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Jonathan Sharp: The incoming CEO giving Britannic an edge p26



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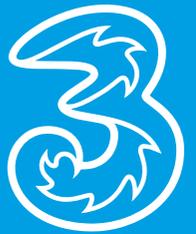
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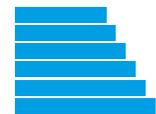


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This month's movers and shakers



# Hellowell poised for Gamma Chair

**FORMER Softcat Chair and CEO Martin Hellowell (pictured) is poised to become Gamma Chairman and Non-Executive Director on 1st July when current Chair Richard Last steps down after nine years in the role.**

**SPECIAL REPORT**

Industry big gun Hellowell was CEO of Softcat from 2006 to 2018 and oversaw a flotation on the LSE in 2015 after years of successive growth.

Prior to Softcat he spent over a decade at Computacenter and associated companies heading up the marketing function. He also ran Computacenter's French subsidiary and led acquisitions in the UK, Belgium and Germany.

Henrietta Marsh, Senior Independent Director, Gamma, commented: "Martin's commercial track record and industry background means he will provide outstanding direction and support for the board and management team as Gamma focuses on its next growth phase."

Hellowell added: "I have admired Gamma for some time. There are exciting opportunities ahead and I will be working with the board and management to help capitalise on them."

Gamma achieved a number of milestones under Last's Chairmanship including its IPO in 2014. The company reported growth in adjusted profit before tax and dividends every year since its flotation.

Last commented: "Gamma went public in 2014 with a market cap of circa £165m. Today, the business is valued at over £1.1bn with operations across Europe and more opportunities ahead. Martin will lead Gamma on the next stage of its growth."

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

EARLY last year when thinking up themes for 2022's Comms Vision conference at Gleneagles (2nd-4th November) I thought of what seemed to be a good headline strand at the time – Maximising the Golden Triennium – referring to

the three years of high opportunity (2023-2025) faced by the channel in the run up to the PSTN switch off.

I said to myself, the retail sector has a Golden Quarter in the lead up to Christmas, so why can't we have a Golden Triennium with the promise of an all-IP migration spending spree, a chance to engage with customers and do more for them? Christmases would be coming early, I thought, with resellers migrating customers onto all-IP hand over fist.

Some people understood the thinking behind the Golden Triennium and used the term themselves, but most scratched their heads... 'the golden what?'. The Golden Triennium theme lacked full impact because the imperative to catalyse businesses along the road to digitalisation is not front of mind for many channel players, not strategy, not a priority.

But in a flash we are now heading towards a Golden Biennium with most SME businesses yet to go all digital despite the big PSTN shutdown. Before we know it another year will fly by and the Golden period will fizzle out, the shine taken off by inaction, with a likely last minute mad panic ensuing in the final year that really won't put the industry in a good light. The PSTN shutdown is already the big issue of the day – so we must get a grip.

This year's Comms Vision will double down on all aspects of achieving a competitive advantage in times of change. In this context, you don't need to be Einstein to see that being stuck in a 2025 bottleneck is unlikely to provide a strategic edge.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

• HOW 7ARDIS CEO and former bodybuilder Matt Mimo plans to give resellers a mobile connectivity powerlift (page 16)

# Ofcom green lights Equinox 2 discount

OFCOM has given a green light for Openreach to introduce a pricing offer for full fibre broadband known as Equinox 2.

The regulator concedes that altnets are likely to face stronger competition from Openreach but says the conditional terms in the offer do not create a potential barrier to using altnets. Therefore, according to Ofcom, 'Equinox 2 is consistent with network-based competition'.

Openreach's FTTP discount offer was due to launch 1st April but was set back two months by Ofcom to assess concerns raised by certain altnets that the commercial terms may undermine new network build.

CityFibre CEO Greg Mesch stated: "We are disappointed Equinox 2 has been approved and will be undertaking a thorough review of Ofcom's decision. We are, however, pleased to see Ofcom's pressure has



Katie Milligan



Greg Mesch

brought about the end of Equinox, with a commitment from Openreach to make no further changes to its wholesale pricing until April 2026.

"We must not forget that while introducing price discounts to bind its wholesale customers and damage emerging competition, BT is at the same time increasing prices for millions of its retail consumers. Ofcom must ensure that competition is effective and sustainable for consumers to benefit."

Katie Milligan, Chief Commercial Officer, Openreach, said: "This is good news for customers as it means lower prices and long-term certainty, encouraging the switch to faster, more reliable broadband connections. It's also good news for the UK as it supports our multi-billion-pound invest-

ment in upgrading the country's broadband infrastructure.

"We take our legal and regulatory obligations seriously and will continue to compete fairly."

Ofcom said Openreach did not have any current plans to change its Equinox 2 rental prices and no intention to initiate further changes until at least 31st March 2026.

The regulator says this may provide 'further clarity for altnets and their investors'. However, Ofcom did not take these commitments into account when reaching its conclusions.

Ofcom also considers that not preventing Openreach from introducing Equinox 2 allows it to engage in network-based competition, without compromising its objective of promoting investment in gigabit-capable networks. **More reaction p8**



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NEWS ROUNDUP

FULL fibre coverage now sits at 14.2 million premises, according to Ofcom's Spring 2023 report, up from the 12.5 million reported in its December 2022 update. This represents almost half (48%) of UK homes, an increase of 15% in one year. But full fibre is available to just 38% of small businesses (10-49 employees) and 35% of medium sized firms (50-249 employees).

NIMANS (part of the Midwich Group) has appointed Richard Bovingdon as Business Development Director. He brings 22 years experience in AV and IT across distributor, manufacturer and reseller positions within the corporate, education, rental and commercial markets. Most recently he was Business Development General Manager at Midwich.

CYBERSECURITY firm Integrity360 has expanded into the Nordics with the acquisition of Stockholm-based Netsecure, which was founded in 2015 and has a circa 40 headcount. Netsecure reported growth of over 35% annually and forecasts sales of around 10m euros this year. Last year was a strong period for the Integrity360 group with order growth of 30% and sales of 85m euros.

## Bowlby: Act now on 2025

SPITFIRE Network Services MD Harry Bowlby has issued a strong warning to business leaders who remain unprepared for the 2025 PSTN switch off – a caution that also implies there is much IP migration work still to do by comms resellers ahead of the deadline.

“My message to those considering making the switch next year or in 2025 is to reconsider,” he stated, also citing that research commissioned by the company showed that 43% of UK SMBs are yet to begin the switch to all-IP.

“By getting prepared and making it a priority for this year businesses will be in a better position,” he added. “With a deadline of 2025 I can understand the temptation not to make the switch to all-IP a business priority, but delaying means you are playing catch up.”

Spitfire Network Services Sales Director Dom Norton added: “While we applaud those SMB leaders that recognise the need to make the switch early to all-IP, it is a concern that a large number of organisations are yet to begin the switch and don't plan to this year. The disruption caused by a lack of planning could be damaging.”

# Chess moves on CyberLab



David Pollock

CHESS is positioned as a one-stop cybersecurity advisor following its acquisition of consultancy firm CyberLab which provides compliance and managed security services.

CyberLab is an IASME certification body for Cyber Essentials and Cyber Essentials Plus as well as the Cyber Assurance standard.

Chess Executive Chairman David Pollock said: “At our cybersecurity conference we heard how cyber threats, hackers and ransomware attacks are becoming more proficient and prolific. Business leaders need to make informed decisions about securing their data.

“CyberLab strengthens our capability to deliver end-to-end services to all of our customers. We're working on providing free access to the CyberLab portal, so stay tuned.”

Chess kicked off its long-term security strategy with the acquisition of Foursys in 2017 followed by the purchase of Armadillo Sec in 2021, a deal that notably added penetration testing capabilities.

NEWS ROUNDUP

IN A BID to tap into the 'underserved' UK MVNO market Gamma and AQA Telecom have joined forces to launch MVNA (Mobile Virtual Network Aggregator) services, leveraging Gamma's technology portfolio and AQA's experience in the MVNO sector. Mike Mills, Director of Cloud & Infrastructure Partners, Gamma, said: “We've been in this space for nearly 15 years and partnerships like this can accelerate our mobile growth strategy. As mobile technology evolves an opportunity exists in the UK which is underserved by MVNOs. We intend to take advantage of that together.”

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

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NEWS ROUNDUP

TALKTALK Wholesale Services (TTWS) has kicked off a string of new altnet partnerships to deliver more Ethernet provisioning options for partners, extending its relationship with CityFibre. "CityFibre is the largest alternative network and this new B2B partnership opportunity will continue to grow as its footprint expands and product portfolio widens," commented TTWS MD Tom O'Hagan. TalkTalk's altnet strategy includes growing providers across a number of products including FTTP.

4COM'S fifth deal in 12 months sees the Bournemouth-based acquirer snap up the 89-strong customer base of Hants located comms provider Meridian IT Communications, which has shut down. The deal adds to 4Com's 13,000 client base and follows the purchases of Midshire Telecom, Eastern Voice and Data, the business telecoms customer base of Bluebell Cloud Solutions and the acquisition of Reach Digital Telecoms. 4Com CEO Gary Scutt stated: "We continue to pursue new opportunities to further our expansion."

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# Jola CEO set to step down

JOLA CEO Andrew Dickinson has signalled his intention to step into an advisory role with parent firm Wireless Logic on 1st August when CTO Adrian Sunderland will take his place.

"It is time for me to step back from a line management position in favour of an advisory role, still within the Wireless Logic Group," stated Dickinson. "Wireless Logic has lost none of its entrepreneurial drive and is an organisational and cultural fit for us."

IoT and mobile data giant Wireless Logic acquired Jola in July 2022, eight years after Jola was established by the former Griffin Internet leadership team and £50k investment. BGF then bought 25% from Jola shareholders in 2021 for £10.75m.

Dickinson has worked in the channel for almost 40 years and as a director of Mercury in the



Andrew Dickinson

1990s was credited for launching a revenue share scheme that, for the first time, paid resellers for calls made by customers.

In 1996, following 10 years in the UK and America, Dickinson left the C&W Group to set up an ISP that achieved an enterprise value of £30m within three years. After investing in several tech start-ups he led the management buy-in of Griffin Internet in 2005 and built channel revenues from £1m to £24m by the time the business was sold in 2012.

Commenting on his appointment Sunderland said: "Having worked closely with Andrew for over 15 years I've learned a lot from him. In August I take the helm and will put that learning into practice while helping the channel to profit from the mobile data opportunity."



Adrian Sunderland

# Partners link with the future

OVER 200 reseller partners attended the latest Future-Connect event staged by TalkTalk Wholesale Services (TTWS) and Virtual11 at the Pan Pacific hotel in the City of London on May 23rd.

Over the course of the event partners were given a detailed overview of the new range of network propositions being rolled out by TTWS and the opportunities they can address on the road to the digitalisation of customers.

New introductions included a SoGEA offering, security and cloud propositions, an updated backhaul product for carriers, plus a new voice solution.

"We are putting the talk back into the TalkTalk portfolio," said TTWS Product Strategy Director Neil Wilson. "We're also helping resellers automate and control their own network infrastructure and become challenger brands in the market."



NEWS ROUNDUP

UNIFIED comms software vendor TelcoSwitch has launched its channel partner tiering programme, which was flagged at the company's partner conference in London earlier this year. The programme will see TelcoSwitch's 450-plus channel partners split into three tiers classified as Channel, Platinum and Carbon, based on the number of active users, with entry to the programme starting at 50 active users. A cornerstone of the programme is the affiliate network where partners gain discounted access to solutions from a range of SaaS businesses, which unlock as they move up through the tiers.

ZEN Non-Exec Phil Male has been promoted as new Chair following former Chairman Richard Tang's reinstatement as CEO. Male has been on Zen's board for four years and has 30 years experience in the telecoms industry including stints at Cable&Wireless and JT Group. Male said: "Having worked in telecoms for the last 20 years rolling out fibre and IP networks across the UK and overseas, I see a clear path for growth at Zen with the Government taking the digital industry seriously – for the first time in my career!" See page 10

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# Mobile tops priority list



Gavin Jones

ACCORDING to research by BT Wholesale end user investment priorities reside in mobile connectivity (70%), cybersecurity (66%), digital phone line (64%) and broadband (62%). Furthermore, 88% of the businesses surveyed are satisfied with their providers. But education around the PSTN switch-off is still required with just 30% prioritising the shift to all-IP solutions. The study noted that larger businesses lead in all-IP progression, highlighting the need for partners to support SMEs on their all-IP journey.

“With the PSTN switch-off fast approaching, it is clear

channel partners must work to spark UK businesses’ digital imagination and help them understand how the move to IP can future-proof and unlock new opportunities,” stated Gavin Jones, Channel Partners Director at BT Wholesale. “It’s the end of the line for PSTN, so if you’re not doing it, a competitor is already trying to.

“The findings also highlight how important it is to keep an open dialogue with customers to fully understand how to best service their needs. It’s about providing a consultative sales approach backed by ease of doing business.”

# VMO2 makes net zero gains

VIRGIN Media O2’s net zero target has been approved by the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi). The firm aims to achieve net zero across its operations, products and supply chain by the end of 2040.

The company also reported that it has cut carbon by 29% against its 2020 baseline, the equivalent of nearly 150,000 car journeys from Land’s End to John O Groats. This formed part of its Scopes 1 and 2 reduction of 29% in 2022.

Virgin Media O2 has introduced more than 70 electric vans with a pledge to electrify its fleet by the end of 2030. And it calculates that its products and services prevented more than 29 million tonnes of carbon entering Earth’s atmosphere last year via Internet of Things applications such as smart metering and by supporting people to work from home.

Virgin Media O2 also helped consumers to carry out 2.4 million circular actions in 2022 against its 10 million 2025 goal. This includes encouraging customers to buy like new second-hand devices and using initiatives such as O2 Recycle to sustainably dispose of unwanted tech. More than 10 million



Lutz Schüler

routers and set-top boxes have now been refurbished and reused since 2014.

Lutz Schüler, CEO of Virgin Media O2, said: “With the backing of the SBTi, as well as the Carbon Trust, we’re on track to deliver our net zero carbon plan by the end of 2040, ten years ahead of the UK’s net zero goal.”

Luiz Amaral, SBTi CEO, added: “Climate science tells us that we need rapid and deep emissions cuts if we are to achieve global net zero.”

## NEWS ROUNDUP

EXISTING Gamma distributor Nuvola Distribution is to distribute (via a wholesale channel model) the Gamma Microsoft Teams Operator Connect solution to partners throughout the UK. Nuvola CEO Michael Lloyd said: “Expanding our Microsoft Teams integrated solutions offering is key to our vision of creating a Microsoft Teams ready solution set.”

STRONG cybersecurity and networking growth supported by a shift to software and recurring revenues put Westcon-Comstor on course for its best financial performance. For FY23 the company posted revenues up 18.3% to \$3.42bn representing CAGR of 8%. Earnings results show a 21% year-on-year increase in adjusted EBITDA profit to \$95.1m, up from \$78.6m the previous year. Gross margins averaged 9.6% globally. Revenue from cybersecurity solutions was up 17% while networking revenues increased by 19%. CEO David Grant said: “We reached many new milestones in 2023, including accelerating our own digital transformation with the launch of our PartnerCentral marketplace.”

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# Thumbs up for Equinox 2

TALKTALK has welcomed Equinox 2 as a ‘step in the right direction’ that will benefit consumers, saying it is not anti-competitive as ISPs will not be deterred from altnets.

Moreover, says TalkTalk, the discounted Openreach price remains above ‘even the top end cost estimate of an efficient altnet and significantly above the bottom end estimate’.

TalkTalk forecasts that lower wholesale prices will reduce retail costs thereby increasing consumer uptake while enhanc-



Tristia Harrison

ing retail competition. In its consultation response TalkTalk also stated that Equinox 2 will indirectly benefit altnets by increasing ISPs’ commitment to and investment in FTTP

through, for example, accelerating product developments that support FTTP such as VoIP, increasing marketing focus on FTTP, stopping the sale of legacy, and the same pricing between FTTC and FTTP.

“Ofcom’s decision is good news for consumers, competition and the ongoing rollout of full fibre,” said TalkTalk CEO Tristia Harrison. “This decision means that full fibre remains affordable while securing rollout investment and maintaining thriving competition.”

## NEWS ROUNDUP

FLOTEK’S eighth acquisition in 12 months sees Swansea-based Liberty Solutions join the growing list of targets. Flotek CEO Jay Ball said: “We now have four Swansea bases as well as multiple locations in England. Expanding our market share rapidly in such a short period of time has been a great first step in our long-term growth strategy. Our priorities are integrating and operating as one business with clearly defined goals.”

ZEN CEO Richard Tang has hailed Ofcom’s decision to allow Openreach’s Equinox 2 offer to go ahead. “We welcome any incentives that enable Zen to connect more of our customers to full fibre,” he said. “Equinox 2, coupled with investment from alternative network providers, will only help accelerate the UK’s journey to a full fibre nation. The offer is crucial in making full fibre broadband more accessible and affordable for millions of households across the UK, especially at a time when many are struggling with the cost of living crisis.” See page 10



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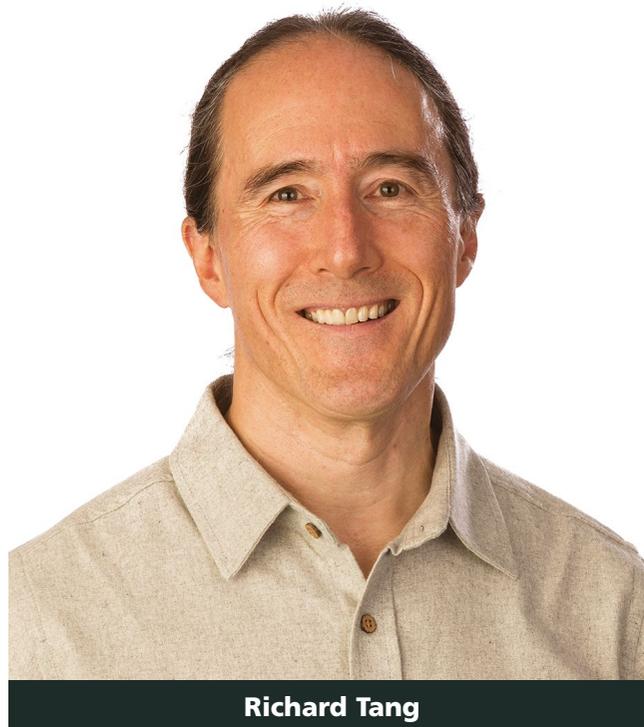


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# Tang on return as CEO

**Zen founder Richard Tang reprised his role as CEO following the retirement of Paul Stobart in March. Here, Tang shares insights into why he's back in the driving seat, and why it still holds 'all the excitement of starting a new job'.**



Richard Tang

digital services grows, so does the need for robust cybersecurity measures and data privacy policies. Again, this presents ample opportunity to those in the channel that can add relevant products to their portfolio.

**Ultimately, what are your long-term objectives?**

My biggest ambition is to create a business that puts people and the environment first with a model that is sustainable for the future of society and the planet. And as a technology company, continually improving our infrastructure will always be the primary area of investment, this will be closely followed by tech innovation and improving our self-serve and automation capabilities.

**What should be top of mind for the channel right now?**

We need to be mindful of the increased adoption of FTTP and how that might impact the leased lines side of business. The channel faces new opportunities from business customers that have access to first grade FTTP for the first time. If they can offer this with the same service wrap as traditional leased lines it can be just as good for businesses but significantly more cost-effective.

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

Creating an environment where people and the planet are genuinely first, so employees can buy into something they believe in rather than a purpose to maximise return to shareholders that they don't even know. I want Zen to be a catalyst for this change and for other businesses to follow our lead. ■

**Why did you come back as CEO?**

I was CEO for 23 years before Paul took over in December 2017 and I became Chairman. Paul's appointment was one of my best decisions, but recruiting externally is always a gamble, none more so than for the CEO role and I wasn't prepared to take that gamble with the entire business. No one externally knows the company and culture as well as I do and I am enjoying the renewed challenge. It feels right. But clear communication is vital as a returning CEO along with getting our executive committee quickly attuned with their new line manager so we keep things moving at pace.

**What message does your return send to the channel?**

A message of stability and continuity, highlighting a commitment to strong leadership that upholds Zen's values and culture. With our renewed focus on innovation we aim to create new opportunities

for channel partners. And last month we appointed our existing Non-Exec Phil Male as new Chairman.

**Do you feel better placed to lead Zen having had a break?**

I remained close to the business in my role as Chair and brand ambassador participating in industry events, conferences and panel discussions, staying informed of the latest trends and developments in the market. I enjoyed the time to step back and see the business develop. Learning different leadership approaches gave me the opportunity to reflect on my own leadership style. I am energised as I return, bringing with me new insights, ideas and strategies that will help guide Zen into its next success chapter.

**What are your immediate priorities?**

Our strategy was already robust in terms of the markets and products we're pursuing so my main priority is ensuring a smooth handover and settling

everyone down. As for longer-term objectives, an increased focus on innovation is definitely up there. We are a technology business with scope to innovate around new services for the channel, 4G back-up for broadband (which is already in development) and better automation.

**Do you need to balance competing priorities?**

There are so many great ideas around the business, but it's about identifying the ones we can put the time, resource and effort into delivering. We will have to make brave decisions, selecting the ones that are the most important to us and accepting that we just can't do everything.

**To what extent do you expect Zen to grow this year?**

I expect our growth for this financial year to be in line with last year, which is at circa eight per cent. In the channel specifically, broadband and Ethernet are our focus areas with the addition of complementary services such as 4G back-up.

**What market trends interest you most?**

The full fibre roll out and advent of altnets are two important market trends both of which are significant to Zen. We have always been a technology provider that invests heavily in its infrastructure and over the last number of years this investment has gone towards building our own exchanges and cable links. We are nearing completion of this massive project which will result in circa 80 per cent of our FTTP and SoGEA coverage being on-net, giving us, and in turn our channel partners, more control over our network. This elevates Zen to an infrastructure player on a par with the tier one players. Also, we welcome Ofcom's decision to allow Openreach's Equinox II proposals to go ahead. Its implementation will drive healthy competition which can only be a good thing for end users.

Cybersecurity and data privacy is another key area. As the reliance on

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# Resiliency theme continues

The positive outlook from Megabyte.com's latest quarterly review is again epitomised by continued comms sector trading resiliency during uncertain times, writes Analyst Philip Carse.

Following the release of the Q2 2023 Megabyte Sector Quarterly Barometer Reports, we're diving deeper into selected peer groups to highlight the key trading and corporate activity themes. This market opinion piece focuses on the Telecom Services peer group, currently comprising 1,069 UK registered companies (up from 1,029 last quarter) spanning the major networks, asset-light network players, comms, IT and satellite resellers, telecoms network support services, and niche verticals such as m2m.

The themes addressed are continued resilient trading helped by price rises and mission critical services, more varied than usual M&A involving telecom resellers (strategic deals, US buyer, another AIM departure), and FTTP funding pressures starting to come through in terms of M&A and investor in-portfolio consolidation.

## Trading resilience

There is little new to say in the way of telecoms services trading, other than it remains relatively resilient, buoyed by highly recurring, contracted and mission critical revenue streams, with price rises helping mitigate cost inflation. This is in contrast to IT consulting and IT managed services where economic challenges are having more of an impact, albeit with trading remaining robust for most.

UK telecoms channel resilience is well highlighted by service aggregator Gamma. In March it detailed calendar 2022 financials, with revenue, gross profits and adjusted EBITDA up 8-10% to £485m, £248m, and £105m respectively, with a strong UK direct and indirect (both 10% growth) helped by stable ARPUs, increased Teams Voice activity, and availability of kit. Analysts have pencilled in 7-8% revenue and EBITDA growth for 2023.

Of course, not all Telecoms Services companies are performing well, with some suffering from issues such as equipment delays (having knock on impacts on install team productivity, project delivery etc), shifts from capex to opex models and over exposure to hard hit market segments.

AIM listed Maintel and LoopUp were particularly visible examples in 2022, but on the whole our discussions with leading comms and IT resellers/service providers (including SCG, Focus, Natilik, Onecom, Babble, Arrow, FluidOne and 4Com) echo the Gamma story of resilient trading and positive outlooks, helped by mission critical, contracted revenues and end users continuing to invest in telecoms and IT for operational advantage.

Alongside more M&A by serial acquirers such as Babble, Croft, 4Com and



Philip Carse

**Telecoms services trading remains relatively resilient, buoyed by highly recurring, contracted and mission critical revenue streams, with price rises helping mitigate cost inflation**

FluidOne (a mix of telco and IT MSPs adding scale and/or capability), more strategic M&A included Nasstar's acquisition of enterprise cloud solutions specialist Colibri Digital, specifically boosting its data engineering capabilities;

FourNet's Nowcomm deal, adding Cisco capabilities; Wireless Logic's acquisition of a Singapore-based managed wireless solution provider, its first (of 16 deals) outside Europe; while Babble's deals included Microsoft-focused Techquarters.

Other themes include another proposed acquisition of a public company, this time by Daisy of cybersecurity service provided ECSC in a £6m deal, following Wavenet's acquisition of AIM-listed AdEPT Technology for £88m (Wavenet also acquired IT reseller Axial Systems out of administration). Another interesting deal was the acquisition of UK-based but globally operating voice comms operator Pure IP by New York-based comms managed services provider BCM One. Details are lacking but we suspect a multi £10m deal, and we wonder if buying a UK-based company as its first M&A foray overseas is likely to lead to BCM One having bigger ambitions for the UK.

Meanwhile, further significant reseller M&A is in the offing with TalkTalk's £85m revenue/£17m EBITDA direct B2B division reportedly being for sale, though an also reported £200m price tag seems bullish for a business in decline. We also await the big one... the Vodafone UK and Three UK merger that has been under discussion for over a year and whose consummation is reportedly due following Vodafone's recent appointment of Margherita Valle as permanent CEO.

## FTTP pressures

FTTP pressures are triggering M&A and in-portfolio consolidation. We have often written about

# ues in Q2

increasing pressures on FTTP altnets triggered by interest rate rises/reduced investor funding appetite and growing competition from BT and VMO2, and the proverbial chickens are now coming home to roost.

Whilst some altnets continue to attract funding (just Netomnia's £230m and Lothian Broadband's £20m in the last quarter), Trooli became the first fairly well established altnet to end up being sold rather than attract new funding, being acquired by a combination of French-owned UK altnet Axione and infrastructure investor Vauban Infrastructure Partners.

What was particularly interesting in this case was the rumoured circa £100m enterprise value, which is not that different to what we estimate Trooli has invested to date, as opposed to the multiples of invested capital paid in prior deals.

Meanwhile, Fern Trading became, we believe, the first UK FTTP investor to consolidate its various UK FTTP assets – retail focused Jurassic Fibre, Swish Fibre and Giganet and wholesale-focused AllPoints Fibre – under the leadership of Giganet's CEO Jarlath Finnegan. This is ostensibly to accelerate the rollout of FTTP networks and establish a national wholesale network during 2023, but will also save costs and potentially makes a combined business more attractive in the inevitable FTTP altnet consolidation.

Investors with multiple altnet exposure include InfraCapital, Aviva, Foresight, Gresham, Abrdn and Sequoia. ■  
philip.carse@megabuyte.com

## COMPANY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

### BT aims for 30-42% headcount reduction by the end of the decade

BT delivered a somewhat bullish full year to March 2023 results statement. Whilst the results were unsurprising - revenues of £20.7bn (-1%), EBITDA of £7.9bn (+5%), capex of £5.1bn (-4%) and normalised FCF of £1.3bn (-5%) - BT flagged significant headcount reductions (from 130k to 75-90k by FY28-30). It also flagged potential expansion of FTTP coverage beyond the 2026 25m premises target (to 25-30m by FY28-30) and a target FTTP penetration rate of 40-55% (versus 30% currently). As of March 2023 it had 3.1m FTTP customers via BT Retail and third party ISPs on 10.3m premises passed. Fourth quarter highlights include a better quarter for Enterprise with just a 2% revenue decline versus 4% for the full year.

### Gamma continues solid trading into 2023 across UK and Europe

AIM-listed Gamma Communications released an inline trading update ahead of its annual general meeting, stating that it is on track to meet consensus of £112.9m EBITDA (+7.4%) for 2023. Gamma expects to pay a total dividend of 15.0p (up 14%, costing £14.5m), whilst net cash as of 30th April sits at £101.3m (April 2022: £54.0m). The release highlighted positive momentum in UK direct and indirect, supported by price rises and cost control, and an improved Europe performance helped by product launches. The board remains positive for fiscal 2023. ■

### Avaya survives Chapter 11 and appoints new board

After announcing its financial restructuring in February, legacy telco vendor Avaya emerged from its second Chapter 11 process (dubbed Chapter 22) on undisclosed terms. The highlights from the company's plan of reorganisation propose a reduction in debt of circa 75% resulting in a net leverage ratio of under 1x; as well as over \$650m in liquidity being made available. As part of the restructure, the board has turned a new page consisting of eight new directors. Post-capital restructure Avaya's focus will be on developing its CCaaS proposition, Avaya Experience Platform (AXP), to strengthen its cloud communications portfolio.

### Maintel chronicles difficult 2022, flags positive progress for this year

AIM-listed business comms, cloud and IT services provider Maintel has issued calendar 2022 results in-line with downgraded expectations, as revenue fell 12% to £91.0m, gross profit fell 18% to £27.9m and adjusted EBITDA more than halved to £4.4m. Hardware supply chains, particularly in SD-WAN, LAN and WiFi, remained an acute issue with delivery delays causing significant project hold ups. However, there are positives, including strong growth in cloud seats (including a majority in public cloud seats now), driving improved margins and recurring revenue (now 77%). Brokers have reinstated forecasts to suggest modest revenue growth and a return to circa £10m of EBITDA. ■



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# Audra set to simplify UK I

**Just launched Audra Solutions, the UK arm of ambitious multinational Dotlines, has set out its UK channel expansion plans supported by global expertise across all key sectors and a technology proposition aligned to simplifying Internet security. Here, Group Chairman Mahbubul Matin shares his UK market entry strategy with high priorities placed on partnerships with fibre broadband providers, distribution and reselling partners.**

**T**he UK launch of Audra Solutions is a significant phase in parent company Dotlines' global expansion strategy. The business already operates in 17 major capital cities worldwide and has deployed enterprise-grade security at home-grade simplicity in thousands of homes and SMEs across Asia. Through strategic partnerships with in-country distributors, major broadband providers, high street retailers and e-commerce platforms, Audra's global influence is ever more strongly felt. Now, its Internet security campaign has reached UK shores.

Matin, who is a lifelong student of economics and

former investment banker turned entrepreneur, is driven to make complex technologies simple for people, businesses and societies. And he says Dotlines will achieve its UK objectives by combining an internationalisation strategy with capabilities in addressing specific and needy security markets.

"In 2005, the field of IT offered an opportunity to make a swift and impactful difference to simplify businesses and lives, leading to the birth of Dotlines," he explained. "As a non-resident Bangladeshi entrepreneur I have always aspired to represent my nation on the global stage, showcasing



**Mahbubul Matin**

**The UK is entering the next orbit of expansion in its fibre broadband outreach, and a user driven Internet security solution like Audra will see more and more applicability**

our blend of human talent and ingenuity."

**Early gains**

Matin embarked on his entrepreneurial journey by developing a locally crafted ERP system. And leveraging his understanding of the unique demands of the region, he seized the

lion's share of the rapidly expanding lease financing sector in Bangladesh. Buoyed by the initial success of Dotlines, Matin turned his attention to another thriving industry – telecom platforms and services. "As Bangladesh experienced an unprecedented boom in the telecom sector

our aspirations soared in tandem," commented Matin. "A timely opportunity arose for us to serve a prominent global entity headquartered in Malaysia."

Through the development of proprietary technologies and services the company continued to make



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# Internet security

significant strides. Today, the organisation comprises 1,800 individuals encompassing 10 nationalities. "This foundation positions us to extend our services to advanced markets like the UK and neighbouring European territories," commented Matin.

He highlighted that in the UK there are circa six million SMEs, while the European Union has around 23 million. "These businesses collectively employ over 116 million individuals and contribute more than 50 per cent to their respective GDPs," he said. "However, as digitalisation rapidly advances SMEs face an increasing number of cyber threats."

Matin also noted that nearly 80 per cent of SME owners find existing firewall and protection solutions excessively complex, while almost 70 per cent don't have a systematic approach nor the IT experts to manage prevailing threats – mainly due to affordability concerns. And 60 per cent of the SMEs that fall victim to cyberattacks are unaware of recovery tactics and consequently shut down within a mere six months.

## FACT FILE...

**DOTLINES** encompasses a range of pureplay connectivity services under Carnival Internet (which connects rural villages in Bangladesh to the global network via fibre broadband across 80 per cent of the country's districts); Internet security solutions through Audra; insurance offerings via Carnival Assure; BNPL (Buy Now Pay Later) and nano-loans through Dana; digital healthcare services under Carnival Care; skill-building initiatives via Ghooori Learning; logistics and online-to-offline transactions facilitated by eCourier; social selling platforms like Lattu for empowering the masses; and lifestyle improvements through ventures like Beyondarie and Eastern Pickle Company. Alongside these, Dotlines offers digital lifestyle solutions, OSS/BSS (Operations Support Systems/Business Support Systems) platforms, and robotic process automation tools.

This vulnerability isn't limited to SMEs alone, even home spaces are at risk, observed Matin. According to Ofcom, 25 per cent of the 28 million households in the UK have access to fibre broadband; and in the EU, the penetration rate is even higher at 44 per cent. "The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a significant surge in broadband usage, permeating into personal and family life as people increasingly embrace digital platforms for basic education and livelihoods," explained Matin.

"This sudden exposure has brought about unfamiliar threats and issues that individuals are ill-equipped to handle. These challenges could be mitigated if firewall solutions were purpose built, practical and user friendly, catering even to non-technical individuals such as parents or SME owners."

**Three dimensional solution** Dotlines' Audra addresses this need gap with a combination of three components. Firstly, there is an on-premise gateway device that requires a straightforward plug-and-play setup via an intuitive mobile app, allowing users

to create Internet controls without requiring technical knowledge. "This is all powered by a cloud-based firewall supported by AI and ML technologies, ensuring the safety of home or SME networks by preventing intrusions and protecting against privacy and security breaches," said Matin.

Demand for such solutions is largely untapped, with 62 per cent of home users concerned about their privacy and lacking awareness of effective and user friendly solutions. Furthermore, circa 41 per cent of home IoT devices fall victim to hacking each year; and around 61 per cent of children experience attention deficiency, encounter unwanted access to online content and exhibit unfavourable behaviour online.

With these issues in mind, Matin says he has ameliorated the challenges of strong UK comms sector competition by identifying the right markets and solutions while developing a successful partnering and differentiation strategy. He claims that addressing stakeholder priorities with a targeted and proven security proposition will support long-term success for partners – and he made the point by citing successful implementations of Audra in Asian markets. "Numerous parents and SME owners have embraced Audra as a firewall solution that they can set up and operate themselves," he said. "The UK is entering the next orbit of expansion in its fibre broadband outreach, and a user driven Internet security solution like Audra will see more and more applicability." ■

# Trends shaping the channel – and your business's future

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STATE OF THE BUSINESS CHANNEL MARKET REPORT 2023

This research provides valuable insights into the trends, opportunities and industry issues reshaping the comms channel, helping you to gain a competitive advantage in a constantly transforming market.

## Industry trends shaping the channel



Insights that give you an edge

**T**he digitalisation of communications and networks is a critical strategic issue that needs to be understood by telecommunications professionals, due to the scale of change, the impact of disruptive and substitutional technology trends, and the growth opportunities available. Understanding the prominent market drivers will also be key for channel business leaders to emerge stronger from an unprecedented period of industry disruption.

**Based on research** undertaken by TalkTalk and Cartesian, this new market report shows the need for actionable information, not only to maintain alignment

with a fast moving market, but to power the right decisions to keep ahead of the curve and win business.

A deep dive into the following categories – Business Broadband, Ethernet, Fixed Voice/SIP, Altnets and Wholesale Models – and gaining an understanding of how they are transitioning and the implications for resellers, will help channel leaders rebalance their priorities with greater clarity and long-term competitive resiliency. **To gain insights into the market trends that matter and how to remain competitive, download the full report here: <https://www.comms-dealer.com/trends-analysis/industry-trends-shaping-channel>**

# Mimo flexes his muscle

**7ARDIS CEO and former bodybuilder Matt Mimo is flexing his channel building muscle based on a belief that he can give resellers a mobile connectivity powerlift.**

**T**ardis (now known as 7ARDIS) was acquired by Mimo's father in 1999 and operated as a pure telecoms business selling satellite phones to the defence, security and maritime industries. These days the organisation defines itself as much as a software company as a provider of intelligent mobile and IoT solutions including SIMs and eSIMs. The Romford-based firm has global reach and grew from 198 to 321 registered accounts since Q4 2021, doubled headcount since 2019, and the sales pipeline for this financial year is forecast to double.

At a global level, Mimo hopes Tardis will make an impact as it seeks to link up with a number of major international mobile connectivity partners, such as Telstra in Australia and Melita in Malta. Tardis has also attracted new partners in South America on the back of advanced router and endpoint management. Mimo says big strides forward in 7ARDIS' portal design will also enable the emergence of a new global player aligned with profitable niches in expanding markets in the UK and internationally.

"The portal simplifies operations and ensures

partners have the right mobile connectivity solution, ultimately saving them time and money," said Mimo. "7ARDIS offers the portal and associated back end as a white label solution for resellers and this model has proven to be a big USP."

Mimo, who joined 7ARDIS in 2014, positions the firm as a unicorn SaaS technology company because it produces 100 per cent of its software. "Not all APIs out there work well, even if they are two-way and entirely open, so we pioneered our own way of generating results, in some cases incorporating AI," explained Mimo. "We offer turnkey bonding solutions with the main benefit being truly agnostic deliverables, regardless of Internet source. There are always gaps to fill in terms of technology, so we're looking into more AI features to add deeper value for vertical focused resellers, whether on the mobile side or IoT add-ons such as CCTV or LoRaWAN."

The company's current priorities also include greater investment in software and automation to further simplify mobile management solutions for partners and customers. Another priority is recruitment – like most tech companies 7ARDIS needs



Matt Mimo

## We're looking into more AI features to add deeper value for vertical focused resellers

more talented people to realise its growth ambitions. But this has not stopped the business meeting high demand for its recently launched Dropship Data service, a SIM-only or mobile broadband solution that has evolved significantly.

### One-stop-shop

"Resellers leverage our software as their own and we deploy our sales support and engineering capabilities as an extension of the resellers' business, making it a one-stop-shop for their clients and end users," stated Mimo. "We are seeing companies across the spectrum utilise new capacity, exclusively via 7ARDIS, with any sized business focusing on selling and marketing. The model is proving popular."

Another core portfolio development will be the

launch of an MVNO offering later this year, which can be white labelled. Developments such as this, and others discussed in this article, along with Mimo's ambition to see more 7ARDIS solutions deployed globally, in particular to establish an office in North America, all prompted the company to 'officially go corporate' in March this year with a brand overhaul aimed at differentiating itself.

"The new spelling of our name, colour palette and use of our bolt emoji shows we have shifted up to a whole new gearbox, let alone moved up a gear," stated Mimo. "7ARDIS has grown significantly and morphed into a software-centric MSP specialising in intelligent connectivity. Our software suite is fundamental to everything we do."

### Just a minute with Matt Mimo...

**Your main strength and what could you work on?** My greatest strength is network marketing, but I can get too technical.

**Industry bugbear:** The egotistical barriers that many companies have.

**If you weren't in ICT what would you be doing?** Professional bodybuilding.

**Tell us something about yourself we don't know:** I drink five litres of water a day. It's a bodybuilding hack.

**Name three ideal dinner guests:** Elon Musk, Grant Cardone and Mike Tyson.

**How do you relax?** I never stop grafting. You can't be Maximum without giving the Maximum.

**The biggest risk you have taken:** Taking over the family business – it's a huge responsibility.

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# Navigating the transition

**Sky has made a science-based commitment to achieve net zero by 2030 and the strategic decisions taken on ESG issues are driven by Group Director Bigger Picture and Sustainability Fiona Ball. Here, she shares insights into her day-to-day activities.**

**T**hrough her work with Sky colleagues, external suppliers and a full range of purposeful organisations, Ball is accelerating action on Sky's all-encompassing transition to net zero. She has worked within Sky's sustainability team for the past 15 years, and prior to joining Sky accrued 15 years experience across the telecommunications, media and entertainment industry. The environment also featured strongly in her academic career. "I've always worked in or been connected to sustainability, long before it existed as a field in the way it does today," stated Ball.

"Sustainability is about the environmental and social impact of everything we do. We're working hard to engage and transform our business including our products and wider supply chains – and all this must be done in a way that supports a just transition to a net zero future."

In 2006 Sky became the first media company to go

carbon neutral, and in 2020 the business launched Sky Zero, its commitment to becoming net zero across its operations and value chain by 2030. "To reach our science-based target of halving our emissions in absolute terms by 2030 there are a number of barriers we have to overcome and workstreams we need to deliver on," explained Ball.

"We know making improvements across our value chain, including Scope 3 emissions, is the most material and impactful part of our existence as a business. However, we also know that making the substantial change required to deliver on our net zero target across our value chain is no mean feat.

"We need to collaborate with other businesses in the UK and internationally from a range of sectors and this must be done at speed, working together towards a common goal. The transition to a net zero economy is going to require partnerships and business relationships on a scale



Fiona Ball

**The transition to a net zero economy is going to require partnerships and business relationships on a scale and ambition level unlike anything we've seen before**

and ambition level unlike anything we've seen before, and will require flexibility to think and deliver work that falls outside existing business parameters. Collaboration

will be crucial. Therefore, within organisations it's critical that we break out of our traditional business unit silos, share expertise and work towards a shared goal."

Sky has reduced direct carbon emissions by 36.4 per cent since 2018 and continues to power its sites with 100 per cent renewable electricity. In 2022 the company launched

# to net zero

Sky Stream, its most energy efficient product with an auto-standby mode of less than 0.5 watts, saving emissions and customer electricity costs. "Like all our other products, the packaging for Sky Stream is also 100 per cent recyclable, Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified and free from single-use plastics," said Ball. "And Sky Business's broadband offering is powered by our greenest ever Wifi hub which is covered in

## Within organisations, it's critical that we break out of our business unit silos, share expertise and work towards a shared goal

85 per cent recycled plastics and doesn't use single use plastics in its packaging."

Sky is also ensuring the robust training and upskilling of employees to build human rights into every decision made throughout its value chain. "Concurrently, we're looking at our approach to nature and biodiversity which complements our reduction strategy," explained Ball. "We have to ensure we are investing in nature in the best way to absorb the emissions that we can't currently cut."

Sky's charity partners WWF and Royal Botanic Gardens (Kew) help to develop an effective nature strategy, advising on how to invest in nature to support net zero targets. Ball also works with several business membership

organisations that specifically address climate change issues. "We're looking at the biggest challenges facing business and coming together to overcome obstacles," she added. "These organisations play a vital role in galvanising businesses and helping them move forward at pace."

### Taking the lead

Ball is a member of Business in the Community's Environment Leadership

Team and Net Zero Taskforce, the UK Corporate Leaders Group and the Aldersgate Group, which covers many issues including policy change and climate leadership. "When engaging individuals on climate-related topics we need to be aware that these may not be everyone's priority or interest," said Ball.

"So it's important to engage people in connection to their passions. By showing them the impact climate change will have on the things they care most about, from sports to food, we hope it will inspire them to take action. We have applied this theory to our Sky Zero consumer website. It has been designed in a way that people can see ways to help the planet while still doing the things they love."

To create greater net zero momentum Ball says we must consider a targeted approach, such as the one Sky took in 2021 working with the Cabinet Office on Game Zero, the world's first elite level net zero carbon football match. The following year Sky showed fans the impact of climate change on sport.

"Our campaign explained how droughts and flooding are disrupting matches and impacting athletes," noted Ball. "Alongside this we showed sports fans what actions they can take from more sustainable travel and plant-based food options to re-using and recycling. Across the summer sports fans took 1.74 million climate positive actions to help protect the sports they love."

It's crystal clear that Ball's activities are wide ranging. Her days often vary greatly between working with stakeholders inside Sky and collaborating with external partners. "One day I might be supporting our internal teams to ensure our target to reach net zero by 2030 is embedded into the decisions we make around product design and supply chain management," she said. "The next day I might be helping our Young People team to bring more school children behind the scenes of TV with Sky Up Academy Studios. I also work closely with our charity partners such as MAMA Youth to champion diversity and inclusivity within our industry."

Ball says that while the pace of net zero action is accelerating, efforts must be redoubled, especially by those organisations that have not yet made sustainability a priority. "Whether you're a small or large business you need to make sure the fundamentals are in place: Ensuring you have the resource, capability, and skills to move forward; measuring and understanding your carbon footprint; and based on your carbon footprint, setting science-based targets to make sure progress can be made." ■

## Alpha Connectivity brings the energy

Alpha Connectivity initially began in the telecoms Wi-Fi arena before moving into card payment services. Director Gavin Hughes explains on what sold him on becoming a Fidelity Energy partner and adding the additional service to the Alpha Connectivity portfolio, "Energy just fits really nicely in our portfolio, especially because we only look to give our customers the best technological solutions as well as support them financially. We do this either through getting the best deal by saving them money on card transfers or with business funding. But obviously energy is an area all businesses are having some difficulty with and it was a natural fit with my customer base and is now the biggest opportunity by far out of all the services we offer.



Alpha Connectivity Director, Gavin Hughes

Energy also gives me access to certain verticals that do not have use for some of the services we offer and it is a simple product to sell. As a small business it has been really beneficial for us, we have been using energy to build our customer base and then cross sell our products in and ask them about their telecoms. You can have a fuller discussion to get to know their business and their individual needs which then allows you to offer advice and solutions that they really need from a consultancy expert.

There isn't a great deal of training required to sell energy as it is not particularly complicated like some of the telecom products. Once we had signed as a partner it's easy for us to get going and we have such a strong Fidelity Energy team and have been managed very well by them. If something comes up that's been an issue or there is a lack of understanding from my part, the team are always there to help and offer support wherever needed on the deal."

Alpha Connectivity's partnership with Fidelity Energy only began earlier this year after most customers would have been impacted by the energy crisis, Gavin explains, "I have secured quite a few deals and I see a lot of businesses in a week through phone calls, meetings or business networking. I now build energy into my conversation as I do come across a lot of businesses that have been impacted by

incredibly high bills or they have issues around their contracts. There is nothing we can do to lower any rates they are already contracted to, but what you can do is guide them and they can gauge what's happening with the market. Letting them know what's going on and being able to aid them to make an informed decision means my customers feel they're getting the full range of consultancy from me.

The problem when you are adding a new product to your portfolio is you're taking time away from the other stuff that you're doing, but selling energy with Fidelity Energy is simple as they are incredibly supportive. There are a lot of people who only offer telecoms or just card machines or solely energy, but I now have a cross portfolio of products. Cashflow is really important to all businesses, so adding an additional product that comes with a recurring revenue stream is a no brainer. When the market is low you can support your customers to make savings and that makes them happy. When the market is high you can help them understand the reasons why and what options they have, which only strengthens the trust and relationship you have with them.

If any businesses are thinking about coming into energy and looking for another stream of income then I would certainly recommend it. Like the energy crisis, there's always good times and bad times within the market. So having the variety of products and solutions gives me a nice balance and broadens my opportunities to support my customers. It creates a lot of opportunity and has only strengthened me as a consultancy expert and assisted me in building my customer base further.



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# Jola and Three partnership gives resellers a knockout Unlimited SIM

**Jola, the channel's leading mobile data specialist, has partnered with Three Business to develop and launch a range of competitive unlimited SIMs to meet the specific needs of resellers.**

Jola has a strong channel reach with over 1300 partners and has a Mobile-data Revenue Generator™ programme, designed to help partners find and close mobile data opportunities. They also have advanced automation and comprehensive portals giving partners control over provisioning, support and margins. Three UK provides the UK's Fastest 5G Network (Ookla Speedtest), reach, reliability and great value pricing.

There is huge demand from businesses for unlimited SIMs for mobile phones, tablets, mobile broadband and smart devices at a great price point.

Resellers have struggled to compete with Mobile Network Operators directly until now. Jola's offering meets this requirement allowing resellers to build monthly recurring revenues from unlimited SIMs at great margins.

Three UK has invested £2bn in their network and IT infrastructure over the last 5 years. They have dedicated more spectrum to their 5G service than any of the other networks and are the only network to meet the International Telecom's Union's minimum standard for delivering high-speed, low-latency 5G. Three has the largest single slice of 5G spectrum of any network provider. The contiguous



**"Being on the UK's Fastest 5G Network, with 99% UK 3G/4G coverage means they will work almost anywhere ..."**

Lee Broxson

spectrum is dedicated to 5G and allows an uninterrupted flow of data across the Three Network, providing higher speeds and lower latency. Three has the world's first 5G-ready fully Cloud Core Network managed from 20 new data centres across the UK and currently provides over 61% of the UK with 5G coverage.

Lee Broxson, Jola's CSO commented, "Channel partners have been asking us for competitive, unlimited SIMs for phones, tablets and mobile broadband for some time and the Three UK Unlimited SIMs meet the requirement. Being on the UK's Fastest 5G Network, with 99% UK 3G/4G

data will complement our award-winning network, and market-leading 5G connectivity. Our network is already recognised for its exceptional speed and reliability, and with this partnership, we can expand our reach into partners in markets we've not previously operated within, and offer even more customers access to the Three network."

#### Demand

Demand for cost-effective, unlimited SIMs from the channel, has never been so high, for use in, phones, 5G/4G routers, pre-Ethernet connectivity and Ethernet back-up. Applications range from digital signage and mobile broadband to bus and train WiFi, monitoring and smart devices. Every day, resellers, manufacturers and service companies are finding new uses for mobile data and, as we accelerate towards 5G, this is unlikely to slow down.

#### Opportunity

The opportunity for the channel is massive. Mobile Manager® gives resellers total and instant real-time control. Provisioning, management and support are easy and SIMs can go live instantly, reducing book-to-bill times to hours rather than months. Often the challenge for resellers is identifying opportunities in their customer base and this is where Jola's

unique productised process, The MRG™ comes in.

#### The MRG™

The MRG™ has helped Jola partners find and win many huge mobile data deals, turning some from telecoms resellers with an EV of 8 x EBITDA, to IoT companies with EVs over 20 x EBITDA. The MRG™ defines the way we work together and qualifies opportunities, capabilities and skills. We help our partners to focus on large opportunities and ultimately win large, high-margin, long-term contracts.

#### Jola

Our ability to innovate is one of our success stories at Jola. We continually innovate to help partners win. On average we launch a new product/product extension every month.

Jola is helping channel partners uncover prospects with immediate requirements for mobile data SIMs. We help develop unique and differentiated solutions that partners can't buy from anyone else, at competitive prices, facilitating healthy margins. We are channel-only so partners can trust us to help them pitch and close deals. We are on hand to support partners and their customers throughout the buying process and we can help create winning propositions, producing large, high-margin long-term contracts.



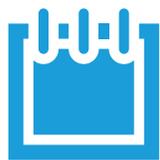


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of the UK outdoor  
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5G ready SIMs – access  
to 5G where available at  
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UK's Fastest 5G  
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£7.50 per month relates to a Three Business Unlimited Voice and Data SIM on a 24-month minimum contract subject to a 4.5% price increase each April. Price excludes VAT. Unlimited use UK only, acceptable use policy applies. Fair use policy applies overseas. Three has been recognised as the UK's Fastest 5G Network four times in a row. Based on analysis by Ookla® of Speedtest Intelligence® data for Q1-Q2 2021 - Q3-Q4 2022. Ookla trademarks used under license and reprinted with permission. Visit [speedtest.net/awards/fastest-5g](https://speedtest.net/awards/fastest-5g) to find out more.

# Riding the intelligent mo

As we contemplate the impact of industry change and the disruptive time ahead, intelligent mobile data demands special attention in terms of how it can deliver a competitive advantage and to understand the pre-conditions that must be in place for it to generate value for resellers. That was the focus of last month's Channel Forecast Insight Session led by Jola Chief Sales Officer Lee Broxson and Pangea Sales Director Bernie McPhillips.

Resellers are facing into a comms sector supercharged by the 2G/3G sunset, the PSTN shutdown, the rise of mobile data solutions and the proliferation of 5G – and when these transformations are added together the potential impact is huge. Jola and Pangea are at the forefront of this sweeping technology transition, and introducing intelligent mobile data applications just as businesses plan to go all IP will enable resellers to emerge stronger and more competitive, believes McPhillips. "If resellers don't have an intelligent mobile data strategy they can only address those use cases and applications that can be swapped to a fixed line," he said.

"There are many areas where SoGEA and fibre are not available, and there's many applications that don't need high bandwidth. It's easier to rapidly deploy a cellular solution rather than trying to dig up every road in the country. This represents a significant opportunity for channel partners and now is the time to act. We are reaching a point where resellers will be at a competitive disadvantage if they can't address all of the available opportunities."

The impact of intelligent mobile data is already strongly felt, creating new possibilities across all sectors, noted McPhillips. He cited many advantages including the 'clever things' that can be done with multi-network SIMs, along with static IPs and web content filtering at network level, for example. "There are many value adds, that's why we call it intelligent mobile data," he stated. "We're reaching a tipping point in the market where people are starting to ask why wouldn't I want intelligent mobile data."

For resellers, the priority is to factor intelligent mobile data into their technology roadmaps to ensure market competitiveness, believes Broxson. "You hear people talk about 1.5 million PSTN connections," he said. "If as a channel we can take 10 per cent of that total it would make a huge difference to the reseller community. In every area of our sector people are talking about the PSTN switch off. In many cases fixed line connectivity is the answer but in a high percentage of locations SoGEA is not supported or fixed line is not financially viable. These cases will benefit from moving to a 4G or 5G application. But everybody,



Lee Broxson

## There are many uses cases and deliverables that are leading us to a mobile future

whether an ISP, MSP or reseller, without mobile data in their portfolio is at an immediate disadvantage."

### Connected world

Broxson provided a glimpse into the future of connectivity and where he thinks the market is heading, highlighting that today's 20 billion connected devices is set to hit 70 billion in

seven years time. "There are many applications moving away from fixed line over to LTE," he added. "The risk is that customer bases will be targeted by suppliers that deliver mobile data solutions. Our biggest competitors are always the networks but being an aggregator gives us an advantage. We are able to differentiate with options from single to multi-network.

Every player in the market should have an option to work with an aggregator."

Rethinking strategy to embrace mobile data does not mean reconfiguring how your business operates. That said, to take advantage of intelligent mobile data opportunities resellers will require strategic guidance. "Don't reinvent the wheel – the biggest opportunities will be right under your nose in your existing customer base," added McPhillips. "We as aggregators support you, find and qualify the opportunities, ask the right questions, overcome objections and close deals. There are opportunities in every business sector, and you don't need to start all over again."

The potential impact of an intelligent mobile data strategy across all sectors is significant, but to realise these opportunities resellers will likely require supportive channel partnerships that add lasting value. "Intelligent mobile data is a long-term strategy," explained Broxson. "You need to work with the supplier and they need to work with you."

It is worth repeating that resellers can address a broad scope of opportunities linked

# mobile data wave

to the PSTN switch off, noted McPhillips. "As well as 5G back-up boosting the value of the sale you can start looking outside the customers' site – vehicles, engineers with handheld devices, signature capture devices etc – these all need connecting too," he said. "For years I've been trying to bust the myth that IoT, M2M and intelligent mobile data means little revenue. There are increasingly big data applications like connectivity for always-on CCTV. We have SIM cards using more than 1.5 terabytes a month. There is everything from the sublimely small to the ridiculously large.

"This isn't a value add that sits next to a portfolio – it's a huge industry in its own right. Connected devices are growing far more quickly than the global population. A strategy to connect things rather than people makes more sense given the rate of growth. And the more you let us in the more we can work together as strategic partners, find, qualify and win these opportunities."

While resellers will need to take stock of their portfolio model, it is also key to understand that they need not reinvent the wheel in order to enable an intelligent mobile data strategy. "There are so many use cases and deliverables that are leading us to a mobile future," stated Broxson. "The opportunity is in customer bases and we can help partners better understand the verticals they are working in, the applications being consumed in those verticals and the pain points end users are experiencing. The channel needs to work with people like Pangea and Jola to



Bernie McPhillips

## Don't reinvent the wheel. The biggest opportunities will be right under your nose in your existing customer base

understand the solutions we have put together for other partners."

### Tipping point

For resellers, the key is to see intelligent mobile data at least as fundamental as fixed line, and understand the extent to which mobile could influence their long-term market competitiveness. According to Broxson, the industry is already at a tipping point where 5G can replace fixed line services. "Infrastructure across the UK is expanding, the altnets are delivering huge backhaul for mobile providers and the cost of delivering services is becoming cheaper," he added. "As a fixed line replacement 5G is a viable option."

The promise of 5G has reverberated around the industry for years. But now,

says McPhillips, its time has come and no mobile data strategy should ignore 5G. "They go hand in hand," he stated. "5G not only makes mobile data a credible alternative as a back-up to fixed line, it is a potential mobile-first solution that offers fast mobile broadband, ultra-reliable low latency, network slicing and real-time data transfer, with a connection density of up to a million users per square kilometre. There is big shift into rural areas which is also exciting for the channel.

"Resellers should be aware that the intelligent mobile data market is far from saturated. With the 2G/3G switch off, the PSTN closure and proliferation of 5G, there's never been a better time to get involved. And the more you let us in, the more we can help."



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# Fishwick on his thrills and

**Ian Fishwick set up Adept Technology Group in a spare bedroom 20 years ago following the ups and downs of a prior career in TMT. In April this year he sold to Wavenet in a £100 million deal. To provide inspiration to the next generation of entrepreneurs, Fishwick recalls, in his own words, a career story characterised by 'sheer bloody-mindedness, resilience, and an absolute refusal to give in'.**



Ian Fishwick

I'm an accountant by profession, although I haven't worked in finance since 1990. I was the youngest Finance Director in Marconi at 27 and became the youngest MD at 30. We had a team of cryptographers providing secret and top secret comms equipment to the UK Government and military, long before anyone else had heard of the word 'crypto'.

In the mid-90s cable was the most exciting technology. Britain was the first country to deregulate and allow one company to provide Internet access, telecoms and TV. I now refer to this as the first fibre roll out. The primary difference between then and now was that it was FTTC rather than FTTP. It was incredibly exciting and I joined Telewest as MD

of its North West division. During this time I learned a huge lesson by breaking what the boss of Telewest Consumer, Roger Wilson (a good friend and mentor) called the 'unholy triangle'.

The first point of the triangle was growth. Many companies cannot seem to grow yet Telewest North West was named the fastest growing cable company in the UK. The second point of the triangle is service. Many fast growing companies leave a trail of wreckage as service teams cannot cope with the volume of new customers. Yet we won the national Customer Service Award.

The third point of the triangle is finance. Many past winners of customer service awards had done so by hiring loads of people so they can answer

## After being made redundant twice in 18 months I got depressed, drank too much, and became very difficult to live with

the phones rapidly. But the cost of this army of people meant that the company finances were hugely loss making. We were the lowest cost operator in the industry.

At the end of the fifth year we decided to move to a single national organisation and I was in a two horse race for the UK Consumer business top job. I was the bright young thing at 40 and the other guy was in his late 50s. They went for the grey hair and for the first time I was made redundant. I was stunned. It taught me that the higher you are the more likely you are to

be affected by company reorganisations. And that life isn't a straight line with an upward trajectory, it has ups and downs that you often cannot predict.

### Turnaround

This was around 2000, the era of the infamous dot.com bubble. Some Americans rang me and asked if I wanted to run the seven UK businesses they had just bought. The combined turnover was £250 million. On the first day I asked how much money we were losing and how much cash we had to finance it. The boss said, 'we lost £20 million last

year and you owe BT £19 million. Can you stop the losses as fast as possible?'. That was one of many, rather interesting, first days.

In an incredible 16 months and we turned a £20 million annual loss into a £1.4 million profit. Then out of the blue I received a call from the Head Office in Atlanta. The caller said, 'we have filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy'. Stunned, I replied, 'we've stopped the losses but not repaid the £19 million debt to BT I inherited from you'. The response, 'we understand that – you are going bankrupt with us'. To

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# spills in comms

say that I was furious would be an understatement. We were all made redundant.

Being made redundant does not mean you are a bad person. It usually means that you were in the wrong place at the wrong time. In addition, if you run a subsidiary of a group, then the financial success of the group will decide your future, even if your subsidiary is doing well.

Having being made redundant twice in 18

## I spent months on my own in a spare bedroom trying to create a business plan and raise money

months I got depressed, drank too much and became very difficult to live with. I'm astonished that my beautiful wife is still with me after all these years. The dot.com bubble had burst and the banks had closed most of the new competitors to BT. It took me several months to realise that I would have to create my own job by setting up my own company. I was 42. Next lesson: You can start a business at any age.

I spent months on my own in a spare bedroom trying to create a business plan and raise money. I then re-met Roger Wilson, my old boss, who said two sentences that changed my life. 'I believe in you. I'll put some of my own money in'. Two people compared to one isn't twice as good – it is a whole new world. Suddenly I could talk over problems with someone. We now had two contact

books and rapidly raised just over £3 million from about a dozen people.

We started Adept by buying Eurobell's residential customer base from Telewest. They could see we had the money but couldn't initially accept that we could turn an empty building with no staff into a fully functioning telco in six weeks. But we did it.

Everyone had told us that you could not make money from small business customers as the support costs were too high. But by starting with a

blank piece of paper we had created systems that needed roughly one third of the staff of any of our competitors and we

rapidly hit a sector leading 18 per cent EBITDA margin.

### Growing opportunity

The original idea was to buy companies for three years and then sell. However, those of us closest to the business could see that the opportunity was far bigger than we had envisaged. There is nothing worse than being a minority shareholder in a private business that does not pay dividends and you have no say in when it is sold. How do you ever get your money out? We floated Adept on the London Stock Exchange in 2006 because we had accidentally trapped our friends, and this was a way of allowing them to sell their shares whenever they wanted.

Adept went on to complete 28 acquisitions. I have now done 42 mergers and acquisitions and one sale.

At the start I set out a simple mission statement – one day, we will be widely acknowledged as the most professional managed service provider in the UK. For the last two years running our peers named Adept as UK Managed Service Provider of the Year. We did it. Thank you to everyone – staff, supplier partners, banks, investors and most of all customers who helped get us there.

Along that incredible journey I had the honour of being named UK CEO of the Year three times, and I wrote the lessons I had learned in a book called The Street-Smart MBA – Mastering Business Acumen Without Going To School. It's on Amazon. For the last seven years I have been a member of the Cabinet Office SME Panel and currently Chair the Industry Working Group looking at how to get the Central Government supply chain down to carbon net zero.

When I announced the sale of Adept I was immediately asked to become Chairman of Airband, one of the UK's leading providers of fibre to rural areas. A positive aspect of the pandemic was that it triggered a shift in society's attitude to remote working. For decades we have seen young families leave villages to seek employment in towns and cities. We have a once in a generation opportunity to reverse this trend and the provision of gigabit fibre to rural areas is the great enabler.

In some ways it feels like I have gone full circle and am back in the middle of another enormous fibre roll out programme. A new chapter begins.

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# How Sharp gives Britannic

**Britannic CEO Jonathan Sharp's capacity for critical thinking and problem solving not only keeps the business moving forward it ensures he remains in control of challenges and makes the right strategic decisions. As incoming chief exec, this highly experienced comms professional already stands out as a dynamic leader with unstoppable momentum.**



Jonathan Sharp

**W**hen it comes to solving problems and challenges Sharp's systematic thinking process kicks in automatically and a positive outcome is the inevitable result. He is a goal setting dynamo that only sees solutions, not problems. Therefore it's safe to assume that nothing will stand in his way. "There have been many challenges along my career," said Sharp. "I have always focused on doing the right thing and acting with integrity, remaining positive, working hard and

solving problems – seeking the win-win. I learnt a long time ago that it's always possible to find a solution by stepping back, approaching the problem calmly and remaining positive. Then test and review. All problems are solvable – it's all about attitude and mindset. Think laterally and logically, break it down and have a go because there is no such thing as 'can't'."

Sharp joined Britannic 25 years ago as Marketing Manager, becoming Sales and Marketing Director in

**All problems are solvable – it's about attitude and mindset. Think laterally and logically, break it down and have a go because there is no such thing as 'can't'**

May 2003. He took the helm as CEO in March this year, succeeding company founder and Managing Director Richard Dendle who led Britannic for almost 40 years and is now Executive Chairman. "I have in-depth understanding of the business, market and customers," stated

Sharp. "I am dynamic and have a passion for developing the business, taking it forward to be the best version we can be.

"Today, business value is created by problem solving, integration and digital transformation through a deep understanding of

customers and a consultative approach. Our problem solving skills enable us to challenge the status quo, ask questions and not accept things at face value. Our desire is always to step into the unknown, take new things on and extend the capabilities of technology and business. The pace of

## Sharp's leadership priorities

- Helping to create and grow the right culture
- Innovation and change management
- Motivation and empowerment
- Collaboration
- Problem solving
- Entrepreneurship
- Partnerships



# ic the edge

innovation and change is not likely to slow down any time soon, which will drive some businesses out of the market, but Britannic with its innovative mindset will continue to be a force to be reckoned with."

Britannic is witnessing a positive return to growth post-pandemic, increasing sales order input by 35 per cent following a period of consolidation and change within the business. "We are developing a number of areas

## Resolving a challenging situation is always made easier by involving others, building shared goals with a desire to move forward

in our portfolio in-house and through strategic partnering," added Sharp. "The market is moving fast and we need to ensure we continue to move with it. Our formalised processes of new product onboarding are key to smooth out this journey."

One of Sharp's immediate priorities is to establish company-wide functional roadmaps that keep the business moving forward, propelled by a team with a shared vision that supports Britannic's values and cultural development. The company has also implemented a new CRM system as part of its ongoing review of processes and systems to deliver greater consistencies and efficiencies, enabling it to reinvest time gained in

driving more improvements in the customer and employee experience. "Our Innovation Hub has also seen some great new value releases with more planned as we strive to differentiate ourselves in the market, by adding value to our customers and supporting sustainable and managed growth," added Sharp.

### Deep experience

With nearly 30 years in the IT, telecoms, software and consultancy industry he is well qualified for the top job. "I have an intimate understanding of the business, team, customers and partner community," added Sharp. "I have worked across all aspects of the company from sales, marketing, project management, service management, systems and product development, and P&L responsibility. I have been instrumental in acquisitions, founded two businesses, delivered consultancy, run customer workshops, discovery and scoping sessions, set vision and direction and successfully executed change. I have a firm belief in the direction of travel and our commitment to the future."

Britannic's key technology partners include 8x8, Five9, Mitel, BT, Calabrio, Uniphore, Bizvu, Cisco and Juniper. It's a line up that Sharp says will ensure Britannic sees continued growth of the cloud, whether public, private, hybrid or multi-cloud. "New models of engagement and business opportunities will continue to emerge," added Sharp. "Our

biggest opportunity is the speed of change combined with new technologies.

"Dynamic AI technology is so disruptive that it is about to turn the world upside down, changing how we work, live, learn and play. We haven't had this transformation in tech since the Internet. This is one of the most exciting times to be in the industry, and we view challenges such as speed of change and a saturated market as opportunities that can be harnessed to grow our businesses."

At the top of this article we referred to Sharp as a 'goal setting dynamo', which along with his natural skill to replace challenges with opportunities may well become another of his defining characteristics. Especially having received a dynamic energy boost from a milestone birthday. "Last year I turned 50 and embarked on 50 challenges to raise money for Cancer Research UK," enthused Sharp. "This brought many great experiences and shared memories with family members and friends, including cycling to Paris and surfing with my daughter, walking the three peaks and swimming in the Lake District with my wife, making and racing a go-kart with my son and father, and so much more.

"I have carried on walking, visiting new places and seeking out fresh challenges. These shared experiences all underline the fact that resolving a challenging situation is always made easier by involving others, building joint goals supported by a strong desire to move forward together."

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Margin will also provide breakout 'technology booster' boardroom sessions and a platform for attendees to engage privately in 1-to-1 sessions on demand with leading vendors and service providers expert at helping their partners grow revenues. The day will culminate in a networking dinner and entertainment with the option of an overnight stay (subject to availability).

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**Dan Cunliffe**  
MD of Pangea

"Pangea are delighted to be a Gold Sponsor at Margin 2023! It's an exciting time for the industry; big changes are coming our way like the PSTN switch off, the

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



**Tom Hynes**  
Channel Sales  
Manager, Telxl

"TelXL is an award-winning SaaS provider powered by creative individuals, laser-focused on delivering stable, feature-rich

communication and contact centre solutions that are designed to make interactions feel exceptional. TelXL provides companies with innovative contact centre solutions that enhance customer experience. With over 20 years in the Telecoms industry, TelXL offers resellers voice, digital and omnichannel products that can scale to any business requirements. Their agile and affordable CCaaS platform, Cxp, is exclusively sold through the channel and provides businesses the ability to offer multiple communication channels such as voice, Messenger, Twitter and email, at ease and within one platform."



**Paul Taylor**  
Sales Director  
Voiceflex

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

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

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

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



**Kevin Boyle – MD – Cloudcell**

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



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

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



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

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



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

Gigabit Networks is a leading provider of ultrafast, ultra-reliable, and value-for-money fibre connectivity for businesses across East Midlands in UK. With a focus

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



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

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



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

Intermedia is a partner-first company that services over 500k UCaaS lines globally, which is our own product developed and back by our 99.999% uptime SLA.

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



**Nathan Mitchell – Business Manager – Mdee**

Mdee is a leading airtime and services distributor of BT and EE products. As specialists in small business through to corporate opportunities, we offer

an unparalleled service to partners across the UK. Speak to us about how we can help you build and process profitable deals for your customers, whilst importantly, retaining full control of your business. You sell, and we do the rest. We don't have punitive clauses or targets to restrict freedom of movement or force business direction.



**Dave Hawkins – Sales Director – Nasstar Channel**

Nasstar Channel look forward to sharing our feature-rich dedicated partner portal and the self-serve capabilities, making it easier for our partners to manage their account

and services, place orders and view their connections all in one place. We will be talking about the move to all IP voice, the PSTN switch off and the opportunities it creates. Come and see us at Margin 2023.



**Paul Sparks - New Business Manager - Nfon**

Nfon has an excellent reputation and track record of supporting partners and maintains a strong position in the

market as a leading provider of integrated business communications. We are looking to engage with new partners either entering the market for the first time, moving into the UCaaS and CCaaS space or simply wanting to explore alternative value propositions.

## Pragma

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



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

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



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

Candio – a digital transformation specialist purpose built to help partners accelerate their organic growth.

Our range of high impact white-labelled subscription services will help you increase your recurring revenue and enable your customers to be secure and found online.



**Laura Maddocks – Head of Channel - Promptvoice**

PromptVoice offers an innovative new AI powered portal that enables resellers to profitably sell and provision bespoke prompts, in-queue and on-hold audio recordings as an integral part of their UCaaS and CCaaS propositions. PromptVoice is proven to work with all platforms, and supports resellers to upsell a new service to every customer, from micro-SME to enterprise contact centre.



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

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



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

Founded in 1984 and headquartered in Canada, Sangoma is a financially stable and growing manufacturer for industry leading UC solutions; helping businesses simplify the way they communicate and collaborate. We own the intellectual property for our portfolio and manufacture

everything; this knowledge and expertise means we are uniquely positioned to offer a complete solution covering everything a business needs for its phone system; while ensuring optimal interoperability with our gateways, IP phones, SBCs. Our proposition is simple - we offer complete flexibility - the user experience is the same for cloud, on-premise, hybrid or virtual deployments; with perpetual licenses or renewal subscriptions.



**Robert Nunn – Business Owner – Viegli**

The global headset market is worth \$44billion and expected to grow at over 30% per annum. "You can struggle to make decent margins on headsets. Often, the end user will suggest they can buy the proposed product cheaper online than the reseller can buy at trade" says Robert Nunn, Viegli's MD. VT is a premium brand, only available to UK & Ireland resellers, with guaranteed 30 + margin and we're looking for new resellers – come and talk to us about how to add these to your portfolio



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

Voip Unlimited has been an industry leader in the Channel for nearly 20 years, delivering business-grade Unified Communication, VoIP services and network connectivity

solutions through our own Tier-1 network. Our company ethos and promise to our partners to create 'solid solutions built to succeed' is a part of every solution we produce. And we measure our success on the success of our partners. Our latest UCaaS platform, Voxone, is leading the way in ensuring business communications are faster, easier, and more advanced than ever before.



**Nino Besevic – Partner Sales – Wildix**

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



**Robert Foster – Sales Director – Zest4**

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

# Fresh perspectives on people and culture

Last month's Comms Dealer Insight Session hosted by Onecom Partners encouraged an open conversation about today's most pressing people-centric issues ranging from recruitment challenges and employee wellbeing to diversity and inclusion. A key theme to emerge from the debate was the need for a more holistic approach across the full spectrum of staff experiences under discussion.

**M**ost companies face a challenge when recruiting applicants with the right skills, and firms in the comms channel are perhaps feeling the pinch more than most. To help overcome the issue Best4Business Managing Director Freddie Hawker takes a joined-up approach to recruitment. "Attitude is key," he said. "Soft skills are becoming far more important than experience, especially if you are looking for a candidate to grow within the role."

Companies can also widen their candidate pool by changing the way job adverts are written. BT Wholesale Managing Director Gavin Jones noted: "By working first with expectations and opportunities associated with the opening, we craft an entirely new title that is more enticing and accurate."

More targeted recruitment also benefits from initiatives that promote diversity by removing unconscious biases. For example, job adverts may be coded in

language that could deter some people. Christopher Wellbelove, Senior Marketing Consultant at BT, stated: "If you are hosting interviews and everyone in the room looks and thinks like you it is important to stop and consider if your process has ingrained biases."

Parysa Hosseini-Sech, People and Culture Director, Onecom, noted that tools are available online that can help identify job adverts that are coded in gendered language. "The diversity gaps in this industry must be tackled from multiple angles, but firstly the talent pool," she said. "The ideal goal is to hire the right person but from a diverse pool of candidates."

These days people are looking for workplaces that align with their career aspirations and wider sense of purpose, which brings organisational culture to the forefront of considerations. Windsor Telecom CEO Pete Tomlinson pointed at the raft of companies that have adopted a Google-esque office layout, installed a pool table and are branding



Industry experts unravel the workforce challenges facing businesses

themselves as forward thinking. But this masks the need for a more people-centric mindset. "Culture isn't about beanbags in the breakroom," he said. "It is about meaningful work and meaningful relationships."

#### Building trust

Another method of conveying company culture to candidates is transparency. Being open from the first meeting shows job seekers that they can expect a relationship based on honesty

and collaboration. Carmel McConnell MBE, Director at the Phoenix Group, noted: "The only USP in a fast global market is trust. Only then will recruits get a real sense of the noble cause."

Identifying what you are truly famous for and giving the megaphone to those qualities helps candidates to engage more directly, believes Pam Blanchard, Managing Director, ICA. "Ask yourself honestly – why is my business worth working for? If you

can't answer yourself, how do you portray it to others. Don't sell candidates a dream you can't deliver or you will soon be out of pocket and starting the recruitment process from scratch."

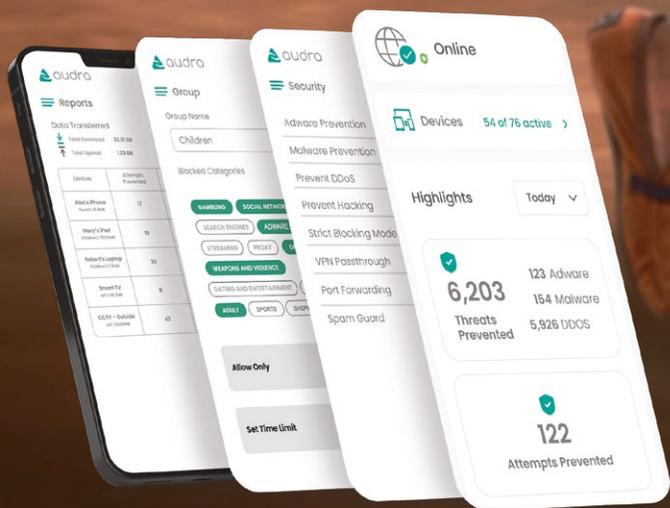
Alex Halsall, Chief Executive Officer at The Phoenix Group, also underscored the importance of reframing company purpose. He said: "The goal is a journey not a destination, and if people buy into that

**Continued on page 32**

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## The ideal goal is to hire the right person, but from a diverse pool of candidates

Parysa Hosseini-Sech, People and Culture Director, Onecom

**Continued from page 30**  
 journey they will join your company for the long run."

Most candidates don't dream about selling SIP or splicing fibre cables, so companies would be wise to emphasise the bigger picture. "We don't sell candidates on our services," added Halsall. "Our business functions to make people more productive and take some of the pain away from the working day. So let people know the good they are doing. This excites people more and sets you apart."

For some fast growth organisations, creating a purposeful culture may involve overcoming challenges linked to M&A activity. Northern Telecom Managing Director John Graves said: "You must decide what you want to inherit. If you completely change the mission for new staff they will no longer buy into the company. It's a balancing act to create a patchwork of cultures that coexist and collaborate."

Remote working adds another dimension to company culture, observed Andy Sadler, Director, Fluent Voice and Data. "Our office-based workers seemed to

think homeworkers were sitting idle all day," he said. "So we put homeworkers on video calls so they could be seen as part of the team."

When hiring candidates who don't have the full package of experience, training becomes crucial, and it may take on different forms. Hawker pointed to the traditional Introduction to Telecoms course hosted by Onecom Partners but added that a personal touch is also key. He said: "Sometimes in small businesses it is great to mentor new staff yourself. They can ask questions and it shows your passion for the industry."

A personal touch is also key for BT which of course provides training, but Bridget Woods, Head of Planning for Wholesale Commercial and Propositions, also highlighted the importance of self-learning in large organisations, and she identified curiosity as a key characteristic looked for in candidates.

"Hire people who are talented but are also self-learners," emphasised Woods. "We want people to be driven by their own learning and curiosity and

then ensure all staff are given tools to go away and learn."

For a workforce to be optimised it must be empowered to make decisions, and according to Ian Walker, Company Director at Fifteen Group, staff feedback is key to improving the customer experience through empowered customer-facing agents. "We ask teams for the same feedback as clients," he commented. "This way we learn from them, and they feel they have a voice in how we interact with customers."

Onecom Partners Managing Director Adam Cathcart has also implemented wellbeing initiatives using feedback gathered from the company's intuitive employee experience platform, Officevibe. "Feedback showed that many of our people were struggling with the morning rush and not having time to eat before arriving at the office, so we started putting on breakfast for staff," he commented. "The reaction was brilliant. We found our teams were coming into the office and having breakfast together, offering them a more positive start to the day, increasing morale and boosting collaboration." ■

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# Channel leaders take stock

This month we share insights from channel leaders who have been especially proactive in their responses to industry challenges and opportunities during H1 2023. Progress has been visible across many areas, from culture to contact centre development, providing a strong baseline for a continuation of strategic advances in H2.



MATT DYKES  
ABZORB

In H2 we will be formalising training and development for managers, improving how we communicate with each other. We have simplified our hosting proposition, making it more efficient for resellers to sell, manage and operate. We are encouraging people to meet face to face and have proper conversations, making communication clear and empathetic. The speed of change and introduction of disruptive tech is a challenge, but we see it as an opportunity. We have been working hard to maintain strong growth in the business after the pandemic, spending time reviewing our strategy for the next three years.



JAY BALL  
FLOTEK

Our investment in developing a learning platform so far this year has allowed our customers to self-educate and utilise our service offering fully. This is the first step towards bringing our customers on a journey to start using AI technology. Our growth strategy is underway with eight acquisitions completed and the ninth target identified for completion in H2. Integrating all eight businesses so we operate as one team with clearly defined goals comes with many challenges. Our focus for H2 is promoting the Flotek values internally and taking everyone through a transformation journey.



JOHN HAYES-WARREN  
AGILITAS

We recently finalised our three year roadmap which focuses on customer experience as our client base grows. We are continually investing in our sustainability initiatives to underpin our circular economy credentials and support our partners with a trusted supply chain. We plan to increase our investment into attracting and retaining talent, strengthening our system integration and bolstering digital access to our services. When moving forward with a new leadership team, challenges are to be expected. Our leadership team, however, has outlined a clear vision and roadmap, continuing our investment into the channel and focusing on partnerships that allow our customers to expand globally.



KEITH JACKSON  
8X8

In the last six months we have added conversational AI to our contact service offering with the launch of the 8x8 Intelligent Customer Assistant and evolved our channel partner programme, Elevate. Long term, our mission is to continue to deliver this customer-obsessed experience through tools and services that meet organisational needs. This way, we can demonstrate our heritage in the contact centre space. There will be challenges. In the current economic landscape we're seeing customer budgets tighten, which will continue throughout 2023. However, by working with partners and continuing to be at the cutting edge we are confident in the future.



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# ck of H1, look ahead to H2



RUSSELL HORTON  
FLUIDONE

Our IT-managed services and cybersecurity projects have driven our highest sales growth, particularly those involving Cyber SOC services over Microsoft Sentinel. Our focus is on achieving organic growth through cross-sales, high service, and acquiring businesses that complement our solutions, broadening our relationships with existing customers. Our goal is to increase our workforce to 1,200 by 2030. Challenges we'll face as we grow lie in maintaining a great culture, having a clear vision that our people can buy into, and designing and running a management operating model that puts the customer first. The transformation from SME to a mid-sized company is well underway with a structure that enables decision making close to the customer.



TONY MARTINO  
TOLLRING

We have made advances in strategic alignment across departments and systems to achieve our business goals. This will continue to be a priority alongside strengthening our partnerships and staying close to our customers for product evolution driven by demand. We are strengthening our core strategies across process, people, product and pricing to support our longer-term growth plans. Talented people are essential to this. In our industry change is normal. Technology moves fast and we not only need to keep up but rather be one step ahead. Slick internal communication is critical, talented people empowered by good management drive internal processes and knowledge, strong strategic direction provides stability and consistency across the brand creates customer satisfaction.



JAMIE HUGHES  
EVOLVE IP

Developing productive channel partnerships remains the cornerstone of our business. Our focus is on enhancing the customer experience and making it easier for resellers to do business with us and developed our Anywhere Portal to this end. Looking further ahead we are planning to launch a full contact centre solution as we are seeing a lot of demand in this sector, especially around displacing older technologies. Maintaining and recruiting high calibre staff is vital for any growing business. For us our leadership focus on simplifying how the business operates. This is all being built on service and support and a more advanced and wider solutions portfolio.



HARRY MCKEEVER  
TEKTON BILLING

At the heart of our internal strategy has been a focus on human capital. With the normality of hybrid working, maintaining a strong, positive and collaborative culture is crucial, and we have made changes to employee benefits and flexibility of working hours and location. There has also been a focus on embracing digital technologies and automation, evaluating all our internal systems, and ensuring we have scalable and sustainable technology to provide that foundation for continued growth. Our external strategy has emphasised the value of our product. During economic uncertainty, clarity of communication in the benefits we can provide is imperative.



RICHARD THOMPSON  
ANS

ANS' remit is to drive growth across SMB, enterprise, and public sector through our new channel partner routes to market. We are making cloud, security and digital solutions simple for our partners and their customers. We've put a marker in the sand that we want to grow this area significantly. We're investing in our systems and capability because being easy to do business with is critical. We're building on the integration of recently acquired Preact, focusing on our people, investing in talent and capability for scale. Our strategy is to keep things simple and focus on our strength areas.



STEVE HACKLEY  
SKY BUSINESS

A key objective of ours is around innovation. That means we need to increase our technology solutions' relevance across more channels and technology sets, bringing the right products and services to market for our partners. Culture matters in being able to deliver on our marketplace promises and we have worked to develop a set of operating principles built with extensive input from all levels across our employee base. By having these operating principles in place they help us to be crisp about how what we want to do and how we want to get it done.



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# Tollring's key hire



**Karen Winter**

TOLLRING has appointed Karen Winter as Head of Partnerships and Growth. She has 30 years experience in the software and telecoms sector including spells at Microsoft, SAP, Sage, Morgan Stanley, P&O Events, Reed Elsevier, plus SMEs as well as her own start-up businesses. Most recently she spent three years as Interim Sales and Marketing Director EMEA at Fonetic. Tollring CEO Tony Martino said: "Karen was initially brought in to analyse our performance and identify opportunities for growth. Having created the strategy we're now working with her to implement those plans and make it a reality." Winter added: "I was exposed to working on strategy early in my career, an experience that inspired me. I enjoy identifying areas of growth – it's about keeping things simple and finding the small things that make a big difference."

## Also on the move...

AKIXI has pulled in John Christian as VP for Marketing. He brings over 20 years experience in telecoms and IT and moved from Microsoft where he was a Principal Product Manager, bringing to market a portfolio of Microsoft Teams PSTN calling products. Prior to that he led the creation and execution of Metaswitch's product marketing strategy. Akixi's Chief Product and Marketing Officer Mike Wilkinson said: "John and his marketing team are key in driving frictionless and impactful GTM strategies, cementing the service provider relationship and its adoption of the Akixi portfolio."



**John Christian**

SOPHIA Haywood-Atkinson has rejoined TD Synnex UK&I as Business Unit Director, Services. Prior to leaving the company for a spell in 'vendor land' she was Head of Tech-as-a-Service B2C and trade-in services UK&I at the IT distribution company. James Reed, Director, Endpoint



**Sophia Haywood-Atkinson**

Solutions, UK&I, stated: "Services are an important element of every partner's business and there is significant potential for growth. We are making strong investments in developing our services capability and, with the experience she brings of working at both distributor and vendor level, Sophia brings a fresh perspective and insight to this key role." Haywood-Atkinson added: "I'm coming to an organisation that takes a positive approach to encouraging and elevating women."

IAN Rooker has moved to Enreach as Chief Financial Officer, taking over from Martijn van der Pas who assumed a new senior executive role at the firm. Rooker has previously served in CFO capacities with several European-based businesses, most recently The Learning Network. He also held CFO and board positions at multimedia groups WPG Uitgevers and FD Mediagroep, as well as the sustainable energy provider Greenchoice. Enreach CEO Stijn Nijhuis commented: "Ian's track record of driving growth and navigating dynamic market conditions aligns with our strategy."

DISTRIBUTOR Mayflex has appointed Stuart Miller as Director of Business Development for Excel in the UK. He joins from Comms Centre (part of the Alcadon), Networks Centre Group, where he was Sales Director. Prior roles include stints in infrastructure, security and the smart building sector working with Redstone Converged Solutions, Datacom Cabling and R&M.

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# CHANNEL CHAMPIONS

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The Channel Champions Awards are now closed for entries and the finalists have been announced. So whether you are a finalist looking to celebrate your teams' success or just want to share a fantastic afternoon of industry networking with the best teams in the channel, now is the time to book your place at the awards. We are expecting over 400 of the channel's great and the good to attend what

has become the not-to-be-missed event of the summer.

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Terry O'Brien, CEO, DWS

have made not only to their business, but to the wider Channel as well. I can't wait," he added.

Terry O'Brien, CEO of Channel Champions headline sponsor Digital Wholesale Solutions, commented: "We are delighted to play our part in paying tribute to the amazing professionals in our fantastic industry. Staging Channel Champions in the open air with a festival atmosphere makes this an event to remember. "Winning, or even being shortlisted for these Awards, will brings a huge uplift in morale as everyone feels valued and they can see how their hard work is paying off. Channel Champions will yet again be fantastic opportunity to recognise the contribution teams

### Newly signed up category sponsors Gamma had this to say about the awards...



Gamma is delighted to be supporting the Channel Champions Awards again this year. It's fantastic to come together to celebrate success in the channel and we're proud to be part of this wonderful community. Best of luck to all those entering the awards this year.

Andy Smethurst – Channel Sales Director, Gamma

To book your table or places visit <http://www.channel-champions.com> or contact **Heather Miles: [hmiles@bpl-business.com](mailto:hmiles@bpl-business.com)**

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