



Jeff Tench: Architect of a Microsoft powerhouse p30



Intelligent portal breaks new ground in the channel p32

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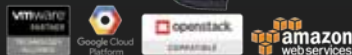
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points to P model

...come mainstream across most industries, ... are already in need of an overhaul.

...ion is redefining ... relationship ... are using more ... IT suppliers. ... will continue in the ... to GCI's CTO ... (pictured) it ... of a managed ... differentiates one ... other rather than ... type of technolo- ... ty of the man- ... as many metrics ... ility and insight

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This month's movers and shakers



Summit points to next MSP model

MANAGED services have officially become mainstream across most industries, so much so that many of today's MSPs are already in need of an overhaul.

SPECIAL REPORT

A new services model was the hot topic at last month's European Managed Services and Hosting Summit (staged in Amsterdam by Comms Dealer sister firm IT Europa) which confirmed that the current MSP model 'came of age' this year.

Speaking at the summit Gartner Research Director Bianca Granetto stated: "The future managed services company will look very different from today.

"Digitalisation is redefining the buyer-seller relationship and customers are using more and more diverse IT suppliers. This process will continue in the coming years."

According to GCI's CTO Mike Constantine (pictured) it is now the quality of a managed service that differentiates one MSP from another rather than the number or type of technologies they offer.

"The quality of the managed service has many metrics such as visibility and insight into the usage and performance of the IT infrastructure, faster speeds, compliance and reduced errors," he said.

"Even more critical is having the expertise to integrate these multiple technologies together and deliver a working solution to the customer."

Robinder Koura, Senior Director of Channel Sales at RingCentral, commented: "The landscape is shifting and resellers have to follow the direction of the wind, and it's blowing stronger than ever."

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

A STAND out factor in this month's issue of Comms Dealer is the extent of innovation and its practical application within the industry right now. Also prominent is the associated transfer of powers which were the preserve of legacy carriers and vendors directly into the hands of resellers who are now able to access the

erstwhile inaccessible and flex their service in real-time and in tandem with the requirements of end users.

A remarkable transformation in network innovation is well under way with leading channel operators and service providers blazing a trail in the implementation of technologies such as Software Defined Networks (SDN), SD-WAN and Network Function Virtualisation (NFV) which are fast emerging into the day-to-day realities of reseller businesses (see our market report on page 48).

The object of all this innovation is in large part to simplify the complex and deliver greater and unheard of levels of control to partners along with a self-serve model that is at the core of plan.com's new V4 intelligent portal. This iteration has a brain with acumen and discerns key insights that the company claims will transform how partners do business. Nor is that all, V4 claims to give resellers functionality that goes beyond the current capabilities of network operators, taking resellers to a new level of empowerment and customer engagement.

We are truly entering the Age of the Reseller, with companies such as Acuity UC acting swiftly on these New World opportunities (see page 40) along with Arden Group which thrives on leveraging responsive technologies to deliver a more personal service (see page 42).

We also profile an American-based business leader who is architecting a global Microsoft powerhouse (see page 30). With high interest in the UK market from across the pond, expect more insightful interviews like this in the future.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

Mayo builds a case for R&D paybacks

KNIGHT Corporate Finance has launched a new company to help channel businesses gain Government funding for R&D, a payback for UK companies that invest in technology development and innovation.

The Government scheme aims to keep R&D in the UK, particularly post-Brexit, and rewards eligible companies with a cash payment and/or corporation tax reduction.

The new enterprise, Knight R&D, is headed up by Australian Rupert Mayo, a former scientist who spent over nine years leading teams in KPMG's R&D tax practice both in his home country and in the UK.

Mayo believes that passion and common sense are key to a successful outcome for claims, which can lead to a 33p in the pound payback on qualifying



Rupert Mayo

project expenditure. "All too often I saw the 'Big 4' accounting firms hire people with extensive qualifications but very little enthusiasm," he commented.

"With Knight R&D I have been able to build a team based not just on their competencies but on their passion for technology and desire to help companies get their full entitlements."

Mayo claims his team also has a strong practical understanding of how companies undertake their R&D in the 'real world', outside of university

style environments. "We rapidly grasp the concepts of our clients and have software and electrical engineers who lead the technical side of our TMT claims," he said.

"There may be some grey areas in the qualifying criteria but we help businesses to apply the rules as objectively as possible, ensuring there is always a fair and reasonable case for claiming while leaving the final decision in what to include with the claimant company."

Mayo says Knight R&D will only invoice on agreed success fees once the company receives its benefit. "If required, we will respond to any enquires from HMRC within the success fee," he added. "However, to date our reports have served the purpose of providing HMRC with all the information it needs."



OVER three quarters of UK mid-market businesses anticipate a hike in IT budgets this year, reckons Node4 in a report it compiled. The survey showed that 35% of IT decision makers in the mid-market expect budget rises of 5-10%, while 22% forecast a rise of over 10% with the key investment areas being business growth, security and reducing operational costs. Hosted and cloud-based services will take a meaty share of mid-market IT budgets in 2017, with IaaS (20%) and managed security (16%) the top two cloud spending priorities, followed by managed services (12%) and DR (11%). Paul Bryce (pictured), Business Development Director, Node4, said: "Despite the current challenging business climate the mid-market is the fastest growing sector in the UK economy and policy makers, investors and IT vendors should focus on enabling this growth."



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COMMENT: A SALUTARY LESSON



Richard Carter

ERIC Monkman provided a salutary lesson last month: 'Monkmania' reached fever pitch as a gripping University Challenge final aired. The Canadian student had already won over a cult following, courtesy of his encyclopaedic knowledge and social media-friendly facial expressions. Lightning reactions verging on the psychic were also much admired. Monkman

seemed able to answer questions before they'd been asked. But it turned out otherwise, and having the fastest finger on the buzzer would prove his downfall.

That's the lesson. For no matter how smart we are, if we don't take time to think things through we may come up with the wrong answer. It's a point worth pondering as the channel responds to an ever-evolving market. Should you be chasing the cloud? What about system sales? Can you make a recurring revenue model work? Can you protect or replace big ticket margins?

There are many questions – but resellers are in the privileged position of having all the answers. The biggest question of all is also a leading one, 'What does the client actually want?'. As a reseller you needn't push them towards hosted or system telephony. You can deliver either.

We all know the cloud is a potential game changer. But equally – and I can tell you this from our own sales figures – systems are far from down and out. So be smart. Don't simply join the crowd chasing the cloud, but think about what your offer should be in relation to your target markets.

Those offering a more nuanced answer, one that might embrace hosted, system, voice and data solutions, will likely emerge the winners in this particular challenge.

Richard Carter, Director of Channel Sales, Nimans

• Game changing times in network innovation (p48).

Disruptive division churns out at Solar

IN A BID to ensure it is always on the technology ball Solar has acted to keep its finger on the pulse of innovation and drive business transformation with the launch of a Disruptive Technology division led by Jason Evans who joined the company following its acquisition of RDC last year.

As Director of Disruptive Technology he is tasked with managing a team of seven, extending the capabilities of the business and pushing disruptive tech into the mid-market.

He said: "My team aims to challenge and disrupt the legacy business technology landscape, enabling the next wave of digital transformation.

"For example, as more businesses move to a cloud-first strategy traditional WAN solutions have created cost, performance and security challenges.

"With a focus on SD-WAN, Solar is working with vendor SilverPeak to leverage 'better than private line' security and performance over Internet bandwidth, while delivering direct-to-cloud connectivity when and where it is most effective.

"Our SilverPeak EdgeConnect SD-WAN solution is key to enabling an effective cloud-



Jason Evans

first strategy for customers. We already have clients in automotive, legal and professional services sectors utilising the solution which is proving disruptive to traditional WAN offerings."

CEO John Whitty commented: "Solar is now dedicating part of its operation to understanding and bringing to market a portfolio of solutions that are set to disrupt the enterprise technology landscape.

"Jason and his team have successfully demonstrated that the market is ready to adopt these new solutions."

The cloud communications provider serves 2,000 mid-market organisations across the UK with a forward looking portfolio that includes SD WAN, cloud UCaaS, contact centre, on-site and cloud storage.

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Abbott heads up Mitel sales

INDUSTRY stalwart Todd Abbott has joined Mitel as EVP Global Sales in a move that sees current EVP and Chief Sales Officer, Graham Bevington, assume the newly created role of Executive Vice President of Business Development.

Bevington will work directly with CEO Rich McBee to drive the company's M&A strategy and funnels, and focus on building strategic partnerships with important large enterprise and business customers.

Todd brings over 30 years technology and business communications experience to the role and joins the Canadian vendor on the back of a career spanning senior sales positions at Cisco, Symbol Technologies, Seagate Technologies, Avaya and Sonus Networks.

In his new role he is responsible for Mitel's worldwide cloud and enterprise sales organisations and channel programmes.



Todd Abbott

McBee commented: "Todd's sector knowledge and international sales experience will be an integral part of how we grow Mitel in 2017 and beyond."

Abbott said: "Cloud enabled communications and collaboration are intrinsic to digital transformation in the enterprise. And Mitel is in a position to ensure organisations get the most out of their communications to boost productivity and drive revenues."

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

NEWS ROUNDUP

Exertis has completed the integration of audio-visual distributor Medium UK and rebranded its AV division as Exertis Medium.

Medium MD Ian Sempers said: "Retaining the Medium name recognises the reputation the company has gained in the market for providing AV solutions and is a clear message to vendors and customers that we will continue to offer the same services and support enhanced by the additional products, resources and reach of Exertis."

Channel Telecom has set the date for its upcoming partner event at the BT Tower in London, billed as a 'look into the future' day and planned for 17th May.

The event is a reflection of Channel Telecom's morale raising Partner of the Year Awards staged in December, claimed MD Clifford Norton.

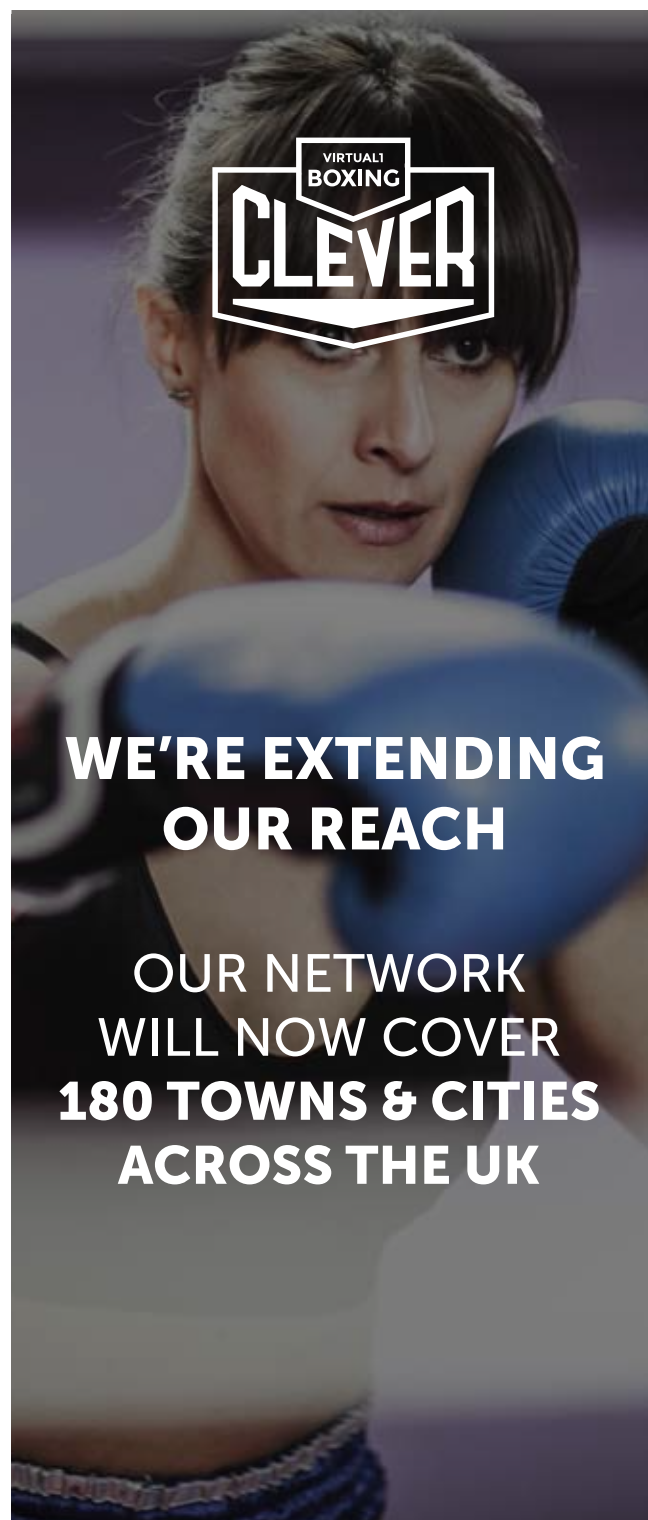
"It's important to keep that morale going," he stated. "With so many new and exciting opportunities on the horizon it was a natural next-step to dedicate a day towards presenting these prospects to our partners."

Lease Telecom has launched a mobile application to over 300 partners, enabling resellers of mobile, fixed and IT equipment to more quickly generate quotes and submit credit applications.

Co-founder Simon Fabb said: "There's nothing to stop Lease Telecom Partners from capitalising on opportunities when out in the field.

"The app complements our desktop offering and gives instant access to multi-term leasing rates, allowing the user to submit deals for formal approval. From the point of submitting the application, the deal is treated under our usual SLAs."

The app will also be available to distributor sales teams with branding options planned for later this year.



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TRAIN to Win.TV is set to rev up 'Girl Power' in a charity drive to raise much needed funds for Breast Cancer Research. A four-strong team (Katie Curtis, Natalie Nicholls, Sue Hester and Julie Mills) is gearing up to take on the Pretty Muddy challenge (1st July, Bedford) along with their 'pretty pink' spaniel Mia, the office dog.

CEO Julie Mills, a cancer survivor, stated: "We want to support all of the incredibly strong women fighting their battle and remember those brave angels who lost theirs. We are doing this for all the mums, aunties, sisters, daughters, grandmothers, wives, girlfriends and friends who are fighting every day, so that we can put more money into researching better treatments, medications and general support for breast cancer patients."

Pictured above: The Train to Win.TV team. To add your support please visit: <https://www.justgiving.com/teams/traintowin>

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COMMENT: STRATEGIC TALK



Alex Tempest

THE latest figures released by the Office of National Statistics this quarter have shown that UK businesses are still struggling to return to their pre-2008 crisis levels of worker productivity. In the fourth quarter of last year, the UK's economic output per hour worked rose 0.4 per cent, but this still languishes far below what it was before 2007.

This is hampering British business' ability to grow and compete effectively against

other major economies. After almost a decade, businesses are willing to be more experimental as they seek to solve their own productivity puzzles. One avenue is for them to look at more innovative ways to use technology within their organisations. This is where the channel comes in. Better collaboration is a good route to a more productive workforce, but IT departments face the problem of serving increasingly mobile and geographically dispersed employees. More than 1.5 million UK workers now work from home, adding another layer of complication.

The channel can help these businesses by offering solutions that are designed to start addressing the shortfall in productivity growth. Tools that allow for better collaboration must also be simple to use and actually help the workflow of employees who will ultimately abandon new solutions that don't fit into the way that they work best.

Of course, the channel cannot raise the whole of the UK's productivity single handed overnight, but by offering its unique insight and the right tools it can be an important part of the solution.

Alex Tempest, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

• Here's why VoIP over VDSL poses a risk to business continuity (p46).

EMIT snares rival Softech



Eamon Moore

DUBLIN-based IT firm EMIT has bagged the managed services business and customer base of local rival Softech for an undisclosed sum. The acquisition boosts EMIT's customer base to over 3,500 end users across enterprise, SMB and public sector organisations.

The deal is expected to add a further €2m in revenue over the next three years.

EMIT founder and MD Eamon Moore stated: "We have been looking at several acquisition opportunities for some time and believe that Softech is the perfect fit, particularly with its pedigree in delivering IT services and solutions.

"EMIT has ambitious business development goals and will actively seek further growth, both organically and through more acquisitions."

EMIT is a Dell and Microsoft partner and last year won Microsoft's Global Small and Mid-market Cloud Solutions Partner of the Year award, as well as Microsoft Ireland SMB Cloud Partner of the Year.

The company began its commercial life in 2003 and provides customers with IT solutions and managed IT-as-a-Service in four main business areas – cloud computing, business productivity, IT security and infrastructure.

Softech has operated in Dublin since 1978 and provides, in the main, IT products and services to Irish business and educational organisations.

The company also diversified into managed services, document management and the development of business process applications.

NEWS ROUNDUP

Fujitsu is beefing up its Select channel programme with a 1m euros investment in new online tools. The refresh includes a dedicated training and certification programme.

Dave Hazard, VP of Sales Operations and Channel, said: "We're making a significant investment to enhance our Select programme so our partners are better able to succeed as they adapt to the challenges of digitalisation.

"Clearly, IT is getting more complex and we're helping our partners bridge the gap in gaining the necessary skills."

Growing ICT technology providers under pressure to invest substantially in virtual and hosted services should look at preserving working capital by exploring asset finance, advised Dan Proctor, Commercial Director of HH Vendor Finance.

"The right financial partner will support ICT companies with innovative structures to release cash from customer contracts, eliminating expensive consultants," he said.

"An unpredictable business environment can disrupt the most prudent ICT budget, and leasing is the only vehicle that allows organisations to accommodate essential investment without breaking the annual budget."

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COMMENT: IT'S TIDY UP TIME



Phil Reynolds

TIDY desk, tidy mind: I've often wondered, perhaps sceptically, about the validity of this phrase. Would my business really be more efficient and effective if every desk was tidy? And would there be greater clarity of thought, better software design and improved service as a result of perfect tidiness?

My initial perception of this question was overturned following a recent visit to the McLaren Technology Centre in Woking. McLaren have of course been amazingly successful in Formula 1 and will no doubt be leading the field again in the future – but what of its offices?

McLaren's building is ultra high tech although it was designed in the 1990s. It has an extensive glass frontage beside a lake but is camouflaged to blend into the background of the local countryside. The inside, however, is black and white with occasional accents of steel, otherwise there is nothing distracting at all on the walls. In the area where road cars are built you'll find shiny white tiled floors cleaner than a hospital's operating theatre, no tools on the floor and cleaning in progress 22 hours or more each day. More interestingly, the only colour in the building is on the cars, which are the single focus for many employees of McLaren.

Like McLaren, Oak is deep into design and technology albeit in different industries, and I wondered if I could change our office environment to bring a closer focus on our core values and our creativity.

Four weeks later I created a working group to make this happen. Perhaps there's a lesson in this for all businesses, because a 'tidy desk, tidy mind' approach can deliver so much more than I originally thought.

Phil Reynolds, CTO, Oak Innovation

• A master plan to bring top Microsoft partners into close union lies behind New Signature's acquisition of Paradigm Systems (p30).

Nuvias rolls out UC offer

NUVIAS has embarked on the next phase of its growth strategy with the EMEA launch of a UC practice following the acquisition of Siphon Networks in October 2016.

The practice builds on Siphon's existing strongholds in the UK and Benelux and will be rolled out through Nuviyas regional branches kicking off with Germany.

As part of the move Nuviyas will add more staff across the region to support vendor and reseller partners.

Paul Eccleston, CEO of Nuviyas, commented: "Siphon's technical and solution engineering expertise has enabled it to work closely with vendors and resellers on the development of UC solutions.

"This factor, together with the provision of service and solutions capabilities from Siphon, has been instrumental in its success."

Steve Harris, EVP Unified Communications, Nuviyas (and MD of Siphon), commented: "A major reason for joining Nuviyas was the chance it gave us to expand both in the UK and internationally. The UC EMEA launch lays the foundations for achieving that ambition.



Steve Harris

"This is an exciting time in UC across EMEA with opportunities for the IT channel to move into the UC market and conquer the legacy competition.

"As part of Nuviyas, and as a solutions and technology enabler, we can provide the service, support and technical know-how our partners need to help them make the most of this market opportunity."

Siphon was ranked 24th in Deloitte's UK Technology Fast 50 rankings last year, notching up 723% growth in the four years leading up to the award.

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

NEWS ROUNDUP

MF Communications has sharpened its focus on the network services side of the business with the launch of MF Telecom Services.

"We have seen huge organic growth and to ensure that we continued to prioritise our UK telecom services customers we needed to launch a new company and separate this from the global telephone system supply side of the business," said Fraser Young, MD, MF Communications.

"We may not be as big as the telecom giants, but we can be every bit as competitive."

In response to demand for product bundles Voiceflex has conducted feasibility tests on its own channel offering and launched bundled SIP trunks (SIPTB) and standard SIP Trunks (SSIPT) which don't have a call bundle package.

"Some carriers have opted for a bundle-only option, we decided this was too restrictive," said Sales & Marketing Paul Director Taylor.

"Offering only a bundled SIP trunks package meant customers were forced to seek alternative providers if the call spend was too low or too high. Having both options is the right decision for our partners as we have seen a rise in sales since our soft launch on 1st February this year."

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THE COMMS NATIONAL AWARDS 2017

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The Comms National Awards is the leading awards process that recognises excellence in the UK ICT industry and the countdown to the 2017 awards has begun.

The awards will be presented at a glittering ceremony at London's Hilton on Park Lane on October 12th, so put the date in your diaries now!

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

The Comms National Awards is the premier awards process for the UK's ICT channel rewarding excellence in the supply of service and solutions to resellers and end-user customers.

- If you are a reseller business, don't miss the opportunity to get the accolade you deserve for the solutions and service you provide to customers.
- If you are a vendor, carrier or service provider, this is your chance to get channel recognition for the support and service you provide for your reseller partners.

The Comms National Awards is the highlight of the industry year. Don't miss being part of it. For more details on entering and securing your place at the Awards ceremony visit: www.cnawards.com



9 TAKE LEAD AGAIN IN RECOGNISING SUPERSTARS OF UK ICT INDUSTRY

LEADING service provider, 9 is delighted to reprise its headline sponsorship of the Comms National Awards at The Hilton, Park Lane on Thursday 12th October.

According to 9's Marketing Director, Mark Saunders, renewing their sponsorship of the awards for a fifth year in succession reinforces their commitment to the channel and love of a great night out.

Saunders stated: "Both the quality of the entries and the enjoyment factor have risen every year during our sponsorship term and it will be a real challenge for entrants and organisers alike to surpass the excellence of last year's event, but I am sure they will succeed."

"It was noticeable how the nominees and eventual winners reflected the changing face of our industry, but I am sure there will still be room for senior stalwarts to secure some silverware too, so why not start thinking about your entry now."

9 will continue their sponsorship of a special award to recognise outstanding customer service, which was won last year by Pam Blanchard of ICA. "This award is presented to the reseller who can truly demonstrate that everything in their business is led by the customer's perspective and how they have remodelled and transformed their business to achieve this," added Saunders.

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COMMENT: MARKETING MATTERS



Charles Aylwin

WITH the new tax year well under way many of us will be looking at how this financial year can improve on previous successes. However, this is easier said than done, so here's a few top marketing tips we were given by the expert speakers at our recent 8x8 partner Marketing Masterclass.

Assess your current portfolio and technology:

Look at your existing customers and analyse whether you have already gone after the low hanging fruit. If the majority of your customers already fit this description it could mean that you need to focus on the harder sells or move into another sector where there are more easy wins.

Set your target and be practical: Telling the team you want a 50 per cent increase in sales is in most cases too extreme. Having a realistic target will inspire more confidence in the whole team's success. Within this target you can break down individual areas for development. You might see a trend of growth in one specific sector or team and this could become an area to build on.

Where's the 'value add'? As with all businesses, there are specific services and products that spark more excitement for the end user and can often be more profitable. This might be call analytics or CRM integration. Assess this now while you've got the whole year ahead so that you're not scrambling to meet your target having finally spotted a trend in February.

Work with a supportive and growing partner: Your relationship with your technology provider is probably one of the most important for your business. So use the new tax year as an opportunity to objectively audit yours and then decide if you need a new partner that can deliver the technology and support to create extra value for your sales team.

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

Ireland firm ties up expansion funding

IRELAND-based IT services company Version 1 has closed a round of funding to drive phase two of its international growth.

The €90m investment will fund Version 1's expansion into the UK and Europe and sees London-based investment firm Volpi Capital take a significant stake in the company, marking its first investment in an Irish business and its largest investment to date.

Version 1's second funding round sees its first round investor, Development Capital, exit and 40 senior managers in Version 1 become shareholders.

Development Capital exits Version 1 with a 250% return on its investment after a period of just three years.

The company will deliver in excess of €100m revenues this year and target more acquisitions and look to the European market as part of a three year expansion push.

Version 1 was founded in 1996 by Justin Keatinge and John Mullen who remain as Board members with former COO Tom O'Connor taking up the role of CEO.

O'Connor commented: "As we look forward to the next five years we anticipate further



Tom O'Connor

strong organic growth in Ireland and the UK, together with more acquisitive growth.

"With much speculation about the impact of Brexit, we believe that there continues to be massive opportunities for well run customer focused Irish firms to grow internationally."

Version 1's first round of funding enabled it to complete three acquisitions in the UK.

Volpi CEO Crevan O'Grady commented: "Volpi will work

with Version 1 to help it grow internationally and to provide the level of funding this growth will require."

The value of the worldwide IT managed services market is forecast to grow from €120bn in 2014 to €215bn in 2020, demonstrating a CAGR of 8.61%, with the UK being the largest market in Europe.

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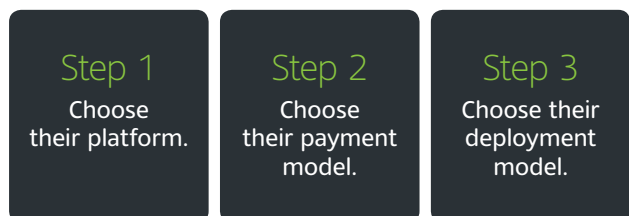
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COMMENT: NON-HOSTED OPTIONS



Peter Crooks

NETWORK and cloud-based call management allows end users to benefit from sophisticated call handling solutions, free from the burdens of capital expenditure and hardware costs. It's also far simpler to design hybrid solutions to make the most of existing assets. As a company, we still have to work hard to encourage

resellers to engage with the cloud. We find time and time again that they wrongly believe it to be a complicated, brand new technology. Yet in essence, they are already using it all the time, every day.

But is the cloud for everyone? In my experience, not always. Living in a rural area miles from the nearest exchange my broadband is extremely poor. This is very frustrating at best. So what about those businesses with poor connectivity that can't yet benefit from cloud services? The channel really needs to find a better, cheaper and more scalable solution for those businesses with poor connectivity or those that can't fully utilise VoIP and cloud solutions. After all, to be financially viable a company in any industry needs to communicate.

So what can be done? As much as we love hosted telephony at Invoysys, we appreciate that where there is poor connectivity it sometimes is not the best solution.

However, we can replicate hosted functionality without the hosted platform using our inbound platform. In other cases, our services are used where hosted has proved unreliable and can add an extra line of resilience for customers. If you go one step further and use hosted and inbound together as one seamless product, this would lead to a big 'yes' from many customers.

Peter Crooks, Co-Founder, Invoysys

• When elevating portals there is no match for taking an intelligent approach, according to plan.com co-founder Keith Curran (p32).

Complexity in sales abolished by Unify

A CHANNEL marketing programme introduced by Atos company Unify will simplify and ease the selling of its OpenScope portfolio, according to the vendor, which also claims that the new online tool, called Triple Play, will enable resellers to intercept potential customers early in the buying cycle.

Triple Play will be integrated into Unify's Partner Programme in the UK and can also be hosted on a partner's own website.

One of the tool's big plus points, says Unify, is that it removes complexity from the buying process, replacing tech talk with straightforward information about outcomes that customers can more easily identify as relevant to their business.

"Triple Play provides end users with transparent solution choices, ensuring their collaboration and communications needs are accurately met," said Zara Pasalar, UK Channel Marketing Manager. "For partners, Triple Play offers an opportunity to increase revenues, enhance demand generation and break into new markets."

Triple Play is based on three choices (platform, deployment model and payment model) that enable partners to tailor the solu-



Zara Pasalar

tion in a way that chimes with a prospect's business objectives and desired outcomes, which could be reducing their costs, enhancing customer satisfaction or increasing cloud capabilities.

"Triple Play provides partners with a tool that demonstrates the flexibility of our OpenScope portfolio, taking technology off the table and focusing on what matters – the desired business outcomes of their customers," added Pasalar.

The marketing tool also removes much of the hard work required of partners wanting to address new markets with UC&C solutions, presenting

resellers with the required outcomes for specific public and private sector organisations, and matching the right products to meet these demands.

"The tool is unlimited in terms of business size, so for those partners wishing to capture 250-5,000 user or large enterprise opportunities they can lead with Triple Play," explained Pasalar.

"As well as the Triple Play digital tool, a complete marketing kit enables partners to reach out to prospects through social media, or target customers directly via a ready to go email campaign."

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Energy is turning full circle for 360

CAMBRIDGESHIRE based reseller 360 Group has warned comms and IT providers to start selling energy to customers before energy brokers move into their territories.

"If you aren't selling energy to your customers, someone else is and you are leaving the door open for an energy broker to walk in and review their comms as well," said Group Managing Director Russell Davis, who is now successfully selling energy services to his customers alongside Fidelity Energy.

Davis also believes ICT solutions providers should bear in mind the reputation they have built for quality of service when considering adding energy supply to their portfolios.

"We are utilising our current relationships and trading energy under our trusted name and brand as energy companies get such bad press for the service they offer. We are used to winning through effort and knowledge of our market. We are inspired to maximise our efforts. Everything we do, we do well."

360 have solid experience of embracing new technologies and their services now



“If you aren't selling energy to your customers, someone else is.”

Russell Davis
Group Managing Director
360 Group

encompass a full unified communications suite complemented by IT services and a growing IoT (internet of Things) division.

When exploring the energy opportunity Davis was pleased to re-engage with Fidelity Energy MD John Haw, who he knew well from his previous sales director role at Gamma.

"John understands we have a loyal customer base who trust 360 Group. Utilities are required by all our customers and I know we have a better relationship with them than their current energy supplier and with Fidelity Energy's

commercial and sales support we have been able to offer a compelling service to our customer base.

"We have done well to date and we are building on the success month-on-month as our experience with energy grows and we are better equipped within the market place. I am confident that we will have a successful energy arm in 2017

"Fidelity offers full support on every opportunity so all we do is get the bills and they advise from there. We are now at the point where we can self-serve through their portal, but Fidelity are

The Fidelity Energy portal enables 360 to view quotes from 17 energy suppliers

always on hand to help if needs be. Fidelity also offer full sales support and now with a fully integrated E-signature option on their portal you can add a customer, credit check them, get quotes from 17 suppliers, and receive an e-signed contract within 10 minutes compared to the standard 1-2 day turnaround from most brokers."

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COMMENT: TIME FOR CHANGE



Dave Dadds

FOR an industry immersed in all things communications and innovation bursting out in many areas, why is our UK number porting process still stuck in the dark ages? Back in 2007 Ofcom launched an industry lead project to bring porting into the 21st century. After various meetings and hard work by many people

Ofcom put out a proposal but lost in the Court of Appeal to an objection from Vodafone in October 2008.

Nearly ten years on from that judgment what changes have we seen? None! In the same ten years the IP voice market has taken off with many more players in the game and demand for number porting at an all-time high. Yet industry stats show that 50 per cent of number ports fail on the first request with some requests taking over six months to complete. This is an ever growing problem for the industry, and more importantly our clients.

According to Ofcom, finding a solution rests on the shoulders of the industry. But is this possible? Taking into account previous experience, we doubt it. The regulator needs to regulate. We already have conditions within the General Conditions and Number Porting Process manual that enable Ofcom to bring in some clout and penalties, which would at least get the ball rolling.

But as an industry we need to do more ourselves. The ongoing number port working groups including the OTA lead Steering Group need to present to industry a short and medium-term strategy. Only if industry gets behind these initiatives will we have any chance of moving fixed line number porting into the 21st century.

Dave Dadds, Chairman, FCS

• Traditional data centres are failing customers and will give way to a new model, claims Redwire Managing Director Ameer Mirza, who says real value lies in the personal nature of service delivery and the interconnection of people with DC technology (p28).

Newing acts on help plea



Matt Newing

ELITETELE.COM CEO Matt Newing has answered a plea for help posted on Instagram by Comms Supply MD Karl Alderton who sought a buyer to rescue his firm from liquidation and save the jobs of all staff.

Newing stated: "Karl approached me as one entrepreneur to another via Instagram to ask for help. I recognised his passion for the sector and empathised with his challenge of trying to maintain sales growth while being distracted by the requirements of being an MD and the wider work load that brings.

"In buying Comms Supply, the trading name of Comms Consulting, we are giving Karl the opportunity to grow his business with the support of our wider team.

"He's built a reputation for working with the IT channel to deliver connectivity and telecoms alongside IT solutions.

"We are continually looking to improve our IT services and I know Karl and his team will bring fresh ideas and energy to what we are doing."

Newing confirmed that Comms Supply will operate under the Elitetele.com brand and continue to serve its customers with the same services delivered by the same people.

Elitetele.com has acquired 13 businesses since 2008 and has a £20m war chest to invest in firms with complementary niche technologies.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

Ingram Micro firm Comms-care has introduced a new set of hardware and software configuration services delivered from a dedicated 4,000 square foot space at Ingram Micro's Logistics and Distribution Centre near Daventry.

Comms-care can now take delivery of components and configure them at the same location for shipping, reducing the time taken to provide fully configured devices.

Operations Director Mark Forster explained the thinking behind the new service: "Our key objective is to reduce the friction involved in the supply chain from hardware manufacturer to end user," he said.

Office space within Nimans' Trafford Park Trade Counter has been commissioned to extend the distributor's training programme.

The first training course at the new venue – a three day educational programme on Panasonic's NS700 and NS1000 comms platforms – attracted resellers from distant regions such as Edinburgh, Tamworth and Hull.

Head of Category Sales at Nimans Paul Burn stated: "Trafford Park is a conveniently positioned new location for reseller training and it received a thumbs-up from all those that attended."

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ShoreTel Cloud hits UK ground running

SHORETEL'S Connect Cloud and Connect Contact Centre platforms have attracted 21 new UK reseller partners in the two months since their UK launch.

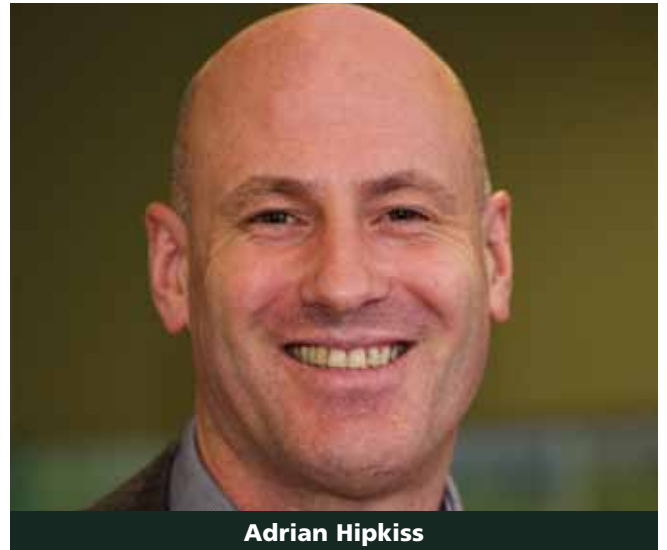
Speaking at the vendor's partner forum held at the Shard in London last month UK Regional Vice President Adrian Hipkiss told delegates that resellers have already sold Connect solutions from three users up to 500 and he underlined the power of the video capabilities they bring.

"After just eight weeks we know customers like it and will make fast decisions," he said. "And we have learnt that video calling is a game changer. Reducing travel is powerful."

Within the Connect Cloud environment users will now be able to collaborate from the desktop and a range of mobile platforms via HD multi-party video initiated in a web browser using WebRTC.

"This is all integrated and included for free, which is disruptive when people are paying for services like Go to Meeting," added Hipkiss.

Hipkiss also emphasised the growing value to the channel of the open APIs available on ShoreTel's new Mobility Client



Adrian Hipkiss

which will enable resellers to offer applications like translation services for larger clients.

"Creating propriety applications will keep customers sticky, but they want open applications," he commented. "We are delivering to the workplace the expectations users have from application players like Amazon in the home environment."

As an example Hipkiss pointed out that the ShoreTel Teamwork app will enable people to work collaboratively on projects tightly integrated with other ShoreTel applications.

"The ability to share files is built into the application," com-

mented Hipkiss. "People can see who has the ball, they can allocate tasks, manage personal tasks and share dashboards."

Alongside this, ShoreTel has introduced to UK partners a new Digital Assistant which combines Connect Cloud with the Summit Communications Platform as a Service (CPaaS), VoiceBase and Teamwork apps.

"This will, for example, enable users to record conference calls, translate the speech to text and deliver transcripts to everyone in a group," said Hipkiss.

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HATS off to ever-popular Comms Dealer sales exec Sophie Timms who completed last month's London Marathon in 5hr 17mins and smashed her £2,000 fund raising target by £500 (and rising) in aid of kids charity Sparks.

Comms Dealer Sales Director Simon Turton said: "Sophie's commitment to her training regime over the past months and determination to raise as much funds as possible for Sparks is a clear reflection of her dedicated approach to working with our clients."

Sophie added: "The marathon was one of the best, and toughest, things I have ever done. Despite painful legs, knees, shoulders, back and feet, along with the mental pressure of having no option other than to succeed, I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and intend to run again next year with a time of under five hours. A massive thank you to everyone who sponsored me along this journey and donated to Sparks, an incredibly worthwhile cause." To continue supporting Sophie's charity efforts please visit www.justgiving.com/fundraising/Sophie-Timms1

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NEWS ROUNDUP

Worldwide IT spending is forecast to reach \$3.5tr this year, a 1.4% increase from 2016, according to industry watcher Gartner.

The growth rate is down from the previous quarter's forecast of 2.7% due in part to the rising US dollar.

"The strong US dollar has cut \$67bn out of our 2017 IT spending forecast," said John-David Lovelock, Research VP at Gartner. "We expect these currency headwinds to be a drag on the earnings of US-based multi-national IT vendors throughout 2017."

The evolution of VMware's focus on hybrid and cross-cloud software and services has prompted the firm to offload vCloud Air US and European data centres, customer operations and customer teams to CSP OVH for an undisclosed sum.



"We have enjoyed a long and successful partnership with OVH and view this acquisition as an extension of our partnership and a positive move for our customers and partners," said Pat Gelsinger (pictured), CEO, VMware.

SecureData bags Cygnia



Ian Brown

SECUREDATA'S acquisition of fellow cybersecurity specialist Cygnia Technologies for an undisclosed sum adds circa £9m revenues to its bottom line and brings offices in Birmingham and central London.

All of Cygnia's employees will remain with the group.

Both companies boast a strong pedigree in the cybersecurity space and are well known to each other, sharing many of the same partnerships with global cybersecurity equipment and software manufacturers.

Ian Brown, Executive Chairman at SecureData, commented on the deal: "In a world where the security threats to businesses are increasing almost daily, having a trusted cybersecurity partner is becoming a critical board room issue.

"The combination of SecureData and Cygnia positions the group well to provide that partnership for both private and public sector organisations.

"The enhanced group is now positioned as one of the leading independent cybersecurity services businesses throughout the UK and selected overseas markets, providing services to approximately 1,000 customers.

"With over 210 employees including 150 cybersecurity engineers, analysts and consultants, the group is positioned to offer customers a one-stop-shop cybersecurity service."

Cygnia MD Jon Busfield said: "With SecureData's range of professional support and managed services, the enhanced offering is great news for our customers and partners."

Norris cheers strategic buy

COMPUTACENTER'S acquisition of ServiceNow Gold Services Partner TeamUltra gives the firm access to a pool of ServiceNow specialists in Europe with over 600 projects and implementations.

Computacenter CEO Mike Norris said: "Just six months on from announcing our sales and service partnership with ServiceNow we have made a strategic acquisition to enhance our commitment to the ServiceNow platform, continuing to guide our customers on their digital transformation journey through integrated cloud services."

TeamUltra will continue to operate independently and become Computacenter's dedicated ServiceNow delivery capability and customer point of contact for providing managed services, professional services, products and licenses.

Mike Beale, MD of TeamUltra, commented: "We can continue our independent and agile market approach with local decision making support while leveraging our respective expertise and complementary solutions portfolios."

Daniel Osterbergh, Area Vice President, Channel &



Mike Norris

Alliances, EMEA, ServiceNow, commented: "Today's intelligent connected enterprise operates in a time of unprecedented digital disruption. Through the acquisition Computacenter can help customers on their digital transformation journey by using ServiceNow's platform and suite of solutions."

Computacenter's partnership with TeamUltra began in 2016 with the delivery of project implementations for financial, utility and pharma clients.

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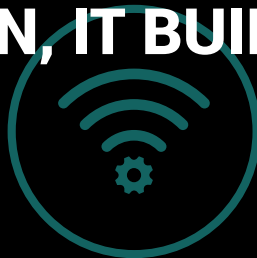
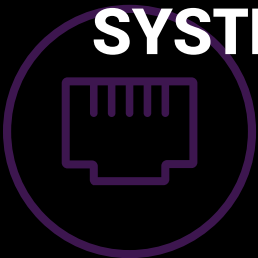


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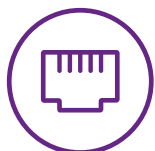
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Huawei eyes leap in sales

HUAWEI has pledged to help deliver an average 35% jump in sales among its west European partners this year, 10% up on 2015's performance.

The Chinese vendor set out its plans at last month's Western Europe partner summit staged in Paris and updated delegates on progress made in becoming a cloud services operation.

Leon He, President of the Enterprise Business Group for Western Europe, said: "In 2016, 90% of our sales came through partners, there was 55% revenue growth in the Western Europe Enterprise Group and we are approaching new digital transformation opportunities."



Leon He

He believes 'Cloud 1.0' was characterised by players such as Amazon, Microsoft Azure and Salesforce and their services. But 'Cloud 2.0' would see Huawei targeting areas and technologies such as Big Data and analytics, the IoT, digital transformation, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning.

Against this backdrop Huawei said it plans to deepen its existing relationships with companies such as Orange, Telefonica and T-Systems to support the delivery of services in the cloud.

Jaco Pesschier, Channel Sales Manager for the Western Europe Enterprise Group, pointed out that the business now had 1,068 partners in the region which represented 4% growth on the previous year.

"We want to keep these partner numbers stable to focus and deliver the optimal support needed as we enter new markets," stated Pesschier.

He explained how the company had committed to a 'two plus one' distribution model whereby each country has no more than two national distributors, with the potential for an additional international distributor where appropriate.

Arden set to bolster IT support



Nigel Walker

ARDEN Group's acquisition of Birmingham-based IT support firm Computerworld Business Solutions (CBS) for an undisclosed sum bolsters the comms provider's offering with IT support and services, and builds on its previous acquisitions of Page IT and Unitycomm, two IT technology companies.

CBS is a Sophos Gold and Synchronised Security partner and its 20-strong team of workers will be merged with Arden Group's employees.

Arden Group MD Nigel Walker stated: "The acquisition of CBS represents an important milestone in our growth strategy. It gives us the chance to deliver a fully converged IT and telecoms solution.

"This partnership will enable us to play a more defining role in the growth of our shared customer base." See page 42

Node4 lauds Nottingham

BOWMARK Capital backed Node4 has set off on the next phase of its growth journey having opened a new office and Security Operations Centre (SOC) in Nottingham.

The move follows three years of growth that saw staff numbers treble to 185.

Bowmark backed the business in a secondary buyout last year and LDC, Node4's original investment partner, has provided more funding to support the growth plan.

Node4's managed security service launched in 2016 and is targeted at the SME and mid-market sector.

A series of acquisitions together with organic growth and a broader managed service

portfolio have helped to grow the customer base to over 900 organisations in 2017.

The Nottingham office will provide a base for up to 50 employees enabling Node4 to expand its presence in the midlands and tap into a city that offers a pool of potential customers and employees.

CEO Andrew Gilbert said: "Our end-to-end service offering has helped us win some high value managed services contracts in the last 12 months.

"We are attracting fast growing companies who want to outsource their IT infrastructure to a strategic partner."

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Luminet boosts G3 Comms

LUMINET channel partner G3 Comms has doubled connectivity orders since reselling the MSP's wireless 1gb Fibre-Air clear channel business Internet service which can be up and running in 10 working days.

G3 Comms is also the first partner to use Luminet's new online portal which automates all sales processes.

James Jeffs, Director at G3 Comms, said: "There is always a lot of ifs, buts and maybes around ordering fibre leased lines which makes it hard to



Sasha Williamson

manage customer expectations. Customers have their own timescales for moving and provisioning delays make hitting them a nightmare. Luminet's

Fibre-Air has short lead times and offers resilience."

Luminet CEO Sasha Williamson added: "Our Fibre-Air proposition has gone down a storm in the channel market.

"The solution is solving a real and long-term issue that is a common frustration for business leaders who are hampered and delayed during office moves because of the time it takes to arrange the connectivity.

"Fibre-Air is not just a temporary fix but an essential primary or backup connection."



THE growing popularity of dog ownership among InvoSys workers prompted the Manchester-based company to adopt animal organisation the PDSA as its chosen charity for 2017. The charity treats the pets of people experiencing economic and social hardship at 50-plus pet hospitals and over 380 practices.

Dan Fish, HR Director for InvoSys and co-ordinator of the charity efforts, said: "It's a key part of our ethos to give something back to the wider community, so we pledge to support a charity each year with staff dedicating their own time to raise funds. PDSA seemed fitting for 2017 with many of the team being big animal lovers. The PDSA is a fantastic charity which helps people and pets stay together, even when they are facing financial difficulties."

Pictured: InvoSys staffers Ellie Hazelwood with Hugo the dog and Dan Fish with Harley.

Exclusive hires BigTec leader



Martin Bichler

EXCLUSIVE Group has enlisted Martin Bichler to coordinate the expansion of its 100m-plus euro BigTec VAD business.

As BigTec Vendor Manager for EMEA & APAC he will be responsible for the business management of revenue and profit targets and for implementing and developing the global BigTec proposition alongside in-country sales teams.

“Martin is a talented channel operator with readymade BigTec credentials to drive the expansion of our data centre transformation VAD business,” said Barrie Desmond, COO of Exclusive Group.

“Martin’s close vendor relationships and experience of rapidly changing channel dynamics will be vital to continuing our success in every local market.”

Bichler commented: “Major IT trends such as advanced automation, hybrid cloud, hyper convergence and DevOps produce many significant new business opportunities for partners.

“Taking advantage of these changes is a defining challenge for channel partners around the world, and one that BigTec supports them to achieve.”

He brings over 17 years experience of working in IT sales and channel management, including a decade in value-added distribution with Azlan and Arrow.

Bichler’s most recent roles were at Brocade working with OEM and reseller partners in Germany and EMEA.

Got a news story? email:
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Channel analytics

A MULTI-channel data analytics solution from Iovox enables marketers to drive more inbound calls and make more informed marketing decisions.

“The new Multi-channel Marketing solution applies a unique phone number to each referring domain that generates call traffic, whether it’s paid, organic, social, email or even offline,” stated Carl Di Cicco, Chief Commercial Officer.

“Combined with analytics from Iovox, marketers have insight into the performance

of each channel and can tune spending accordingly. In early customer implementations the Iovox solution has led to significant cost savings.

“Despite the perception that interaction is all moving online, business phone calls continue to grow and marketers are waking up to the need to track what marketing spend is driving the all-important call.

“The platform allows multi-channel marketers to track which media channels and driving calls with 100% accuracy.”

Solar CEO wraps up key buys

SOLAR Communications has completed the integration of last year’s acquisitions of Denwa and Response Data Communications (RDC). The enlarged business is now operating under one banner, Solar, with the RDC and Denwa brands retired from the market.

Denwa’s offices in Burnley have been decommissioned with the majority of staff relocating to the Salford Quays facility. Solar now has offices in London, Chippenham, Manchester and Harlow, and employs 100 staff across its operations.

Solar Communications CEO John Whitty commented on how the integration was achieved: “The most challenging and critical part of any acquisition is always to ensure that the continued service delivered to both sets of customers is maintained at the same standard, and where possible improved, avoiding any adverse customer or end user impact.

“The success of this transformation largely depends on ensuring that the staff feel comfortable and are warmly welcomed into the new organisation, while being provided with the requisite tools and facilities to transition seamlessly.

“The Solar team delivered the integration of three reasonably sized businesses technically and operationally within 28 working days – which is no mean feat.”



John Whitty

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NEWS ROUNDUP

TalkTalk Business has been awarded Platinum status by Mitel, making it one of four such partners in the UK.

Simon Skellon, VP, at Mitel, said: "Our Platinum level partners attain this status thanks to their technology expertise, combined with excellent customer service and success in offering our products. TalkTalk Business has consistently met all of our Platinum Partner criteria."

Distributor ProVu Communications has doubled its warehouse capacity following work to better use the available space at its Huddersfield-based offices, making the most of unused cellar space.

The development also included the installation of a lift and a new stairwell.

Sales Director Ian Godfrey commented: "The expansion of the warehouse opens up more potential for ProVu.

"Our sales are increasing year-on-year and with our greater capacity we can hold more products ready for next day delivery."

F-Secure has acquired Little Flocker (the security technology for Macs) from a private app developer and will build the security engine into its new XFENCE technology.

"Macs have become an appealing entry point for attackers," commented Mika Stahlberg, CTO at F-Secure.

"With Little Flocker's technology we will enhance the behavioural blocking capabilities in our Mac endpoint protection."

Wavenet has followed up last August's MBO with the acquisition of Manchester-based Talk Internet.

Wavenet CEO Bill Dawson said: "Our greater scale and resources will deliver a broader product set, a more robust and automated technical platform, stronger relationships and a better customer experience."

Slough joins Gigabit club



Rob Lamden (left) with Nick Gray

SLOUGH and Maidenhead are poised to join the growing ranks of Gigabit Cities including neighbours Reading and Bracknell as infrastructure provider CityFibre prepares to replace more legacy copper-based networks with pure fibre in partnership with Berks-based BtL Communications.

The build will light up 38km of fibre network from Slough Trading Estate to the town centre and a further 10km across Maidenhead. This investment is expected to contribute to Thames Valley Berkshire LEP's prediction that boosting ultra-fast connectivity will generate an additional £1.2bn GVA for the region over the next five to seven years.

Nick Gray, City Development Manager at CityFibre, commented: "Berkshire is known as an economic powerhouse, and Slough in particular is a renowned hub for blue chip businesses and start-ups

"The digital technology industry contributes billions to the UK economy, creates high value jobs and attracts investment from all over the world.

"This presents excellent opportunities for Thames Valley communities. It is vitally important, therefore, that this growing region has the best connectivity possible to enable it to remain competitive on a global stage."

With customers already connected to CityFibre networks in Reading and Bracknell, BtL Communications will be offering businesses in Slough and Maidenhead access to some of the fastest download and upload speeds in the world.

BtL MD Rob Lamden said: "Since 2001 we've been helping businesses with their IT, comms and Internet connectivity, and we are working with CityFibre to make a real difference to the region's digital landscape.

"Having grown up in Maidenhead and Slough from the age of nine, I am particularly motivated to bring the gigabit revolution to these towns."

Joos calls for unorthodoxy

SHORETEL CEO Don Joos is urging resellers to adopt 'unorthodox thinking' to push their businesses forward in the fast changing digital world.

In his keynote at the US vendor's UK & Ireland Partner Forum held at the Shard in London last month Roos told reseller delegates that being unorthodox does not necessarily create chaos.

"The pace of change is staggering and to move forwards and do things differently we must detour," he said.

"You must have unorthodox thinking to create a new reality. When we are brainstorming and a crazy idea comes to the table – that's when I get excited."

Talking in the context of ShoreTel's channel roll out in the UK of its Connect Cloud UC platform, Roos underlined the company's commitment to offering channel partners 'people to machine' communications solutions that mid-market customers are now demanding.

"We are in a connected world and the connections are evolving," he added. "Five billion interactions could be occurring at any minute. For ShoreTel it is now less about communications and more about interactions.



Don Joos

"Mid-market customers want to consume solutions and embed applications into the workflow of their organisation, and we are now seeing more interaction at a people to machine level.

"For example, when I walk into a room for a conference call I want to be recognised with presence via my smartphone, I want a conference bridge pass-code delivered to me and my conference presentation fired up and ready to go."

Roos concluded by advising reseller delegates to start thinking about developing secure bespoke APIs for customers, perhaps with external partners, to fully benefit from Connect Cloud opportunities.

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ScanSource heads named

A NEW leadership team announced by ScanSource Communications and Imago ScanSource marks the next stage of the integration of the two businesses which will now operate under the name ScanSource Imago.

Paul Emery, Vice President UK&I, will be responsible for the sales operations in his designated region; while John Vickerage has been appointed Area Vice President of Northern Europe with overall responsibility for the sales operations



James Vickerage

in DACH, Benelux, Nordics, Baltics and Eastern Europe.

Nicolas Jouan has been appointed Area Vice President

of Southern Europe with responsibility for sales in France; and Phil Boyd, Vice President of Merchandising, will lead the teams responsible for managing the vendor relationships.

James Vickerage, President of ScanSource Imago, stated: "The continued integration of the companies allows us to build on the strengths of both organisations, while offering significant growth opportunities for our partners across Europe."

ScanSource acquired Imago in 2014.

Pollock hails Foursys buy

CHESS has upped its cyber-security credentials with the acquisition of Sophos's top UK education partner Foursys.

The Bury St Edmunds-based company adds £11m annual turnover bringing Chess' run rate to over £120m.

Chess CEO David Pollock stated: "Cyber security is of upmost importance for any modern business and this acquisition enhances our security offering to our customers. With Foursys we have the talent and technology to deliver integrated solutions across enterprise, mobile and cloud environments."

Foursys MD James Miller, added: "Being part of a much larger business brings new supplier choice, opportunities, expertise and skills in a range of ICT disciplines to our customers and partners."

Jonathan Bartholomew, Channel Sales Director at Sophos, commented: "Chess will pro-



David Pollock

vide Foursys with the platform to deliver the Sophos security solutions to even more organisations in the UK."

Richard Btsh, Director of Chess, added: "We continue to diversify our product range by making strategic acquisitions of quality businesses."

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Excalibur's addition is final piece

EXCALIBUR'S acquisition of Berkshire-based Ntegra's IT support services is the final piece in the firm's strategy to become a 'complete communications and IT partner', according to CEO James Phipps.

"This purchase adds extra strength and depth to our technical support team, as well as gaining important customers in the education and charitable sectors," he said.

Ntegra provides outsourced IT support to SME customers in and around the M4 corridor.

Its co-founder and CEO Andy Jefferies added: "Our core focus is providing consulting and Enterprise Managed Services to a strong portfolio of FTSE 100 and 250 clients.

"With this in mind we took the strategic decision to find a home for our support services. Excalibur specialises in this area and shares our values."

The Ntegra deal follows Excalibur's acquisitions of Chippenham-based IT firm Devision, Bridge Solutions and Emnico Enterprises.

Exchange in Hasbro deal

GLASGOW-based Exchange Communications has won additional business in Europe from global toy giant Hasbro having completed an earlier contract.

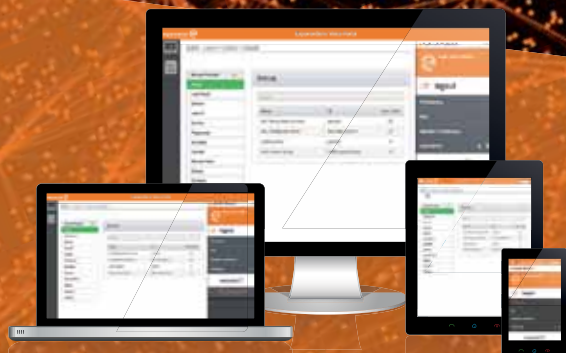
Hasbro, the third largest toy maker in the world, previously called on Exchange to upgrade its comms systems at sites in Germany, Spain and France.

Exchange has now been asked to extend the network into more Hasbro sites in Italy, Greece and Turkey.

MD Tom Sime said: "There was a challenging deadline for the German, Italian and French sites without disrupting the day-to-day operations, but we knew we could deliver on time."



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GIGACLEAR'S new office space at Abingdon Business Park has been officially opened by Nicola Blackwood, local MP for Oxford West and Abingdon. The rural broadband provider has secured a series of contracts to expand its network as part of the BDUK programme which has led to an increase in staff. To accommodate them the company has acquired a further 5,907 sq ft office space for its headquarters on Windrush Court. Mike Surrey, CFO at Gigaclear, commented: "We have been able to expand our HQ space without having to move which is invaluable to the organisation."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

Vodafone's virtualised security capabilities have been boosted following a link-up with Fortinet that enables the operator to offer security services as a network feature.

Vodafone Secure Network Gateway includes network-based firewalling along with intrusion protection and detection. The second service, Secure Remote User Access, enables remote workers to connect to the corporate network securely.

Both services are delivered from within the Vodafone Global IP-VPN network and are purchased as part of the connectivity tariff.

Distributor Nimans has witnessed a 15% spike in demand for Bluetooth enabled devices since tougher mobile phone laws while driving came into force in March, hitting offenders with six penalty points and a £200 fine.

Headset Business Manager Jason Welsh said: "Many of today's Bluetooth headsets offer much more than just standard voice functionality as they are an inherent part of the overall UC mix.

"For example, they can provide presence capabilities via Skype for Business thanks to inbuilt sensors. So a colleague in the office knows instantly if the wearer is available to take a call. It's about being safe and working productively and intuitively."

IPCortex has lifted the curtain on a new hosted PBX communications platform, IPCortex Hosted Suite, based on the core IPCortex PBX platform used by over 80,000 business users.

CEO Rob Pickering said: "Contextual and embedded communication is redefining the value that resellers can expect from hosted services.

"Our existing service providers who have been deploying the IPCortex platform as hosted are reporting growth of 100% year on-year."

Invitation to 'see' is seized AI poised for fast adoption



Martin Lauer (left) with Ken Sturdy

WHEN partner companies IT@Spectrum and The One Point took their strategic partnership to a new level in January they did not foresee the high number of businesses that would take them up on their invitation to 'come and see' how technology drives growth. More than 500 people have visited in response to the invite.

The sister businesses have created a state-of-the-art working environment at their £2.75m headquarters at the Bridgehead business park in East Yorkshire, where their teams work together to offer a package of IT managed services to a joint client base of 1,200-plus organisations.

The new offices, called The View, have also been purpose-designed to enable formal and informal meetings with customers and prospective customers, enabling them to see the latest technology being used to deliver efficiencies and productivity.

IT@Spectrum has for 30 years provided solutions that enable businesses to print more efficiently, manage their data and information electronically and automate processes.

Business IT and telecoms provider The One Point collected the 02 Direct Partner of the Year award in 2016 and is in the top 5% of Microsoft partners in the UK.

IT@Spectrum MD Ken Sturdy said: "We're showing the latest technology in action and we're practising what we preach. It's been a revolving

door. Every day people are coming to visit and make use of the facilities in a variety of ways. Our message is 'come and see, you're welcome and you might learn something'."

The One Point MD Martin Lauer said: "The View has effectively become a business destination with some of the region's most influential organisations routinely making use of our offices."

Sarah Downing, Head of Marketing at the Bondholders which used The View for a board meeting, said: "It's a positive move by IT@Spectrum and The One Point to make their offices available to so many visitors. It reflects the forward thinking approach they take to developing links with businesses across the region."

ARTIFICIAL Intelligence (AI) systems are entering a steep adoption curve says IDC which reckons Western European revenues will hit \$1.5bn this year, up 40% on 2016.

AI is expected to attract significant investment over the coming years achieving a CAGR of 42.5% through to 2020 when revenues will exceed \$4.3bn.

"IDC is seeing huge interest in cognitive applications and AI in Europe from different industry sectors, healthcare and government," said Philip Carnelley, Research Director for Enterprise Software at IDC Europe.

"Although only a minority of European organisations have deployed AI solutions, a large majority are planning to deploy or are evaluating its potential.

"They are looking at use cases with clear RoI, such as predictive maintenance, fraud prevention, customer service and sales recommendation."

From a technology perspective the most spend will be on cognitive applications (\$516m), which includes cognitively enabled process and industry applications that automatically learn, discover and make recommendations or predictions, according to Carnelley.

The use cases that will see the greatest levels of investment in Western Europe this year are sales process recommendation and automation systems, fraud analysis and investigation, quality management investigation and recommendation systems, automated threat intelligence and prevention, and IT automation systems.

The three largest Western European industries to invest in cognitive and artificial intelligence systems are banking, retail and discrete manufacturing, although cross-industry applications have the largest share across all industries.

By 2020, these industries (including cross-industry applications) will account for almost half of all IT spending on cognitive and AI systems.

IDC says the finance sector will account for 22% of cognitive spending in 2020. But the fastest growing sectors will be distribution and services (professional services, retail and transportation) with a CAGR of 60.8%, the public sector (education, government and healthcare providers) with a CAGR of 60.8%, and infrastructure (telecommunications and utilities) with a CAGR of 60.1%.



A SAMSUNG sales incentive offered by Daisy Distribution resulted in a 7.5% uplift in sales volumes, while sales of the target £250 premium device range grew by 69% in the incentive period. The scheme ran from August 2016 until the end of January this year and the top nine purchasing partners from three league tables won a three-day trip to Iceland which included a Jeep tour and snowmobiling. Julien Parven, Marketing Director at Daisy Distribution, commented: "It is important that we not only teach and nurture our partners to succeed, but that we reward them for their hard work. The trip was the perfect way for us to do this after a fantastic five months of business on Samsung devices."

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Sispal hired by CityFibre



Jatinder Sispal

FORMER Head of BT Local Business and seasoned channel builder Jatinder Sispal has joined CityFibre as Head of Carrier and National Providers assigned to drive new partnerships and deliver growth in pure fibre connectivity.

Sispal brings 22-plus years carrier industry experience as a senior sales and marketing leader in a career that includes a notable stint at Telstra where he was responsible for building the wholesale division from scratch. He also led Colt's UK wholesale operation before heading up the northern European indirect sales and marketing divisions.

Sispal joins CityFibre from BT where he was Head of BT Local Business responsible for the enterprise division serving approximately 700,000 customers a year and driving annual revenues of £400m.

His new remit is to advance the benefits of CityFibre's independent full-fibre networks to the carrier and national provider sector including content providers and data centre operators.

"CityFibre is driving forward the construction of full-fibre infrastructure across the UK and I wanted to play a key role in this agile and revolutionary organisation," stated Sispal.

"Our focus is to enable customers to innovate with the support of a true alternative infrastructure partner that's committed to extending its reach and delivering service excellence."

Rob Hamlin, CityFibre's Commercial Director, stated: "Jatinder brings decades of invaluable experience to his new role and is fully aligned with our vision to transform the UK's digital infrastructure. The team is already benefitting from his insights and energy."

Sispal immediately started work on building automation into CityFibre's channel operations enabling partners to transact 'smartly' and deliver fibre connectivity through his four key sub-verticals – carriers, data centre operators, SIs and VARs.

"We're already introducing CityFibre to a new prospect base," added Sispal. "We are ambitious, innovative and focused on keeping the proposition strong and simple."

Intelisys model pays off with major deal

BLUE Planet Networks, NV Consulting and The Cloud Networks Germany have joined forces through the Intelisys Global model to secure an initial three year contract from an international sports retailer to provide in-store Wi-Fi services at 40 sites across Europe in a deal worth 130,000 euros with more stores in the pipeline.

Making the most of partnerships established via the Intelisys Global two-tier distribution model, NV Consulting was able to put together a multi-country network solution to support a Wi-Fi package from The Cloud Networks Germany and leverage Internet connectivity services from Blue Planet Networks, a new Intelisys Global supplier partner.

"This project shows how the Intelisys Global Technology Services Distributor model can bring together consultancies, resellers and suppliers to enable new market opportunities," said Stephen Hackett, MD for Intelisys Global.

"From an initial introduction at our London Mindshare event in September, NV Consulting was able to build out its solution within just a few days, removing all the overheads and delays



Stephen Hackett

typically associated with pricing and specifying as this was all handled by Intelisys Global."

Achim Moehrlein, CEO of The Cloud Networks Germany, added: "Working with the Intelisys Global model gives us

access to initial supplier agnostic support and advice, along with access to the consultants, technology providers and implementation specialists we needed to create a competitive proposition for our retail customer."

BOB Sparks (pictured), founder of Cardiff-based comms reseller Ayspark, struck gold last month as the lucky winner of a genuine gold bar at one of Fidelity Energy's 'Gold Rush Discovery' events staged in London and Manchester. The events were designed to create greater awareness and understanding of the tools available to partners entering the energy supply arena, including marketing and sales support along with the company's new portal. "We have seen a significant uptake in portal usage and signed new partner contracts with activity up by around 20% compared to before the events," stated Fidelity Energy MD John Haw (who will be running an educational webinar on the 6th June for those who missed the events).



TeleWare-Weston in collaboration

NEW financial sector regulations that come into force next year have prompted TeleWare and Weston Digital Technologies to link up and co-develop an on-site compliance capture, record and analysis solution.

MiFID II comes into effect in January 2018 when all communications (voice, face-to-face and electronic) relating to financial trades must be recorded and stored for a minimum of five years (possibly seven).

And the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)



Paul Millar

kicks off in May 2018 requiring marketers and data handlers to clean up customer data within

their own environment to ensure the correct permissions are held and compliant.

To meet these requirements TeleWare and Weston have created a solution that captures fixed and mobile voice recordings together with SMS and uses TeleWare's Intelligent Import technology to push the recordings to an on-site recorder.

Paul Millar, Chief Innovation Officer at TeleWare, commented on the collaboration: "We are working together to offer Weston customers a recording

solution that holds everything in one place on-site."

Weston MD Derek Townsend added: "Our goal is to avoid swivel chair compliance. MiFID II requires financial firms to record all communications in all forms that may be involved or result in a trade.

"Bringing it all together on one platform, a unified solution for compliance, is so much more efficient."

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Agents lack proper tools

RESEARCH by 8x8 has brought into sharp focus the yawning gap between properly tooled up call centre agents and their ill-equipped counterparts who work in less structured 'informal' contact centres.

In its report 8x8 cites figures that suggest 'informal' agents outnumber formal contact centre workers in the UK by six times (4.6 million), and 46% of this category say they are unsupported and undertrained despite having responsibility for customer service enquiries across various channels.

Almost as many say that access to customer service technology would help them to improve their performance with developments such as AI and chatbots cited as a potential boon to their capabilities.

Despite growth in the use of non-traditional channels skills in managing social media and email contacts are lacking among a sizeable section of informal agents.

8x8 UK MD Kevin Scott-Cowell stated: "When people think of customer service they imagine aircraft hanger sized contact centres full of headset wearing agents. This is a complete misconception.



Kevin Scott-Cowell

"Informal contact centre agents are having to communicate professionally with customers across multiple channels, but in most instances they haven't been trained and don't feel confident.

"But with the right technology and training staff can be supported, even small teams.

"The advent of cloud-based contact centre technology means this doesn't have to be a huge investment, but it will undoubtedly improve the overall customer service."

Speedier delivery

VAIONI Wholesale has launched its Pre-Ethernet service in London enabling partners in the city to accelerate the connectivity delivery process, improve service levels and move from order to invoice more speedily.

Vaioni MD Sachin Vaish stated: "While our average delivery time for Ethernet is above the industry norm it still isn't good enough. With our Pre-Ethernet Service for London businesses we can deliver our SLA-backed product in as little as five working days."

The London Pre-Ethernet service offers flexible contracts and can be delivered as a fully managed service including data, voice and video.

"The service covers 10,000-plus postcodes across London and delivers a seamless transition to the primary service once live, and can be ordered easily online via the myVaioni Procurement Platform," added Vaish. "In the coming months we will be launching several complementary National Pre-Ethernet products."

Roaming costs cut by clever YR4 unit

A MERSEYSIDE-based technology company is seeking to build a channel of resellers with clients that regularly travel abroad and want to slash data roaming costs.

YRoam's YR4 product is a device – slightly heavier and thicker than a smartphone – that uses cloud SIM technology to locate the local 4G or 3G networks that offer the most affordable rates, giving travellers their own portable Wi-Fi hot-spot.

YRoam claims the device operates in 100 countries worldwide and is not locked down to a specific network so users will only ever pay the flat rate from the data package chosen.

The hardware unit includes 1gb of data and can connect up to five devices simultaneously with a range of up to 50 metres. The YR4 also doubles as a power bank so the user can stay online and connected throughout their trip.

"In 2017, being connected to the Internet should no longer be an expensive luxury, but an affordable and instant necessity," commented YRoam's MD Matt Agrimi.

"We are in the process of agreeing exclusive commercial reseller opportunities across Africa, Asia and the US to name a few, all with groups that have recognised the opportunity that the ever-growing demand for data roaming creates.

"We are open to all indirect channel opportunities and markets and can bespoke our commercial offering.

"The data roaming space is one that will continue to grow and expand at pace as will the associated revenues. Therefore the returns for any prospective partner are unrestricted."

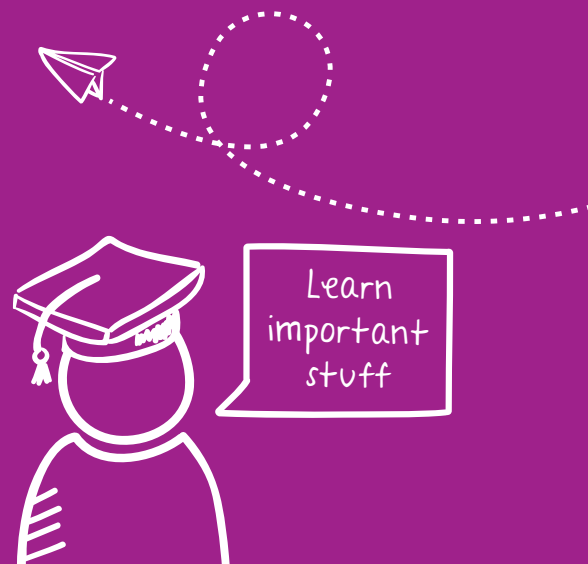
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Redwire drives data cen

Traditional data centres are failing customers and will give way to a new model, argues Redwire Managing Director Ameer Mirza, who says real value lies in the personal nature of service delivery and the interconnection of people with the latest DC technology.

Mirza presents Redwire as a brave new dawn for the data centre landscape and the industry cannot ignore it. He says RedwireDC is the most exciting new data centre anywhere in Britain having contrived to fuse people and their data to the interconnectedness of its location. This is the magnetism of RedwireDC, claims Mirza, whose company has advanced data centres far beyond their original purpose.

Redwire was established by Mirza's father in Q3 2016 following years of research into the data centre marketplace. "Flexibility and customer service at a purpose built Tier 3 data centre is something that the market desperately needs," said Mirza. "We are positioning the business to offer a never before seen solution to an overlooked problem. We react to the ever changing marketplace and in west London there is a lack of new and high quality data centres which was a key factor in our decision when setting up Redwire."

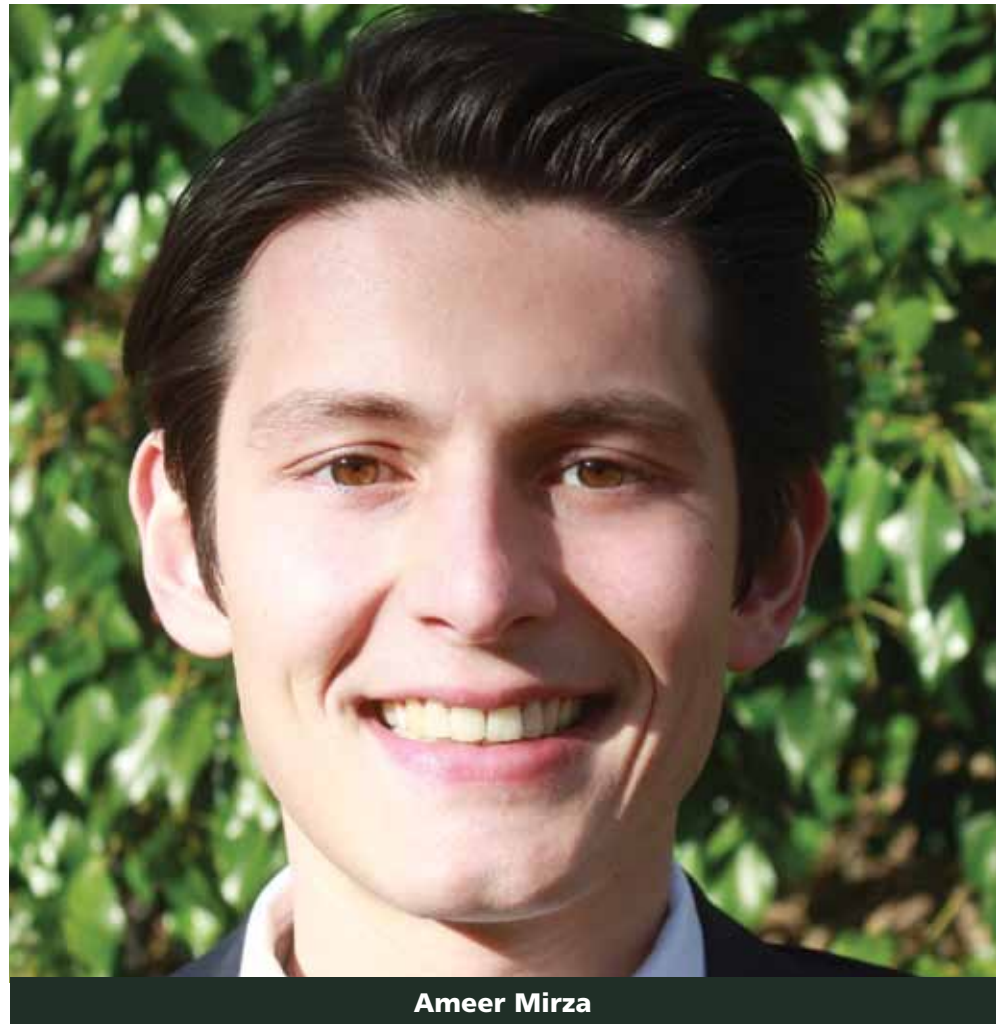
Locating the data centre on Uxbridge Road in Ealing was a 'no-brainer', noted Mirza. "RedwireDC is positioned on two connectivity thoroughfares with fibre from multiple networks and is positioned near high speed transport links from east London and

the Docklands through to Heathrow Airport," he explained. "Connectivity is key and we made this decision a top priority."

Redwire is gunning to be west London's tech hub and has support from the local Government, local businesses and educational institutions. Its facility also offers serviced offices which means clients' data is managed securely within the same building. The company has shown how static data centres can become living places of congregation that leave traditional rivals with the impossible task of competing. Redwire thus stands poised to supersede these 'relics of the past' as they give way, claims Mirza, who emphasised that the essence of any service is the point of contact with customers.

"Being able to give a business, whether small or large, the ability to be near their data, access their data, and own their data in ways they cannot currently do in data centre models gives us that concierge level personal touch that businesses are looking for," commented Mirza. "I am already proud to see companies that use our services grow exponentially, and my ambition is to see more people and companies launch their businesses successfully from the foundations we've created."

Mirza himself has strong foundations in the business



Ameer Mirza

We're offering a never before seen solution to an overlooked problem

world. He is an Ernst & Young trained chartered accountant with a full understanding of how to manage a business and deliver a professional service. He also studied economics at Warwick University where he developed an analytical mind. And he has been immersed in his family's property development

and construction business for as long as he can remember. "Growing up in this environment gave me a deep sense of business acumen," he stated. "I have always been fascinated by IT and its ability to empower and transform a business to be the best it can be. IT is the present and the future, and it's an area of business

that I always had a leaning towards since I was young."

Mirza's boyhood aspiration has been realised and Redwire currently employs 11 full-time staff and calls on a number of expert consultants when required. "David Gilpin, who was formerly CEO of Sungard Data Centres, and David Hall of Equinix have

the revolution

been with us every step of the way in designing our data centre to ensure it ticks all of the boxes from a customer and technical perspective," added Mirza. "Other partners were Hurley Palmer Flatt which designed the facility, Future-Tech worked on the mechanical and engineering fit out, while Daisy supplied the networking."

Managed services

Since the facility was opened for business Redwire's strategy has been to offer existing products (colocation and related services) with a higher quality of service to customers as competitively as possible. The company has moved forward and now plans to add managed services to its colocation offering. "We expect to launch Redwire Managed Services in the coming months," noted Mirza. "We want to offer enterprise grade operational standards to SMEs. Businesses are not simply cogs in the machine, we empower them to be the machine. And being a family owned company with no debt we can pursue various options."

"For example, we are aiming to roll out a new cloud platform that we believe will offer the best animation rendering available in the UK to serve the media industry. It is an exciting business and we are lucky to have a wide range of opportunities in front of us from which to expand our existing offering. We see the demand for data centre capacity in the UK growing significantly over the coming years."

Another area of great interest to Mirza is the IoT sector. "IoT devices are expected to triple by 2021

but I think the UK is under prepared to manage this growth in terms of the supporting infrastructure," he commented. "Data centres are a key factor here. Our proximity to the London metropolis means Redwire is well positioned to support the large increase in data and storage that IoT is expected to bring in."

Mirza also has his sights set on certain verticals where he feels there is a sharp appetite for flexible high quality data centre space. "The channel is one of these verticals and we are looking to work with partners that realise they can regain margin lost after the introduction of services such as VoIP," he said. "We enable partners to truly own their clients and offer the latest technology using both public and private cloud."

Redwire has quickly grown a large sales pipeline and one major US blue chip company has approval from its board to migrate most of its IT requirement in the UK to Redwire and also launch a new European operation from its data centre. "I'm particularly excited given the great product this company has and the potential for it to grow," commented Mirza. "It recognised the value of being able to fully manage data while relying on me and our team to deliver their required levels of flexibility."

Despite early successes such as this Mirza still believes he needs a megaphone for his comms channel cause. "The biggest issue for me is raising our brand awareness and getting our products and services out to market," he stated. "We are expanding the sales team and attend recruitment events to scout

for the most capable sales representatives to convey Redwire's strengths to the market. As for the long-term outlook, we are such an agile and flexible business it's hard to say exactly how we'll reach our goals, as one of our many ventures could take off and drive the whole business forward. That's what makes this even more exciting." ■

Just a minute with Ameer Mirza...

What talent do you wish you had? Parkour, it looks like fun

Role model: Warren Buffet: His consistent success and growth is remarkable, along with his contributions to charity and philanthropic work

Describe the Redwire culture? Go the extra mile, personal and approachable at all times

What do you fear the most? Lifts, but I am taking steps to tackle the fear

Biggest achievement? Being the first in my intake at Ernst & Young to qualify as a chartered accountant, enabling me to join the family business well in advance of my expectations

Three ideal dinner guests: Muhammad Ali, a legend; Warren Buffet, he's seen and done it all; and Jimi Hendrix, I'm a big fan

How would you like to be remembered? As an easy going guy with a passion for business and success

Your greatest strength and what could you work on? I'm calm when the proverbial hits the fan, but I could work on taking more time off

If you weren't in IT what would you be doing? Property development

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Jeff Tench: Architect of a

A master plan to bring top Microsoft partners into close union lies behind New Signature's acquisition of Paradigm Systems in February. And according to CEO Jeff Tench, the US-based company's global ascendancy is symbolic of Microsoft's emergence as an industry leader in all things cloud.

The grand scale of Tench's growth ambition is matched in stature by the extent of his past experience in building businesses, which is why he is so deftly able to fashion an acquisition led tour de force in New Signature. Tench has more than 20 years experience in leading high growth technology companies. Prior to New Signature he was CEO of Teliris, a role that followed a stint as President of the Business Markets Group at Level 3 Communications. "I have also built and re-built companies that weathered many storms yet ultimately succeeded in the face of drastic market changes," said Tench. "With New Signature we are taking a different approach in a market that has strong endemic growth, having partnered with Microsoft and, most importantly, identified companies that have already achieved great success and bringing them together. The goal is to build something tremendous and

create an amazing team that stands upon outstanding culture and values."

In April 2015 New Signature, the 2014 and 2015 Microsoft US Partner of the Year, secured an initial funding commitment of \$35 million from Columbia Capital to fuel expansion. With this backing Tench focused on acquiring fellow Microsoft partners that each bring distinct capabilities to the greater team. The potent sweep of Tench's buy and build strategy began in June 2015 when New Signature acquired CMS Consulting and Infrastructure Guardian, sister companies based in Toronto, Canada. "By adding Canadian operations with deep technology expertise in Microsoft Azure and cloud infrastructure solutions we furthered the expansion of our capabilities and market coverage," explained Tench. "Infrastructure Guardian brought a strong infrastructure managed services practice that has propelled New



Jeff Tench

Signature's capabilities greatly in that area."

Five months later New Signature acquired imason, a Microsoft application development firm also based in Toronto. The deal strengthened New Signature's capabilities in web and mobile application development. Days later InfraScience was acquired, a premier Microsoft Partner based in Atlanta, Georgia. And in April 2016 UK-based Dot Net Solutions (a specialist in application migration to Azure and 2014 Microsoft UK Partner

of the Year) was picked up, launching a second front in New Signature's strategy to bring together like minded Microsoft partners.

UK launchpad

"We knew from the start that the UK market was a neat fit for New Signature, and Dot Net Solutions, under Paul Cosgrave and Dan Scarfe, was the perfect launching point," stated Tench. "The addition of Dot Net also allows us to increase our international presence by helping customers with multi-national operations. Dot Net's business, both in professional

services and managed services, aligned perfectly with New Signature's strategy for growth."

As Tench continued to scour the Microsoft partner ecosystem for potential acquisition targets on which to pitch his grand vision, London-based Paradigm Systems was always a prime target. And in February this year New Signature made its move, bagging the premier Microsoft Partner and adding skills in Azure, Office 365, Windows Server and desktop deployments, as well as a managed services business

Microsoft powerhouse

community which lends itself to more streamlined communications and enables our team to be more agile."

New Signature's headcount of circa 350 employees is growing by the day along with top line organic growth of 20 to 30 per cent, while its global base of mid-to-large enterprises is also expanding. Against this backdrop of rapid growth and acquisitions Tench confronts the mechanics of his integration challenge with practical mission statements that speak of unity and summon staff to the flag. "We have brought together seven distinct companies each with great synergy and vision, but it is a massive undertaking to align all of these different businesses and processes," said Tench. "We recently went through a company-wide effort to develop Mission, Vision and Values statements that resonate with all employees. A group of volunteers representing every geography and team across the company have joined our Culture Committee to draft these new statements. We are proud of the work this team has accomplished in a short space of time."

Tench cares about his people and, as we have seen, is thinking afresh in areas of integration and unity. "The hardest part of scaling a business through M&A is the integration of our team members, especially in a people-based business," he added. "At the start of this investment I was interested in growing a services organisation which means working closely with the people in this company. It's not widgets or 'things' that make our business successful, it's the people who are part

of the team. I want to make sure that every decision we make provides greater opportunity for our team to grow and learn. Culture was the most important aspect of every acquisition. If there was a bad culture fit we moved on."

Message from the top

The most successful business leaders do not leave their people uncertain of their destination. They must have a clear and coherent message, which Tench does not lack. He is just as clear on the growth potential of cloud technologies and digital platforms such as Azure. "The mainstream adoption of cloud is encouraging and directly supports our investment in the Microsoft ecosystem," he stated. "The opportunity is massive to grow alongside Microsoft and deliver transformational solutions to our customers. A key aspect of helping customers transform their business is focusing on the full lifecycle of infrastructure and application transformation, not just one-off engagements. Being a true partner to our customers means helping them manage the environments and applications we build and deploy."

Another trend that is gaining momentum and will continue to grow is the focus on the Internet of Things and advanced analytics driving digital transformation, observed Tench. "New Signature is working with customers to help them solve difficult business problems through analytics," he said. "Some of the most interesting problems we have been solving are around discrete manufacturing and helping

customers save millions by optimising their operations through innovations like Azure Machine Learning. New Signature's offering, Six Weeks to Insights, provides insights from the data generated by the connected devices and systems."

Tench explained that Microsoft wants partners to operate more deeply as trusted advisors through developing transformation roadmaps (such as Six Weeks to Insights), delivering complementary software solutions and products, and developing meaningful IP on top of the Microsoft platform. "Another great example of this is the New Signature Cloud Management Portal which helps customers glean meaningful insights into their spend and usage for Microsoft Azure and Office 365," he added. "Microsoft is also looking for partners to provide ongoing managed services to customers to help them operate and consume their investment appropriately."

The opportunity to create a new force in Microsoft that bestrides the globe and continues to scale holds long-term appeal for Tench, a shrewd leader whose mind is fixed on delivering business transformation. "We are building a team that enables us to scale our global business and deliver transformation to customers," he commented. "We are also evolving our operating model to more closely align with the ways our customers want to engage; and staying ahead of our competition by dedicating our company to continued learning and professional growth." ■

Just a minute with Jeff Tench...

Tell us something about yourself we don't know:

I live in Boulder, Colorado, with my wife and two small children. We raise chickens, bees and vegetables on our property there

What talent do you wish you had?

To play a musical instrument

Role model: My father who instilled in me a strong sense of self-reliance, responsibility and integrity that he always applied in his business career and at home

What do you fear the most?

Given the people-centric nature of our business, there are a lot of folks relying on me to effectively drive and lead this organisation. While I am confident in our path, our market and what makes New Signature a great company, I wouldn't be human if I didn't fear the risk of letting those people down

One example of something you have overcome:

Growing up I was almost two years younger than the rest of my class (I skipped a grade in elementary school) which made me physically smaller than the rest. This can be challenging for a young kid, so I learned early on that being outgoing and positive will help to bridge most gaps

In hindsight: I would have left 'big business' earlier in my career to work more entrepreneurially sooner

Your greatest strength?

I have the ability to synthesise input from various and many sources – market, personal and professional – and turn them into actionable themes and tactics

that chimes with New Signature's portfolio. The deal follows a year of working together on joint projects.

"There are differences in the global market that have to be taken into account as we scale the business," explained Tench. "The North American operation is geographically dispersed which adds another layer of communication between our team and customers as well as Microsoft, and it also introduces the potential for friction at different parts of the customer journey. The UK ecosystem is a tighter

Intelligent portal breaks

When elevating portals to the next level there is no match for taking an intelligent approach, according to plan.com co-founder Keith Curran who reveals the remarkable 'smart' capabilities of the company's upcoming Version 4 portal.

Since launching into the UK market in April 2014 plan.com has developed three versions of its renowned portal, but the latest 'smart' iteration, Version 4, comes with a brain. With it, the company has pioneered targeted data penetration and automation giving power to partners who control it. The primary purpose is to enable partners to do things they currently can't do with network operators or distributors, while giving them a helicopter view of their entire operation 'as things happen'. "Our investment in V4 and a private APN into the heart of the network is huge," stated Curran. "It enables the intelligent management of data and delivers live insights that are invaluable for partners wanting to understand the anatomy of their business in real-time. V4 is the manifestation of our thinking about the future of portals."

Laying your hands on needles in finite haystacks is easy compared to identifying and connecting useful data assets in ever-expanding seas of Big Data. But Version 4 extracts key information automatically and in real-time, putting unprecedented power into the hands of partners. "It's no different to partners having an infinite number of people analysing every aspect of their business 24/7, with key data fed back to them live via a TV,



Keith Curran

V4 applies 'intelligent thinking' to all available data, giving partners real-time insights that will transform the way they'll do business

computer, laptop, tablet or smartphone," added Curran.

It is estimated that 90 per cent of the world's data has been created in the last two years, amounting to several quintillion bytes of

unconnected user, network and traffic data per day, creating a wilderness of information and a new technology frontier for probing innovations such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). These techniques push the

boundaries, they interpret the creation of data in real-time to reveal patterns that put channel partners streets ahead of the competition, pointed out Curran.

"The answer is in the detail, but the challenge with Big Data is that there is no guarantee of finding it," he said. "V4 will be regarded as the industry's first smart portal because it does all of the detailing for partners and gives them the information they need when they need it, online and in real-time on whatever connected device they choose. Partners can manage their business from anywhere in the world. Some partners are 'one man' operations, others have 500 employees, whatever their size customers will be impressed and astounded by the flexibility."

The portal enables partners to build fully bespoke tariffs and whole solutions in front of customers, calibrated to meet their needs and offering a level of flexibility not currently possible with network operators or distributors. Partners can also build deals according to the most advantageous commission structures based on contract value and likely overspend, and see the commission figures in real-time as the deal is put together.

The real-time management of existing customers is also a boon, and Curran cited practical examples of V4

in action to illustrate this point. "If a customer visits a country its national flag immediately appears to indicate that the client is now roaming there, enabling the partner to react accordingly in real-time," he explained.

Curran also offered a snapshot of the portal's wider capabilities, of which there are many. These include knowing the moment when customers are starting to overspend (prompting an appropriate action from the partner). V4 also identifies which customers are most at risk from the competition (displaying the exact status of SIMs that, for example, are out of contract and how many days are left until they become out of contract); which customers are the most lucrative; the handsets customers use (highlighting upgrade opportunities); insights into the live status of deals made by individual sales people and collective teams (offering quote-to-sale conversion rates in real-time); and shows information such as customers who are having difficulties paying their bill.

Plan.com's claim to have introduced, with V4, the industry's first 'intelligent portal' is driven by its mission to always put partners first, so much so that the direction of plan.com's portal development is largely governed by feedback from partners to ensure the portal always reflects their fundamental requirements



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and 'wish list'. "It's all about the partner and taking them to the top of the pyramid," added Curran. "Enabling them to not only match but go beyond the capabilities of network operators. We also have a partner 'radar' that blips 24-7-365. They are part of the team and we encourage partners to talk to us. Not a day goes by without a portal enhancement based on their feedback."

Complete automation

Curran says the imminent launch of V4 will render the industry's old ways of doing things defunct, and he believes that the core technology driving V4 will continue to blaze a trail in solving partners' day-to-day bugbears, including spreadsheets and renewals. "Partner commissions are reported on spreadsheets that need reconciling, which for many partners means a full-time member of staff to fulfil this task," he explained. "With V4, all relevant data is automatically fed into the partner's Wallet on screen,

in real-time, so they know immediately how much money they are making.

"As for partner growth, losing one customer costs twice as much as gaining a new one, because two new customers must be added to continue the growth. Feedback from partners shows that 75 per cent of their time is spent on renewals, so we developed V4 to remove this costly task, allowing partners to manage renewals in minutes rather than days.

"We are empowering partners to do more than a network operator by just using their finger tips. Our in-house developers have succeeded in their original core usability objective – to make even Apple look complicated. A good portal is simple in nature and easy to use; a great portal delivers what partners want and expect; but a groundbreaking portal delivers the unexpected. As the first intelligent smart portal, that's what V4 is all about." ■

PARTNERS GIVE V4 THE THUMBS UP...

"The V4 portal is extremely informative, providing the tools needed to manage our customers. A key benefit to Rydal is the ability to see live international usage via the dashboard interface."

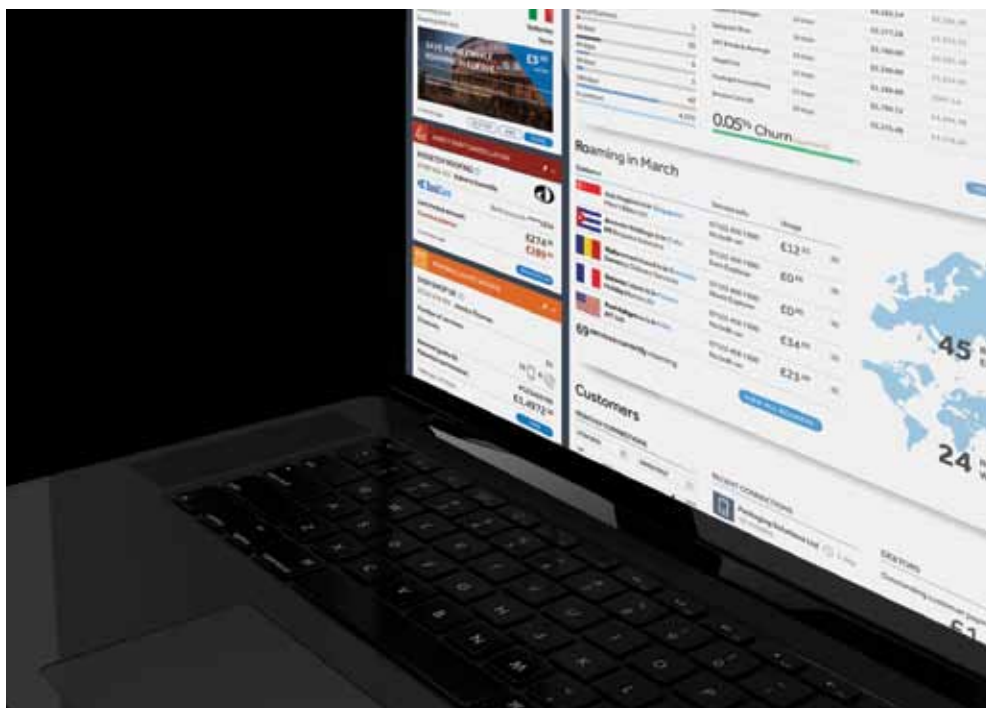
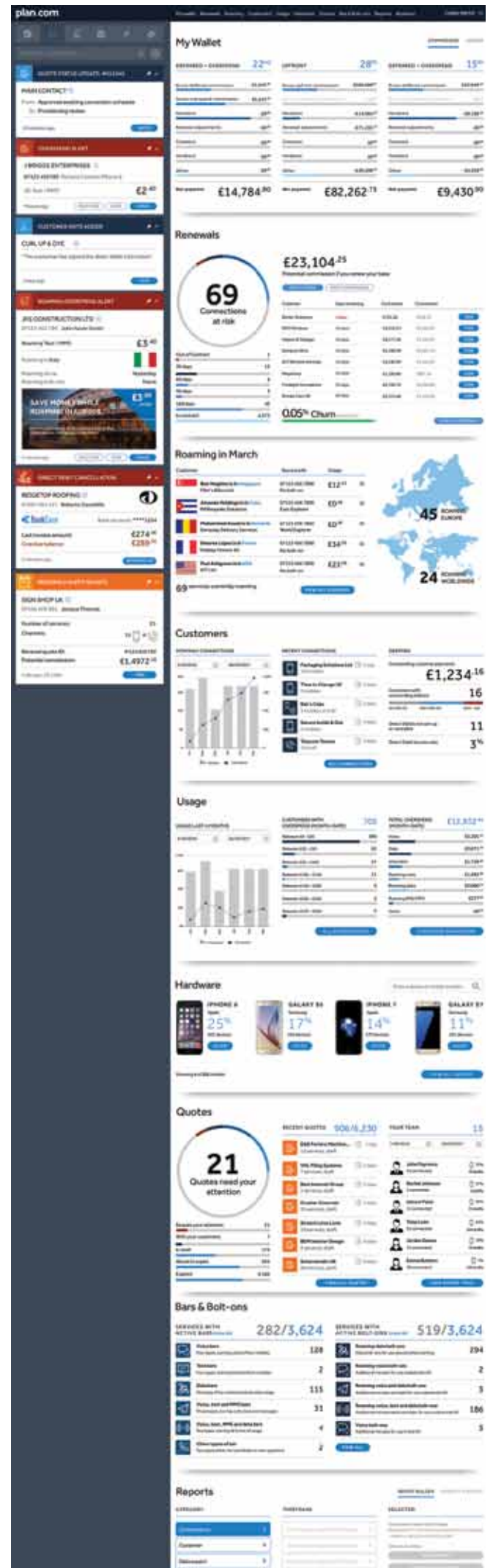
Steffan Dancy, MD, Rydal Communications

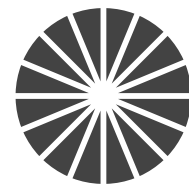
"V4 takes us to a new level. We currently use the portal to highlight any overspends to customers before they receive their bill. Also, we are informed within minutes when a customer lands overseas, allowing us to add the relevant bolt-ons."

Paul Stevenson, MD, One Connectivity

"We have not seen anything like V4. To provide true value to our customers we require real-time information and fast responses. V4 gives us everything we need and enables us to compete and win at the highest level."

Matthew Morrow, MD, Simply Telecom





Have you Powered up?

Since Blizzard Telecom became the first to launch utilities to the channel in early 2014, its partners have boosted earnings from their customer bases by including electricity and gas contracts in their offering.

Blizzard Telecom added energy to its telecom portfolio and launched to the channel just over three years ago. However it first started offering energy management services back in 2008 through its subsidiary Blizzard Utilities to corporate customers, it was on the back of this that a channel SME offering was first explored. At the time, the process of both quoting and signing customers up was too long winded. Roll forward six years and with significant investment Blizzard now had an end to end instant online quoting and contract tool.

Managing Director Mark Jones explains 'Initially we launched energy through our existing partners for whom we were already supplying voice, data and mobile services on a white label basis, with a view to exploring and testing how telecoms companies would benefit from adding energy contracts to their portfolio'. Over the past three years, Blizzard's partner base has grown outside of its existing telecoms resellers to new telecoms and IT resellers who were also looking for an opportunity to offer energy to their customers. 'Many of our new and existing partners have benefitted significantly from the sales and back office support provided by Blizzard, with hugely valuable contracts secured' says Jones.

Offering energy to new and existing customers has allowed Blizzard partners to be far more competitive in securing telecoms business against rivals who don't offer this extra revenue generating service. Stuart Townsend of Pure Communications comments 'We started working with Blizzard Telecom just over three years ago, and quickly saw the benefit of adding a utility offering to our portfolio. It was clear from the outset that this service was welcomed by our customers and is now the fastest growing part of our business. The process couldn't be simpler. We acquire copies of utility bills and Blizzard provides quotes and, once agreed

with the end user, the contract is electronically signed'.

Last month saw the de-regulation of the business water market in England, Blizzard Partners will be taking advantage of this, offering their customers a choice of water supplier for the very first time. Jones adds 'Our partners have told us that their customers don't want to miss out on having the opportunity to choose a more competitive water supplier. The fact that all businesses in England are in

effect out of contract and have a choice creates a great opportunity. It is also a good excuse to go and see a customer about something new, and as we know conversations always lead on to other opportunities'.

Including energy and water as part of Blizzard's portfolio enables partners increased revenue and cross-selling opportunities. Tony Hayes of Diamond Solutions UK agrees. 'We sell telecom and utility services through our partnership with Blizzard. The support in terms of back office and sales has helped us to secure large energy contracts within our base that we wouldn't have otherwise achieved. It's often been the case that the energy earnings from the customer have outweighed the telecoms earnings'.

Having built long term business relationships solidly since

Tony Hayes
Diamond Solutions UK



Stuart Townsend
Pure Communications



Mark Jones
Blizzard
Managing Director



2008, Blizzard enjoys the best supplier terms available from all of the UK's leading energy and water suppliers and offers a range of upfront and ongoing payment plans. Since Blizzard started offering energy there have been new entrants targeting the channel. Blizzard welcomes this competition as the more the channel hears about the benefits of adding energy to their portfolio, the more likely they are to try it.



Tom Jacques
1st Communications



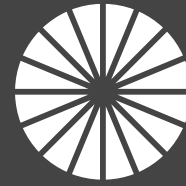
Claire Baker
Chalvington Communication

Tom Jacques of 1st Communications adds 'Our telecoms strategy is focused on the public and corporate sector. Blizzard has helped us increase revenues from our base by supporting and fronting negotiations on several of our larger customers, some of which required bespoke usage and spend reporting. Being able to offer these services has further improved our customer relations and is now an integral part of our business'.

To assist partners Blizzard actively produces marketing campaigns and end user content. It doesn't stop there though, the company also offers staff and company incentives to its partners. Claire Baker of Chalvington Communications explains 'Blizzard has consistently supported our team, ensuring that they are well informed to sell energy to our customers, and are fully incentivised for all efforts made. The team look forward to the regular challenges and have been successful in achieving multiple rewards for their profitable performances, driving them individually at the same time as increasing sales'.

If you would like to find out how your business can benefit from offering energy call one of the team on **0845 873 7950** or email marketing@blizzardtelecom.co.uk.

Kelly Nicks
Blizzard
Marketing Manager



Blizzard

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A true channel champ

As a world champion powerboat racer Informatica's channel chief Rodney Foreman has emphatically proven his competitive strength, which is reflected in the company's ramped up ambition to become an ever potent force in the global data management market.

Informatica's worldwide expansion campaign has begun, and with Foreman at the helm it is likely to be another example of high speed growth and glory. The company's long-term goal is to double the value of the business from \$5 billion to \$10 billion and accelerate its strategy to deliver more data management offerings in the cloud. "We are looking to drive 50 per cent of our business through the channel," stated Foreman, who is Informatica's SVP for the Partner Ecosystem. "Our priority is to ramp up partner capacity and give them the skills and knowledge they need to sell and deploy our products. We are addressing this, our greatest challenge, by creating an authorisation programme with training roadmaps and courses. This is a crucial part of our vision for the future and will be central to how we grow the business."

The company currently works with over 7,000 customers and 500 partners globally and is focused on building a network of VAD and VAR channel partners via a two-tier programme designed

to bring to market its Intelligent Data Platform. As part of the growth strategy Informatica has formed a distribution deal with Arrow. The company also expanded its distribution agreement with Avnet to include the United States and Canada, building on agreements in EMEA, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. "The implementation of a two-tier channel programme will enable VADs to undertake partner recruitment and activation," said Foreman.

Informatica was founded in 1993 by Gaurav Dhillon and Diaz Nesamoney after they spotted an opportunity to help organisations gain a competitive advantage from making the most of their data assets. "Our purpose is to enable customers to achieve maximum business value from all things Big Data in the cloud, real-time and streaming," explained Foreman. "Informatica provides software to help organisations turn their troves of raw data into actionable information."

In 2015 Informatica changed ownership and transformed its corporate structure, a



Rodney Foreman

move that made life better for employees and enabled the company to be more flexible in how it builds products and services, while speeding up the development of cloud offerings.

Rise of the cloud

"The cloud has been one of the most fundamental business model shifts during the last 10 years," added Foreman. "That meant we needed to find ways of getting closer to our customers through a broader range of touchpoints. The global channel partner programme, launched in February, widened our scope to bring in new partners. Reaching new customers globally is dependent on the success of our channel programme and the work we do with partners."

Foreman says Informatica's biggest opportunity is to become 'the intelligent cloud data management platform for mid-market companies'. "We are seeing tremendous growth in the mid-market," he noted. "We also see a huge opportunity with data governance. Our acquisition of data governance platform Diaku supports that focus. We can also combine this with data security in an approach that secures data at the source, rather than by protecting the perimeter which is the practice of most security software vendors."

Foreman expects the evolution of his strategy to embrace more OEM type business models with system integrators, jointly creating solutions by industry vertical around data integration, data

management, data quality and data security. "We expect to leverage the VAD marketplaces to align our products with other vendors and create these industry vertical solutions," he added.

Foreman brings deep industry insights to the task in hand. His career began as an engineer working on portable computers at Compaq Computer Corporation before becoming an architect for large scale network systems, and then moving into software product management and sales. He went on to lead the cloud software channel business unit at IBM. To sum up, Foreman's career experience positions him well to succeed in his current role as Informatica's senior exec' responsible for the channel. "I enjoy having face-to-face time working with partners," he added. "Creating a win-win scenario with partners is something I'm passionate about. We will continue to strengthen our partnerships, execute on our aggressive product roadmap and grow our customer base, while reflecting the broad shift in customer buying behaviours."

"Customers today are more likely to purchase multi-vendor solutions from technology partners. They want resellers and SIs to be their trusted advisors, providing complete end-to-end solutions that leverage the cloud. In this context, partners will evolve into a role that drives new customer sales and innovation around ISV products. The most successful partners will combine multiple vendor solutions that are targeted at specific industries. That will be the way customers buy in the future." ■



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Key to success in digital



'Digital Marketing' is all about the marketing of products or services using digital channels to reach and influence consumers and get an insight into their behaviour. This now extends beyond internet marketing and encapsulates mobile phones (both SMS and MMS), social media marketing, display advertising, search engine marketing and any other form of digital media.

Changing long standing paradigms to embrace the social media revolution can be a challenge. It requires a new approach to marketing and a new understanding of customer behaviour. To take one example, analytics is now a central cog in social media machinery. Companies now need to analyse and quantify the value of downloads of apps on mobile devices, tweets on Twitter, likes on Facebook and so on.

The joining up of social media activities into a rounded digital

marketing campaign is illustrated by a recent highly successful project run by Pizza Hit in the USA. They created an app allowing customers to create their own pizza by dragging their selected toppings onto a graphical pizza base. The iPhone would then determine which location the customer happened to be nearest. Pizza Hut advertised the new app online, in print, and on television - even winning a placement in Apple's own iPhone commercial.

Within two weeks, the Pizza Hut app was downloaded 100,000 times and within three months iPhone users ordered \$1m worth of pizza. The app now has millions of users across the iPhone, iPad, and Android platforms. This demonstrates how digital marketing has come of age and underlines the importance of understanding your audience, engaging with customers and delivering an easy to use solution.



CLIFFORD NORTON
CHANNEL TELECOM

“ Social media has evolved into a powerful, commercially advantageous animal. It's important to understand how best to use SM however, as in the wrong hands the effects to your business could be devastating. That being said, the opportunity to reach thousands of potential customers, increase brand awareness and cement your brand for little to no cost is not to be dismissed in fear. With Facebook alone currently boasting over 1,870 million active users (22% of the world's population) of which three quarters log in every day, it's no secret that the younger generation have carved a significant SM space into their lives. As these people make their way up the ranks in business, we've been handed a cost-effective way to reach decision makers on a plate.”



LAUREN MCMANUS
DAISY WHOLESALE

“ Whereas in the past, B2B was typically driven by cold calls from sales teams, our partners and potential partners are now able to take the first step and contact us through our social media posts. Working with the channel, our team can establish relationships through these digital networking platforms, and we can demonstrate thought-leadership within the market. Although relatively new to social media, we are already seeing benefits. My three top tips for companies not using social media are to plan a communications strategy; share content which is relevant only to your target audience; and post regularly, as once you start, you need to commit – a pet hate is being directed to an account which hasn't been updated in years.”



LORRIN WHITE
BAMBOO TECHNOLOGY

“ To embrace digital marketing it's vital to understand, prepare, commit and engage. Learn about and understand the digital channels available to you. Be sure to choose the right one for your target market/audience. Plan and prepare content that is meaningful and aligns with your vision, values and proposition. There is a myriad of research and articles from multiple sources to be shared for free. To stay true to your values though, there is no better way than to create your own content. Enthusiastically commit. Understand your company network opportunity and use every level of proactive interaction available. Finance, service, executive level and everything in between. People connect with people, so be interesting and engage the entire business in all related activity.”



DARREN FARNDEN
ENTANET

“ We took steps to embrace social media several years ago when we originally set up our opinion blog and created our Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook profiles to help promote our posts, and our profiles are quite well established now. Since then we've continued to enhance our profiles and expand their use, with regular communications of all our relevant company news, paid-for product based posts and ongoing customer engagement. SM can clearly help to open communication channels with your customers, help to distribute your content and messaging and can even help to generate interest and enquiries; but it also takes a significant amount of work to keep it fed with relevant news and ensure any customer interactions are responded to in a timely manner.”

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marketing is integration



KATIE SLOAN
FIDELITY GROUP

“ In order to embrace the digital world, we have created a new team centered on the foundation of increasing digital engagement. With users spending ever increasing time on their mobile devices, it has become essential for businesses to have a strong digital presence. This expands from dynamic social media feeds to an interactive website; with aims of increasing brand awareness, diversifying lead generation and driving new and sustainable buying interest and behaviour. Social media for business requires constant monitoring, content management, and creativity. We would advise companies to have a team member dedicated to digital engagement who is passionate about it, ensuring that the content shared is useful, beneficial, and captures your audience’s attention regularly and relevantly. ”



GARY GOULD
SHORETEL

“ 84% of B2B senior executives use social media to help make purchasing decisions, and our appreciation of social media’s impact on the sales cycle has been integral to our success. We are now well into the age of social selling, where salespeople can directly interact and create opportunities with prospects through social media. It’s therefore essential that ShoreTel catalyses and supports this progress. We constantly share content and ideas with our sales team, provide training and advice where it is needed, and help them build their own social media profiles. We do similar activities with our partners to help them grow their brand presence, and drive conversation around our brand. It’s a powerful mix. ”



ELLIE ALLSEYBROOK
INFORM BILLING

“ Digital marketing provides a great opportunity for a growing brand to extend its reach when resources are tight. For us, it evens the playing field with larger competitors and keeps us on people’s radars. Everything we do online originates from or links back to our website, ensuring potential customers can find us. Always be clear on what you want to achieve, save time by planning regular posts in advance and recycle your content. Then just keep at it; a following must be built and it’s a classic case of quality over quantity. Trial a range of platforms and see what works best - you might be surprised! Sometimes we engage with individuals rather than an ‘official’ business account, so don’t rule a platform out because its predominantly B2C. ”



HILARY OLIVER
TOLLRING

“ Tollring has embraced digital marketing and will continue to do so, not just from our own marketing perspective but also from a product development perspective. As B2B tools and usage increase, it is becoming increasingly important to consider every element of communications when liaising with customers. From an analytics viewpoint, we will see the development of some very exciting tools which will consolidate digital and voice communications to reveal a whole new depth to understanding a customer’s journey. We believe the opportunity of customer engagement resides in relevancy – keep relevant and focus on delivering the right information to the right people in the right way. ”



STEPHEN MCINTYRE
NIMANS

“ Whilst it’s important to seize the opportunity to communicate and engage with customers at low cost through social media, always have top of your mind who your audience actually is. Traditionally marketers have thought business-to-business, B2B, or business-to consumer, B2C. But now we should be thinking of B to me. Someone may be a major corporate buyer Monday to Friday, but Saturday they could be wheeling a trolley around Tesco. Think not just content, but timing and tone of voice. Encourage engagement and action with click throughs to other relevant content, like blogs, which strengthen your brand identity. Simply hard selling turns people off. Social media marketing techniques are learned skills so invest in training or outsource to a specialist agency. ”



VINCENT DISNEUR
UNION STREET

“ The rise of social media and other forms of digital marketing has opened a lot of doors for marketers. Gaining better insight into customers is certainly one of the most exciting aspects of social media. A lot can be learned from how people respond to posts/content, what’s commented on, shared and so on. Ultimately, all of this can be used to develop highly targeted campaigns. The key to making social media work is to understand that it’s a tool to engage with people. Don’t make the mistake of seeing it as a medium for endless sales announcements and self-promotion. Build rapports through interaction and sharing compelling content. Aim for a consistent but not overwhelming level of posts and interaction. ”

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Dowbiggin on strategy

From SIP trunking security to automation and self-service provisioning, founder and CEO of Acuity Unified Communications John Dowbiggin has big plans for the future.

When Caterham-based Acuity Unified Communications acquired the customer contracts of SIP trunking security firm 500 in March, along with a self-service provisioning portal, it put the company on track to deliver accredited fraud protection software while adding emphasis to the role of automation as a means to manage some of the key growth challenges faced by today's ICT providers. "One of our biggest challenges is time management as there are only so many hours in the day," stated Dowbiggin. "So we are looking at ways we can develop more automated processes to help us with the time pressures we encounter."

The 500 acquisition increases Acuity's customer base and product portfolio, adding fraud mitigation which protects customers from the financial and legal consequences of toll fraud on SIP. "The fraud protection software portfolio is currently our biggest opportunity, delivering security for mobiles and SIP connectivity while meeting the suite of telecoms service standards defined by the Federation of Communication Services," explained Dowbiggin. "Our accredited cyber secure

telephony solution is proven to significantly protect businesses from toll fraud, auto dialler and mobile fraud and other forms of cyber attack aimed at the telephony estate. We can now offer security fraud protection to the whole of the Acuity base and all new customers, as well as giving them the option of self-service provisioning."

Dowbiggin is building up the Acuity business on a bedrock of 27-plus years industry experience, including a notable stint as Managing Director of AboveNet UK where he led the company from near bankruptcy and transformed it into one of today's top managed fibre service providers in the City of London. Prior to this rescue mission, which he regards as his biggest career achievement to date, Dowbiggin was VP for IP Solutions at Cable&Wireless UK&I, a role he undertook following C&W's acquisition of tier 1 ISP Internet Network Services where he was National Sales Director. Here, he was responsible for building and running the UK and European sales operation, and spent two years developing and deploying one of the largest Internet market acquisition strategies in Europe. Rewinding the clock further,



John Dowbiggin

Dowbiggin was Director of the South East Region for Telewest Communications (now Virgin Media) which at the time was the UK's largest telecommunications, ISP and cable TV provider.

Business grade service

"During my time at AboveNet I identified a gap in the market that concerned the level of service being offered to SMEs in particular," said Dowbiggin. "So eight years ago I established Acuity Unified Communications to bring a business grade cloud telephony service initially to SME and lower corporate businesses, but we now have customers across the size spectrum. We have grown year-on-year by around 50 per cent. In recent years average customer sizes have ranged between 50 and 250 users with our sales pipelines showing a continued increase in average customer size."

The company deployed its own hosted platforms in 2012 which removed any

reliance on third parties, a move that quickly brought on board a major UK PLC followed by a big public utility. Four years later Acuity acquired the customer related IT and telecommunications trading assets of The Integral Group which increased its software development portfolio. Acuity is focused on organic growth as well as acquisitions and two years ago embarked on a strategy of in-house development with its own software developers. The company has also increased automation, streamlining processes and boosted efficiency as a result, while augmenting related processes such as the self-service provisioning portal which benefits dealers and resellers. Acuity has also been busy deploying its own infrastructure such as Citrix Xen Server based on industry standard hardware and Storage Area Networking (SAN).

"We have worked hard to differentiate ourselves with

our fully integrated Unified Communications services," commented Dowbiggin. "For example, with some clever engineering we have fully integrated our AcuityMobile SIM offering, enabling mobiles to be a fully integrated part of the UC platform, becoming an extension of the office phone system, with the added bonus of the handset being able to roam seamlessly across all UK mobile networks combining maximum coverage with maximum functionality.

"Because we have a strong engineering focus and offer a bespoke service we are also able to assist hardware providers such as Cisco with the integration of their products into the end user's business. Working with strategic partners like this is another big opportunity." ■

Just a minute with John Dowbiggin...

What talent do you wish you had? To speak Italian

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I white water rafted over the Shotover Canyon in New Zealand

Something you have overcome: I took flying lessons to beat my fear of flying

What can't you do without in your job? Café Nero and almond croissants

Biggest risk taken? Black water rafting. I crawled through tunnels hundreds of feet underground that were only 12 inches high and half filled with flowing water. Never again!

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



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Arden in growth mode

When Arden Group Managing Director Nigel Walker set up his company in 2002 he also took charge of the growing convergence opportunity and turned it to great advantage.

Just a minute with Nigel Walker...

Role model? Any genuinely self-made individual

What talent do you wish you had? Patience

What do you fear the most? Mediocrity

One example of something you have overcome? Fear of failure

If you weren't in comms what would you be doing? Anything to do with boats

Biggest risk you have taken? I take risks every week, so there's too many to list

How would you like to be remembered? As anything except mediocre

Three ideal dinner guests: Peter De Savery, a genuine self-made man who's also nearly lost it all and made it again; Lee Evans, such a funny guy; Barry Sheen or James Hunt, true gladiators living on the edge and playing hard at the same time

Current pain point: Money, always money, and lack of if you want to grow

Your biggest career achievement: Establishing Arden Group and its success

Top tip for resellers: Don't be bothered by what your competitors are doing. Plough your own furrow

Coventry-based Arden Group has matured into a considerable market force strengthened by its acquisition of Computerworld Business Solutions (CBS) last month. The deal builds on the firm's previous acquisitions of Page IT and Unitycomm creating a fully managed service provider of IT and telecoms products and services largely driven by convergence and consolidation. "With the complementary technical expertise that CBS now brings to Arden from an IT services perspective we are well placed to offer our clients the services they require for their own long-term needs and act as their trusted technology partner," commented Walker. "We currently have a portfolio of 600 clients in a variety of industries, although the majority include large SME and small corporate organisations and we have strong footholds in property management, legal, education, finance and retail."

In 2013 Walker bought out the original investor and took a 90 per cent share of the business which was generating turnover of circa £5 million. The acquisition of CBS has boosted turnover



Nigel Walker

to £10 million and rising. "Following the acquisition we now have a 50 strong team and expect revenues to reach £11 million with anticipated sales targets of £5.5 million in 2017," added Walker. "We're aiming for a recurring long-term contracted base of 75 per cent relative to overall turnover. Our expected growth is at least 15 per cent per annum at gross profit level."

From the outset Arden Group emerged as a forward thinking business with its finger on the pulse of a developing market. The company was founded in 2002 by Walker following a previous venture that saw him establish IDN Group in 1996, which was AIM listed in 2001. Prior to IDN Walker worked in the finance

sector undertaking sales and management roles between 1987 and 1996. Arden was formed when Walker spotted an opportunity to provide complete communications solutions to a market used to procuring services from separate suppliers.

Convergence

"More and more customers want to deal with one supplier in one place, and this is plays into our hands," commented Walker. "After more than 20 years working in the communications industry I have seen how technology has changed and evolved, which helps me to recognise trends and anticipate future developments. In recent years the telecoms and IT sectors have converged which has largely been brought about

by the mass availability of high-speed Internet connections, a cross-sell culture and customer loyalty."

Walker's current priority is to focus on integrating CBS and develop a service offering which delivers a fully converged IT and telecoms solution. "We expect increased levels of organic sales following the acquisition as we move to cross-sell and offer multiple products and services under a managed service proposition," he said. "We'll also be looking to grow the value and size of our customer portfolio with a focus on enterprise account activity.

"However, employing the right people to drive growth can be a challenge. But my time in the financial services sector gave me experience in building and managing sales forces which helped to create the successful team around me today. We have built an experienced team that has significantly contributed to the success of the company and will continue to drive it forward."

The main focus of Walker's team is also the company's biggest opportunity – to provide a personal service. "By working closely with our clients we can provide tailored solutions that help to meet their individual needs," he added. "It's this close contact service and personal touch that some of the larger companies can't offer. Customers are looking to companies that can manage all their communication needs, and with the cost of service supply and critical mass, specialist organisations need to review their service offering. It's a case of eat or be eaten."



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

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

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

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

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

Speaker line-up



DEMYSTIFYING THE M2M OPPORTUNITY – ANTON LE SAUX, ZEST 4

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



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

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



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

In his presentation, Knight CF Director Adam Zoldan will give his annual overview of the M&A landscape, the trends and themes that have driven deals and his predictions for the coming year in the new Brexit economy. Adam will also look at the key factors that can influence the value of your company especially as you add more cloud based business to your order book.



HOW TO STAND OUT IN THE CROWDED HOSTED PBX MARKET – IAIN SINNOTT, VANILLA IP

The Hosted PBX market has now moved beyond simple one-bundle solutions with customers becoming smarter to the possibilities of Cloud. In his keynote Iain Sinnott, Head of Sales at VanillaIP will be talking about how resellers can stand out in a crowded market, addressing branding, automation, reporting, commercial options and all the tools required to transition to a sophisticated product offering and build long-term success in the Cloud.



FIND YOUR WAY INTO THE CLOUD – GARY GOULD, SHORETEL

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

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



MARKETING TO MILLENNIALS – ANDY GRANT, BOWAN ARROW

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

Meet New Partners



"ShoreTel is a leading provider of business communications deployed in the cloud, onsite or a hybrid of the two. At this year's MiVaD event, Gary will provide an overview of how ShoreTel works collaboratively with partners, helping achieve high win rates and industry leading margins. He will also reveal the latest edition of ShoreTel's partner programme that includes innovative and flexible

marketing-as-a-service options."

Gary Gould
Shoretel

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"Two million ISDN channels are set to be changed out for SIP or hosted applications. 20% expect to be sold in the next 2-3 years and the rest being drip fed until 2023 when there'll be a surge before the ISDN turn off in 2025. Sales opportunities are enormous. We've launched new SIP Trunk bundles to

enable our partners to stay ahead. Find out more at MiVaD."

Paul Taylor
Voiceflex

SILVER SPONSORS



"The market opportunity in Hosted PBX is enormous, but what are the barriers resellers need to scale to be truly effective in winning business and maximising sales opportunities? Resellers need smart overlay services that can be added to a base user to address the entire market spectrum. VanillaIP will be

addressing what this means for resellers in real terms at MiVaD."

Iain Sinnot
VanillaIP

SILVER SPONSORS



"Zest4 are delighted to sponsor this year's MiVaD event. We will highlight the huge growth opportunities both now and in the future in the M2M & IoT market. MiVaD is a great opportunity to meet with key resellers and spend time with partner principals who are actively keen to grow their business and

revenues and engage with suppliers to help them meet these objectives."

Mandy Fazelynia
Zest 4

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"Invosys is a new generation carrier - a challenger to the telecoms 'establishment' - providing ground breaking yet simple products and services. At Margin in Voice & Data, we'll showcase our cloud-based Number Manager portal which allows customers to configure, manage and monitor their services

wherever they are, across all devices, as well as our new hosted product."

Peter Crooks
Invosys

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"MiVaD is a great opportunity for us to demonstrate to new and existing partners the range of flexible solutions that Marston's Telecoms can provide to the channel. We look forward to discussing how our products provide partners with revenue opportunities, underpinned by a solid network platform and affordable pricing."

Rob Derbyshire
Marstons Telecoms

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"NTA are proud to be sponsoring this year's MiVaD. We will be demonstrating to all new resellers how our existing partners in the Comms & IT industry are making margins of 80% plus with our Hosted Telephony platform. Our system is White Labelled even down to the sub domain for log in purposes and

has over 500 features as standard."

Justin Blaine
NTA

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"We're very much looking forward to attending MiVaD this year, to meeting both new and existing clients and to finding out how we can add value to their businesses. We'll be showing off some of the latest enhancements to our award winning aBILLity billing software, including some big developments

to our cloud infrastructure that makes our solutions an even more attractive proposition for comms providers."

Vincent Disneur
Union Street

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"We are delighted to be attending our first MiVaD event and we're looking forward to meeting industry colleagues, sharing our experiences, discussing potential bespoke billing requirements and our feature rich web-based QuickStart platforms. Our objectives are simple, to work together, giving customers

freedom of choice with minimal billing limitations and offer maximum functionality and customer care, to maximise return on investment."

Simon Adams
PRD Technologies

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"We are excited to be involved with this event for the first time and we're looking forward to meeting up with existing and prospective customers and strengthening channel partnerships. Delegates will have the opportunity to find out more about the latest developments to our services, our new training programme, and most importantly, the new version of our billing software rolling out in 2017."

Shaun Bodsworth
Inform Billing

DISTRIBUTOR ZONE



"As an adviser, MiVaD helps us understand what's happening at ground level of the sector, how customers are reacting to changes in the market and how this impacts and influences the vendors and suppliers around them. Whether you are looking to review your strategy, raise finance, considering an acquisition or want to understand more about Exit options, we look forward to meeting you at MiVaD."

Adam Zoldan
Knight CF

HOSPITALITY SPONSOR



"ProVu are looking forward to meeting new Channel Partners at MiVaD and demonstrating how our range of value added services can help reduce the cost of deploying Customer Premise Equipment. Whether you're looking for quality VoIP hardware or remote installation support, ProVu have the skills and expertise to help. Visit us to discover more about our value-added services and how they fit your requirements."

Darren Garland
ProVu

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"As the training company for the channel, delegates can expect to learn how our services can improve their business but most importantly their people. We have a wide array of telecoms focused courses ranging from Selling SIP & Hosted through to Regulatory and Compliance certifications. We are also thrilled to be launching Support to Win.tv, a hosted telephony support service for the channel. It allows partners to focus on their strengths while we take care of their customer on-boarding and life's Moves, Adds and Changes.

Julie Mills
Train To Win

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VoIP over VDSL alert

VoIP over VDSL poses a long-term risk to business continuity despite many company leaders rating the technology as adequate, according to Spitfire's joint Managing Director Harry Bowlby who puts a spotlight on the potential pitfalls.

A lack of QoS guarantees for VDSL (Very High Speed Digital Subscriber Line) leaves businesses vulnerable to poor voice quality with no route to resolution, emphasised Bowlby. And users wanting to upgrade to Ethernet connectivity for VoIP can face deployment lead times of up to a year. The situation is set to worsen as more public Internet services such as Amazon Prime, Netflix and digital TV are prioritised. The answer, according to Bowlby, is a complete end-to-end SIP service run over a wholly owned IP and TDM infrastructure. "Businesses that choose a VoIP solution without appropriate QoS guarantees are gambling with their future," he stated. "VoIP telephony has numerous benefits in terms of cost savings, flexibility and functionality. But to provide a dependable VoIP service a high quality, reliable and secure online connection is vital."

VDSL technology has become widely established in the UK and is increasingly being used by businesses for high speed Internet access. With download speeds of up to 80Mbps it is not difficult

to see why. However, a broadband circuit optimised for Internet browsing is not the best choice for VoIP. "To give satisfactory voice quality it is generally accepted that a circuit must deliver a maximum latency of 150ms end-to-end (mouth-to-ear), packet loss less than one per cent with jitter less than 45ms," noted Bowlby. "These requirements may be met on a VDSL service most of the time. However, they are not guaranteed to be met for all or any of the time. A 500ms delay on a web page is barely noticeable, but such a delay during a telephone call is clearly noticeable."

QoS is available on VDSL as a chargeable option. VDSL supports two types of services – Best Efforts and Real-Time. By default all traffic is Best Efforts meaning that in the event of congestion voice traffic could be dropped just like any other Best Efforts traffic. Real-Time QoS is an additional service that can be purchased for downstream VDSL. But there is no QoS mechanism deployed upstream on VDSL as this is not considered necessary because most web access involves download, not upload. However, a phone conversation is asynchronous



Harry Bowlby

and requires equal download and upload quality.

Poor quality

"No actual latency, jitter or packet loss targets are stated for VDSL Real-Time QoS, the service just offers to prioritise marked packets over others," added Bowlby. "In the event of poor voice quality on VDSL faults may be reported, but fault investigation is limited to the underlying broadband service. That said, VDSL is probably okay for now for many customers. It is considered by many to be adequate for voice based on how the wholesale network is currently dimensioned and performing. But in the future VDSL may not perform as it currently does in which

case there are no guarantees to fall back on, because no contractual commitments have been broken."

Network usage is growing by the day and a big growth driver is television delivery over broadband with new service providers such as Amazon Prime, BT Vision, Netflix and NOW TV requiring assured data rates for their subscribers. "As this grows other traffic may have to take lower priority," said Bowlby. "High definition TV is already here and Ultra HD (4K) has been launched that uses 30Mbps per TV channel. As competition grows, to become a leader in the streaming TV market the national network will have

to meet this new objective. Given the amount of money being spent on content for TV services Internet broadcasters will be keen to ensure that viewers on VDSL have priority access. As video traffic grows it will take priority over VoIP traffic and voice may get squeezed out resulting in call quality issues, which neither the end user nor the service provider have any recourse to resolve. So a critical consideration for customers should be, 'if VDSL proves unsuitable over time can I swap it for another circuit that will work?'"

If in time a VDSL circuit proves unsuitable users may consider replacing it with Ethernet or complementing VDSL with a voice approved circuit. This is dependent on the supplier being active in the local exchange and whether there is spare capacity to provide the circuit. "It can take up to one year or more to install a new Ethernet circuit," said Bowlby. "During this time a business will continue to experience poor quality voice calls which may prove detrimental to the organisation."

Spitfire has tackled the issue head on with its own Voice Approved Broadband circuits for VoIP SIP trunks which assure end-to-end call QoS with guarantees on latency, jitter and delay both upstream and downstream. The reassurance of an end-to-end service with QoS guarantees has been a key factor in the growth of Spitfire's SIP trunks for VoIP. "Businesses that opt for VoIP solutions without QoS guarantees are storing up trouble," warned Bowlby. "VoIP over VDSL is a significant potential risk to UK business." ■

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Since 2008 Elitetele.com has acquired 14 businesses. We pride ourselves on having an excellent reputation for continuing to work successfully with the business owners who we buy from, and who are not ready to retire. We also work hard to ensure the owners meet their earn-out targets.

Mike Ridgway, the former MD of Qualitel which we acquired in April 2014, has continued to work in the business and indeed has led Elitetele.com Mobile Limited (formerly Qualitel Voice and Data Limited) to record growth. We were delighted when Mike agreed to stay with the business after his successful three-year earn-out period.

Mike has just been promoted to MD of Elitetele.com Mobile Limited after his successful leadership has increased growth in gross margin in his division for the first two years since acquisition of 83%. He is on



Russell Horton, COO
Elitetele.com

track to have doubled gross margin over the three years.

In June 2016 we acquired NetCentrix and SystemHOST, which broadened our capabilities in cloud-based technologies and cemented our position as the leading unified communications provider. Elite worked closely with Phil Scanlon, who was Managing Director, NetCentrix and SystemHOST and is now Commercial Director of IT Services at Elite to ensure a smooth transition.

Over the years we have worked in partnership with many of the management teams we have acquired to help them realise their business vision within Elite. Last month we acquired Comms Supply a provider of business communications, based in Norwich, out of liquidation. We are looking forward to working with the MD, Karl Alderton to help him grow his business under the Elite brand.

Our own CEO, Matt Newing, was approached by Karl over Twitter and their mutual passion for the sector led to further dialogue. Matt recognised Karl's challenge of trying to maintain sales growth while being distracted by the requirements of being a managing director and the wider work-load that brings. By purchasing Comms Supply we will be able to provide the support Karl needs to realise his business vision.

As a result of our acquisitions, Elite's clients are now benefiting from a full end-to-end managed service for IT and unified communications which is unmatched in the industry. We have further funds to invest in firms whose niche technologies or services will further benefit our customers.

If you would like to discuss how Elite can help you realise the potential of your business, please contact **Russell Horton, COO, Elitetele.com on 0844 875 8880.**

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Game changing times

Britain's infrastructure badly needs smart innovation and the response by leading channel network providers ranks with some of the greatest comms industry game changers to date.

Virtual1's Product & Marketing Manager Neil Wilson sees two key trends dominating the market, and the company is active in both – SDN and SD-WAN. Virtual1's new national network will be fully software defined to drive efficiency and improve the feature set delivered to the channel. On SD-WAN, Wilson said: "This is about more than just network flexibility. There is also a tremendous amount of value to be had from the metrics and reporting these solutions will provide. This will be particularly important as businesses start to look for more granular SLAs against individual applications rather than how the circuit as a whole is performing."

Over the last 18 months Virtual1 has worked hard on upgrading and expanding its network. Introducing templates and standardisation across the network gives partners access to perform many of the configuration changes that they traditionally rely on carrier providers for, such as bandwidth changes and VLAN resizing etc. "SDN delivers a real world advantage that we are keen to deliver to the channel," added Wilson. "It is essential that we roll out our full UK

network without incurring the considerable overheads of the legacy carriers. This reduction in overhead means that we can be commercially competitive, and this disruption will bring revenue and margin opportunities to the channel."

Wilson says network innovation is about giving channel partners access to the functionality enabled by Virtual1's SDN network. "In 1Portal we have a vehicle that our partners use already, so we will simply layer the additional functionality in there," he explained. "With our own in-house development behind our SDN functionality and 1Portal we will be able to take configuration requests through 1Portal and implement them directly on our network, removing error and delay from the process and delivering those updates in real-time. In verticals or applications where a dynamic network is required partners will be able to administer these changes themselves rather than being at the mercy of a legacy player with manual workflows and processes."

In advancing its technological developments Virtual1 is simplifying what is currently highly complex. Making



Neil Wilson

SDN delivers a real world advantage and we are keen to bring that to the channel

configuration changes accessible to the many rather than the few is key, with portals and APIs playing a critical part in this. "We also see attention focusing on the application or business outcome rather than the individual components of a networking solution," noted Wilson. "After all, it is the application or business

outcome that really matters to a business. The status of an individual component comes later. A longer-term outlook might take in VR and AR for network visualisation. Moving from 2D into 3D would allow a greater breadth and depth of information to be communicated."

Dynamic agility

As we have seen, networks are increasingly becoming agile and more dynamic. This enables the network to adapt to the demands of end users by putting resources where they are most needed and by being more efficient as a result. BT is continuing to invest in both the network and infrastructure to make it more dynamic with programmable capabilities.

"This is important because it allows users and channel partners to take self-control of resources, putting them in the driving seat," stated Henry Bohannon, Director, Data and Broadband Products at BT Wholesale. "We are already starting to realise this with B2B interfaces where services can be controlled and modified. This is ideal for the channel because it enables underlying networking and infrastructure to be quickly modified to suit the needs of services and applications running over the top."

In terms of network and infrastructure innovation Gamma's Chief Architect Andy Rawnsley pointed out that infrastructure layer Optical Transport Network **Continued on page 50**

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This new and exciting era for Zen and its partners was only possible because of the company's continued independence and reiterates our commitment to the channel.



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Continued from page 48

(OTN) technology provides a framework for delivering flexible capacity by switching at a wavelength level. Provisioning multiple Gigabit capacity between network nodes can therefore be as simple as a few keyboard stokes or mouse clicks.

Further up the stack the Network Function Virtualisation (NFV) – moving network functions from proprietary hardware to mature COTS IT hardware – alongside Service Orchestration platforms enable the deployment of flexible, scalable and open networks. The integration of all of these makes for adaptable and scalable network capacity and services.

“At the optical layer we are deploying a 45-fold increase in core network capacity to cope with the increasing demand for bandwidth, while establishing access aggregation nodes closer

to the end user customer sites,” commented Rawnsley. “In the access layer Gamma is providing ‘single hop’ connectivity to cloud-based Software as a Service platforms to assure continued business operation.”

He also noted that at the application layer Gamma is disaggregating functions to provide flexibility in service creation and delivery. An example of this is the introduction of database driven voice call routing control which is separated from the voice switching and border edge nodes.

“Gamma is deploying an ‘open system’ network systems and software architecture that creates useful internal and external interfaces where component attachment and interchange takes place,” explained Rawnsley. “These principles will allow both internal and external systems to interact with Gamma’s platforms to deliver tailored products and services that address the needs of the differing channels we serve. We are embracing innovation in our delivery, support, test and diagnostic systems to provide channel partners with provisioning, monitoring and fault investigation tools, enabling a responsive end customer service.”

No matter how an end user is served, comms networks will need to provide service flexibility and scalability as well as being customisable. “Delivery of these three principles does and will present assurance and security challenges,” added Rawnsley. “We will need to ensure we all defend and mitigate against malicious actors. They are here to stay.”

According to Andy Furnell, Lead Technical Architect at Zen Internet, SDN represents the single biggest change to our industry for some time, probably since the widespread adoption of



Henry Bohannon

Programmable capabilities puts users and channel partners in the driving seat

MPLS in the early 2000s. “More recently we are starting to see some interesting technologies that significantly tighten the level of integration between telco/ connectivity and enterprise/ hosting domains, which will ultimately allow for tighter, simpler and more meaningful integration of connectivity and hosting services and applications,” he stated.

Network expansion

Zen Internet is refreshing its core network and expanding its LLU network from 200 to 400 exchanges. “The focus at the moment is less about exciting innovations and more about building a strong and solid foundation to support the growing demands of our customer base,” added Furnell. “This is a two year programme but we expect the network we are deploying to be in the ground for the next 7-10 years, hence a lot of our time is spent planning how we will evolve and grow the network in terms of capacity and resilience, and in terms of features and functionalities to ensure our products remain relevant.

“The key focus for us at the moment is in providing a more open, dynamic and programmable network. In reality this means a lot of work behind the scenes to tighten up standards and processes with the ultimate aim of exposing more self-serve to our channel customers, giving them more control over their end user experience and improving levels of transparency throughout the service lifecycle.”

A more transparent and programmable infrastructure is key, noted Furnell. It delivers tangible differentiation for end user services when coupled with more service-oriented technologies and topologies. “We are working towards an entirely service-oriented architecture for both infrastructure and software where each and every end user service is discretely instantiated end-to-end within our network,” he added.

“The possibilities are huge. The ability to manage each service for each end user

will allow us to monitor and report meaningful QoE and SLA metrics on a per-service basis, and will give our partners and our own technical teams high levels of control over where and how their end customer services are served.”

While network connectivity is increasingly a commoditised market the availability of ultrafast connectivity products serves to level out the playing field while at the same time presenting a significant business opportunity, believes Furnell. “Faster speeds based on more reliable connectivity opens up many possibilities to deliver a quality set of supporting services, both OTT and ‘through the middle’, via tighter integration between infrastructure and applications and blending the best aspects of traditional infrastructure technologies with an increasingly dynamic and flexible set of end user services,” he commented. “We see a place for both, which can only mean more choice for end customers and constantly developing and improving value opportunities in the channel.” ■



Andy Rawnsley

We are embracing innovation in our delivery, support, test and diagnostic systems

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Cloud-first for 20 years

The current industry obsession with Big Data and Business Intelligence plays directly into the hands of Sentel, according to CEO Ger Connery who has spent two decades working with telecoms analytics in the cloud.



Ger Connery

Just a minute with Ger Connery...

Role model? Steve Jobs – I’m inspired by his innovation and different way of thinking

What talent do you wish you had? To be a better people manager

What do you fear the most? Losing a customer

Tell us something about yourself we don’t know: My dad, Paddy, just won his first international tennis cap at 82! Never give up on your dreams

One example of something you have overcome? Financial payback for the Sentel purchase. I made the last payment in 2016

If you weren’t in comms what would you be doing? A football coach

Lesson learnt? I would have invested earlier in resource ahead of the ball and not afterwards

How do you relax? Football and tennis

The biggest risk you have taken? Putting the family home up as collateral when buying Sentel

Industry wish? To reduce the pen pushers in large organisations and get to the deal quicker

Against the backdrop of the late ‘90s dot.com gold rush Connery first worked as a Sales Manager in payroll software and mailing equipment before joining Sentel, a telecoms start up, as Sales Director in 1998. The company serviced the network reporting market which at that time was only served by BT. It won a number of large corporate and public sector accounts including Barclays, AIB, the Department of Social Welfare and MOJ, along with many SME accounts mainly through the partner channel.

“Our USP was online access to reporting suites for CDR management with graphical as well as statistical display, not DOS which was the standard presentation output back then,” explained Connery. “We were the first true cloud-based provider of telecoms analytics taking a managed service approach. We targeted all of the alternative telcos and resellers, and becoming profitable within three years of launch was a milestone.”

Connery put his house on the line to lead an MBO before becoming CEO in January

2006. “When the stock market crash came we had to readjust,” he added. “Our move into more traditional call logging through vendor channels such as Cisco, Avaya and Mitel followed, but always in the cloud and with a managed service wrap. It didn’t suit everyone as many were still wedded to the on-premise approach. But we had developed a hard shell, always believing that cloud was the future.”

Diversification

To drive revenues the company branched out into other areas such as billing analytics for Your Communications which then became C&W, and ran a mobile reporting service for the NHS. “The market changed quickly during

the noughties,” recalled Connery. “After the building downturn and the following economic downturn of 2008, and drawing on our broad experience of all things telecoms, we decided to invest in an all-in-one telecoms platform focused on cost reduction, audit and asset tracking, tapping into the growing Business Intelligence and Big Data space.

“We built and launched our TEMS solution targeting enterprise and the public sector. This service is a strong performer for us today. We never lost sight of our telco and service provider history and thankfully there has been a huge upturn in activity in this space since UC adoption has become the

trend. Sales are rising for our UC analytics and our new toll fraud protection service propositions, tapping into the cybercrime defence market.”

Sentel has now streamlined its services into two clear lines of business – a Service Provider UC Analytics wrap and Enterprise with full TEM managed service wrap. “Instead of all things to all people, with 10 services we are clearly defined and better resourced to pick our battles,” added Connery.

Sentel has over 500 customers and expects to grow 30 per cent this year as part of a three year plan to achieve 100 per cent growth, with staff numbers forecast to rise by 50 per cent. Connery says a young management team and more dynamic product development will speed up the delivery of products and services to market, thereby accelerating growth. “Our drive is to double turnover in the next five years and build the business into a BI market leader in the telecoms space,” stated Connery.

The growing popularity of UC and the cyber fraud issue has also improved Sentel’s position in the service provider market, resulting in a product roadmap that includes toll fraud protection, voice recording integration, contact centre, SP facing UC adoption reports, revenue assurance and CTI wraps. “The consolidation of SIs and telecoms vendors served to trigger a refocus on our channel driven services, making them sharper and more stable,” said Connery. “All the chat is data analytics and business intelligence. This is good for us and we are in the right place.” ■

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** www.comms-dealer.com Online property (1st January 2016 to 31st December 2016), Derived daily Average Unique browsers 840)

*** Distribution of weekly email newsletter (1st January 2016 to 31st December 2016, Average Distribution 20,392)

TheCloud gets Crespi



Daniel Crespi

THECLOUD has appointed Daniel Crespi as Managing Director as the channel-only business prepares to raise its brand profile in the partner community. Crespi brings 26 years industry experience working in Australia and the UK, 17 of which were senior positions in wholesale and channel, most recently as Director and shareholder of Telcoinabox.

TheCloud launched in 2012 as a provider of cloud solutions via its Revolution Cloud platform which is in its fourth iteration (released in January 2017) following a £2m-plus investment. RevolutionCloud is an end-to-end platform owned and operated by a single party from the ISP layer through to applications and storage and hosted across four London data centres and an off-grid remote DR centre.

Founder and Director Allan Packer said: "Daniel is a significant addition to our team and his experience will prove invaluable as we launch a suite of Revolution Cloud products. His skills perfectly match our channel-only model."

Crespi added: "If a telecoms reseller, indeed any reseller, isn't seriously considering cloud services in their offering they won't be around as convergence gathers momentum. To join the TheCloud at this time simply makes sense."

Excalibur in CEO switch



Peter Boucher

SWINDON-based Excalibur Communications has appointed Peter Boucher as CEO following a stint as Non Exec Director. He takes over from James Phipps who has moved into an Executive

Chairman position after almost 20 years as top dog. "With Excalibur ready for rapid growth now is the time for Peter and the management team to drive the business forward," commented Phipps. "As Executive Chairman I will still be heavily involved in the business with a particular focus on new opportunities, acquisitions and our work with good causes."

Boucher added: "The business is on a very solid footing with lots of potential to grow. Since I became involved with Excalibur in 2013 as Non Executive Director I've also been attracted by its commitment to staff and the local community projects it supports."

Also on the move...



David Simpson

DAVID Simpson has joined Virtual1 as Operations Director, moving from Virgin Media where he held a number of senior roles in the operational division including Head of National Networks and most recently running strategy,

analytics and NPS for the COO. Tom O'Hagan, Virtual1 CEO, said: "David is a positive, energetic and enthusiastic person who will fit in very well with our team ethos and prove invaluable as we look to expand our operations." Simpson added: "This is a great and exciting opportunity for me and I can't wait to get stuck in and make a difference."

LIQUID Voice co-founder Chris Berry is to lead the UK operation as Managing Director moving up from his previous role as Sales & Marketing Director.

Berry said: "I have been appointed Managing Director to steer Liquid Voice through its next period of growth. As well as building our sales, support and administration teams, I relish the opportunity to forge closer relationships with our expanding network of voice recording distribution and ISV reseller partners."



Chris Berry

Timico hires PE expertise



Neville Davis

TIMICO has welcomed tech-driven PE specialist Neville Davis to the role of Non-Executive Chairman. He brings 20 years experience as a chief executive including 12 years at a quoted company, and has a strong track record in scaling and developing private equity

backed companies having chaired and grown other tech businesses to in excess of £300m turnover and 1,500 employees. The appointment follows a £50 million investment in Timico by growth investor Lyceum Capital.

Davis also currently chairs private equity-backed IT companies Peppermint Technology and Clifford Thames, as well as travel management firm Key Travel. He is also Non-Executive Director of Kalibrate.

Ben Marnham, CEO of Timico, said: "Neville's considerable experience in managed IT and more than 20 years as a successful CEO will be a real asset to Timico."

Davis added: "I am confident that I can make a significant contribution, helping the team to realise its ambition in the UK mid-market."

Exponential-e signs up Attari



Afshin Attari

FORMER KCOM exec Afshin Attari has joined Exponential-e as Director of Public Sector. The posting follows a near-ten year stint at KCOM where he was latterly responsible for developing,

implementing and leading the client management strategy across enterprise and public sector markets. Prior to KCOM he spent five years at O2 working as Head of Business Development and Head of Service and Sales.

Attari said: "There is huge demand for cloud services within Government departments as they look to reduce costs by using application solutions and services, rather than the oversized technology contracts of yesteryear. There is also an expectation that organisations must be able to provide support and hold data within the UK and Exponential-e ticks both of these boxes."

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