enforcement action to make sure companies get this up and running as quickly as possible."

New rules came into force last month requiring landline and broadband providers to operate the One Touch Switch process for residential customers. The simpler switching process was first discussed in 2019 and after consultation with industry Ofcom set out the rules a year and a half ago to make



Cristina Luna-Esteban

broadband switching quicker, easier and more reliable.

"We will continue to work with industry to make sure the new switching process is delivered as soon as possible," added Luna-Esteban.

NEWS ROUNDUP

FLOTEK Group has notched up its seventh acquisition since launching in May last year, this time swooping on South Wales IT provider Toolk-IT. Flotek CEO Jay Ball stated: "This acquisition is a natural fit that brings our nationwide client base to over 1,000 and our turnover to almost £5m." Toolk-IT founder Richard Williams continues working within the group as Client Account Consultant. "Combining our IT expertise with Flotek's integrated offering enables us to provide greater telecoms services to clients, offering them a more complete solution," said Williams. The deal follows Flotek Group's expansion into North Wales, the midlands and north west England.

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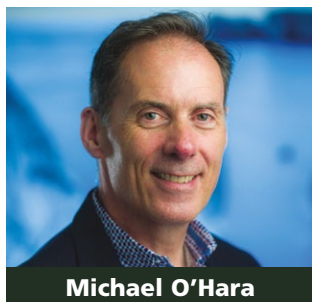
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# Security-cloud spur distie to record revenues

CYBERSECURITY and cloud division growth helped spur DataSolutions towards a record 29% revenue hike for the financial year ending March 2023, hitting £109m.

The IT distributor's UK cybersecurity division witnessed a 64% increase, driven by high growth areas such as zero trust cloud security, secure hybrid working and MSSP solutions. Meanwhile, the UK cloud division saw 28% growth (the UK and Ireland combined grew by 26%) driven in large part by



Michael O'Hara

Citrix, one of DataSolutions' marquee vendors.

MD Michael O'Hara said: "Last year we decided to double down on our cybersecurity and cloud divisions and that has

paid off in the UK. Enterprises will continue to invest in IT infrastructure to enable them to reduce costs, become more efficient, reach new customers and grow their businesses.

"This is our sweet spot so we are confident of continued growth in this market. However, the IT consumer market will find it more challenging. With higher interest rates, slow economic growth and the cost-of-living impact combined, these factors will create difficulties for growth in the year ahead."

In the last year DataSolutions has recruited more women to the business. The female contingent now makes up 41% of the workforce and DataSolutions aims to grow this to 50%.

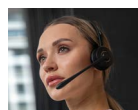
The company has also developed new initiatives to support employee wellbeing, mental health and staff retention.

"What matters most in any business is your people," added O'Hara. "Sustainability will also still be at the heart of DataSolutions' plans for continued growth."

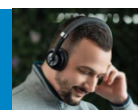
Techies Go Green, the movement of tech firms committed to decarbonising their businesses co-founded by DataSolutions, has grown its signatory base to over 350 businesses.

"Despite the current economic pressures we're still seeing a significant number of business leaders recognise the importance of sustainability on their organisations and wider society," commented O'Hara.

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# Transparency nets MS biz

TRANSPARITY Solutions' leadership ambitions in the Microsoft arena have been advanced with the acquisition of Microsoft-focused DataShapa, a consultancy on data, AI and BI solutions for enterprise customers in the UK, Europe, Middle East and Asia.

Post-acquisition DataShapa will become the specialist data practice within the group.

Transparency CEO Paul Bolt said: "We hear first-hand from our customers on the strategic importance of data to their organisations. Building a modern data approach is a digital imperative and will define who succeeds and who doesn't over the coming years."

Beech Tree Partner Adam Rudd added: "Data is a significant focus area for the business now that the majority of clients have so many disparate sources of data in the cloud, and have a need to bring it together and use it to their advantage."

DataShapa MD Alister Jones noted: "The Microsoft ecosystem we both work in makes for a great place for DataShapa to continue its development."

Transparency currently employs over 220 staff across the UK and plans to boost headcount by at least 80 over the coming two years.

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# Croft gets Badger

CROFT'S influence in the education sector has been significantly strengthened with the acquisition of IT company Badger Computer Services.

Badger was established in 1992 and operates mainly in north London and the northern home counties.

The deal adds 25 full-time engineers servicing over 100

schools across 18 boroughs, along with a broad range of commercial customers.

The transaction builds on Croft's previous acquisitions of Pure IT and Kiwi IT in February this year.

The double swoop bolstered Croft's IT offering and expanded its footprint into the south and west midlands regions.

# FourNet buys Cisco partner

PALATINE Private Equity owned FourNet has snapped up one of only two Cisco Gold, Master Security and Master Collaboration accredited partners in the UK.

The acquisition of Derby-based Nowcomm is FourNet's third in three years and boosts its cybersecurity and network infrastructure offering. The deal also takes FourNet's headcount to circa 200.

Nowcomm was established 18 years ago by Cisco employees Mark Lamont and James Baly who saw a gap in the market for a consultative-led Cisco business focused on engineering and technology.

FourNet co-founder and CEO Richard Pennington said: "As one of the leading Cisco partners in the UK Nowcomm brings skills and expertise which will enable us to provide a significantly enhanced cybersecurity, networking and collaboration offering to customers, from central government to blue light and other critical services.

"With the post-covid convergence of the IT and communications marketplace and the increasing pace of digital transformation the acquisition also provides Nowcomm with



Richard Pennington

access to a broader spectrum of solutions and customers."

Lamont added: "We have been working with FourNet on various projects in recent months and our thinking and our businesses are well aligned."

James Painter, Senior Investment Director, Palatine, commented: "Adding capability through strategic M&A is a key part of FourNet's growth strategy with Nowcomm representing the second acquisition since our initial investment.

"The acquisition enables FourNet to expand its offering and we are keen to support the group in making additional acquisitions in the future."

FourNet has offices in Manchester, Burton-on-Trent, Scarborough and London.

## NEWS ROUNDUP

BCN Group's portfolio and UK base has expanded following the acquisition of Microsoft Solutions Partner NewCMI, which was founded in 2009 and has offices in London, Belfast and the Thames Valley. The deal is BCN Group's second since ECI Partners invested in the firm last year and follows the purchase of Evo-soft in September 2022. BCN Group CEO Rob Davies said: "CMI's complementary product and service offering allows us to increase our Microsoft customer base and strengthen our team of technical experts. We can take our combined technical capability to the next level."

COMMS Council UK has called for a centralised public awareness campaign to draw more attention to the PSTN switch-off in 2025. Tracey Wright, Chair of Comms Council UK's Industry Developments Group, commented: "We believe now is the time to provide more education. The switch-off will impact consumers and businesses and people must be prepared for the transition. We encourage the Government and Ofcom to work with industry, consumer groups and other third parties to communicate the changes to ensure a smooth transition."

# FluidOne bags Project Five

FLUIDONE has added a fourth acquisition to its Business IT Centre of Excellence branch network with the purchase of Camberley-based MSP Project Five, which is best known for providing outsourced IT services to SMEs across Surrey, Berkshire and Hampshire.

The deal creates a £30m revenue business unit with 134 employees delivering local IT managed services to almost 1,000 business IT customers.

The transaction follows the acquisition of Highlander



Russell Horton

Computing Solutions in January this year. Highlander's Sheffield headquarters serves as the branch network hub.

FluidOne CEO Russell Horton commented: "The ac-

quisition builds on our strategy to create a branch network for IT managed services to business customers. The strength of relationships the team has with clients was reinforced by feedback in our survey."

Project Five MD Steve Coburn added: "The FluidOne portfolio broadens the service offering to our customers."

Horton is now Chairman of Project Five with FluidOne Directors Brendan Lynch, Chris Rogers and Roy Hastings also becoming board directors.

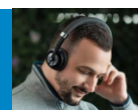
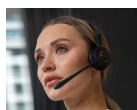
## NEWS ROUNDUP

TEAMS device sales at distributor Nimans have hit record levels according to an update from Director Paul Burn. "With the increased adoption of Microsoft Teams businesses are looking for collaboration hardware that can integrate seamlessly with the platform, allowing them to get the most out of their UC solution," he commented.

WESTCON-Comstor has described its new PartnerCentral multi-vendor marketplace as a 'transformative shift' in the way it works with channel partners. The tool enables partners to configure, quote and order hybrid solutions including a combination of software, hardware and services. "Partners want a digital interface to help their transformation into more efficient data driven businesses," said Patrick Aronson, CMO, Westcon-Comstor. "They want insights that help them understand opportunities and they want a marketplace to help them procure and manage hardware, software and services."



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# Sky Business chief set to re

**When Stephen Hackley became Sky Business Managing Director last June he grasped an opportunity to continue leading with purpose and overcome a challenge of the first order – to transform the comms channel model in a way not seen before.**



Stephen Hackley

**F**ive years after entering the UK comms channel as Sky Connect and with a rebrand to Sky Business under its belt Hackley is set to build on the company's growth and experience with a wide ranging strategic revamp – and he is moving forward with the right pace and priority to maximise opportunities for partners while delivering broader industry change. "We have a drive to reinvent what we do and make no apologies for our ambition to change the channel permanently, at a level that only a business of our scale can and in a way that will leave partners wondering why things weren't done like this before," he stated. "We're investing in building a wholesale business based on our learnings, laying the foundations for the next stage of growth."

But creating a new channel force with scope to impact the market like never before means turning up the volume on Sky Business's ambition and intent if it is to make

its influence more strongly felt. "Only 30 per cent of businesses are aware that Sky offers business solutions," added Hackley. "So we're going to be more front footed when it comes to educating the marketplace. My remit is very much about accelerating growth, driving scale, expanding our distribution and half of our business will be through channel partners."

The point Hackley makes is that Sky Business's channel experience to date has become a catalyst of innovation and transformation, bringing a sharper focus on the key issues that matter most. "In 2018 when Sky first entered the channel it's fair to say that we were relative novices in how to serve businesses indirectly," added Hackley. "But over the last few years we've learned what works for our partners and listened and adapted to what the channel is crying out for. To that end we are looking to develop a full suite of layer 2 and 3 connectivity services to support our existing and

**We make no apologies for our ambitions to change the channel permanently, at a level that only a business of our scale can, and in a way that will leave our partners wondering why things weren't done like this before**

new channel partners." Hackley also underscored another set of imperatives facing Sky Business: "We have a big task ahead to bring the right products and services to market," he added. "In time this will enable our partners to make the most of the opportunities they're facing."

The upshot is a strategy to reinvent and a key part of this is to either build, buy or partner a way through the solution sets that customers demand. "There are some fabulous solutions and providers out there that I would partner with rather than starting from scratch," noted Hackley. "Economically that's wise and it's important to acknowledge and recognise where

excellence already resides." From the outset Sky Business has also been selective about engaging with the right partners, believing that to unlock growth in the channel it would be foolish not to work with existing customers to drive the evolution and create a wholesale division that operates as an extension of partner organisations. "We aspire to be a reflection of the channel," explained Hackley. "It's about offering a broad choice model where every channel has a role to play."

#### High potential

He recognises the potential of this model based on an omnichannel approach, and made a decision to segment the marketplace to cater for small, medium

and large businesses. "We are organised around how customers buy and it's about respecting the fact that customers want to have different relationships with their providers, whether indirect, direct or through VARs," added Hackley. "The customer decides what is best for them and we'll meet customers where they want to be. We don't play each channel against each other. Ultimately, we believe in a proposition that can cut across all routes to market."

Introducing new products and driving growth is comfortably familiar to Hackley. He has first hand experience of the transition from cable TV to Internet, to new TV functions such as high definition and video





# raise channel bar

on demand to streaming. "These life cycles of adding products, growing, adding and repeating is something that I've done and have some scars to show for it,"

## My remit is very much about accelerating growth, driving scale, expanding our distribution and half of our business will be through channel partners

he said. "Although I'm new to the UK market I've had years of experience in driving growth in the B2B television and communications markets, so I'm aware of what needs to be done. I've got good instincts in the space and leaned on the support of a great leadership team at Sky."

### Strong pedigree

Prior to joining Sky Business Hackley was based in the States working for Comcast for over 22 years in a variety of high level leadership roles in the B2B and residential sectors. He was responsible for growth and distribution strategies and led on various strategic growth programmes. Sky became part of the Comcast family in October 2018.

Hackley will leverage all of his experience to address two broad megatrends reshaping the UK comms sector, alongside other emerging imperatives in the

wider business environment. "The industry itself is going through two important macro level changes – the copper shutdown and last mile fibre-based services roll out," he explained. "Those two transformations need to be navigated and resellers are traditionally good at helping businesses undergo change. At the same time we are seeing customers taking steps to future-proof their networks and show an interest in digitally enabled service personalisation.

"In terms of raw technologies we're also seeing a trend towards the streamlining of suppliers, cumbersome assets and legacy technology. And we see a comms channel that's keeping pace with the velocity of change demanded by UK businesses and the economic environment. What's surprising, and perhaps shouldn't be, is the number of examples we see of the channel leading the way forward with business solutions in-a-box that keep things powerfully simple for clients."

The growing emphasis on making life easy for customers to focus on their core interests represents an acceleration of the need for resellers to modularise their offer, believes Hackley, because the end user can seamlessly progress from one solution set to another as they grow. "Resellers have to build for add-on growth, have an eye towards future-proofing and create technology roadmaps that don't have dead ends," he stated. "That's what develops referenceable clients." ■

### Just a minute with Stephen Hackley...

**What talent do you wish you had?** To type faster. I'm one of those people that types with two fingers and the occasional thumb.

### If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing?

I would love to teach, and I see myself doing that when I hang up my telecoms hat. My goal is to teach in an American school within an inner city turnaround neighbourhood.

### Something you have overcome:

Early in my career I was often the youngest person in the room or on the board. I'm well past that now but I recognise that people look at you and have biases whether it's age, race or background. I'm much more aware of those inequities than when I was just charging through my career.

**Industry wish:** To be further along in the evolution of networks.

### Biggest career achievement:

Helping to foster cultures of integrity and respect, connecting people to the moments and experiences that matter the most. Happy, satisfied colleagues help deliver outstanding service and I'm proud of those achievements in my career.

### How do you relax when not working?

By being outdoors, whether watching sport, playing sport, being in nature or travelling with my wife. The good thing about coming from America is the long list of things that I need to see and do here in the UK, and a lot of it is outdoors.

### How would you like to be remembered?

I always aim to bring my best self to work and there is no difference between me at work or how I am in my personal life. So I would like to be remembered as a well grounded actual person, not just the MD or CEO.

## Energy services with the personal touch

Netcom Solutions, based in Surrey, have been a reliable and trusted choice for businesses and individuals for 17 years. They signed up as a partner with Fidelity Energy back in 2018, but it wasn't until 2022, when they switched their first customer, that they realised the true value of offering energy alongside their core business.



NetCom Managing Director, Charlie Martin

Managing Director, Charlie Martin, said, "Energy is something that goes hand in hand with what we do as a business, so the partnership felt like a natural progression for us. We signed as a partner five years ago, but at the time, we weren't sure if it was the right thing for us. It wasn't until we had a conversation with a client who had purchased a large property and they mentioned their energy bills were almost £20,000 a month. So, I mentioned we could potentially help them manage their energy through our partnership with Fidelity Energy and all they needed to do was send a copy of their bill. That is exactly what we were able to do and that was our first contract signed, which was a great success. Since then, we mention energy at any opportunity that we get and now proactively promote it to our clients, and have subsequently secured some great deals for them.

We're dedicated to providing a bespoke service to all our clients, and we want to make technology hassle-free by taking the stress away. It's great that we can now offer business energy as one of our services, and our customers can get even more value from their partnership with us. Many of our clients now see us as a one stop shop. We had one customer who initially was looking to use us for Wi-Fi for their business, but what really sold it for them was when they realised we could handle their Wi-Fi, broadband and energy. Another client initially looked to us to handle their energy and that progressed to us also talking about installing Electric Vehicle charging points in their car park. Our clients already have enough suppliers they have to contact about all the different utilities they need managing, so they are always delighted when they realise we are able to cover multiple projects for them."

One of the core values for Netcom Solutions that set

them apart is the quality of their service provision, which goes hand in hand with how Fidelity Energy treat their clients and partners. Charlie explains, "When we first onboarded with Fidelity Energy it was very easy, we were given training around the portal which is very straightforward to use. I love the fact that we can see reports, from open opportunities to future commissions.

The whole team are so supportive, from marketing help to assistance with every deal. I met with a potential client a couple of weeks ago and mentioned all the things we can do, including energy, and they told me how they had received an exceptionally high energy bill and their supplier had messed it up. So we are now in the process of helping them to rectify that and taking over managing their energy for them. As a company we genuinely care about our clients and their challenges, so to have personalised support if needed to find the right solution for each of our clients has been amazing.

Energy is now a big feature on our website and the energy brochure is available to download. We have utilised the marketing resources on the portal as well as the bespoke mailers created for us and have rebranded everything into our company colours too, so we can push on socials and emails. We have also pledged to plant 10 trees for every successful energy deal, which is a nice touch.

Despite our initial reservations about selling energy, partnering with Fidelity Energy has resulted in a great relationship. From our Business Development Manager, Clare Stratford, coming to visit us to the in-house Account Managers and wider team supporting us in any way needed. Energy has been such a successful addition to our business, and I obviously regret not doing it sooner."



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# Driving the D&I agenda

**Senior Director for International Channel Marketing at RingCentral Emily Fallon discusses what it takes to open the boardroom door for high potential females, and she spotlights the universal business and personal benefits of driving forward the broader D&I agenda.**



Emily Fallon

to industry. So broadening skill sets and expanding networks are crucial facets for anyone working their way up in business. To drive this change forward it will require everyone to take accountability and progress fellow female colleagues where possible, while ensuring that board level jobs are made more visible at all levels.

#### **How important is workplace flexibility to women?**

For women to be supported at senior levels there are a few areas that should be considered. Firstly, organisations should look to have flexible working policies for childcare as women are often the primary carers. Companies should also review their internal policies such as leave for menopause or maternity to ensure these needs are accommodated.

#### **Do leadership pipelines include enough women?**

It's clear that not enough is being done to support women progressing to leadership roles. Strides need to be taken to increase pay and job posting transparency. It's critical that these roles are made more visible to women and that responsibilities are clearly outlined.

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

We have seen increased diverse representation in the sector and more visibility of senior women, and we are seeing fewer women confined to traditional HR or marketing roles. Ongoing discussion of careers in STEM has made the channel sector a viable career path for many, and with increased awareness comes increased diversity at the leadership level. ■

## **W**hat are the benefits of a female presence in boardrooms?

A strong female presence in the boardroom is a must. Ample diverse representation is imperative and should always be reflective of the community that we're working to support.

With a female presence in the boardroom you have a greater balance of perspectives. There is also an additional layer of pragmatism which supports decision making. If you don't have diverse representation at the top of your business it's unlikely that any diversity strategy is fit for purpose.

#### **What have been your experiences in terms of being female?**

For most of my career I have worked in a male dominated environment. At first this was an overwhelming experience with so many strong and senior characters and lots of different personalities to manage. But in my day-to-day work I am well organised, come prepared

to meetings and keep track of items on agendas. I use these skills to my advantage to shape not only my ways of working but my career path. It's important to be yourself, don't be afraid to speak up and always work with people from all departments and at different levels.

#### **How are you taking a lead on increasing female representation at the top?**

I give my team opportunities to own and lead on projects. I put them forward for events or awards and aim to foster an inclusive environment for everyone to excel in, regardless of gender. Furthermore, being part of the leadership team I'm aware that I can be seen as a role model for other women in the business, so it's important that I remain approachable and support future leaders.

#### **What initiatives do you participate in to help boost the presence of women on boards?**

I am part of an internal group called WISE (Women

## **It's important to be yourself, don't be afraid to speak up and always work with people from all departments and at different levels**

In SaaS Empowerment) which holds regular events, education and mentorship, communication and advocacy meetings to support women in the industry. I am also part of another internal group called SASSY Women which is an internal forum for women in the business.

#### **What are the objectives of these efforts?**

The aim is to ensure there is a more diverse split across males and females in the company and that women are being progressed into leadership and C-level positions. I am fully supportive of this and will be putting my team forward for more of these types of initiatives to ensure everyone can take advantage of the opportunities.

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

Last year the FTSE 100 reported that nearly 40 per cent of board positions are held by women, compared to 12.5 per cent 10 years ago. While this is a significant increase it's clear that progress has been slow. There is a responsibility for organisations to ensure that opportunities for women to join boards are made more accessible. This includes showcasing clearer details on how to apply, what the role looks like and the skills required.

Often there are several women who are perfect for the role but are unaware of how their skills can be transferred from industry

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# Gamma CEO shares strategy

**Gamma Chief Executive Andrew Belshaw is doubling down on securing European UCaaS leadership while building on the service provider's strong position in the UK comms sector. Among his top priorities is the imperative to transform product stacks while becoming super-responsive to the opportunities presented by the fast-moving end user and channel market.**



Andrew Belshaw

**A**s CFO, Belshaw took Gamma through its IPO in 2014 and played a key role in the firm's subsequent growth. Now CEO, a role he assumed last November (following a stint as interim CEO after former chief exec Andrew Taylor exited) Belshaw is confident that his plans will keep Gamma on track as it seeks to become an international UCaaS powerhouse. "I know where Gamma's going," he stated. "I'm excited about our direction. And I have much more to add to the future success of the company."

His ambition includes Gamma becoming Western Europe's leading UCaaS provider which of course hinges on certain pre-conditions being met. "We want to take our

experience and expertise from the UK across Europe and we need to continue developing and evolving our product," he added. "UCaaS by its nature is a continually evolving term, it means different things to different people and will continue to grow. So we will create new features and functions, even adding new ways of communicating. We want to do that across Western Europe and need to get the balance right between growing in Europe but maintaining our focus on the UK."

Striking a broader portfolio balance is also a priority and Belshaw noted that Gamma will be revamping its entire product and service offering. "We want to evolve our whole portfolio," he stated. "Some of this will

**I know where Gamma's going. I'm excited about our direction. And I have much more to add to the future success of the company**

be improving what we offer today while other aspects are more exciting, taking us into the IoT which we already offer in Germany – this will strengthen our mobile proposition. We are also looking at cyber security and expanding our relationships with tech giants such as Microsoft and Amazon."

#### Innovation

Gamma is a financially secure company and has the means to invest significantly in R&D; and Belshaw believes that Gamma's flexibility will enable it to deliver new innovations to the channel quickly – faster than larger more

bureaucratic organisations. But he acknowledged that Gamma's performance on this key parameter requires improvement. "I'm being transparent: We haven't done as well as we could have on this over the last couple of years but that's being addressed," he confirmed.

"We'll do this by listening to the channel and making sure we're delivering on a timely basis. We'll be talking to partners, talking to end users, understanding what they want and need and understanding where the market is going. My biggest priority is to enable my team

to ensure those products we build are exactly what the market we're targeting and our channel partners who are selling them need. We're creative and will continue to innovate."

The new product pipeline has already cranked up to meet what Belshaw says is a big opportunity in the UK SME space where cloud PBX penetration remains well below 50 per cent. "We've got a product portfolio coming through including PhoneLine+, CircleLoop and our partner specific solution, Simple Swap, a tool that enables partners to switch



# Strategic outlook

their SME base over to the new digital or cloud-based phone lines as part of the PSTN switch-off," explained Belshaw. "The switch-off presents a huge opportunity to start winning wholesale line rental bases from the current incumbents.

"Then there are cross-selling opportunities for the other cloud products that we provide. These include Horizon Contact, our customer contact management system for small and medium sized businesses, which I see as a growth area both for us and our channel partners because the margin can be higher than traditional telco products.

"Furthermore, the rise of digital means that areas where the channel can add value in the past have changed. They are becoming more automated and you need to look for problems that aren't perhaps as trivial and straight forward. Adding value is no longer as easy as provisioning or tapping into a portal. It's about truly adding value and continuing to innovate for customers."

Belshaw observed that the channel market is in an 'exciting phase' not just because of technological innovation, but also due to the increasing levels of M&A turning a number of Gamma's channel partners into significant players, with some branching out into Europe. "By making sure our products are available and compliant in other territories we are supporting partners to drive the international expansion of their organisations," said Belshaw.

Gamma recently acquired multiple businesses across

Europe in markets that have promising growth potential. "We found good businesses that looked and acted like Gamma did in the UK a few years ago," said Belshaw. "With our experience we can support our European teams on their own growth trajectory. Most of our European business is through channel partners and dealers, so it's great to bring our portfolio of products to partners in these territories along with our partner programme."

## Scaling up

Gamma's enterprise business is also growing and presents a further opportunity for larger channel partners that target the top end of the market and the public sector. "We are expanding our product portfolio to scale and keep abreast of the biggest challenges enterprise organisations face," commented Belshaw. "But despite Gamma having grown into a big and established European business we still believe in, are supportive of and invest in the channel. SME will always be Gamma's heritage and expertise."

Belshaw puts an equally strong emphasis on his appointment as CEO being another positive message for channel partners, a point that is solidly underpinned by his heritage with the firm. "My first job at Gamma was Finance Director of the channel business," he said. "I've been part of the management team for the last 16 years, part of the board for the last eight years, I've grown up in Gamma, I've grown up with the channel and my appointment underlines our commitment to UK partners." ■

## Just a minute with Andrew Belshaw...

**What talent do you wish you had?** To play a musical instrument. My talented daughter has been giving me clarinet lessons, but they're not going well.

**What do you fear most?** I worry about the way politics is going, globally. Politicians seem unable to focus on the key issues and are distracted by the need for short-term popularity.

**If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing?** When I was younger I always wanted to be a pilot.

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Nelson Mandela, my grandad who passed away many years ago (I miss his wisdom), and Tom Hanks.

**The best advice you have been given:** Make sure you look after your people. All leaders should have that at the forefront of their mind.

**Industry bugbear:** The landscape has become extremely complicated. We as an industry have an opportunity to help the right people make buying decisions more easily.

**The biggest risk you have taken?** Working for Gamma 16 years ago. At the time there were only 100 or so employees and a few friends did question my choice. It turned out great.

**How do you relax when not working?** I get on my exercise bike and watch films while I'm cycling. That's not everyone's idea of relaxing but it helps me unwind while fitting in exercise.

**Top tip for resellers:** In a changing world with evolving technology, make sure that you're always working out how you're adding value to your customers. Any company that is adding value will be successful. There will always be a place for them in the market.

## CHANNEL CORNER

WITH  
JAMES DRAKE



The telecoms industry is forever changing and that is why we have our agony uncle and channel expert James Drake here to answer all your channel queries and industry issues. James is the Managing Director of Eclipse Wholesale, a channel-first connectivity and comms distributor that offers market-leading services throughout the UK. With over 30 years in the business who else is best placed to answer all your burning questions?

Take a look below for this month's most sought-after queries...

**Q1. My customers can only get ADSL. What do I offer them with the switch off fast approaching?** Judith, Newcastle

A1. Engagement is key. Speak to your suppliers about SOTAP and keep you informed about the Full Fibre roll out. Alternatively speak to a Channel Aggregator who may offer alternative network suppliers.

**Q2. What is the difference between Fibre and Full Fibre?** Robbie, Doncaster

A2. Fibre, FTTC, and Superfast all relate to fibre to the cabinet. A copper/fibre hybrid product, Full Fibre is fibre to the premises.

**Q3. How does IoT differ from a standard Mobile SIM with a data bolt-on?** Michelle, Belfast

A3. Internet of Things (IoT) mobile SIM cards are specific

data services, usually offering a static IP address and no voice service.

**Q4. Some industry experts are predicting several products have now peaked. Is it all just churn?** Scott, Leeds

A4. The telecoms industry has always been proactive in its approach to proposing new products to customers. Some may call that churn, but great opportunity still presents itself. Get out there and smash it!

**Q5. My company resells Broadband and we raise invoices via an accounts package. Is there a more efficient way to bill?** Gareth, Liverpool

A5. Well Gaz, a more efficient way would be to utilise billing software to allow you to import raw data, reconcile your supplier invoices and raise consistently great bills.

Got a question or would like to find out more about Eclipse Wholesale?

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# Dixon helms Agilitas

**As part of Agilitas' sweeping leadership revamp Mark Dixon was appointed Chairman in March following the departure of CEO Shaun Lynn. Here, the former mountaineering risk taker explains why his move to Agilitas is a safe bet.**



Mark Dixon

**D**ixon brings 25 years experience in manufacturing and distribution and headed up public and private equity backed companies with turnovers ranging from £55 million to £400 million. Here, we asked Dixon the key questions arising from his appointment...

#### **Why did you take the Chairman role?**

My experience working with distribution companies was relevant but most importantly when meeting the shareholders and management team there was a good connection. As a Chairman, my role is to act as a conduit between the company and its shareholders. In the short-term I am acting as CEO.

#### **What's your first impression of Agilitas' channel?**

Most of our channel partners are focusing their investments to increase the resilience of their business and customers. We are seeing rapid progression in managed services and consumption-based service models. This will provide a significant opportunity for a pure

service business like Agilitas to underpin these efforts.

#### **How is Agilitas evolving?**

Over the past few years we have witnessed a significant increase in digitisation and advanced technologies. And with skills challenges combined with the global shortage of key components and supply chain complexity, technology businesses are having to determine the trajectory of their organisations and investments to meet the demands of their customers. Agilitas enables these organisations to outsource their inventory supply chain and maintain availability of key assets while accelerating time to value. Moreover, our sustainability and circular economy services help partners compete for business where customers demand help to meet net zero targets.

#### **Does the channel need to adapt in other areas too?**

End customers simply want to consume technology quicker and ensure it is resilient and increases productivity. Channel and technology organisations will need to adapt to focus

more on service rather than the benefits of the product. From a channel perspective it will be less about the strategy of the OEM that counts, and more about the quality in which they supply and service the outcomes they are providing.

#### **What service improvements is Agilitas working on?**

Developing access to our services digitally to ensure we are easy to do business with and can provide insights on the performance of our services. And the ongoing improvement of our core services and delivery, including remote monitoring to ensure maximum uptime of hardware estates.

#### **What market trends interest you most?**

Digitisation is removing barriers to global service and logistics. Some of our largest growth clients are seeking to outsource these services to partners who can deploy services globally with ease. The need for end customers to outsource certain operations via managed services is creating an interesting dynamic. The focus on

customer experience rather than the flavour of OEM will become more apparent. We are already seeing some winners and losers in the OEM hardware supply chain due to availability, and we will need to navigate a path that enables us to support partners accordingly.

#### **What are the ICT channel's biggest challenges?**

The availability of investment to support a rapidly changing marketplace driven by digitisation. Along with skills and resource availability to deliver time to value for end customers, while maintaining productivity and minimising staff churn.

#### **What are today's leadership priorities?**

I don't think you can go beyond the basics of letting the talented people in your organisation deliver excellent customer service. It is the leadership's task to provide that environment through empowerment, openness, teamwork and development.

#### **Biggest career achievement?**

The career progress of many of the great people I have worked with over the years.

#### **Role and inspiration models:**

Ernest Shackleton who led his whole team to safety from an ill-fated Antarctic expedition; Emmeline Pankhurst who fought for a just cause; and Nelson Mandela who showed so much compassion and forgiveness despite the injustices he suffered.

#### **Tell us something about yourself we don't know:**

I was an active rock climber and mountaineer. I have been fortunate enough to climb in the Alps, Andes, Alaska, the Himalayas and Antarctica.

#### **Your greatest strengths and what could you work on?**

Teamwork is my greatest strength, while being more patient is something I have worked on. I could also be a better listener.

#### **The biggest risk you have taken?**

As a mountaineer and scuba diver in my younger days I took lots of risks. On reflection, I may not make the same judgements now! Probably the two greatest risks are soloing Mont Blanc by a hard ice climbing route on its Italian side in 1986, and my 130 meter dive on a shipwreck in 2002.

#### **Best piece of advice you have been given?**

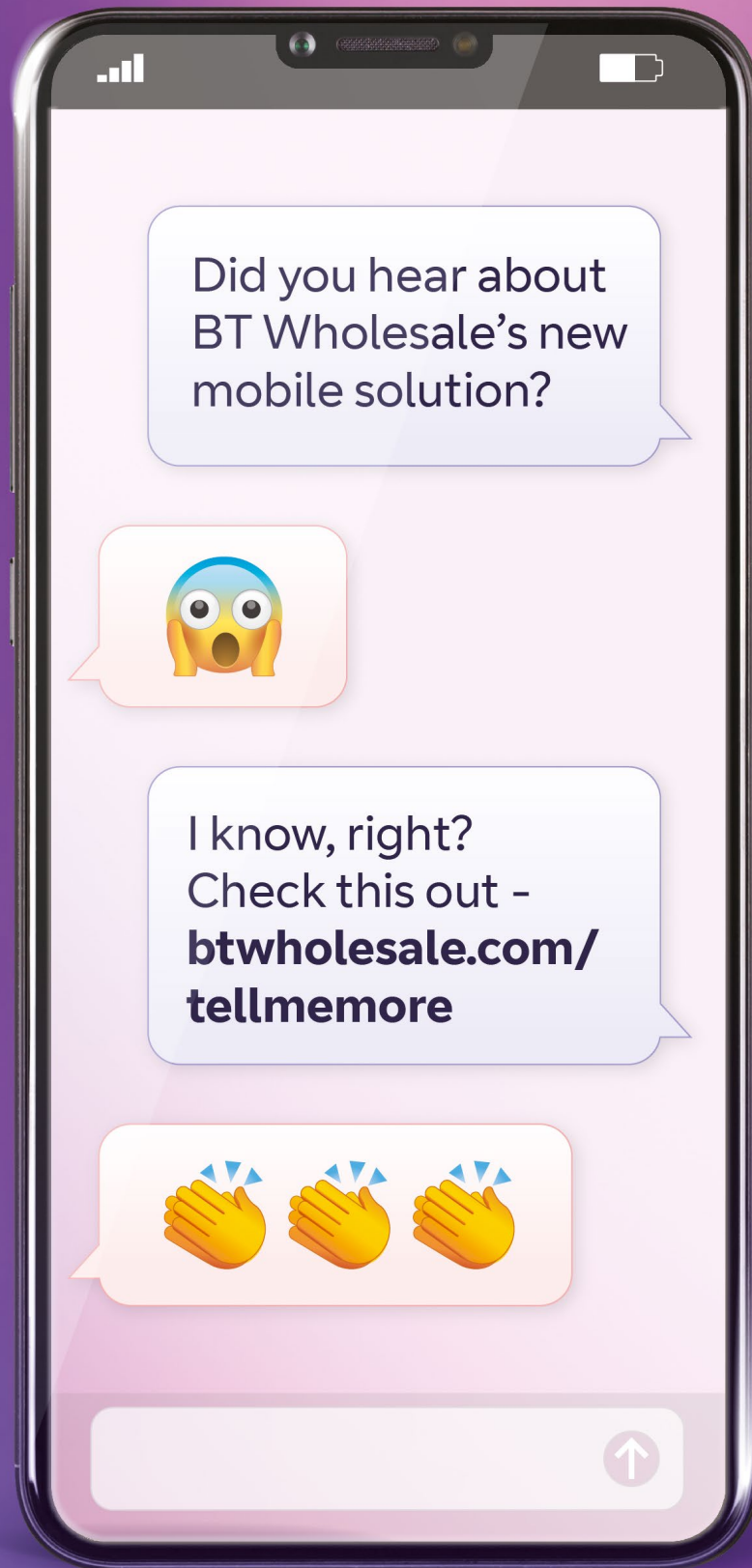
E+R=O (Event + Responses = Outcome) – from Jack Canfield.

**Tell us about something you've overcome:** At school my headmaster said, 'Dixon, you may get three or four GCEs but you are more likely to end up in prison'. From that day I never let anyone tell me what I can or can't achieve.

#### **Top tip for resellers**

People, people, people. ■





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# Realising full potential

**Voiceflex CEO James Arnold-Roberts is accelerating a business transformation plan that goes the whole distance to realise the comms provider's potential for significant growth.**

**A**rnold-Roberts is taking decisive measures to offset waning demand for traditional voice, introducing new applications, building a development team and elevating the customer experience as part of a five year plan leading to private equity investment. "The plan is to drive 10 per cent organic growth this year and then look for acquisitions that can add both skill and scale," he stated.

"When I joined Voiceflex in September 2021 I saw the opportunity to build a business that had a strong heritage and a relationship with the market that spanned two decades. I could see a company that hadn't grown at the speed it could have but was in the right place and time to develop and expand."

Voiceflex has recorded organic CAGR growth of 20 per cent over the past four years, however Arnold-Roberts noted that traditional revenue streams are slowing. "The role of traditional voice is diminishing with the rise of VoIP," he said. "We saw a mass take up of Microsoft Teams and Zoom during the pandemic and this is only increasing as hybrid work becomes the norm."

For context, Juniper estimated back in 2020 that operators would face a 45 per cent revenue drop in traditional voice services by 2024.

Arnold-Roberts states that while emerging technology is harming voice revenues, it is also paving the way for fresh thinking and innovation. "As communications will live in the cloud the key is to look at pivoting to new revenue streams while managing traditional voice revenue," he added.

If you can't beat them join them. That's Arnold-Roberts' view on the rise of Microsoft Teams and its rapidly growing ecosystem. "We can't fight against Teams so we want to ensure our resellers are monetising its ecosystem through our over-the-top services," he added.

Voiceflex aims to offer Operator Connect by early 2024 and is part of the accelerator programme, working with one of the key global accelerator partners. This will be a reseller play, not a direct play, assures Arnold-Roberts. "We will then look to layer this with other services to build a robust value stack for our partner community," he explained. "This will all be done in tune with our voice



**James Arnold-Roberts**

**I saw a company that hadn't grown at the speed it could have but was in the right place and time to develop and expand**

heritage which will be the foundation of our business as we enter a new phase driven by UCaaS and CCaaS."

#### Key partnership

Voiceflex took its first steps into these markets in mid-2022 following a partnership with European UC powerhouse Telavox. Arnold-Roberts said: "We had a beauty parade of around 12 providers and decided that Telavox aligned best with our mission. It owns its own stack and allows us to speak to the CC and UC market."

In March 2022 the pair launched Voiceflex Flow, a unified platform offering both communications and contact centre as a service. Although somewhat late to the party, Voiceflex Flow now has over 10,000 licences in the market. To expand this proposition, Voiceflex will launch a Cyber Light package playing into the next generation UCaaS platform from Telavox. The initial play will be mobile threat detection and port monitoring, with a PCI compliance solution to come.

Voiceflex partners should also prepare for an upcoming omnichannel proposition, starting with WhatsApp integration. "This will be for small and medium businesses as the need for WhatsApp integration continues to grow across the UK," added Arnold-Roberts.

He also understands that fibre providers present a big opportunity. "There are two possibilities here," he commented. "To work with the altnets and sell their APIs onto our partner community and to sell our over-the-top services into the altnet community."

Arnold-Roberts' ambition and promise to drive Voiceflex into its next phase of growth based on a business transformation is ironclad as the company lines up with solutions that address the impending switch off, the rise of fibre and 5G and the move to cloud telephony. "We are not a big tanker company and have been able to react to the markets quickly over the last two years," he commented.

Responsiveness is achieved through a layered approach to interacting with the market and hearing the needs of partners, noted Arnold-Roberts. The top layer is a new KPI driven customer service team with the sole job of talking to partners about their requirements and acting as their champion.

Arnold-Roberts added: "We are building an intelligent layer on top of our traditional service delivery which allows account managers to go out and talk to partners about the new world as we pivot towards next generation voice applications." ■

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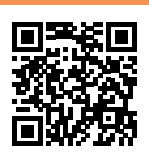
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# Tedesco focuses on strate

Here, Diego Tedesco, Director of Wholesale Fixed, Virgin Media O2 Business, discusses a broad spectrum of priority leadership topics including backhaul empowered partnerships, FTTP targets, the rise of industry collaboration, ESG imperatives, AI, D&I, to name a few – and he assesses their far reaching implications for the channel.



Diego Tedesco

To become a top player it is essential to consider the many success factors at play in today's market. Core business is of course key, but there are a number of other priorities to be elevated up the leadership agenda, and Virgin Media Business Wholesale is urging partners to consider them all. The company is also opening minds to new possibilities linked to the evolution of its network, in large part because its long-term goal to upgrade the UK has brought a renewed focus on how backhaul capabilities empower partners to support growing demand for infrastructure beyond Ethernet. "By the end of 2023 we will have covered our entire network with scalable architecture that supports 10Gb National Ethernet and Optical services," commented Tedesco.

Virgin's multi-million-pound investment programme to transform its 10Gbps portfolio, called Project Spark, will provide a significant boost to channel partners. "Project Spark will give partners access to a high performance national 10Gb network that enables lower costs and faster deployment," added Tedesco. "In another development, we are starting designs on a standardised 100Gb optical network that should be available from the end of the year."

#### Leveraging an advantage

As well as driving standardisation and accessibility of its high bandwidth portfolio, Virgin is also exploring how it can leverage its own technology changes to introduce XGS-PON for partners in the future. Longer term, Tedesco noted that Virgin is aiming to upgrade its entire network to FTTP by 2028. "Businesses

## MSPs should be ready for the huge increase in demand for AI across industries. It's no exaggeration to say that this is as seismic as the invention of electricity

are expecting faster speeds, greater capacity and more resilient networks," he said. "This upgrade will provide an alternative to Ethernet connectivity with XGS-PON offering the symmetry and guaranteed performance of Ethernet at a lower price. For businesses stuck on copper technology the increase in upload and download speed will transform how they communicate, with more complex UC systems and AI solutions becoming more viable."

Tedesco also believes that the industry is heading towards the 'decentralisation of connectivity'. "Businesses

need lightning fast results and they can't be constantly transferring data to core sites that are hundreds of miles away," he added. "Services like 5G-enabled small cells and XGS-PON are helping bring connectivity closer to the people that need it, and they're key to our fibre roll out programme."

#### Primary trends

According to Tedesco there are three notable trends in the market today, all calling on partners to rethink their partnerships. "Firstly, as the requirements for high capacity services increase exponentially, so too is the complexity of channel

offerings," he said. "This is leading to a convergence of interoperable 5G and fibre. It's not enough for partners to offer one or the other, the channel is looking for solutions that work in tandem. This allows for the resilient transfer of huge quantities of data from point to point. But it also helps multiple users collaborate more seamlessly in the cloud."

"Solutions this complicated can't be supplied by one partner alone. So we're seeing an increase in the demand for a multi-partner approach with partners collaborating to provide a unified solution."



# Strategic priorities

This need for collaboration is mobilising great change in the market, believes Tedesco, and catalysing an increase in demand for flexible and scalable partnerships that allow partners to grow their offerings. "It's exciting to see where this will take the market in the future as collaboration becomes even more key to success," he added.

## Removing complexity

It follows that the role of resellers and systems integrators is transforming as they respond to a new customer emphasis on solutions over systems. And as businesses increasingly look to the cloud, the huge variety of implementation routes can be 'scary', noted Tedesco. "To overcome complexity customers are looking for a partner that can manage their services and ease the pain points of integration and troubleshooting," he commented.

"This may mean transforming to look more like a managed service provider and building in integration and alignment support into their offerings. For example, resellers and SIs may need to include managed network services, cloud connectivity and other value added services to help customers optimise their network infrastructure."

In order to succeed in the market resellers and SIs should also adopt a customer focused strategy, observed Tedesco. "They'll need to build their offerings around their customers' needs and provide more tailored solutions," he added. "In an increasingly competitive market being able to find these points of

differentiation will be crucial. Those that can't evolve will be left behind because customers are expecting more from their partners, and there's no going back."

On the one hand, this has been catalysed by recent advancements in AI, most notably the launch of chatbots like ChatGPT, believes Tedesco. "It's no exaggeration to say that this is as seismic as the invention of electricity," he added. "It's transforming what we're capable of doing in the modern world, and MSPs should be ready for the huge increase in demand for AI across industries.

"The bandwidth required to produce AI responses, especially when these services are being rolled out across Microsoft and Google platforms, is enormous. MSPs will need to re-evaluate their own connectivity to ensure they're future proofed for more data hungry solutions."

## Multi-dimensional value

Partners will also need to offer their customers confidence that they will be by their side to deliver value, especially in these turbulent times. Because to truly differentiate from competitors MSPs can't just provide digital solutions – they must understand that client relationships are far more multi-dimensional.

"One example is making Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) a priority," commented Tedesco. "It's no longer enough to make empty statements. Partners need to be actively involved in the race to Net Zero while also implementing effective diversity and inclusion policies. There is a fantastic

opportunity for us to achieve collaboration through a green lens and enable the channel to come together and work towards agreeing on a standard to achieve Net Zero operations across the industry. Virgin Media O2 has launched its sustainability strategy including robust targets to achieve Net Zero carbon across our operations, products and supply chain by the end of 2040.

"We want to share our learnings with channel partners and hear their plans too, so we can establish best practices across the industry and have a collective approach to cutting carbon while helping businesses and communities to lead greener lives.

## Time for action

"Ambitious targets are a good first step, but it's an immediate action that is most needed. So ensuring your supply chain is trending towards Net Zero, and rethinking recruitment policies to encourage diverse talent into your business is more essential than ever to prove you're not just talking the talk, but actually making a difference."

This is all part of building a future that is already 'hurtling towards us', believes Tedesco. "It's an exciting prospect, but one that we'll all need to be ready to adapt to," he added. "MSPs should consider what they are offering today, and what they might need to offer tomorrow. Building a roadmap that considers the new advancements in automation and the onus of the telecoms channel to become more sustainable will help MSPs respond successfully to this period of great change." ■

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Dan MacKrell

The pandemic has shown us the benefits of online collaboration and communication. Between 2019 and 2020, the average transport emissions in local authorities fell by 18% (gov.uk). With more people working from home and relying on digital platforms to communicate, the reduction in business travel has resulted in a significant decrease in carbon emissions for businesses.

By working with Shire Leasing, resellers can help customers achieve their goals, by offering affordable payment options on a host of products and solutions such as mobile handsets, on and off-premises solutions & IT allowing more efficient equipment to be acquired and sustainable business practices to be adopted.

In 2019, the UK signed a legally binding target of reaching net zero emissions by 2050. As UK SMEs work towards achieving net zero emissions and buying behaviours change, it's important to consider how our businesses can differentiate and align services to real business challenges, by playing a part in helping SMEs with climate action efforts.

We believe that every business has a role to play in reducing their environmental impact and we are committed to doing our part. According to a 2022 survey conducted by SME Climate Hub, 60% of SMEs have plans to reduce their carbon footprint. At Shire Leasing, we're taking steps to reduce our own carbon footprint with examples including transitioning to paperless processes and researching how employees are traveling to work. We're also supporting customers with their goals, we have been instrumental in developing Clean Air Zone Financial Assistance Schemes of which we administer across the UK and developed a new green asset policy to make investment more affordable for SMEs.

As you implement your own sustainability changes, what can you do to go above and beyond for your customers, without compromising profits?

However, the government-set target for becoming carbon-neutral presents challenges, with research from Bank of Scotland finding that almost 40% of SME owners cite the costs and fear of low returns on investment as a significant barrier to action. Shire Leasing's vendor finance programmes enable resellers to support customers to invest in net zero goals, without either party impacting cash reserves. By offering leasing solutions on your ICT solutions, businesses can invest in greener technology and sustainable processes without the large upfront costs whilst you receive payment in full the same day.

As market-leaders, we have a responsibility to protect the planet and support customers in doing so too. But to do this, we must also ensure our businesses are sustainable in sales and profits too. By working with Shire Leasing, resellers can maximise sales conversions and support more customers to invest in the latest efficiencies.

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# Time to invest in interco

The extent to which we are facing into an interconnected mobile-first future depends on how much investment is made into catalysing innovation-led growth opportunities beyond supercharged mobility, according to industry experts.

**F**ixed line will continue to play a pivotal role but resellers would be wise to recognise that the future will be mobile first, given that the network edge has moved from on-site servers and desktops to mobiles, laptops and IoT sensors. That's according to Tardis CEO Matt Mimo who also highlighted Ericsson and Vodafone's recent 5G proof of concept as a bellwether, which provided immersive experiences through live performances powered by 5G, mixing music from DJs across London in real time.

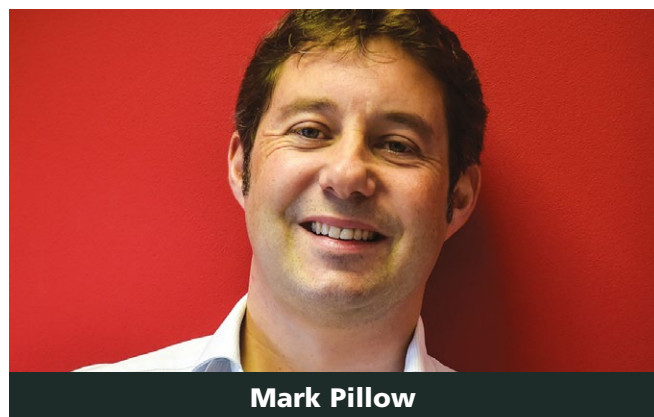
"End user businesses may look at these kinds of proof of concepts and want the same for themselves," stated Mimo. "Some will be lucky enough to leverage public 5G networks while others may be impatiently waiting for their areas to go live. Many still don't see the benefits, especially those in areas where 5G coverage is sporadic and unreliable. Businesses shouldn't have

to wait for the Big Four to deploy their infrastructure or make sure coverage is reliable both indoors and outdoors."

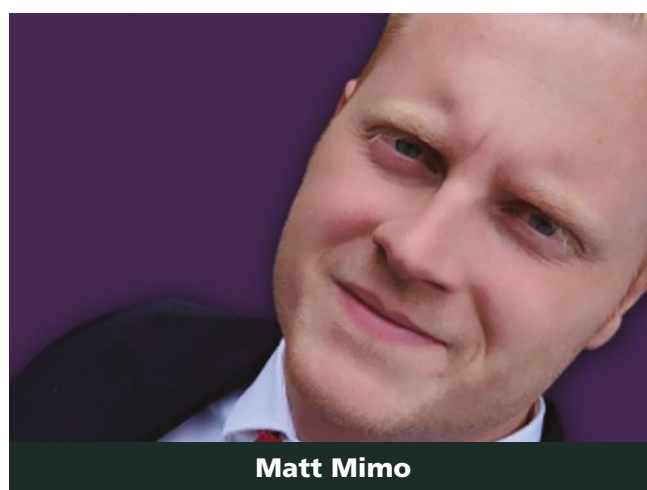
With the 2025 switch-off fast approaching the smartest businesses are already investing in robust intelligent mobile connectivity, like private 5G networks, to get ahead and start creating the new generation of customer experiences, pointed out Mimo. "Plus, it means they're perfectly placed to enjoy a seamless 2025 transition and leverage IoT and other smart services to gain operational advantages," he added.

"Only by having a breadth of mobile connectivity options can resellers ensure that all of their business customers' challenges can be solved."

Mark Pillow, Managing Director, Voip Unlimited, also emphasised that we are rapidly moving into an all-digital future and he says investment is needed to ensure all areas of the country can utilise 5G to



Mark Pillow



Matt Mimo

its fullest, with private 5G networks playing a big role as many businesses can't rely solely on fixed line services. "Especially given that carriers have not been able to roll out a consistent experience in line with the expectations of businesses and consumers," stated Pillow. "This presents an opportunity for the channel to step in and connect the areas that will see an immediate benefit."

Pillow also noted that the 5G network will impact the reseller market in less obvious ways. For example, mobile voice services will no longer be monopolised by carriers because voice services and end user experiences (alongside audio quality) are now influenced as much by the application and its optimisations as by the network used. "In many ways this is ideal for channel resellers who may be looking to explore margin rich data solutions, but they

need a partner that is an expert in both voice and data services to guarantee a positive customer experience," added Pillow.

"Furthermore, business mobile solutions are no longer decided upon by the size of minute bundles, given businesses and consumers now rely on data and app services such as Unified Communications and VoIP. Therefore, the quality of service, reliability and top tier audio quality are far more influential in buying decisions than simply how many free minutes you can offer."

#### Optimising coverage

According to Pillow we are moving towards a more interconnected future but to be truly interconnected we need reliable Internet access everywhere, not just in major towns and cities. "The public 5G infrastructure still needs much work to optimise its coverage and reliability, and

businesses and consumers still need to be convinced that mobile networks are the better option when compared to fixed line services," he said. "For instance, in high footfall areas such as shopping centres or stadia a 5G signal may be poor if relying on public carrier coverage. And in rural areas the expectation of receiving a 5G signal is little to none.

"3G and 4G still remain dominant in many scenarios due to the inherent limitations of the 5G roll out in areas with next-gen infrastructure already deployed. Before making plans for an interconnected mobile-first future, technology leaders must first and foremost focus on getting the 5G infrastructure right and ensuring it's fit-for-purpose, which at the moment it certainly isn't at a national level."

That said, 5G is enabling a variety of use cases that are transforming many industries, observed Javier Martin, CEO, Summa Networks (part of Enreach). "IoT will accelerate with the deployment of 5G networks," he stated. "5G will enable IoT devices to process data faster and will drive new use cases such as remote surgeries, the monitoring and control of industrial equipment, autonomous vehicles and smart cities. Think how the IoT already supports daily life



# nnected future

by connecting smart home applications, or how it's changing industries such as logistics, energy, healthcare, and virtual and augmented reality applications that require high bandwidth Internet connections for higher quality displays and less data congestion."

Martin also noted that 5G is catalysing the growth of over-the-air (OTA) services which enable, for example, software updates and maintenance to be carried out remotely, reducing operational costs and complexities. "We expect 5G to accelerate innovation in those verticals where secure and fast communication are of paramount importance," added Martin. "The rise and expansion of private networks is also a trend that we see emerging with 5G adoption. Non-telcos, such as enterprises and industrial sites, will become operators of their own networks with secure, reliable communications and transmission of data."

Martin pointed out that edge computing development enhances 5G technology as it can help reduce latency and improve the performance of applications. "Combined with 5G networks data can be processed at the edge of the network," he added. "Network slicing is another



**Matt Dykes**

characteristic of 5G and gives operators the ability to create virtual networks targeting specific use cases, increasing differentiation and ways to better monetise 5G networks."

#### Critical infrastructure

Faster networks like 5G are vital to the success of new technologies like AI, noted Matt Dykes, COO, Abzorb. "The Government's ambition for the UK to become a global leader in AI design and development means increasing investment in the infrastructure to facilitate this vision," he said. "The Government stated that everyone will be on 5G by 2030 and over-the-air testing is taking place. However, the 5G network should be standalone, not non-standalone."

The Government announced on 11th April 2023 that it

will be investing £40 million to reach 100 per cent standalone 5G coverage for all populated areas by 2030. "But 77 per cent of the population in the UK using 5G are on non-standalone 5G," added Dykes. "5G standalone is a virtualised cloud native core designed to be disaggregated across the network as opposed to the traditional hardware dependent networks. The advantages of it being cloud-based are significant for increased speed, lower latency and deployment, albeit more technically challenging. To drive the mobile IoT world standalone 5G connectivity is crucial."

Furthermore, noted Dykes, PWC has calculated that 5G can unlock up to £43 billion for the UK's GDP by 2030. "Additional investment is essential," he urged. "5G networks will also enable more people in remote areas to access faster connections which is vital now that 44 per cent of the UK population is hybrid working, according to Office National Statistics. 5G will also be beneficial in improving the customer experience. Since the pandemic more people shop and bank online and a seamless customer service is expected as the norm." ■



**Javier Martin**

## Why Seamless Integration Is The Key To Success In An Omnichannel World

**K**eeping communication simple can be a constant challenge in an increasingly diverse and complex 'always on' world.

Multiple platforms, video calls, mobile devices and even traditional deskphones all have a role to play in keeping businesses and their people connected wherever they maybe. Driving customer engagement is crucial too.

Choice is good. However, businesses need to be able to engage via every available channel – from one centralised, all-in-one-place communications platform - to maximise efficiency and performance.

#### Global Collaboration

It's an omnichannel approach which requires seamless integration, as Unified Communication continues to transform the hybrid working world. Responding to this omnichannel challenge is the next step on the journey.

As a global collaboration service provider, Evolve IP offers a white-label, cloud-based telephony and collaboration platform which has the power to bring everything together in a simple and effective way.

We believe it should be all about making things as easy as possible for the partner to engage; pre and post-sale. Today, that means ensuring they can do so via whatever channel they prefer which, in turn, means integrating all of those channels into a powerful Communications Platform as a Service (CPaaS) or Contact Centre as a Service (CCaaS) solution.

Regardless of industry sector, location or seat size, user experience and customer experience are now mainstream concepts that are at the centre of a dynamic and flexible buying process.

Separation between those channels of communication makes for a resource-heavy, fragmented eco-system with huge potential to frustrate customers and agents alike. In addition, that kind of fragmentation is a barrier to the smooth harvesting and

interpretation of communication data that is so key to knowing your customer and supporting the design of more efficient workflows.

#### Seamless

Our CPaaS offering seamlessly brings all of an organisation's communications channels together onto a single, platform; making it easier to execute, manage, monitor and oversee an omnichannel strategy.

Powered by cloud technology, it can competitively, economically and accessibly deliver services to businesses of all sizes, providing them with the agility they need to develop and integrate communications channels and features, without the need for dedicated tech and tailor-made apps.

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We recognise that one size doesn't fit all. Every sector and business has different needs, so it's important to offer tailored solutions that provide maximum value and impact.

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# Pastel chief tones up for

**Having recognised potential for strong growth Pastel Group Managing Director Mark Thorndike is resolutely doubling down on the move to wholesale, third party partnerships and closer customer engagement.**

**A**s Thorndike proceeds to strengthen Pastel Group's influence and presence in the market he continues to execute his strategic growth plan on a number of fronts, supported by impressive year-on-year revenue figures that culminated with an 81 per cent increase in 2022 over the previous year, driven largely by a significant boost from wholesale billing which was up 170 per cent. Early indications are that 2023 is shaping up for a record year with wholesale billing up 45 per cent on 2022's Q1.

"We have many priorities this year, one of which is a strong commitment to building our Pastel Partners programme," stated Thorndike. "Third parties can join with no minimum requirements and go straight into offering a full suite of voice, data, mobile and IT. It's a great way for any business that doesn't currently offer comms to jump in with our support."

Staffordshire-based Pastel Group began its commercial life in 2013, originally trading as Pastel Solutions and specialising in the mobile

arena which was Thorndike's first stomping ground since leaving university (after graduating he worked for an independent mobile phone reseller and within three months became Sales Manager). "However, since diversifying our product offering to include voice, connectivity and IT services we took on the Pastel Group name and went through a rebrand in 2021," explained Thorndike.

The company opened a Truro office in 2015 and a new office in Whiteley, Fareham, this year. The Truro move extended Pastel Group's geographic reach and coincided with the business branching out from being mobile centric to offer other products such as hosted phone systems and data lines.

"At first, we started working with partners like Gamma on a dealer model basis but soon realised we needed to bring these key elements in house on a wholesale, self-billed model," added Thorndike. "In 2021 our Sales Director, Ollie Moseley, joined the team and contributed greatly towards UCaaS growth especially. We also



Mark Thorndike

## Where resellers like us can add true value is by knowing the market, listening to the pain points and finding a joint solution

launched Pastel IT Services and the Pastel Partners sales channel designed to give third parties the ability to sell our core products."

### Partner loyalty

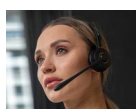
Thorndike is confident that his early decision to select and align with core partners will keep Pastel Group on track, helping to drive growth by remaining loyal and gaining preferential 'rights'. "By showing partners loyalty we have been included in many pre-release stages of their services, enabling us to mould and

tailor our approach to the market," added Thorndike.

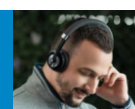
"For example, we recently became a Gamma Technical Alliance Partner. The team put many man hours into up-skilling and development and the designation shows our interest in finding out how customers work on a day-to-day basis. This includes digging below the surface to unearth potential issues. And we advise customers on the true market, not just the product that makes the most margin. We aren't product

pushers and this is reflected in our retention figures."

Pastel Group promotes a 94 per cent customer retention rate, and according to Thorndike close customer engagement is key. "We looked at how our customers were talking to us, how they interacted and what that looked like for them," he added. "That's why we invested in our CCaaS offering. This year we are looking at how this service can sit in all businesses, not just the classic contact centre filled with outbound traffic."



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# growth

This all points to real momentum around customer engagement strategies supported by consultation. "Real value is created by listening to customers and letting them dictate what is important for their business goals," said Thorndike. "Where resellers like us can add true value is by knowing the market, listening to the pain points and finding a joint solution. Pairing that with providing a realistic expectation from both parties for roll out and ongoing support is where we have found our success."

## High exposure

The imperative to turn up the volume on Pastel Group's many advantages for customers is not lost on Thorndike who is now placing a great emphasis on broadening the firm's exposure to potential clients and most importantly the existing base. "We need to improve on how much we shout about what we do," he added. "A long-term customer told me recently that they didn't know we could provide IT services. If they had known we could have saved them a headache."

"This year we are putting more investment in our outbound image. We are going to do our best to tell the comms world what we do. The business has gone from strength to strength and we know with all the work being put in to build our supplier relationships and customer engagement we are on to a winner. Our great strength is our relationships with customers and suppliers. We move heaven and earth to achieve their goals. Equally, we are not afraid to have disruption conversations."

## Just a minute with Mark Thorndike...

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

Attention to detail and building relationships is a strength, but I need to work on making more time for my family (my golf game also needs improvement).

**Lesson learnt:** Realising that I am not an expert in every field. Having the best people around me to complement my skills gives us the best chance of thriving.

**In hindsight:** I would have moved into the wholesale market sooner. It's a great sustainable model and will always allow for organic growth as opposed to capital investment.

**Industry bugbear:** Regulation. There are still too many companies that price incorrectly to win the business and then mess it up. They tarnish the reputation of legitimate companies.

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I was an extra on Eastenders.

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Jonny Wilkinson, Robin Williams and Steve Jobs.

**One example of something you have overcome:** Weight: I went from 18.5 stone to 12.5 stone.

**Top tip:** Get the right people around you to succeed and look after the customer.

"From the research we have conducted, some of the best customer engagement we have seen is when we show the outside world what it's like to work at Pastel. We have a great team, the offices are lively and people enjoy their jobs. We want like-minded individuals who have the desire to build and scope their own careers and we strive to keep this ethos going." ■

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# Knowing your options

**Cloudcell Managing Director Kevin Boyle is busy redefining the industry's understanding of alternative network provision – and his connectivity innovations have little to do with full fibre.**

Cloudcell is perhaps best known for innovating solutions around connectivity and according to Boyle a big challenge facing the industry is that traditional fixed line services do not always deliver the level of connectivity and service a customer requires. "Full fibre is still not consistently resilient and rural areas remain largely underserved," he said. "With this in mind Cloudcell continues to develop an understanding of fibre alternative solutions."

Boyle believes that the shortfalls he sees in fixed line connectivity will drive the adoption of Fixed Wireless Access (FWA). "In some cases where FWA is not used as a company's primary connection it can be seen as a viable business continuity option," added Boyle. "This is evident in the residential market with EE/BT providing 4G backup for broadband products."

Cloudcell is sharply focused on identifying where fibre alternatives fit into a partner's portfolio and the marketplace in general and while 5G is a strong contender it won't become the de facto option

unless there is a watertight case for its deployment. "We aren't simply going to sell everyone 5G," added Boyle. "Every location and every customer is unique and the existing 5G landscape is still patchy. Although coverage is improving on a daily basis this does not always guarantee high performance."

"Furthermore, 5G is currently being rolled out in non-standalone mode which means it is utilising the existing 4G network infrastructure. Inconsistencies in performance are being regularly observed by our field engineers who are constantly testing 5G connectivity across the country."

"They have found poor 5G performance in both metropolitan and suburban locations. This appears to be a capacity issue. There is also the MNOs' use of the 5G n28 (700 Mhz) band rather than the more common n78 (3500 Mhz) in many towns and rural locations. This band does not deliver the same level of performance and although a location may say it has 5G it will often not deliver a significant improvement on existing



Kevin Boyle

## Full fibre is not consistently resilient and rural areas remain largely underserved

4G. That said, the rollout of standalone 5G should see performance improvements and even better coverage which will make 5G a true competitor to fibre."

### 5G use cases

Boyle currently sees two stand out scenarios for 5G adoption: Firstly, where a customer is moving to a new office and has a fibre installation planned. If at the last minute the fibre is delayed and the customer needs a high performance connection to support its business a 5G or multi 5G connection can provide an interim solution. The second use case is a customer moving into a new office and has requested a fibre installation. If the excess construction charges are

excessive 5G can provide a viable replacement.

Boyle also emphasised that full fibre availability is still a long way from being a standard. "Laying new fibre is not a quick process," he commented. "5G could be seen as a viable alternative. This is more challenging in rural locations where 5G is even more patchy, but the Shared Rural Network roll out should provide these locations with a decent 4G performance which would be a viable alternative to poor broadband. Where 5G is available customers who do not have fibre can look at FWA as an alternative."

Perhaps not surprisingly given the challenges noted above Cloudcell is equipping

partners with a more flexible portfolio and is gearing up to launch a new reseller programme while expanding its EQ Storm proposition to cover all multi-connection products. "Our EQ Max product can be configured to deploy the optimum solution according to need and location," explained Boyle. "This could consist of two 5G, four 4G or a mix of 4 and 5G connections to deliver the optimal solution."

Cloudcell will also roll out EQ Flex this year which is commercially made up of multiple EQ Storm modules. "This allows the solution to be as large as needed with a modular commercial model that is easy for the customer to understand," explained Boyle. "The EQ flex solution will require a site survey and some consultation before quote and installation."

Boyle noted that Cloudcell is looking to introduce low earth orbit (LEO) stationary satellites into its portfolio to bring additional capacity and resilience to larger solutions. "The combination of satellite and cellular delivers a solution that can provide a business grade wireless connectivity service in a variety of different locations," he said.

The extent to which Cloudcell is pathfinding alternative connectivity solutions that serve a great purpose is impressive and Boyle plans to continually share market knowledge and experience with his expanding reseller network. "The connectivity marketplace is evolving rapidly, resellers' portfolios need to represent the best available solutions and fibre alternatives have their own place in that offering to customers," stated Boyle. ■





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rollout of 5G, and the 3G network sunset. As channel players, you need expertise and solutions to help your customers. There's never been a better time to partner up with us and our game-changing Intelligent Mobile Data solutions - we're channel-only, we're dedicated, and we never sell directly to customers. We don't win if you don't win, so we don't leave anything to chance! If all you're looking for is a provider that sends you a price list and a box of SIMs, then we're not right for you. We help you support your customers every step of the way by providing sales training, marketing, tech knowledge, and deal clinics to help you identify, qualify, and win big revenue deals!



**Tom Hynes**  
Channel Sales Manager, Telxl

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**Paul Taylor**  
Sales Director Voiceflex

"Voiceflex has been a sponsor at Margin for several years, allowing us to meet existing and potential partners and

we have always been known as a traditional carrier supplying SIP and hosted services. The communications marketplace is changing; voice will not be the prime method of communication for many organisations in the next few years. Instead, more and more communications will take place online, and we will be showcasing a number of new products and services to complement our existing portfolio. What we love about communications is it's constantly evolving. Join us to find out how we're helping to better serve the channel, our partners and the working needs of today's customers."

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**Mark Riddell – Head of Indirect Channel – Abzorb**

Abzorb simplifies unified communications by delivering end to end solutions to partners through a single portal. "We aim to simplify mobile, cloud telephony and unified communications for our partners. We've made some exciting improvements to the look and feel of our hosted portal by simplifying the ordering and provisioning processes to deliver a more seamless experience with increased capability and functionality. It is probably the most intuitive and comprehensive portal in the channel today."



**Kevin Boyle – MD – Cloudcell**

Cloudcell Technologies has rapidly become a trusted and recognised leader of fibre-alternative connectivity in the IT reseller sector. We believe every business deserves outstanding broadband. Our wireless expertise, technology and solutions provide your customers with guaranteed, reliable, and fast connectivity anywhere they want it. As a partner-focused company, we provide our partners with a program of tailored support and training, enabling them to grow existing revenues and establish new customers in proven customer verticals. We pride ourselves on our service excellence – constantly exceeding our customers' connectivity expectations. If you're looking for a connectivity partner you can trust, you're in safe hands.



**Alan Stephenson-Brown – CEO – Evolve**

Evolve Managed Networks offers proactive and human-centric digital solutions to keep your business running smoothly 24/7/365. With smart systems and agile procedures, we identify and fix problems before you even notice them. Our three primary services - Business Connectivity, Guest WiFi, and SD-WAN - provide one-stop solutions for all your telecom needs. Our patented SD-WAN technology allows us to deliver top-notch hardware with software-defined WAN paths that offer layers of redundancy, ensuring high availability and cloud-based control. Our PCI DSS compliant solution is level 1 certified, and we are members of IWF and part of the Cyber Essentials Scheme, with ISO 9001 and ISO 27001 certifications.



**Sean Dixon – Sales Director – Fidelity Energy**

Partnering with Fidelity Energy enables you to easily create a recurring revenue stream from your existing customer base, just through obtaining their energy bill. It's a complimentary product for the telecoms channel, which makes it the perfect cross-sell opportunity. From standard energy procurement to sustainable products such as Electric Vehicle charge points, Solar PV panels and Voltage Optimisation, there is a wide range of solutions that you can add to your portfolio to support your customers even further. Join Managing Director, John Haw, and Sales Director, Sean Dixon, to discover the benefits to your business through a partnership with Fidelity Energy.



**David Yates – Co-Founder – Gigabit Networks**

Gigabit Networks is a leading provider of ultrafast, ultra-reliable, and value-for-money fibre connectivity for businesses across East Midlands in UK. With a focus on providing future-proofed services, Gigabit Networks uses the latest technology to offer the best service possible, giving businesses the assets they need to thrive in today's digital landscape. Gigabit Networks' dedicated team of experts provides a personalised service to every customer, from initial consultation through to ongoing support. With a commitment to delivering exceptional customer service and a passion for innovation, Gigabit Networks is the ideal partner for any business looking to take their connectivity to the next level.



**Ellie Allseybrook – Business Development Director – Inform Billing**

"We are excited to be involved with the new combined 'Margin' event this year, which will provide a fantastic opportunity for learning, discussion and networking. Shaun and I will be available for meetings throughout the afternoon, to chat about billing challenges and to advise on how to overcome them. We also have some brand new areas of value we are looking forward to introducing to delegates."



**Philippe Du Fou – EMEA Sales Director – Intermedia**

Intermedia is a partner-first company that services over 500k UCaaS lines globally, which is our own product developed and back by our 99.999% uptime SLA. As one of our partners, you can resell our UC and Contact Centre offer under a private label to separate yourself from the pack. Besides, we only sell via indirect channel, so we won't compete with you. We eliminate the need for multiple communications service providers with our seamlessly integrated solutions portfolio – including voice, video, chat, contact center, business email, file sharing & backup – delivered on one highly reliable, secure platform. With one monthly bill, one point of control, and six-years running J.D. Power-certified support, Intermedia provides enterprise-grade products with a Worry-Free Experience.



**Nathan Mitchell – Business Manager – Mdee**

Mdee is a leading airtime and services distributor of BT and EE products. As specialists in small business through to corporate opportunities, we offer an unparalleled service to partners across the UK. Speak to us about how we can help you build and process profitable deals for your customers, whilst importantly, retaining full control of your business. You sell, and we do the rest. We don't have punitive clauses or targets to restrict freedom of movement or force business direction.

## Pragma

*Pragma and Candio are part of the EnableX Group who are 'Changing the Channel' with our dedicated approach supporting our partners to win across multiple high margin technology areas.*



**Roan Pratt – Group Sales & Marketing Director – EnableX**

Pragma – a Cloud Service Provider centred around Ericsson-LG iPECS technology with >15M users globally and >115K in the UK. Our Enterprise Class platform is the perfect solution for customers of all shapes and sizes. It is feature-rich and includes ANYWHERE, our FMC solution, and our exciting roadmap is bringing AI to our UCaaS and CCaaS portfolios.



**Tom Chedham – Business Development Manager – Candio**

Candio – a digital transformation specialist purpose built to help partners accelerate their organic growth. Our range of high impact white-labelled subscription services will help you increase your recurring revenue and enable your customers to be secure and found online.



**Anna Maria Marzec-Thomas – Sales Director – ProVu**

ProVu are the Channel's leading Comms, Security and Data specialist distributor. We've been providing custom services to Channel partners for over 20 years. With a wide variety of services designed to simplify your processes, we take distribution to another level. We provide automated services for the fulfilment, provisioning, and ongoing management of VoIP hardware. Whether it's a complex install which requires consultancy, a large installation you don't have the resources to carry out yourself, or you simply want to talk to a friendly team who are passionate about helping you maximise your opportunities. Visit us at Margin to discover the future of value-added distribution.



**Mark Jones – Channel Manager UC - UK and Ireland – Sangoma**

Founded in 1984 and headquartered in Canada, Sangoma is a financially stable and growing manufacturer for industry leading UC solutions; helping businesses simplify the way they communicate and collaborate. We own the intellectual property for our portfolio and manufacture everything; this knowledge and expertise means we are uniquely positioned to offer a complete solution covering everything a business needs for its phone system; while ensuring optimal interoperability with our gateways, IP phones, SBCs. Our proposition is simple - we offer complete flexibility - the user experience is the same for cloud, on-premise, hybrid or virtual deployments; with perpetual licenses or renewal subscriptions.



**Robert Nunn – Business Owner – Viegli**

The global headset market is worth \$44billion and expected to grow at over 30% per annum.. "You can struggle to make decent margins on headsets.

Often, the end user will suggest they can buy the proposed product cheaper online than the reseller can buy at trade" says Robert Nunn, Viegli's MD. VT is a premium brand, only available to UK & Ireland resellers, with guaranteed 30 + margin and we're looking for new resellers – come and talk to us about how to add these to your portfolio



**Mark Pillow – Managing Director – Voip Unlimited**

Voip Unlimited was founded in 2006 and has become an industry leader in creating and providing quality voice services for the Channel. We focus on delivering business-grade Unified Communications, VoIP services, and network and connectivity solutions through our own Tier-1 network. But we measure our success on the success of our reseller partners. Our company ethos and promise to our partners to create 'solid solutions built to succeed' is part of every solution we produce. Our latest communication solution, Voxone, is a game-changing UCaaS platform designed to bring simplicity to all modes of business communication.



**Nino Besevic – Partner Sales – Wildix**

Wildix is the first unified communications solution that is 100% sales-oriented. The company was founded in 2005 by the Osler brothers to develop a UCaaS solution that would disrupt the market. It currently has over a million active users across 135 countries who trust the communications and collaboration systems created by the company, delivering significant cost savings, leaner business processes and powerful results that ensure a positive ROI.



**Robert Foster – Sales Director – Zest4**

Zest4 is a dedicated supplier of wholesale unified communications for the reseller channel. We have an extensive portfolio spanning mobile, telephony, IoT and connectivity, allowing our Partners to best serve their customers, and providing them with the tools they need to succeed. We make transacting simple with easy-to-use portals, offer a full suite of marketing content have The Connected Hub which gives end-users the ability to run their own accounts, we also give our Partners the option to bill direct or to leave it in our hands. Every Partner has a dedicated account manager to give them the best service.

# Creating value through f

Ongoing economic pressure means that securing the liquidity and working capital required to drive business growth will continue to be a challenge for the foreseeable future. But last month's Comms Dealer insight session, held in association with B2B APM, measured the potential impact of a new subscription funding model that could enable channel organisations to accelerate the cash flow they need to build value, engage better, drive efficiency and further their growth ambitions in times of challenge, opportunity and change.

**A**s comms sector transformation continues to gather a head of steam it's more important than ever to focus hard on cash flow management and push working capital optimisation to the top of the corporate agenda – but the funding required to underpin growth, support change and deliver long-term value is becoming far more difficult to secure. "For telecoms resellers in particular, and at service provider level, their options for raising extra cash is limited in terms of securities which need to be given and the lending that is available," stated B2B APM Director Dan Proctor.

According to Proctor, subscription funding is the most appropriate model to drive working capital optimisation. His strategy pushes cash into channel businesses to accelerate their income and, for example, drive innovation and growth. Proctor is convinced that this is the way forward and has launched a product into the telco market that not only turns new recurring deals into immediate cash but also enables channel

firms to sell on their service based contracts and gain a cash injection on day one. "Channel companies can utilise existing assets in their business in a straightforward way to improve their liquidity," added Proctor.

CEO Andrew Dickinson noted that while the debt market in the channel is not closed, it is however squeezed and limiting. "You're probably getting two to three and half times cover at best and paying punitive interest," he said. "Anything you can do to smooth this and move from a non-recurring revenue model to a predictable recurring one is a good thing. Moreover, the old days of buying a box are over – with exceptions – so you have to make sure your sales people are in tune. They need to get used to the idea that they get paid when you get paid."

#### Up-front payments

This scenario supports the case for a subscription funding solution that pays up-front and is geared towards working capital optimisation. After all, working capital becomes more critical in times of economic headwinds



Industry thinkers consider new strategies for working capital optimisation

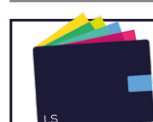
## For telecoms resellers in particular, and at service provider level, their options for raising extra cash is limited

and market disruption, making it important for the channel to prioritise cash flow management.

The extent to which the cost of borrowing, for example, can inhibit channel firms and stop them from responding

to future opportunities at pace was underscored by Inform Billing Managing Director Shaun Bodsworth. "The issue is not about funding the deal, but funding business growth," he stated. "We've grown organically over 13 years

but to fast-forward our investment the options are to put your head on the block with personal guarantees or take private equity, which is not for everybody. Subscription funding opens up another opportunity. We could accelerate our



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# Finance model innovation

is semi-leasing and semi-rent, believes Viegli Business Owner Robert Nunn. "Cash is King, so anything you can do to leverage a relationship with a finance business that puts cash into your business is a good thing," he stated. "All of my cash is in the warehouse. Why would a distributor give a credit line worth many thousands to a small reseller? We deal with small resellers that only do three or four bits of business a year but it's good business. And accelerating cash into our business can help us."

Both Bodsworth and Nunn highlight the potential for a new funding model to be applied across the supply chain which could drive cash flow for upstream providers like billing companies, distributors and aggregators for example. Furthermore, Nimans Sales Director Tom Maxwell provided some context to underline how emerging financing solutions will be riding the wave of an already buoyant marketplace. "We've been offering financial services for many years and just had our best two months back-to-back," he commented. "Two or three years ago we couldn't get licences leased but we now have products that are 100 per cent licensed. Leasing and financial services has evolved, albeit slower than the market requires, but it's going well."

## Accelerating change

It is Proctor's intention to speed up that evolution by moving away from the lease to raise service revenue. And there are a number of different applications of the product, called Liquid Subscriptions, which Proctor says is the 'antithesis of leasing' and the first of its

kind in the telco channel. There is a similar offering in the SaaS market but the advances are small by comparison. In practice, there is a 10 per cent fee payable to APM but in return

## Cash is King, so anything you can do to leverage a relationship with a finance business that puts cash into your business is a good thing

the company accelerates cash and working capital that can be invested into growth strategies with outcomes that far outstrip the initial investment.

## Key use cases

Shedding light on some of the applications for Liquid Subscriptions, Proctor said: "The service can be deployed on a per contract basis as new customers come on board and it can be used to support the overall commercial construct of a deal. Another example is a reseller using this to leverage the balance sheet of a company they are buying, looking at the recurring revenue in the knowledge that they can get x amount of cash back immediately, which is reducing the amount of liquid cash they put into these ventures. It all comes down to our risk and our underwriting.

"We're also working with people in the CRM field which advertises a cost per month but bills up-front so

you have to pay annually in advance. Their customers can now truly pay monthly and they still get paid annually in advance. Leasing companies won't touch this because it's pure services to be provided in the future."

It goes without saying that the fast-moving business comms market has created a need for alternative payment and funding methods, a requirement that is reflected in Daisy Communications CEO Dave McGinn's experience. "When I speak to friends in the industry

I generally say to them that they need to get as much monthly revenue into their business as possible if they want to gain high multiples," stated McGinn.

"Ninety six per cent of our business is now recurring revenue. We have moved away from on-premises and leases. But with monthly recurring revenue you are becoming the debt underwriter of your customers. You might not want to underwrite the debt or future debt of customers, and might want to subset some of that to someone else. It's about figuring out how you want to attack it."

One approach, noted Voiceflex Chief Commercial Officer Paul Taylor, is to use leasing as a hybrid product to help and support people transition to a recurring revenue model. Another important factor is the extent to which this strategy could be applied to existing customer bases. "Resellers

## More insights...

In terms of the liquidity of the channel a big question is which distributor you chose and who is going to give you the biggest credit line and how long will they allow you to pay for it?

**B2B APM Director Dan Proctor**

What's important from the banking and funding side – which is why they all love the IT and telecoms industry – is the business critical assets. Bad debt in the IT and telco world is around 0.2 to 0.3 per cent.

**Hexa Finance Co-Founder Stuart Mason**

Look at how resilient resellers are: The channel used to be IT and comms but with the advent of IP we've diversified and given customers entry into new markets like CCTV, the network and wireless LAN. The wallet share of the customer has increased.

**Nimans Sales Director Tom Maxwell**

The industry has created a perception that leasing has no part to play, but an educated sales person can sell against opex all day long with a capex and lease approach.

**Viegli Business Owner Robert Nunn**

The channel is incredibly resilient and our bad debt is ridiculously low. We deal with a thousand reseller partners and service providers and may get one or two a year with an issue.

**ProVu Group Managing Director Darren Garland**

The word 'leasing' is evolving – finance is the importance piece.

**Hexa Finance Co-Founder Stuart Mason**



in the subscription economy

development by drawing in some cash from sound revenue from customers that have been with us for a long time. So rather than take on a developer in six months time and another one in a year's time I can take them both on now. That's the key. For anyone in the as-a-service business there's legs in the idea."

In the distributor segment there is a real need for a hybrid finance model which

Continued on page 30


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# comms dealer Digital Events



Comms Dealer's new online events are designed to offer a cost-effective route to market and a unique opportunity for sponsors to build their own reseller communities.

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- Comms Dealer Virtual round tables
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Use our digital events to deliver...



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Brand exposure and networking



Research and industry insight



Analytics & measurement

Our digital events are built on media serving an engaged digital channel community including: The Comms Dealer website which provides over 21,000 unique monthly visitors, our e-newsletters going direct to over 15,000 ICT channel contacts and our influential social media networks.

Contact us to explore how you can grow your community with Comms Dealer online events.

**Simon Turton**  
sturton@bpl-business.com  
07759 731 134

**Continued from page 29**  
need cash in the business but they have to morph," he said. "Furthermore, the acquisition of a new customer is difficult. But telecoms is the best industry to be in because you can meet the requirements of an existing base and keep that product chain running over time. We started with PSTN and moved to ISDN, then ISDN to SIP, from SIP to UC and now UC to UCaaS. You can have the same customer for 20 years and every three or four years sell them a brand new product. Many resellers have big bases and can sell additional products. And many resellers are smart organisations with recurring revenue."

Notably, recurring revenues are not leasable assets so leasing companies don't

## Working capital is vital to businesses regardless of their lifecycle

like funding them, and subscription licenses cause a lot of risk to the leasing firm. But new funding approaches can dovetail with a comms provider's existing sales approach and business model and help them double down on the need for a laser-like focus on liquidity whatever their size.

"Working capital is vital to businesses regardless of their lifecycle," said Pragma Sales Director Roan Pratt. "The traditional leasing model is critical to newly established and young businesses, less so to those more mature with increasing monthly recurring revenue. If an alternative model can deliver both of these elements providing working capital in different ways then I'm sure the channel would welcome it."

It's also worth noting the big changes experienced



by the public sector at the moment in terms of IFRS 16, the accounting standard implemented to make sure that nothing is off the balance sheet from a leasing perspective, and which could have a ripple effect across industries. "The public sector is going through a huge challenge in terms of how it can enter into a contract," explained Proctor. "The split between service and hardware raises the question

of what is and isn't a lease. It's an interesting example that shows how moving to a pure service based service

model will help public sector organisations enter into a contact a lot quicker."

### Setting the standard

Changes to leasing standards are not only reflected in IFRS 16. Hexa Finance co-founder Stuart Mason shared insights into how his leasing firm is shaking up the traditional finance function by becoming a generator of positive value across three segments – vendors, channel partners and resellers. "We add early value where companies haven't got the balance sheet nor the cash to invest and they need the leasing to power the business," stated Mason. "Four to five years later they may want to exit but that means growing recurring revenue to increase multiples, which means coming off of leasing and maintaining liquidity in the business to service customers. We take these organisations

to a point where they can exit, including through due diligence and credit matrices. Fifty per cent of what we do isn't finance, it's guiding around due diligence."

The importance of finance transformation in the comms channel cannot be overstated, and ProVu Group Managing Director Darren Garland succinctly summed up why business leaders should focus on finance models that relieve working capital and operational pressures by prioritising the cash intake needed to run day-to-day operations and invest in future growth. "Having worked in a number of businesses with poor working capital I have learnt the hard way how important it is," he stated. "A good working capital position allows you to protect your business from unexpected events and downturns. More positively it enables you to take advantage of opportunities that you would otherwise have to pass by.

"However, gaining a healthy working capital position is easier said than achieved. For many reasons a good business may not necessarily have a strong working capital position. In these situations companies need to look for external support through different funding methods. And as the sales mix transitions from a capex to more of an opex play there are opportunities for innovative new funding sources that can be tailored to meet the new operational approaches taken by many channel companies. ■

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# Crossing UCaaS boundaries

Forward-thinking comms resellers are reaping the benefits of crossing service level boundaries with TSI's fresh-to-market feature rich and user friendly next generation UCaaS platform with disruptive pricing models.

**T**SI Director Jack Michalski expects the Cross Connect UCaaS platform to drive seismic shifts in how businesses communicate based on levels of flexibility not seen before. TSI has been a reseller of cloud-based VoIP Unified Communications systems for many years and sold several different systems provided by the largest suppliers in the UK. Disillusioned with those systems TSI carried out a review of the marketplace and met with many suppliers to investigate solutions and pricing models.

"While all have strengths, all had the same issue of inflexibility with pricing models and the inability to create bespoke feature sets for businesses that have employees/devices with different levels of use, so TSI began a project to develop our own solution to address these problems," stated Michalski. "As a reseller we knew the pain points that needed to be resolved."

In 2022 UCaaS expert Aaron Foster joined TSI as Technical Director. He was previously CTO at TelcoSwitch having spent just under five years building its flagship platform. "With Cross Connect's powerful APIs Aaron has developed tools to easily migrate customers from other platforms at the click of a button and to automate the order process for partners,"



## "As a reseller we knew the pain points that needed to be resolved"

Jack Michalski

added Michalski. "It's a quick and efficient process."

Cross Connect's underlying technology is built upon Crexendo's NetSapiens platform, which supports over three million users worldwide. "The development of Cross Connect never stands still to ensure partners can supply cutting-edge technology," confirmed Michalski. "It can integrate with over 300 CRM and business application systems as well as MS Teams, and later this year TSI will be launching an omnichannel Contact Centre and embedding a bespoke audio recording tool using ChatGPT."

"Cross Connect will continue to stand out by having cutting edge features, packaged in a flexible way that allows channel partners to create bespoke solutions for their customers at a

disruptive price point with no long-term contracts and a single pane of glass to manage residential and business customers."

Cross Connect is designed for resellers to be able sell as their own product, with co-branded marketing documents and a Knowledgebase available from the end user portal, and can be white labelled by adding the resellers logo to the platform through to full branding of the entire product.

TSI launched Cross Connect at Channel Live '23 and Michalski said it was 'very pleasing' to get such a great response, with an enthusiastic response to demo's and many following through after the show to become resellers. "Everyone within TSI is just as passionate about Cross

Connect and the test soft launch to circa 2,000 users went incredibly well with fantastic feedback and no issues," added Michalski.

"While perfectly suited to end users of all sizes, from a PSTN replacement through to large enterprises and contact centres, the disruptive pricing of Cross Connect allows resellers to target verticals that cloud UC has been less competitive with compared to onsite PBXs.

"For example, in education and hospitality settings resellers can create bespoke solutions by mixing and matching subscriptions so that the end user does not have to pay the same price for a low use handset in a classroom or hotel room as they do for reception. And Cross Connect Integrator connects to their CRM system, such as SIMS within education."

TSI offers a fully managed dealer and reseller model, as well as bureau billing and a full range of hardware. "We have onboarded some fantastic resellers already this year who have had great success in winning new business by selling Cross Connect in sectors that they were less competitive in with the previous systems that they sold, as well as migrating their existing customers to make more margin," enthused Michalski.

"The uptake has been fantastic since we launched and TSI is going from strength-to-strength, scaling up and hiring new resources in both our London HQ and regional office in Runcorn. TSI is committed to providing ongoing fantastic support while developing new tools to simplify the journey for our partners."

TSI is an established and profitable business that is entirely owner managed and self-funded since inception. "We are not beholden to external investors, we are well resourced and big enough to trust but small enough to care about each and every partner," stated Michalski. "By delivering exceptional service TSI has grown through recommendations over the past 30 years, particularly in the fields of structured cabling and data connectivity."

Martin Coleman, Operations Director for TSI said "developing accounts and repeat business through outstanding service have been our strengths. The launch of Cross Connect marks an exciting new phase for TSI focusing on channel partners. The combination of cutting-edge features, robust and reliable architecture, flexibility to create bespoke solutions for clients and disruptive pricing gives our partners the ability to win any deal." ■

# 4Com Acquires Again: Reach Digital Telecoms is their fourth purchase in just 10 months

4Com is continuing their rapid expansion, coupling strong organic growth with a series of acquisitions. Here's what has been said about each of their acquisitions so far.



**Simon Lister**  
Operations Director at Midshire Telecom

"We really appreciated the approach 4Com took with their acquisition. From the outset they were clear on what they were looking to do and were transparent with us throughout both in terms of process and price. In short, their approach ensured the process was seamless."

**4Com's deal with Midshire was completed in May 2022, within 3 months of the initial contact being made.**



**Haydn Neville**  
Director at Reach Digital Telecom

"We have really appreciated the patience, honesty, and integrity 4Com have shown throughout the process and we want to thank the whole 4Com team for helping us get to this point. Our team are looking forward to this next step."

**4Com's deal with Reach Digital Telecom was completed in March 2023, with conversation having started just 3 months earlier.**



**Ben Newbury**  
Director at Bluebell Cloud Solutions Limited

"4Com were very clear from the outset how the process worked, and pulled no last-minute tricks on price, as so commonly seen in the industry. At Bluebell we wanted funding to expand the business further, so we needed an injection of capital, that's where 4Com came in and purchased a large part of our customer base."

**4Com's deal to acquire the telecoms customer base of Bluebell Cloud Solutions was completed in February 2023, just 6 weeks after they got in touch.**



**Russell Marriott**  
Director at Eastern Voice and Data

"We've been impressed with the diligence, patience and support that 4Com have shown throughout this process. From the outset, they've been up-front and honest with us, and supported us as a smaller business to help both parties reach the desired goal."

**4Com's deal with Eastern Voice and Data was completed in November 2022, within 3 months of their initial contact.**

If you're interested in selling either your business or your telecoms customer base, please visit

[4Com.co.uk/acquisitions](https://4Com.co.uk/acquisitions)







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# Striking the right board

The benefits of a diverse leadership team are many, varied and well documented. Not so clear is the extent to which channel companies are progressing with their D&I strategies at leadership level. Here, channel leaders share insights into their boardroom diversity status, strategies and successes.



THEA TANNER  
BT WHOLESALE

"At BT Wholesale, 62 per cent of the leadership team are women, from an ethnic minority background or both. We have started an LGBTQ+ leaders initiative to ensure those in the LGBTQ+ community are represented at senior levels in the division. BT Group aims to have 17 per cent of our workforce made up of disabled colleagues too. A truly diverse organisation is diverse from the top down, as leaders set an example that trickles down to all levels. Boardroom diversity is an integral part of company culture, employee wellbeing and wider business strategy. Greater diversity improves workplace culture, giving employees the confidence to contribute and ensuring a range of voices are considered. Organisations which reflect our diverse society will reap the rewards in the future and the channel should pave the way for a more inclusive workplace which provides equal opportunity.



VICKI RISHBETH  
FOCUS GROUP

"I am proud to be a part of an ELT which is 40 per cent female. While this is only one diversity metric, it is unusual for our industry. Our longer-term strategy for boardroom diversity is the same from the top down, it is about analysing patterns and behaviours for any potential blockers that stop our people from taking opportunities, seeing how we can negate these and set a positive example by making sure we have diverse high performing teams throughout the group. The greatest teams have a mix of talents, backgrounds, experience and approaches. When making high-consequence decisions in the boardroom it is important the team can bring many perspectives to ensure the right strategy is analysed and implemented quickly. For me, diversity means developing an environment and culture which enables anyone who strives to be part of that team, an opportunity for a seat at the table."



SOHINI RAIATHATHA  
REDSQUID

"To maintain our focus on diversity and equality while fostering personal development we invite non-exec team members to present at our monthly board meetings. This approach has brought new and diverse perspectives to problem solving and has provided insights from different areas of our business. We prioritise diversity within our team and ensure that it is reflected from the floor to the boardroom. Without diversity boardrooms can become static and innovation can be stifled. That's why we make a conscious effort to build a team that encompasses diversity in age, race, nationality, gender and skillsets, which is also reflected in our boardroom. We intend to continue nurturing leadership qualities within our team and we look forward to extending this opportunity to new team members in the next 12 months."



KELSEY HOPKINSON  
COLT

"We've worked hard to achieve 50/50 gender parity, racial and ethnic diversity in our executive leadership team and DEI is a business imperative. If just one team member has traits in common with the customer, the entire team is 152 per cent more likely to understand the customer so our commitment reaches beyond just the boardroom. Diverse businesses deliver a better customer experience. We've just achieved our highest ever NPS scores. There are lots of factors behind this but a diverse, happy, engaged workforce delivers a better customer experience. More than 50 per cent of the women that join the tech industry quit by 35, and 56 per cent by mid-career. It's crucial to remove barriers that hinder the progression of minority groups to senior levels, otherwise boards will look the same and make the same decisions as they did five years ago."



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# Boardroom diversity balance



JO LAWRENCE  
EXERTIS

"In the last five years we've increased our gender and ethnicity diversity, still with more to do. We've increased our balance of long-serving and newer tenured colleagues to blend corporate knowledge and other sector insight. We've more than doubled the number of women in our Senior Leadership Team in recent years. We must continue this and be more proactive beyond gender. We work with our Employee Resource Groups to attract and promote talent from under-represented groups and continue to develop our leaders through inclusive leadership programmes and reverse mentoring schemes. We have an annual D&I pulse survey to understand the progress we are making and the lived experiences of all colleagues. Boardroom diversity means having a range of experiences, thinking styles, preferences and protected characteristics where everyone can be their true self and be heard. This brings better outcomes as we're more creative and consider a wider range of options."



JULIE BISHOP  
IT NATURALLY

"Our leadership team is made up of women and men, full and part time workers and varying ages and ethnicities. We hire based on aptitude and personality which allows us to recruit a wide range of people. When we combine women and men's perspectives we create a more balanced and inclusive environment. Diversity allows for a broader range of ideas, solutions and approaches that lead to better service for our customers. We are agnostic to diversity, we don't set targets and at the request of our team, we don't ask questions. This has led to an amazing team that is diverse because everyone is the best person for the job. Diversity is not about ticking boxes, it's about fostering innovation, creativity and success."



MANDY FAZELYNIA  
ZEST4

"As well as our board of directors, for day-to-day management we have the leadership team which has an almost 50/50 representation. Every consideration is taken to make sure that we maintain and enhance our diversification at all levels. We feel incredibly strongly about diversity and equality and want to make sure there's fair representation across every level of our business. We do this by nurturing our staff to progress throughout their time with us. This makes sure that the skill we cultivate stays within our business, creating a committed team. Diversification at board level is a direct result of the talent we nurtured rising naturally to the top of our organisation, and because of this we create a strong, focused and dedicated leadership."



CHERIE HOWLETT  
JOLA

"Deloitte says diversity takes various forms in a boardroom and can be broadly categorised into skills, expertise and experience. Having the optimal mix is paramount. We believe diverse boardrooms are often more successful because of the way they utilise the wide range of skills and experience at their disposal and the corporate culture they have cultivated. Diversity is part of our values and positively affects how we do business. It starts with an ingrained respect for others and a desire to work together to achieve a common goal. This influences how we innovate, our marketing style and the way we help partners. Hiring people from diverse backgrounds can help to foster creativity and offer a range of perspectives and ideas. Employees are more likely to feel empowered to innovate in an environment where inclusivity is a priority."



LINDA PATTERSON  
TD SYNnex

"We have four women on our main board of ten (this was just one four years ago) and a goal to have 40 per cent women in senior level positions across the business. It's harder to set targets for other diversities, but we certainly do have people of different ethnicities, sexual orientations and with disabilities or neurodiversities in our organisation. A good DEI policy can only be effective with leadership commitment at the highest level. Greater diversity brings broader views and increased creativity which is good for the whole organisation. Our DEI policy ensures everyone can perform to their best and advance their skills and careers. All this makes us more diverse, gives us access to a wider talent pool and creates a more open and fulfilling place in which to work."



VICKY BORI  
NEOS NETWORKS

"Boardroom diversity means having people of different ethnicities, genders, religions and age groups contributing to the leadership and direction of the business. Greater representation empowers organisations to make more informed, collective decisions which utilise a variety of skill sets and experiences, to positively impact company culture, performance, competitiveness and sustainability. Research shows that diverse companies are 35 per cent more likely to perform better. Across telecoms and STEM, gender diversity continues to be a challenge. To address this, we're investing in grassroots engagements such as presentations in schools and offering work experience to encourage more women and girls to pursue a career in these sectors. We're looking at where our business stands today and quantifying the positive impact diversity can have. It's critical that the sector explores methods to plug the gaps, creating more diversity and inclusion and an easy gateway into the industry."

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# Perfecting the leadership

**Vertiv CEO Giordano Albertazzi epitomises the balancing act that many business leaders must perform to deliver their mission critical priorities and strategic objectives with a flourish.**

**E**stablishing the preconditions for a new phase of growth has been central to Albertazzi's current thinking and his biggest priority early last year was to address a number of near-term challenges. "After a challenging end to 2021, in February 2022 we laid out a strategic framework for strengthening our supply chain, addressing cost pressures and operational challenges in the Americas, and advancing our pricing processes to continue to increase our financial strength," stated Albertazzi.

"Each quarter showed a marked sequential improvement and our recent fourth quarter financial results demonstrate the progress we have made in executing our strategy. Now, our senior leadership team

is applying that same rigour across the entire organisation to deliver improved performance and profitability in 2023 and beyond."

Last year proved to be pivotal and transformative for Vertiv, culminating in its best quarter ever with strong year-over-year and sequential growth in revenue, operating profit, margins, cash flow and a record backlog. "Supply chain pressures are easing, pricing continues to improve and we have made steady progress in the Americas with operating margins in that segment rebounding to over 20 per cent in the fourth quarter," added Albertazzi.

"We continue to see healthy demand in our end markets and are confident in our positive outlook for 2023. By prudently managing costs, maintaining a laser



Giordano Albertazzi

**I am always on the front line, working with my team and listening to their ideas to find new ways to improve our performance and drive long-term growth**

sharp focus on operational execution, efficiency and building a high performance culture, we are positioning Vertiv for sustained long-term growth and value creation."

**Ambidexterity**

Albertazzi continues to display strategic ambidexterity and the success of his balancing act is dependent on implementation and leadership at the forefront. "I focus our efforts on execution," stated Albertazzi. "By securing the fundamentals and focusing on clear priorities and good processes, our high performance culture will allow us to achieve our full

potential. It takes hard work and I will lead that work by example. I am also passionate about fostering a culture of innovation, teamwork and customer focus within the company. And I am always on the front line, working with my team and listening to their ideas to find new ways to improve our performance and drive long-term growth."

Monitoring and information gathering is intertwined with Albertazzi's mechanism for strategising and decision making, to ensure he is moving the company in the right direction and at the right pace. "To maintain a balance we use a data-driven

approach to make strategic decisions," he added. "We measure our performance and regularly review priorities to ensure that we are allocating resources in the most effective way.

"There are many other factors we need to balance to drive growth and stay competitive. For example, we innovate and improve our products and services while focusing on cost-effectiveness, operational efficiency and sustainability. As technology and market conditions continue to evolve it is important for business leaders to stay informed and adapt their

**FACT FILE...**

- Giordano Albertazzi joined Vertiv over 25 years ago and was President of EMEA from 2016 to 2022 before becoming President of the Americas in March last year. He assumed the CEO mantle in January 2023.
- Vertiv designs, builds and services critical infrastructure that enables applications for data centres, communication networks and commercial and industrial facilities.

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# balancing act

strategies accordingly, such as leveraging alternative and sustainable energy sources to improve energy efficiency and contribute to widespread net zero goals.”

In response to sustainability challenges, Albertazzi is taking actions to transition

**We measure performance and regularly review priorities to ensure that we are allocating resources in the most effective way**

all of Vertiv’s major EMEA facilities to 100 per cent renewable energy via utility green programmes in 2023, and moving its global HQ campus in the United States to renewable energy. The company is also evolving its product portfolio and service offerings to enable customers to leverage renewable energy in their data centre operations.

“Extending the life of data centre infrastructure equipment is key, achieved through high efficiency solutions, equipment upgrades and scheduled maintenance to keep equipment running smoothly,” added Albertazzi. “Our service team can retrofit a customer’s older thermal equipment with energy saving components including variable speed fans, variable capacity compressors and advanced system controls with a fast return on investment versus system replacement.”

Partnering with industry innovation groups like RISE enables Vertiv to stay abreast of developments and trends, and Albertazzi’s next moves include a focus on innovations around network edge computing which involves moving data processing closer to the users.

This trend is driven by the increasing need for low latency and high bandwidth applications such as streaming services, autonomous vehicles, IoT and 5G.

“Moving data processing closer to the source can reduce the amount of data that needs to be transported over long

distances, which can improve performance and reduce costs,” commented Albertazzi. “Additionally, we are seeing an increasing interest in hybrid solutions where data is processed both in the cloud and at the edge, which can provide the best of both worlds by combining the scalability and cost-effectiveness of the cloud with the low latency and high bandwidth of the edge.”

**Focus areas**

Albertazzi forecasts continued growth in the data centre segment, driven in large part by the increasing need for data storage and processing power as more and more devices and applications become connected to the Internet.

“We will continue to focus on operational efficiency, sustainability, and scalability to ensure that we are able to meet the growing demand for data centre services in the future,” he confirmed.

“We are closely monitoring a number of trends in the market, such as the adoption of prefabricated modular data centre infrastructure to respond at speed to the call for increased compute; higher rack densities requiring new thermal strategies for capacity and energy efficiency; and demand for energy efficient and sustainable solutions to address both changing industry regulations and the commitment that companies are making to adopt more sustainable practices. These trends will play a significant role in shaping our strategy while guiding innovation and future growth.”

**Clear objectives**

It is clear to see that Albertazzi’s strategic balancing act extends far and wide, and he is equally clear on his objectives and how to achieve them. “In today’s rapidly changing market leadership priorities include being adaptable and agile, staying informed about the latest technologies and trends, and fostering a strong and motivated team,” stated Albertazzi.

“The key to continued success is the ability to anticipate and respond to change while staying true to the company’s core values and mission. We develop these conditions with an intense focus on processes, clarity of strategy and tight orchestration to create a framework for good decision making at all levels of the organisation. By staying focused on our priorities and objectives, investing in innovation and R&D and fostering a strong team, we will continue to drive growth. I’m energised as CEO about the future possibilities.” ■



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# New Celerity execs



Julie Redfern and Michael Gowen

BGF-backed Celerity has strengthened its senior team with the appointment of Julie Redfern and Michael Gowen to the board of directors. Redfern has stepped into the CFO role while Gowen becomes CRO.

Redfern has worked at a number of private equity backed and owner managed businesses including NSS, Citation and Latitude. She brings a track record of helping businesses accelerate their revenue and profit growth while supporting founders to secure growth capital.

Gowen's industry experience includes stints at Flow, Daisy and Dimension Data. And as Celerity's CRO he is responsible for overseeing the company's revenue generation and customer acquisition efforts, with a focus on driving growth, transformation and profitability for the business.

Celerity Chief Operating Officer Craig Aston commented: "Julie and Michael will play a pivotal role in ensuring we reach the next stage of our growth journey. Over the next few months we intend to expand our team further to help meet our strategic aims."

## Also on the move...

YAY.COM'S Jez Pickering has taken the newly created role of Head of Customer Experience at TelcoSwitch, which has worked closely with Yay.com since its 2022 acquisition by TelcoSwitch investor Queen's Park Equity. Pickering joined Yay.com in 2017 and already leads TelcoSwitch's restructured numbering division. He will now operationally lead the technical support function in a combined team delivering end-to-end support for TelcoSwitch partners. "My first objective is to streamline support for our partners," stated Pickering. "I want partners to reach us quickly, efficiently and by whatever means works for them."



Jez Pickering

KAO Data chief executive Lee Myall is to head up Neos Networks as CEO. Current chief exec Colin Sempill will continue in the role until Myall joins the company, then he will focus on strategic growth initiatives including leadership of the Network Rail telecoms upgrade project. Myall's sector experience includes a 15 year stint at Interoute where he had strategic and operational responsibility for the UK, the largest business unit in the organisation.

HELEN Ranaghan's promotion to Group Marketing Manager at EnableX is a marker of the company's progression and development, according to Chief Executive Will Morey.



Helen Ranaghan

Ranaghan joined Pragma 10 years ago as an account manager. The group comprises Pragma which was founded in 2012 and Candio, the digital services sister company launched in 2020. Last

year Pragma acquired Techland and created EnableX Group. Morey commented: "It's important to recognise the strengths you have in your team. We believe in supporting our staff to achieve remarkable things."

NFON CEO Klaus von Rottkay is preparing to leave the business making way for incoming chief exec Patrik Heider who joins from software companies Thinkproject and Riskmethods where he was also CEO. "With Patrik we gain an experienced and international manager with leadership qualities and capital market experience which is essential for the development of NFON," stated Chairman Rainer Koppitz. von Rottkay's appointment to the executive board ends 30th November 2023.



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