



Evans opens up on hSo's big expansion plans p26

Steve Soper: A man with the courage of his convictions p32



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Action on GDPR laws

Although new EU data laws come into force, the industry's reaction appears to be woeful.

er, Chairman of... commented: ... year away from ... up of European ... governance laws ... to say that many ... d public sector ... re ill-prepared. ... l economy req- ... bust legal frame- ... re confidence in ... of information, ... ns need to adapt ... standards now." ... respondents in a ... y published last

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This month's movers and shakers



Call to action on tough GDPR laws

WITH less than one year to go until tough new EU data laws come into force the level of preparedness among those affected appears to be woeful.

SPECIAL REPORT

When the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) comes into effect on May 25th next year all organisations that retain or process personal information will need to comply or face crippling fines.

But according to law firm Blake Morgan many organisations across the public and private sectors are far from having their house in order and could be fined up to £17m or 4% of worldwide turnover.

Bruce Potter, Chairman of Blake Morgan, commented: "We are just a year away from a major shake-up of European information governance laws and it's fair to say that many businesses and public sector organisations are ill-prepared.

"The digital economy requires a more robust legal framework to ensure confidence in the protection of information, and organisations need to adapt to these higher standards now."

Just half of respondents in a NetApp survey published last

month had 'some' understanding of GDPR. "We have a long way to go and only a year to do it," stated Dr. Dierk Schindler (pictured above), Head of EMEA and Global Legal at NetApp.

"C-suite staff and IT managers, however, are still uncertain when it comes to data compliance, which is concerning as it lies at the heart of GDPR.

"Their knowledge of compliance and ability to be responsible for the data they handle will directly affect their capacity to fend off future fines."

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EDITOR'S COMMENT



Stuart Gilroy

THOSE who wave flags get noticed, and I see a lot of flags every month. The most important is the red flag I see – which signifies to me all of the hidden, unfurled flags that remain wrapped up despite representing a rich heritage, interesting background stories and strong values. These are the rising

star companies that do not have recourse to PR specialists and marketing expertise – the professional flag wavers – or have limited in-house marketing resource. So this month we urge all channel companies with a story to tell, and that's most, to put a stake in the ground and get noticed.

Our industry is perhaps the most dynamic and diverse of all and this should be fully represented in this magazine which prioritises people and companies. Our door is wide open to new faces and great stories, be they strategic or personal (*email sgilroy@bpl-business.com*).

We are sometimes contacted by business leaders who have reached a stage where they want to tell their story, get noticed and be appreciated. Yet they are gobsmacked when they get a swift and positive response from Comms Dealer – so please feel free to raise your flag with us.

This month, for example, we profile Beta Distribution, described by its Managing Director Steve Soper as one of the industry's 'best kept secrets'. Not any more. No longer in the background, his march towards building a £500 million business is almost audible on page 32, where the Beta banner blows in the channel wind for all to see and acknowledge.

As is the norm, this issue is packed with business profiles and interviews with people who help to make this industry one of the most exciting and progressive sectors in the UK.

Stuart Gilroy, Editor

- In his strategic reactions to new market opportunities hSo MD Chris Evans is not short of a dead cert growth plan (p26).

Claranet bags trio of key acquisitions

CLARANET has pocketed a trio of acquisitions that extend its reach and capabilities across key European markets and boost revenues by 40%.

The IT services provider has also secured long-term financing and an acquisition facility of £80m.

The refinancing exercise also introduced new minority shareholders including Tikehau Capital which has come in alongside existing shareholders.

The three new acquisitions – Sec-1 in the UK, French IT firm Oxalide and Portugal-based ITEN Solutions – add security, DevOps, systems integration and IT services capabilities to the Claranet Group.

The expanded Group has annualised revenues of £310m, more than 1,800 employees and over 6,500 customers.



Charles Nasser

Charles Nasser, founder and CEO of the Claranet Group, commented: "Claranet's organic growth combined with acquisitions has enabled us to establish a significant operation in the managed IT services market at the European level.

"These acquisitions represent a big step forward for Claranet. The refinancing, and these latest acquisitions, means that we are better positioned to meet the

opportunities and challenges of a rapidly evolving technology services sector.

"We will see continued consolidation of the European managed services market over the next two years and we are on a strong footing in all major western European markets to take advantage of the opportunity."

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NTA's target busting hosted telephony resellers were rewarded with an all-expenses paid trip to Cyprus (May 16th-20th) where they enjoyed a selection of activities including golf, a boat trip and diving, along with evening treats such as a casino trip. NTA Sales Director Justin Blaine commented: "It's great to have so many partners who qualified. During the trip they have not only forged a stronger relationship with the NTA team, but also between themselves through sharing business ideas and stories about their different routes to success."

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COMMENT: MOBILE MATTERS



Richard Carter

WE ALL know that sinking feeling when our mobile phone has been lost, stolen or simply broken. It's a scary thought to be cut off from the world and the sheer personal panic indicates our reliance on what has become, for many, the most important device in our lives.

The arrival of 4G has further strengthened our dependence and enabled

us to take advantage of ever more sophisticated applications. 5G is around the corner too which will allow us to do even more – in theory at least.

Sadly, mobile connectivity still remains hit and miss depending on where you live and where you are travelling around the country. You would have thought by now that the billions of pounds worth of investment would have brought a consistent and level playing field. But no. If you live or are near Middlesbrough then according to the latest Which? survey you are ranked number one in the country for 4G availability. But London comes in at a poor 16th with Bournemouth and Poole just about scraping into the top 20. Connectivity is probably the most important aspect of any mobile device and as a frequent traveller I know all too well how performance can fluctuate.

Just over 10 years ago the iPhone was born and mobiles have revolutionised our home and working lives. They are now more powerful than some basic home computers. The mobile world moves on – but just make sure your security is up to date after the recent worldwide ransomware attack when global panic replaced personal panic.

Richard Carter, Director of Channel Sales, Nimans

- Ahead of the education sector's summertime ICT buying period we highlight the areas of opportunity for resellers and spotlight the technologies and integrated solutions under consideration by schools planning their summer break upgrades (p50).

MTI plans to boost headcount by 10%

PAN-European cloud service provider MTI is to boost its sales and technical team headcount by 10% across the UK, France and Germany.

The move follows the acquisition of MTI by PE firm Endless LLP in January 2017.

Based in Godalming, Surrey, £70m turnover MTI provides on-site and cloud-based storage, security solutions and IaaS.

The headcount increase also follows the appointment of Scott Haddow as MTI CEO two months after the acquisition.

Haddow has strong experience in the IT channel having held senior roles at New Horizons and Computacenter.

Haddow said: "Since the start of the year we have designed services for delivery through the G-Cloud 9 framework in the UK; and across Europe we are working towards a Microsoft Gold Azure partner accreditation after receiving Silver accreditation in May.

"This targeted headcount investment will allow us to bring the broadest range of secure data solutions to new and existing customers."

Haddow noted that some of the new positions will be for apprentices and graduates.



Scott Haddow

"This is an approach that has worked so well in the businesses that I have led, and others in the channel that I admire," commented Haddow.

"It is great to help build a skilled and loyal capability from the ground up and to supplement the experienced talent that we are now attracting."

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Circulation 01635 588 869

ISSN 1366-5243



Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations ABC total average circulation 16,020 (Jan-Dec 2016, 12,634 print, 3,386 digital)

bpl. | A BPL Business Publication

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

Subscriptions
Subscription rates for 12 issues:
UK, £65; Overseas: £80 (incl p&p)
Back issues can be obtained:
UK £6 (incl p&p), Overseas £10 each (incl p&p)
For subscriptions please call 01635 588 869

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Node4 seeks new partners

A NEW cloud-based UC offering based on the Cisco Hosted Collaboration Solution (HCS) platform has been rolled out by Node4 which is seeking additional partners to bring this solution to the mid-market.

“In the last year we’ve sensed real hunger within the mid-market for the kind of advanced, fully featured UC systems that, until recently, only the largest enterprises have been able to afford,” commented Simon Herbert, Cloud Solutions Development Specialist, Cisco.

“There’s an enormous opportunity here. It’s only right that more advanced functionality should start to migrate down the chain via a UaaS model.”

Andrew Wilson, Director of Channel Sales, Node4, commented: “Our focus is on new customer acquisitions in the mid-market and our channel partnerships form a critical part of this strategy.”



Andrew Wilson

“With the expansion of our UC proposition collaboration solutions are no longer a privilege for the large enterprise.”

A Node4 survey of 200 UK IT decision makers showed that cost was the number one complaint regarding UC in the mid-market. And many mid-market companies feel that their UC deployments are not reaching their full potential.

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Boudier leads in mid-mkt

STEPHANE Boudier is to head up Avaya’s European mid-market campaign following a year working with the vendor as Orange Global Account Director where he delivered 160% growth in the mid-market space in Q4 2016.

Boudier has notched up almost 30 years telecoms industry experience including two decades with service providers such as TDF, Orange and SFR.

He also brings wide international experience to his new position as EU Mid-Market Leader having formerly served as CEO of PSN in Poland, Executive CTO for Orange Jordan, as well as years of experience in both North American and Asian companies.

Fadi Moubarak, Vice President for Avaya Channel, EMEA & APAC, commented on the appointment: “Stephane has demonstrated both a clear understanding of the diverse needs of our partners and end customers as well as real enthusiasm for achieving growth and strong relationships.”

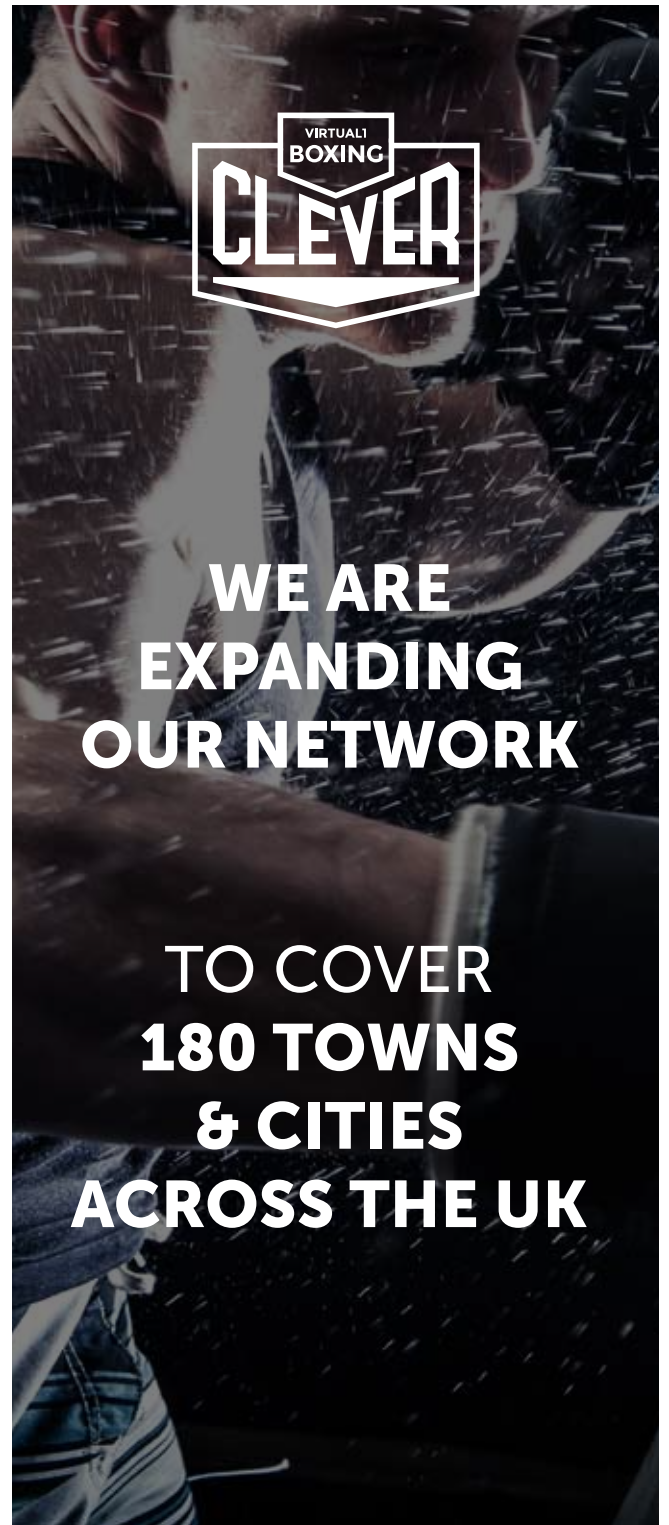
Actility snaps up Abeeway

LOW Power Wide Area Networking (LPWAN) firm Actility has pounced in geolocation system company Abeeway following a \$75m fundraising round.

“We’re seeing massive demand for location aware IoT solutions from industry,” stated Actility CEO Mike Mulica.

“We’ve been developing our ThingPark Location platform to deliver tools to service providers and our customers in the tracking ecosystem.

“As a long-time partner with Abeeway we saw great potential in adding its patented assisted technology and expertise in tracking to the capabilities of our ThingPark platform.”



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BUILDING on its programme of sailing-based corporate hospitality Koris has taken title sponsorship of the Royal Southampton Yacht Club’s annual Double Handed race series, a run of eight races divided into two sub-series (Solent and Passage) of four races each. “Among other things, we will be exposing our customers to the controlled mayhem of racing by taking them out to the start line on the committee boat,” commented Craig McCalley, Sales & Marketing Director at Koris. “This high adrenaline sport mirrors some of qualities we see in our clients – the ability to remain calm and make good decisions under significant pressure.” Pictured above: Paul James, Marketing Manager at Koris, who is taking part in the Solent Double Handed Series.

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NEWS ROUNDUP

hSo has secured a place on the latest iteration of the G-Cloud framework, G-Cloud 9.

Avner Peleg, Customer Development Director, said: "Our presence on the Government's Digital Marketplace proves once again that a SME such as hSo can deliver off-the-shelf cloud services to public sector organisations of all sizes, while still applying rigorous compliance processes and dedicated support."

hSo has provided G-Cloud related services since 2014 and has a strong presence in local and central government.

Prianto is to distribute F-Secure's UK corporate security business portfolio.

The agreement includes stand-alone software solutions and products that support managed services for partners via the F-Secure Cloud portal.

The deal will see distributor Prianto provide centrally managed security configuration, management and responses to over 700 partners in its network.

F-Secure will also make its new Cloud Protection for Salesforce product available to users through Prianto.

The security firm says the offering adds a layer of security to check files and links uploaded into Salesforce.

Security market in phase of disruption

ADVANCED analytics, expanded ecosystems, the adoption of SaaS and managed services plus the prospect of punitive regulations are set to drive a 'dramatic transformation' in the security software market, according to industry watcher Gartner.

"The security market is undergoing a period of disruption due to the rapid transition to cloud-based digital business and technology models," said Deborah Kish, Principal Research Analyst at Gartner.

"This disruption is changing how risk and security functions deliver value in an organisation. At the same time, the threat landscape and an increase in the number of high impact security incidents are also creating demand for security technologies and innovations that deliver greater effectiveness."

Gartner says enterprises are increasingly seeking products that incorporate 'smarter' predictive and prescriptive analytic technologies. These more advanced analytical capabilities are driven by a variety of underlying technologies, such as heuristics, AI and other techniques.

"Successful vendors will work with customers and prospects to understand use cases



Deborah Kish

where analytics will deliver significant value and augment limited security staff and resources," added Kish.

She also noted that the EU General Data Protection Regulation will come into effect on 25th May 2018 and could see organisations facing heavy fines should they receive a complaint for mishandling private data.

"Punitive regulations will create board level fears, driving security software budget decisions based on the potential

financial impact of fines and non-compliance," added Kish.

"Organisations will look to providers with products that offer visibility and control of their data. Providers should identify the key regulatory requirements in target geographies by working with legal counsel to deliver product and service choices that will alleviate board level fears."

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Leach sits as MD of NFON UK

NFON UK's head honcho Rami Houby has left the business to focus on a new venture, making way for incoming MD Myles Leach who worked alongside Houby for two years.

Leach joined the firm as UK Business Development Director and was promoted to Strategic Channel Development Director prior to Houby's exit.

He was previously MD of a successful telecoms reseller.

Hans Szymanski, CEO at NFON AG, commented: "Since Rami opened the NFON UK subsidiary in April 2013 the UK market has gone from strength to strength.

"NFON UK is set to have its best year ever in 2017. With Myles at the helm we are confident it will continue to go on to break even more records."



Hans Szymanski

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COMMENT: CHANNEL CONFLICT?



Justin Blaine

OVER the years I have dealt with many channel partners who tell me it's imperative that they own the customer, and that their customers are not aware of who is actually providing the product or service. Resellers are terrified of customers being pinched by their incumbent suppliers which could potentially sell at the price resellers buy at. Ownership of the end customer and

white labelling of the service is key, right? Or is it?

It never ceases to amaze me that the bigger the vendor in our marketplace the more it's a case of 'like it or lump it'. Some of the largest suppliers of products and services and manufacturers in the IT and telecoms space have a huge direct salesforce. Are you happy with this? It seems you are, as these players have a channel conflict policy in place to safeguard against them going against one of their partners directly.

According to this policy they will walk away or even support resellers if they come up against them in the field. However, there are many stories of this not happening with business being written directly, shunning resellers. Yes, the very resellers that helped those organisations become the forces they are today.

It's obvious to me that if you are playing in the channel space you need to have your ethics and morals right. Choose direct or indirect routes to market. You cannot do both without a conflict of interests. And for resellers, choose your suppliers wisely as they may also be your competitors.

Justin Blaine, Channel Sales Manager, NTA

• For a man with the unswerving courage of his own convictions, Steve Soper's plan to build Beta Distribution into a £500 million business within five years is entirely plausible (p32).

Top exec set for CityFibre

CITYFIBRE has strengthened its Board and growth ambitions with the appointment of industry big gun George Wareing as Sales Director.

He brings 18 years experience in the cable and mobile sectors including a 15 year stint at Virgin Media Business where he built a commercial team and is credited with transforming the mobile backhaul market through a £100 million national backhaul deal with MBNL.

He left Virgin Media Business to become UK Sales Director for Telecity Group in 2014 (now Equinix) where he led many record contract wins.

CityFibre Commercial Director Rob Hamlin said: "George is one of the most respected and highly sought after Sales Directors in the industry. His appointment marks a significant



George Wareing

milestone in CityFibre's ambitions to transform digital infrastructure in the UK."

Wareing said: "We have the ability to transform digital infrastructure, alter the status quo for the benefit of all and meet demand for better service and affordable gigabit connectivity. As Sales Director, I'm looking forward to playing a lasting and significant role in this journey."

Leicester firm Yello acquired

LA CONNECT'S acquisition of Leicester-based comms firm Yello Communications significantly extends its portfolio of telecoms products and services, including data and voice installation, network services and a maintenance service.

The deal is Windsor-based LA Connect's second acquisition and builds on its four year run of organic growth with turnover in excess of £24m expected in its next financial year.

Lee Waller, General Manager of LA Micro (part of LA Micro Group), commented: "LA Micro is expanding its service offering having recently become a Microsoft Partner. Combining the experience, strength and product range of the two businesses will broaden our offering and bring new opportunities for both companies."



A TEAM of 22 staff from Telford-based Entanet have completed the Tough Mudder Half Midlands challenge, raising funds for the stillbirth and neonatal death charity Sands. The Entanet team comprised a mix of men and women from various departments including two who completed the challenge dressed as Tyrannosaurus

Rex dinosaurs. Stephen Barclay, Sales Director, said: "The course lived up to its name. It was really tough and very muddy, but it was also a lot of fun. It must have been particularly difficult for our T-Rex duo who went above and beyond to support Sands."

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COMMENT: NETWORK INSIGHTS



James Hickman

LIVING through the transition from VHS tape to DVD, to Blu-ray and now Netflix, I do wonder about how quickly the technology becomes obsolete for what is essentially just watching a movie. I bring this up because we at Virtual1 are building out our national network, which requires much planning to deliver a sustainable infrastructure that can cope with future demands. But

how do we get it right? Building big is attractive as it allows for growth, but it requires a subtle balancing act of engineering perfection versus real-world economics.

For a start you have to build more capacity than you need right now. How much more ultimately depends on how good your sales team are. The stuff you buy from vendors needs to be keenly negotiated, both for the initial build and expected expansion. It makes no sense to get locked-in to a vendor by sleepwalking through a sweetheart deal and getting over excited by the feature list on their latest bleeding edge kit. They have no crystal ball seeing into the future any more than you do.

Right now, network vendors are looking to Software-Defined this and Virtualised that. The aim is to reduce the complexity from the customer perspective while simultaneously delivering operational flexibility at reduced costs. Even our SDN deployment has a way to go before it fulfils everything that some industry visionaries would say is possible. And that comes down to a lack of readiness from some suppliers, no credible standardisation among vendors and of course cost.

But, we are getting it right as our network has a lot of flexibility and we will expose this through portals and APIs over the coming months. It is much like getting the latest Star Wars on Blu-ray after only ever watching it on VHS. You know the story but the experience is so much better.

James Hickman, CTO, Virtual1

Wade knee deep in revenue stream rise

CLOUD and network provider Exponential-e's financial results for year ending January 31st 2017 were ahead of forecast with revenues up 26% to almost £97.5m driven by an increase in demand for cloud network computing and managed services.

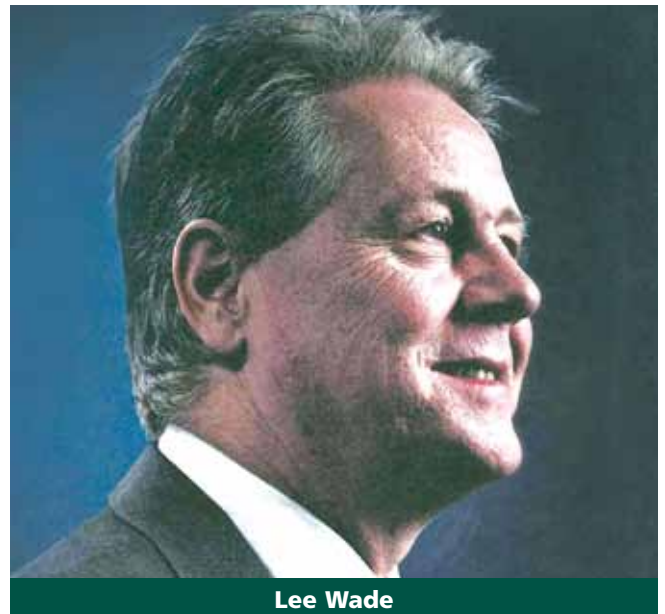
Exponential-e's EBITDA was reported to be over £20m, up 45% with profit before tax up 48% to just over £9.9m.

CEO Lee Wade said: "The last year has been incredibly successful for the business, delivering record revenues. Customer acquisition has continued to rise fuelled by strong demand for our cloud-based offerings.

"Our model is built to deliver innovative, 'non-stop compute' solutions that use best-of-breed technologies. These have proved popular with our customers over the last 12 months and have contributed to this revenue growth."

The last 12 months have seen Exponential-e develop a range of new products and services.

In July the company launched a SD-WAN proposition that allows companies to centrally assign and manage application policies across multiple sites and scale bandwidth up or down as required.



Lee Wade

A 10 Gigabit Internet service was made available in February, which is over 400 times faster than the Government's minimum definition of superfast broadband, available to businesses throughout the UK.

Exponential-e also expanded its operations outside of the London area, moving its Manchester office to a new, bigger location and growing its headcount there to 20 people.

Earlier in April, Afshin Attari was appointed Director of Public Sector tasked with growing the company's pres-

ence in the Government computing space.

"Despite market uncertainty we expect the next 12 months to be positive," added Wade.

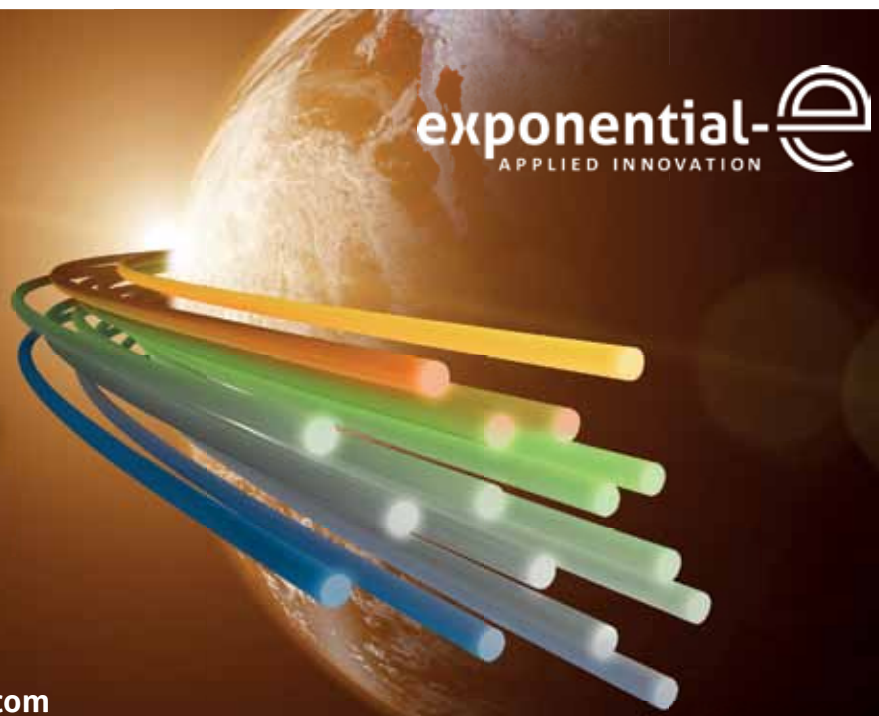
"Our determination to innovate and create products ahead of the market will endure and hold us in good stead. As further commitment to this part of our business we have earmarked £2m to be used solely for research and development."

See page 28

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COMMENT: SKILLS MEANS SALES



Charles Aylwin

WHEN it comes to selling cloud-based unified communications and voice solutions, resellers need a set of different but complementary skills to be able to deliver these services effectively. Resellers know that if they fall behind in acquiring the skills needed to broaden their footprint in the unified comms space they risk creating leeway for competitors

to move in to their customer base. But the opportunity in the unified comms space is enormous if resellers can get this right. It's already a \$50 billion market and is set to continue to grow 65 per cent by 2018.

Technical skills are key for the channel to understand the products they are selling. But it's also important to know how to evaluate a customer's business environment to position products in the right way. For example, being able to explain the benefits of a Unified Communications system as compared to a legacy on-premise solution.

Partnering with the right vendor will be a huge support to develop these skills. We run an Academy at 8x8 giving partners the skills needed to understand our portfolio and sell effectively. Our partners value the competitive edge the training gives them in the market.

A good vendor should also support resellers in the field, offering pre-sales support, dedicated field sales, as well as running regular workshops that help them to develop new skills, such as our 8x8 Marketing Masterclasses.

Turning technical skills into sales know-how is key, and demonstrating how technology will have a genuine business benefit is a crucial differentiator when selling to businesses. The most competitive resellers will be able to offer the right solution and add value. If they don't, someone else will knock on their customer's door and do it for them.

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

Cloud giants eye channel

CLOUD giants such as AWS, Microsoft, Google and IBM have swung their gaze onto the channel as a means to sustain and drive their stellar growth rates; and their interest in the enterprise and mid-market space where competition is fierce will see them prioritise indirect partnerships to extend their reach, claims Canalys.

In Q1 2017 AWS maintained its dominance, holding a stable global market share of 31% on 43% revenue growth. Microsoft grew revenues by 93% and Google was up 74% compared to the same quarter a year ago, while IBM witnessed 38% revenue growth.

The overall worldwide cloud infrastructure services market was up 42% year-on-year in Q1 2017 to reach \$11.4bn, according to Canalys.

"Competition for enterprise customers is intensifying among leading cloud service providers which are investing heavily to secure key national and global accounts," said Canalys Research Analyst Daniel Liu.

"Timing is crucial, as many large accounts are assessing, formulating and executing strategies to move existing workloads and infrastructure to the

cloud and develop new types of workloads as part of digital transformation initiatives."

Cloud players are looking to the channel to expand their reach, especially when it comes to mid-market opportunities, says Canalys Senior Analyst Jordan De Leon. "The channel has become integral to winning in the enterprise, with top cloud players focusing on channel expansion plans," he said.

AWS has a growing and established channel programme which the company says is helping to win key global clients. And Google has revamped its partner programme to reflect the technology and feature needs of large enterprise customers.

"Go-to-market strategies, including both customer and channel partner engagement, will ultimately determine vendor success in this segment," commented De Leon.

"Larger enterprises will adopt a multi-cloud strategy to distribute risk.

"Ultimately, to challenge AWS, vendors will need deep financial resources to continue to participate and advance."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

The third phase of SSE Enterprise Telecoms's network expansion has kicked off with plans to unbundle an additional 40 BT exchanges in 'prime' business areas around the UK. The company will offer Ethernet services and also deploy dark fibre services on the successful completion of Openreach's Dark Fibre Access trial.

This expansion, dubbed Project Edge, will bring the total number of exchanges served by a national fibre optic network to 140.

Colin Sempill, MD of SSE Enterprise Telecoms, stated: "To function in today's economy businesses need reliable, high capacity connectivity in all corners of the UK."

Pan-European cloud managed services firm Claranet has secured an £80m investment from French asset management firm Tikehau Capital in return for a minority stake in the business.

The investment follows the company's move in February to set up Claranet Italy in response to demand for managed public cloud solutions in the Italian market.

The new entity based in Milan focuses solely on public cloud services working with partners such as Amazon, Google and Microsoft.

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

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

Mills unveils new service



Julie Mills

TRAINING firm Train to Win.tv has introduced a new managed service – Support to Win.tv – which provides outsourced support for hosted telephony customers, covering all non-commercial requirements such as moves, adds, changes and the provisioning of services.

Julie Mills, founder of Train to Win.tv, commented: “We have responded to repeated requests by channel partners and end users to extend our range of end user training services.

“We’ve set up a dedicated support centre and employed experts on an array of hosted telephony platforms.

“Support to Win.tv is based on a white label ticketing system and telephone answering service that can dovetail into a partner’s own support process.”

The firm has also introduced services that overcome some of the hurdles it has encountered in day-to-day operations. “A great example of this is the new guided install service,” added Mills. “During the last 12 months the market has seen a significant increase in hosted sales to businesses of less than 10 users.

“These organisations simply do not warrant an on-site visit but they still need handholding through the initial set-up and installation. By offering a virtual installation via webinars and over the telephone we can ensure that customers get the same level of service you would get from an onsite deployment but at a much lower cost.”

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High number of IoT failures

IOT DEPLOYMENT success rates are woefully short of the mark according to a study by Cisco which suggests that 60% of IoT initiatives stall at the Proof of Concept stage and only 26% of companies have had an IoT initiative that they considered a complete success. A third of all completed projects were not considered a success.

“It’s not for the lack of trying,” said Rowan Trollope, Senior Vice President and General Manager, IoT and Applications, Cisco. “But there are plenty of things we can do to get more projects out of pilot and to complete success.”

Inbar Lasser-Raab, VP of Cisco Enterprise Solutions Marketing, added: “We are seeing IoT innovations almost every day. We are connecting things that we never thought would be connected, creating new value to industries.

“But the biggest opportunity is where we partner with other vendors and create solutions that are not only connected but also share data.

“That shared data is the basis of a network of industries – sharing of insights to make tremendous gains for business and society, because no one company can solve this alone.”



DAISY Wholesale’s move to new offices reflects its ‘most successful year ever’, according to MD Terry O’Brien. “It’s exciting times at Daisy Wholesale,” he stated. “The support of our partners has helped us grow and we needed more space to serve them better.” The new HQ on Hampshire Corporate Park in Chandler’s Ford, Eastleigh, currently houses over 120 staff under one roof (with room to grow) and a new demo suite.

Exclusive appoints cloud ace

EXCLUSIVE Group’s Cloud First strategy has a new man at the helm, Patrick van Arendonk, who brings almost 30 years experience and joins from Exclusive Networks Netherlands where he held positions including General Manager and Director of Business Development.

Prior to this he was founder of VADition Benelux (acquired by Exclusive Group in 2011) and has also worked in senior sales roles at Juniper, F5 and Cisco, among others.

“It’s time for some blue sky thinking now that the cloud consumption model is beginning to become more relevant,” said Barrie Desmond, COO of Exclusive Group.

“The Cloud First initiative helps us, our vendors and reseller partners understand their relevance in this journey and put cloud at the forefront of their proposals and mindset.”

Arendonk, Director of Cloud First, added: “The traditional markets for cybersecurity and infrastructure are still growing, but the private, public and hybrid cloud alternatives are growing 10 times faster.

“The opportunities for partners are huge, but only if they take steps to evolve.”

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COMMENT: STRATEGIC TALK



Alex Tempest

BUSINESS demand for high speed data is growing rapidly. Ovum predicts that in the next three years alone demand for 1Gb+ speeds will increase by 50 per cent, forming around 60 per cent of all connections. This is supported by insight into our own customers' bandwidth demands. Last month we saw data across our network grow to hit a new peak of 2.7Tb, in stark contrast with just 0.9Tb in 2009. We expect this to double again within the next

12 months. Last year we saw data revenues increase 30.8 per cent over the year, with over 8,000 new high speed Ethernet and EFM (Ethernet for the first mile) data lines connected. In future, as businesses find new ways to use the bandwidth available, this trend is only set to continue.

According to combined research from leading industry analyst houses, the growth in Ethernet is being driven by increased use of, and reliance on, cloud services, as well as unified communications tools and high definition video. However, organisations still expect the same on-premise experience from in-cloud services and won't accept applications performing poorly because of insufficient bandwidth. These services are totally dependent on a first class network to function and there is too much at risk for this to fail. Partners already offer businesses a robust Ethernet connection alongside new tools for end-to-end solutions, but high bandwidth services also need to be cost-effective.

The UK's infrastructure needs to improve further or the channel risks stunting the potential of future innovations and opportunities before they have even arrived to market. The needs of the business world are evolving and so the connectivity offered by the channel needs to evolve with them.

Alex Tempest, Director of Partners, TalkTalk Business

Excell picks Apple hotshot MacSeven

EXCELL Group's acquisition of IT and Apple support firm MacSeven Consultants adds £2m-plus turnover to the bottom line and follows last year's City Audio Visual Services buy.

Excel said this latest acquisition is particularly relevant to the 6,000-plus customers in Excell-enabled business centres where Apple Mac OS and other devices are in high use.

MacSeven's team of seven, headed up by Directors Michael Humphreys and Naveen Nahar, will operate autonomously post-acquisition and continue to be the point of contact for existing customer support.

Excell's Finance Director Edward Pettit said: "There are multiple benefits here: Excell's customers now have access to specialist Mac services and support, and MacSeven's customers can now take advantage of a range of telephony, network, comms and business resilience services. It's diversified our product suite further."

Naveen Nahar, co-Director of MacSeven, added: "With a 25 year pedigree and consistent growth, Excell will allow us to continue refining our expertise and resource, while significantly growing our offering."



Edward Pettit

Excell marks its 25th anniversary this year and has ramped up its acquisition strategy. Its

deals are structured to give Excell a controlling interest but still leave sellers with a stake.

IT buying influenced by cross-dept execs

A NEW report by CompTIA has re-confirmed the influence of cross-company execs in the ICT buying process.

"CIOs and IT teams remain involved in the process," commented Carolyn April, Senior Director, CompTIA.

"But business lines are clearly flexing their muscles. It's another strong signal that technology has shifted from a supporting function for business to a strategic asset.

"However, lines of business have little knowledge or inter-

action with the channel. So it's incumbent on the channel to get their faces in front of line of business leaders.

"The channel needs to speak the language of business because this new generation of buyers does not want to hear about the technical implications of their purchases.

"Channel partners need to position themselves as consultants and service providers who can help customers make informed decisions about what they buy."

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NEWS ROUNDUP

ScanSource Imago has extended its 'huddle room' solutions portfolio following a distribution deal with Vaddio, the maker of pan-tilt-zoom camera, AV and VC kit.

Resellers gain access to Vaddio's PTZ cameras for conferencing, lecture capture and general AV, along with enterprise video collaboration and bridging systems.

"Vaddio's solutions present new opportunities for our reseller partners," said Phil Boyd, VP of Merchandising, ScanSource Imago. "There is particular interest in huddle space technology."

The latest iteration of Entanet's Ethernet Quoting Tool offers additional bandwidth options from a select group of carriers.

As well as existing options of up to 100Mbps, resellers can get immediate quotes for 200Mbps, 300Mbps, 400Mbps and 500Mbps leased lines on 1Gbps bearers. They can add multiple options to each quote.

Sales Manager Paul North commented: "We've seen a rise in requests for 200Mbps, 300Mbps or more on 1Gbps bearers. We could provide these before but they weren't on the quoting tool which we have always wanted to keep as simple as possible."

Welsh dealer ties up MBO

Cisco swoops on MindMeld



Kelly Bolderson

CARDIFF-based Glamorgan Telecom has completed a full management buyout with support from Finance Wales which takes a 15% equity stake in the group following the deal.

MD and majority shareholder Kelly Bolderson and members of the senior management team have bought out founding director Neal Pughe's stake to bring the company under the control of the current board.

The move enables Glamorgan to refinance its existing debt, advance growth plans across south Wales and the south west and target revenues of £5m-plus before 2019 having expanded its sales team by 40%.

Bolderson stated: "This is the beginning of a new and exciting journey for the business. With a full buyout in place the management team now has control to guide Glamorgan Telecom into an exciting new chapter, and with the investment we can continue with our expansion plans."

This is the latest investment from the Wales Management Succession Fund, a Welsh Government-backed £25m fund supporting business succession for growing Welsh companies.

Glamorgan Telecom was established in 1993 and has more than 1,800 customers and currently employs 32 staff.

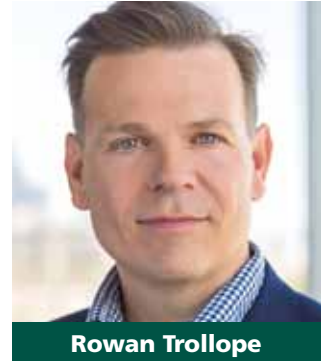
CISCO'S acquisition of San Francisco-based AI company MindMeld will 'power new conversational interfaces for Cisco's collaboration suite', said the firm.

MindMeld has developed an AI platform that enables customers to build intelligent and human-like conversational interfaces for any application or device, and Cisco believes that AI and machine learning will play a vital role across all parts of its business.

"Through its proprietary machine learning (ML) technology, MindMeld delivers accuracy to help users interact with voice and chat assistants in a more natural way," said Rowan Trollope, SVP, Cisco IoT and Applications Group.

"Cisco is unlocking capabilities through AI that were unthinkable in the past. For example, empowering our customers to self-manage their network and data centre, stay ahead of security attacks, embed intelligence at the edge, deliver predictive analytics and revolutionise the workplace."

AI and ML technology is already evident across Cisco's portfolio in products such as Stealthwatch, Cisco Spark



Rowan Trollope

Board and Cisco Spark Room Kit, along with features like SpeakerTrack and VoiceTrack in the video portfolio.

"This acquisition will power new conversational interfaces for Cisco's collaboration products, revolutionising how users will interact with our technology, increasing ease of use and enabling new cognitive capabilities," added Trollope.

"For example, users will be able to interact with Cisco Spark via natural language commands, providing an experience that is highly customised to the user and their work. Together, Cisco and MindMeld can bring voice AI to meeting rooms throughout the world.

"The workplace of the future is one powered by AI, and this is a significant step toward making that workplace a reality."

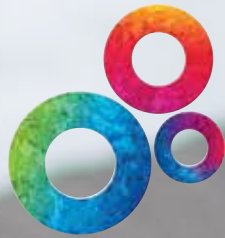


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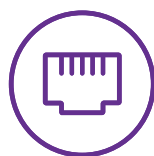
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NEWS ROUNDUP

Node4 has been awarded a place on G-Cloud 9, the Government's cloud services procurement framework.

"A number of public sector organisations are increasing their use of cloud services," stated Paula Johnston, Head of Public Sector. "They now have better access to Node4's solutions to run mission critical systems and services."

Gold Business Partner status has been awarded to Daisy Group by Lenovo, its highest tier. Daisy's Lenovo revenue stream achieved over 170% year-on-year growth.

Andrew Pring, Daisy's Vendor Alliances & Supply Chain Services Director, said: "Lenovo underpins our desk-top lifecycle services to some of Daisy's longest serving and most prestigious customers."

8x8 CEO Vik Verma has given incoming CMO Rani Hublou a rousing reception.

"Rani is a proven innovator, competitor and winner and her accomplishments at Comprehend, PSS Systems, BEA Systems, Broadvision and Icarian speak for themselves," he commented. "She has marketing and consulting expertise and a successful track record using an analytics approach to help companies expand into new markets."

New force in networking



David Walsh

THE merger of Sonus Networks and Genband creates a new force in next generation comms networking with greater scale and market reach across products, customers and regions.

The joint entity has an enterprise value of approximately \$745m with Sonus and Genband shareholders each owning circa 50% of the combined company.

The transaction brings together Sonus' expertise in real-time communication virtualisation, cloud-based SIP and 4G/voice over LTE solutions and security initiatives, with Genband's UC, mobility and embedded communications solutions.

The combined company is expected to realise annual cost synergies between \$40m-\$50m

by the end of 2018 and to generate at least \$100m in annual EBITDA, with fiscal year 2020 EBITDA projected to be approximately \$140m.

Raymond Dolan, President and CEO of Sonus, said: "This is a strategically and financially compelling transaction for Sonus. With Genband we will achieve our growth initiatives faster and more fully than either company could do on its own."

Genband CEO and Chairman David Walsh added: "Like Sonus, Genband has transitioned its business to support and accelerate the modernisation and transformation of networks, and we have seen improving profitability over the last couple of years and into 2017."

TalkTalk adds MiCollab app

TALKTALK Business has added a multi-platform mobile app to its Hosted Voice product in preparation for a near tipping point in workplace mobility.

The company cited a report by The Work Foundation which says that within three years 70% of people will work away from the office just as much as they work at their desk.

In preparation for this future working environment TalkTalk Business has introduced MiCollab, a UC application based on Mitel technology that enables users to access the same functionality from a PC, laptop, desk phone or smartphone.

An optional Skype for Business plugin means that TalkTalk Business partners can more easily provide enterprise-class voice within the Skype for Business platform.

Workers can download the app directly from the Android, iOS, BlackBerry and Windows application stores.

Guy Miller, Director of Trading at TalkTalk Business, commented: "Businesses have long been looking for ways to improve their productivity while also providing much more flexibility for their increasingly mobile workforce."



Guy Miller

"More and more firms are finding that for their employees work is an activity rather than a place to be. They expect to be able to work from any location with the same level of access and connectivity as if they were in the office."

"With the introduction of the Unified Communications feature set to our Hosted Voice platform, TalkTalk Business is allowing partners to cater for evolving working practices while also providing telephony which is secure and reliable."

TalkTalk Business is a Mitel Platinum partner.

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Intercity set for UC move



Andrew Jackson

INTERCITY Technology is set for the channel launch later this year of Touch Technology, a global UC solution backed by a £10m R&D investment.

Touch Technology was developed in-house and is protected by a global patent, offering integrated voice calls, video conferencing, mobility, screen sharing and collaborative tools.

Touch Technology has an open API and integrates with other business systems including Sales Cloud from Salesforce and Microsoft Dynamics.

It is also available as a mobile first solution.

Andrew Jackson, CEO at Intercity Technology, said: "We have created a disruptive solution that can completely transform the way businesses work. Boosting productivity is key

to business success and Touch Technology is an exciting innovation that empowers organisations to facilitate communication and collaborative working across the business."

Lee Hull, Executive Director at Intercity, added: "Thanks to its global coverage and scalability, Touch Technology enables us to support more businesses across the world, helping them to work smarter and get the most out of their team.

"We've worked hard to create a flexible and scalable communications solution that can be quickly deployed. We're looking forward to launching this into the channel later this year." See page 36

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PCM extends to UK

US-BASED and publicly traded value added reseller PCM has outlined plans to expand into the UK and the European market, and will use its wholly owned subsidiary, PCM Technology Solutions UK, as a ready made springboard. The firm expects to fill around 90 positions by the end of the year.

In February PCM UK hired Donovan Hutchinson as MD. He joined from Global IT where he was responsible for executing collaboration programmes and extending service offerings

from North America-based clients into the UK, Europe and Asia Pacific markets.

"Our expansion into the UK marks a major milestone for PCM," stated Chairman and CEO Frank Khulusi. "PCM UK will be our hub for the UK and the rest of Europe."

According to the company, which saw its 2016 revenues hit \$2.25bn and has nearly 4,000 employees, the move to the European marketplace represents 'the next major step' after expansion into Canada in 2015.

Frontier in TeleWare affiliation

FRONTIER Voice and Data has added cloud call recording solutions to its portfolio following a link-up with TeleWare.

The partnership will focus on mobile, fixed line and Skype for Business call recording particularly in the financial sector where companies must become compliant with the upcoming MiFID II regulations.

TeleWare's COO Nick Reaks commented: "MiFID II is demanding greatly increased call recording and storage from companies. For smaller businesses such as hedge funds, implementing a total transformation of telephony systems to achieve full compliance is a costly and difficult process.

"Furthermore, operating that system can be a full-time job which takes away from their main task of delivering performance. By providing systems that are easy to implement and sit on top of existing solutions we are able to help these smaller operations remain profitable and improve their communications solutions."

Nolan Braterman, Business Development Director, Frontier Voice and Data, added: "The analytics that we offer will also mean that companies can gather more data and apply it to inform their growth strategies."



Nick Reaks

Energy diversion pays off for BAU

ADDING energy to your portfolio of customer services is an 'attractive business diversion' according to Josh Hanning, Managing Director of central London based BAU Systems. "Success is governed by simple parameters and diversions can create growth, increase customer acquisition or generate brand awareness which are all worthy reasons to explore new ideas," said Hanning, who has now successfully partnered with Fidelity Energy.

BAU (Business as Usual) provides IT and Energy Consultancy services to businesses across the UK, offering clients access to leading products and partners across six core service pillars, namely Network & Connectivity, Hosted & Virtualised IT, Security, Unified Communications, Professional Services & Engineering and Energy.

"Technology and energy markets are fast moving and complex with many suppliers offering comparative solutions. Our clients trust us to provide unbiased expertise and guidance to help solve their specific business challenge," continued Hanning.

"We make the Procurement of IT and Energy services simple and seamless by offering market insight, choice, competitive commercials and dedicated resource to design, implement and support. All managed and billed by one entity."

Hanning decided to explore the energy opportunity after hearing good reports about the work Fidelity were doing with IT and

telecoms companies in London and further afield.

"The Fidelity model complemented our objective to offer cost savings whilst making procurement of core business services easier to manage. Time is a critical factor for most business people, you can only truly claim it back when you can delegate with peace of mind. This is a sentiment that BAU shares with Fidelity.

"Since partnering with Fidelity we have helped clients save anything between 15-40% per annum which gives us great pleasure. Sales of any description isn't easy and energy isn't the anomaly to the rule. There are some preconceptions to overcome. Customers can be surprised by how energy procurement differs from other services such as IT for example. Timing is a big factor and the market fluctuates daily.

"Fidelity have a great team of knowledgeable and helpful people who are consistently looking for ways to improve the partner and end customer experience. The portal that they have built is unique in the market and provides a single pane of glass for pricing and signing energy contracts. In addition, their supplier selection is a vetted process which mirrors BAU's model.

"Supplier vetting is an important factor in the current economic climate and should provide partners and customers with peace of mind that they will be dealing with viable long term suppliers."



“The Fidelity Energy model complemented our objective to offer cost savings whilst making procurement of core business services easier to manage.”

JOSH HANNING,
Managing Director,
BAU Systems



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Gigaclear in funding deal

GIGACLEAR has secured £111m in additional equity funding to build new fibre networks in rural areas.

Existing shareholders Infra-capital and Woodford have committed to investing £60m and £15m respectively with other shareholders contributing a further £1m.

RPMI Railpen, the investment manager for the Railways Pension Scheme, a new institutional investor, invested £35m in the company.

"In recent months we have won significant tenders to deliver our broadband net-



Matthew Hare

work to hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses across Devon, Somerset, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Northamptonshire through the Government-backed BDUK programme," stated Matthew Hare, CEO, Gigaclear.

"The new investment will fund the first stage of these new networks along with other commercial network build projects.

"This round of investment will enable Gigaclear to step up our speed of network delivery and is a clear signal of the confidence investors have in our continued expansion and success.

"Millions of rural homes and businesses need better broadband and we want to reach as many of those in rural areas as quickly as possible."

Greg Mesch, CEO of fellow pure fibre player CityFibre, said: "This is not only welcome news for the rural communities stranded on unsuitable copper infrastructure, it also serves to highlight the crucial role and growing momentum of competitive full fibre players and the rapidly increasing market support for full fibre investment."

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BT swings axe as job cuts loom



Gavin Patterson

BT PLANS to shed 4,000 jobs globally within two years, mainly across back office and managerial positions in its Global Services division.

The cuts come after an accounting scandal within the Italian operation of BT's Global Services arm that is said to have cost the company over £500m.

BT's CEO Gavin Patterson and outgoing Group Finance Director Tony Chanmugam have been stripped of a bonus for the 2016/17 financial year.

BT also announced that Bas Burger is to become CEO of Global Services. He has been at BT for nine years in a variety of roles, most recently President of BT in the Americas.

The news came with the release of BT's annual results to March 31st which disclosed that BT's annual pre-tax profits dropped 19% to £2.35bn.

Data boosts TTB revenue

TALKTALK Business has again proved itself to be a key contributor to the Group's performance having generated a 30.8% increase in data revenue, according to figures in its preliminary financial results for the 12 months to 31st March 2017.

Revenue growth speeded up in H2 to +6.1%, up from +2.3% in H1. The number of new Ethernet and EFM lines increased by 8,000 during the period and overall revenues grew by over 4% year-on-year.

TalkTalk Business plans to double its size based on demand for high bandwidth data products and next generation voice services ahead of the 2025 ISDN switch-off.



Kristine Olson-Chapman

The company also expects to capitalise on the opening up of the Ethernet market through new access to Dark Fibre later this year.

Legacy voice revenues declined 17.9% but there was a strong take-up of TalkTalk Business's next generation IP voice product with revenue growth during the year of 20%.

The launch of IP Voice products followed the acquisition of TIPicall in April 2015.

TalkTalk Business says 116 Partners have signed up to sell this new service and the total base of SIP channels on the platform, including the acquired base, increased by 7,340 channels (up 65%) during the year.

"The acquisition has continued our diversification into next generation telephony services," said Kristine Olson-Chapman, MD at TalkTalk Business. "Our hosted telephony platform saw the user base grow by 43%.

"Even more encouraging is the ongoing increase in demand for next generation voice and data services."

Altos extends global reach

THE extent of MyPhones.com's worldwide influence has been revealed after analysis of SIP trunks in use with its Altos hosted telephony platform.

"We originally designed Altos for the UK reseller channel," said Dr Stuart Marsden, founder of MyPhones.com.

"It came as a surprise to see just how far our end user base had spread.

"As expected, the vast majority of our end users are located in the UK, but they are also spread across Europe, North



Dr Stuart Marsden

America and Asia, and as far as South Africa, Australia and New Zealand."

International end user subscriptions now account for

almost 5% of MyPhones.com's total subscriptions, pointed out Dr Marsden.

The firm currently has end users in more than 60 countries covering most of mainland Europe and Russia.

"Altos doesn't mind whose SIP trunks are used to carry the calls," added Dr Marsden.

"Some of our resellers are looking overseas either for better SIP trunk rates or to deliver a service to customers based outside the UK. And we are very happy to support them."



A QUARTET of Directors from South West Communications Group are set to tackle the Three Peaks Challenge this month to raise money for the Prince's Trust. MD Brian Lodge and board members Jon Whitley, John Holdstock and Sean Doyle aim to scale Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon in less than 24 hours on June 20th.

Lodge said: "We are of varying ages, sizes and abilities, so this really does represent a challenge. More than that though, we want to raise as much money as we can for the Prince's Trust, for which we became a patron last year. They carry out some fantastic work across the south west and we want to support the young people they help every day."

CEO and Chairman Tony Rowe OBE is to chauffeur the group between each peak. "Tony has a big part to play in achieving our 24-hour target time," said Lodge. "He will drive overnight to deliver us at the foot of each mountain in a safe and timely manner. He will also oversee nutrition on the move and the all-important motivational talks, not to mention sharing a pint or two with us at the end!"



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NEWS ROUNDUP

Ahead of the latest release of its partner and customer portals fast expanding plan. com has added 15 more sales staff, moved to a new Isle of Man HQ and is relocating its UK office.

Angie Ablard, Head of Sales, said: "It takes more than an intelligent portal and hard work to maintain and grow our customer base and relationships. It takes people – smart, experienced people."

The retentions team is also expanding and will relocate from its current base in Didsbury, Manchester, to a new office in Stockport.

Exertis is to extend the credit lines of a select number of SMB resellers in a move that the distributor described as 'a major credit initiative'.

The Credit Xtra offer is available to over 1,600 accounts and could be worth up to £20m with plans to extend further where resellers have used their credit.

Mark Reynolds, Exertis B2B Sales and Commercial Director, said: "By working with our credit insurers we are in a position to double the facility and extend that further if they remain within our usual credit terms."

Exertis works with Chubb Ace, said to be one of the world's largest publicly traded insurers.

Cisco's \$610m all-cash acquisition of Viptela extends its SD-WAN portfolio and capabilities, offering a cloud-first approach with scale and straightforward deployment.

"This is what today's customers demand," commented Scott Harrell, SVP of Product Management, Cisco Enterprise Networking Group.

"With Viptela and Cisco, we will be able to deliver a portfolio of on-premises, hybrid, and cloud-based SD-WAN solutions."

The acquisition is expected to close in the second half of calendar 2017.

Mitel set for 10% job cull



Richard McBee

MITEL is targeting a 10% cut in its global workforce by year-end in a move that CEO Rich McBee described as 'proactive cost reduction' based on the loss of circa 330 jobs.

This is expected to bring savings of around \$30m while the cost of job reductions is thought to be in the range of \$25m to \$35m this year.

The news came with the release of Mitel's Q1 results and follows the Canadian vendor's sale of its mobile software division (based on the \$545m acquisition of Mavenir in April 2015) in February this year.

Richard McBee, CEO, commented: "With the mobile divestiture behind us we are taking proactive cost reduction actions to align our operating expenses with our current and future business investment needs.

"This includes a workforce reduction of around 10% expected to be completed between now and the end of the year."

Mitel's Chief Finance Officer Steve Spooner commented: "During the quarter Mitel took major steps to fundamentally strengthen its capital structure and operating model.

"We paid down \$364m in debt, secured new credit facilities at significantly lower interest rates, initiated a stock buy-back programme and started cost reduction actions to posi-

tion the company to achieve its long-term financial targets."

For its first quarter Mitel reported a dip in revenues to \$223.1m (down from \$233m in the same period last year), and a net loss of \$21.1m.

Recurring cloud seats grew by 45,000 during the quarter and now stand at 588,000.

"In Enterprise, we drove steady market share gains," added McBee. "We were especially pleased with our performance in the larger European markets, while recurring cloud grew in-line with our expectations as orders continued to be strong, and we continued to ramp our installation capacity."

BETA Distribution MD Steve Soper has called off a deal to acquire Entatech.

He said that Beta had been in detailed talks with Entatech and its advisors about acquiring certain assets of the company.

"Although we have been in discussions for some time, information obtained during detailed due diligence meant we were unable to continue," commented Soper.

"It is disappointing because this is an industry sector that we are extremely interested in and are looking to develop."

Although not generally known as a company with an acquisition strategy Soper says that the business is 'always on the lookout for opportunities to grow the Beta name' and has pursued a number of opportunities in the past.

"We have been just as active as our competitors in looking for acquisition opportunities, but so far nothing has materialised," he added.

"Beta has a five year plan based around organic growth, but if the right opportunity came along to increase that growth by acquisition then we would consider it seriously, as we did with Entatech."



Steve Soper

With annual revenues on track for £200m and year-on-year double digit growth Soper believes that Beta has the infrastructure and financial capacity to support the right acquisition.

"We will look to buy a company that can contribute to our business that may have expertise that we currently don't have," he commented.

"Entatech fitted the bill, with experienced people, important supplier relationships and a well established customer base, but it wasn't to be." See page 32

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

Zen hires technology chief

ZEN'S incoming CTO Justin Fielder has compared the firm's potential with that of his old stomping ground Easynet, the first comms company to implement LLU, where he was a driving force.

Easynet was sold to BSkyB in 2005 and the network still forms the backbone of Sky's residential broadband service.

"The similarity between Easynet and Zen was a key factor in tempting me to relocate from the south east to the Manchester region," said



Justin Fielder

Fielder. "Easynet was operating at a larger scale but Zen has all the pieces in place and has just doubled its LLU footprint.

There are big gaps in the market and major opportunities for Zen, so it's an exciting time to join the business.

"My experience of growing a similar business at Easynet can help Zen fulfil its ambitions. We can swiftly automate everyday back-end processes, freeing up technical staff to focus on long-term projects for the benefit of the business."

CEO Richard Tang commented: "There are few CTOs in our industry with Justin's level of experience."

WE'RE EXTENDING OUR REACH...



The future of ICT distribution

Information and communication technology (ICT) has become so prevalent these days that life would be unimaginable without it and, with over three billion people connected to the internet, just envision where ICT is heading.

"We are already living in a globally interconnected world where the transfer of information is transmitted in real-time," says Paul Clarke, Regional Sales Manager UK & Ireland.

"ICT impacts global economies, politics and culture, greatly influencing the way we identify the world and ourselves in it; giving voice to those who weren't heard before and an even greater voice to the ones we wish would just give it a rest."

Whether you are an older millennial, a Generation Xer or baby boomer, or one of the earlier generations to appreciate life before the tech boom; most agree that ICT has progressed so fiercely that without it business would perish. Whether the world's heavy reliance on ICT is a good or a bad thing, it's certainly a money-making tool and an entire industry of its own. With a global booming tech industry, new SaaS players enter the market day by day, monetizing on the development of progressive products that continuously improve and make ICT more accessible for end-users.

"SaaS products usually require very little hardware, keeping logistics and shipping costs at a minimum, implying the end for SaaS partners, however for many successful corporations, a strong and price competitive SaaS product in correlation with a vendor-distributor arrangement is the essence of their success," argues Clarke

3CX: A Global Channel Company

3CX is a 100% channel company that has geared its Partner Program to cater to the needs of partners dispersed throughout the world. When joining the program, potential partners are given the opportunity to receive free training and gain access to 3CX's online learning materials to prepare for the 3CX's free online certifications. Thereafter, the program provides resellers with free leads, marketing tools and support to provide them with strong foundations so they can effectively sell 3CX products to their



“As the ICT market grows, the vendor-reseller relationship is expected to increase as well.”

Paul Clarke

customers in their target markets. "What's more, partner sales and projects are rewarded in the form of points," says Clarke. "Moving up a partner level depends on the number of points a partner has acquired through sales. The points system aims at rewarding partners who are certified and trained by 3CX and who also display loyalty to the company through consistent and repeated sales. The points system does not only reflect sales volume, but also the effort and commitment a 3CX Partner shows towards 3CX."

The 3CX Partner Program's points system

consists of five levels ranging from Affiliate, Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum, which are based on loyalty and sales volume. The higher the level, the more benefits and margins are offered. Being a 100% channel company, 3CX only sells via its 3CX partners hence it is never in competition with its resellers. Boasting numerous awards and recognition for its innovative product development and business model; 3CX has experienced an astounding 40% growth rate annually.

Specific Market Knowledge

There is a growing concern that resellers

and distributors of software-based systems are becoming less needed since SaaS products can simply be downloaded. However, contrary to popular belief, the vendor-distributor relationship extends much further than just product sales. Boasting an annual growth rate of 40%, 3CX's strategic distribution plan proves to be spot on and, according to Clarke, strong partnerships have been established across the globe.

"We can acquire specific market knowledge regarding partners' respective target areas and end-users, bringing them a wealth of insight regarding their customer base in different parts of the world. What's more, 3CX's business-model continues to open the doors to a whole range of new markets, allowing them to offer their products internationally."

With businesses increasingly making the move to hosted services, it becomes vital for both vendor and distributor to offer cloud based solutions. Vendors should provide the necessary tools and support needed for partners to fully benefit from the cloud market.

3CX has catered to this need by developing PBX Express, a deployment tool which allows resellers to install a customer's PBX in their own cloud account in a matter of minutes, making it much easier for resellers to offer their clients a hosted PBX on a cloud provider of their own choosing or on their own hosting account.

"As the ICT market grows, the vendor-reseller relationship is expected to increase as well," adds Clarke.

"There is no denying that resellers bring in masses of revenue and provide maintenance and support services before and after installation of ICT products. Not only does this allow resellers to build profit with additional services, but the vendor can ensure that its thousands of end-users around the world have access to support, a feat which they could not attempt alone."

Evans opens up on big e

In his strategic reactions to new market opportunities hSo Managing Director Chris Evans is not short of a dead cert growth plan. Here, he reveals the strategies and drivers that will double company revenues within three years.

Evans has key markets and channel expansion directly in his sights and is pushing forward a strategy to double revenues within three years via a mix of organic growth and acquisitions that he hopes will generate a 10 per cent EBITDA profit margin. "The organic growth will be powered

by investments in growing our presence in channel, wholesale and public sector markets," commented Evans. "A key development for hSo (HighSpeed Office) has been getting on the RM1045 Network Services Framework and gaining Crown Commercial Service supplier status. That enables us to bid for Government contracts to supply data connectivity, IP telephony and traditional voice services, and resulted in us winning many millions of pounds of additional business."

hSo is currently a circa £10 million turnover company with around 40 employees. Its enterprise team targets organisations with 100 to 1,000 employees and those with multiple sites. The channel team tends to work with IT support companies while the wholesale operation mainly deals with hosting firms, ISPs and service providers. "We are working to grow the wholesale side of our business," added Evans. "Our acquisition of Goscomb Technologies boosted our wholesale and channel offering substantially. We can now offer services in over two dozen data centres and have many more wholesale customers as a result of the acquisition. It also improved our economies of scale, enabling us to offer better prices to our channel partners and customers."

Evans describes hSo as a network service provider



Chris Evans

As a SME, hSo can focus on customer service, responsiveness and tailoring solutions to individual customers

specialising in bespoke cloud solutions for voice, data and IT security. "We were founded in 2000 to become the Broadband Office of the UK," he explained. "We bid to provide IT and telecom services to buildings owned by a consortium of property owners. We won the tender but the dotcom boom turned to bust and we lost our funding.

Thankfully, the property owners saw our potential and agreed to fund us."

Customer service

hSo has wholesale relationships with all UK telecoms carriers. "Resellers have been poorly served by the major carriers," claimed Evans. "As a SME, hSo can focus on customer service, responsiveness and tailoring

solutions to individual customers. This is something resellers appreciate as well as keen pricing. We always listen to the feedback from our customers and partners and respond accordingly by developing appropriate products. We prefer to be led by customers' needs rather than speculatively developing products that may or may not have a market."

hSo Timeline...

- 2001:** Signed up first customer
- 2002:** Online data back-up service introduced
- 2004:** VoIP/SIP implemented in core network
- 2005:** Became EBITDA profitable
- 2006:** MPLS core network implemented
- 2009:** Hosted VMware virtualisation implemented
- 2010:** hSo:compare launched providing prospects with instant leased line quotes
- 2013:** ISO 9001 and ISO27001 certifications
- 2013:** Goscomb Technologies acquired
- 2014:** Achieved G-Cloud status for virtualisation and SIP services
- 2014:** ISO 20000 certified
- 2015:** Crown Commercial Service Supplier status confirmed for RM1045 Lots 1, 3 and 5
- 2016:** Public cloud connectivity introduced
- 2017:** Launch of hSo: wholesale brand. Outsourced NOC service added

Expansion plans

hSo serves customers nationwide but its base in London brings a requirement to occasionally leverage partnerships in the regions. Evans hopes to plug these gaps with potential bolt-on acquisitions that extend hSo's geographic reach while on boarding local people to serve customers locally, as well as acquisitions that increase scale or strategic and product options.

"We continue to look for complementary products for which there is growing demand," he added. "In recent years we have added public cloud connectivity and hosted voice services based on BroadCloud and Asterisk. We're open to filling gaps through organic development or via targeted acquisitions."

Another key factor driving hSo's growth is cloud computing. "We now provide connectivity to public cloud platforms AWS and Azure and have our own private cloud platforms based on Citrix and VMware virtualisation," commented Evans. "A challenge will be to deliver services that combine the pricing of the public cloud with the security of the private cloud."

It is a challenge Evans is certain to overcome given his previous working experiences which are wide ranging. He trained as an accountant with Ernst & Young in the 1980s and was based in Reading which at that time was the UK's nearest approximation to Silicon Valley. "Having worked on fundraising for a client, Dolphin Telecom, I was asked to join the company," recalled Evans. "Dolphin Telecom was a network provider that combined GSM phone and push-to-talk technology in a single

handset. I then joined hSo in 2001 as Financial Director. But in 2003 the Board asked me to replace the existing CEO. Back then my role was focused on establishing systems and processes. Now, my day-to-day tasks are orientated more around growing the business by attracting the right talent and increasing revenues. The biggest challenge is determining what developments are going to be the next big thing that can be used by the business world to improve performance."

Sales wins

Again, this is a hurdle that Evans will surely overleap given his eye for an opportunity and ability to turn opportunities into market realities that generate revenues. His foresight is evident in the decision to achieve important accreditations to win new business, such as ISO accreditations and RM1045 which are responsible for public sector contracts worth £3 million being won during the past year. Evans described the uptick as 'transformational'.

He also believes that strong customer relationships will grow in importance due to tougher conditions ushered in by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) within the context of a stringent data protection environment. "This will make winning new business, which is hard at the best of times, even tougher," commented Evans. "Resellers with a close personal contact with their customers will be in a stronger position to defend and grow the business relationship. Cultivating customer relationships will become more critical." ■

Just a minute with Chris Evans...

Role model? Richard Branson. He's self-made and recognises that a lot of success is luck

What talent do you wish you had? To sing well

What do you fear the most? Heights like cliff tops, but tall buildings are fine!

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I'm one of the youngest qualified ASA swimming teachers in the UK

How would you like to be remembered? As someone who delivered on promises, who was generous with time and resources, and who supported and encouraged everyone

What's the biggest risk you have taken and why? Leaving Ernst & Young to join a technology start-up. The challenge and growth potential were a compelling draw

If you weren't in IT what would you be doing? Landscape gardening

Top tip for resellers: Build the relationship. People buy from people

Give one example of something you have overcome: Shyness as a child and teenager. Recognising that nobody is perfect, that we all make mistakes and we all have something to offer helps. But in the end you have to be confident and engage with others. Everyone likes to talk

Your greatest strengths and what could you work on? I see issues quickly and clearly and identify appropriate actions, but could take more risks

How do you relax? Taking the dog for a walk



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This model strategy crea

Every reasonable business leader agrees that people are the lifeblood of a company, none more so than Exponential-e's Head of Channel Alp Kostem who infuses people-centricity into every aspect of his management style and growth strategy.

For Kostem, putting people first is not an adopted strategy, it is in his nature. It's a personal quality that dovetails with Exponential-e's championing of staff as the primary driver of growth, and this approach has given the company a remarkable hand of cards that comes up trumps every year as revealed in its impressive financial figures. Exponential-e has seen solid compound annual growth since 2002 – without a whisper of M&A activity. In its latest set of annual figures revenues were up 24 per cent to £97.5 million, with 45 per cent growth in EBITDA to over £20 million. Profit before tax was up 48 per cent at almost £10 million.

"Our goal is to hit the £200 million target within three years," said Kostem. "There's been speculation on whether the company is for sale, but that isn't the case. Creating opportunities and investment

in young people is far more important to our CEO Lee Wade. His personal goal is to ensure that Exponential-e is recognised as a world class company. Growth is driven by our profits which are used predominantly to fuel research and development work. This R&D and a firm focus on investing in people is what drives the company forward."

Kostem joined Exponential-e in 2010 and his primary focus has been growing the channel and increasing revenue, gaining strength from his previous work experiences in the recruitment industry and fast growth organisations. "I focus heavily on hiring, training and re-training people to join our team," he explained. "We now have one of the biggest channel teams in the UK with 38 people. I attribute this to our channel products and offerings, how we cater for dealers, resellers, partners, wholesalers and carriers – with flexibility being key.

"We've developed our own brand of ICT products to put on top of the network, and by supplementing this with our 900-plus active channel partners we have been able to continue our momentum. Exponential-e is also a diverse company in terms of its markets – strong in the public sector, finance, broadcast and retail. Around 3,000 end users are using our products."



Alp Kostem

Exponential-e's channel sweet spot is £20-50 million revenue partners. But there are no hard and fast rules. The company also has much bigger and smaller partners which is testimony to the flexibility of Exponential-e's broad product portfolio. "We are also completely agnostic and work with any other UC or cloud offering, whatever works best for our customers," added Kostem.

His predilection to working closely with people can be traced back to a five year stint in the high pressured IT recruitment business during the Y2K dot.com bubble. The experience was a one-

The fact that I get to empower people, see my team members buy their first house, get married and have children is a huge source of personal pride

off, a reflection of the times and close to being torrid. But Kostem emerged with key skills he otherwise would not have picked up, and the experience lay the step stones of a career path that has always been people oriented. "It was survival of the fittest in IT recruitment around the turn of the millennium," he said. "I've not seen such a cutthroat and dynamic environment since. Not to mention the 85 to 100 hour weeks that were part and parcel of the time. But it gave me a good grounding in how to use the telephone. Knowing how to make 200 calls a day is a skill worth having."

Milestones...

- 2002:** Exponential-e claims a first in introducing Ethernet to the UK
- 2006:** High speed Internet product Power NGN was launched
- 2010/11:** Entry into the broadcast market having handled the US broadcast for the Royal Wedding to all of the main US providers
- 2012:** Introduced a full suite of ICT products

ates true value

Frustrated by the vagaries of 'selling people' Kostem decided to sell solutions which are more predictable in their nature, and worked for John Caudwell when he set up Reach Telecoms, which later became Caudwell Communications. "This was an interesting experience in how to quickly grow a market presence and make a return in a short space of time," added Kostem. "John was one of the most impressive people in business I've ever seen."

Fast growth

Then, start-up company V Networks beckoned. Established in 2005 V Networks grew to circa £23 million in two years. It was sold to TalkTalk Business in December 2008. "V Networks was a lean, mean channel machine," noted Kostem. "This was a completely different kind of experience and interesting to see a start-up grow to such a size in a short space of time. It was also a challenge to learn how to sell for a company that had no existing partners or references. I continued at TalkTalk for a year and a half, working on three acquisitions during my time there."

Kostem's background makes him an ideal candidate to play a key role in advancing Exponential-e's 20-plus per cent growth rate year-on-year, which is a difficult task. So Exponential-e listens to partners and end users to drive new products and services based on demand, and also responds appropriately to external forces that have an influence on the market, such as the up-coming GDPR regulation. "We are looking to target the security space and will recruit

experts in the field," added Kostem. "We want to offer our own security proposition that will be separate to our other products. The GDPR regulation and the constant attacks that people are seeing keeps such issues in the public consciousness."

Aside from external regulatory and technological forces, the big challenge facing most channel organisations is how to recruit the best people. The scale of the task is most acutely felt by fast expanding companies such as Exponential-e. "We're growing fast and a big challenge is finding and matching the right people to the right positions within the company," added Kostem. "We tend to take on graduates, so we invest a lot of time, training and effort into our people. Products can be developed relatively straightforwardly, but people don't just 'happen' in the same way."

Hence the Exponential-e academy which is in its 11th year. The company takes people from all walks of life – young people, career re-starters, those with degrees and those straight from school – trains them over a six month period and places them into the appropriate department. "Many academy graduates have risen up the ranks within the business," commented Kostem. "My biggest achievement is moving from a sales focus into hiring, training and investing in young people to work in our teams. The fact that I get to empower people, see my team members buy their first house, get married and have children is a huge source of personal pride." ■

Just a minute with Alp Kostem...

Role model? Alex Ferguson for his impeccable man management, consistency over a number of years and unbeatable will to win

What talent do you wish you had? To play a musical instrument

What do you fear the most? Being in an environment where I'm on edge. Places like an operating theatre spring to mind

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I represented England at rugby at under 16 level

How would you like to be remembered? As someone who has achieved something in their time

What's the biggest risk you have taken? Going into management. I've always been responsible for just myself, so having 37 people working on the team rather than being in charge of my own destiny is a major change

If you weren't in IT what would you be doing? Banking or a statistician. I'm a numbers man at heart

Top tip for resellers: IT is never going to stand still, neither should you

One example of something you've overcome: English is my second language. I grew up speaking Turkish

Your greatest strengths and what could you improve on? My desire to be successful is a strength that has served me well throughout my career. But I could work on improving my listening skills

How do you relax? A glass of red wine and time with my family. I have twin girls and love spending time with them

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THE COMMS NATIONAL AWARDS 2017

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

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

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

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

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

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



9 TAKE LEAD AGAIN IN RECOGNISING SUPERSTARS OF UK ICT INDUSTRY

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

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

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

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

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

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Distribution Category

Paul Taylor
Sales Director
Voiceflex



"Voiceflex is delighted to once again sponsor the Distribution category at this year's Comms National Awards. We're 100% channel focused and value the relationships we have. We support our partners with continued investment, portfolio development and enhancements plus sales and technical training. In less than eight years, every UK business will be using some form of SIP or hosted applications to communicate and we're dedicated to supporting our partners get on the SIP and WebRTC journey. We look forward to celebrating continued channel success at the CNAs and wish everyone the best of luck."

SME Reseller of the Year

Garry Growns
Sales Director
Daisy Wholesale



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

Software Application Category

Nick Goodenough
Partner Service Manager
Spitfire



"Spitfire is delighted to again sponsor the Vendor Software Application category for the 2017 Comms National Awards. We know from experience of our own Comms National Award winning solutions, such as Spitfire SIP Communicator™, that the development of successful applications requires significant investment of time and expertise. Consequently, it is important that the telecoms industry recognises and rewards innovation and excellence. We value the high esteem in which the Comms National Awards are held and they have become the benchmark for excellence in the industry, providing well deserved acknowledgement of achievement."

Cloud Communications Solution Category

Steve Mace
Senior Director - Channel
Interoute



"Interoute firmly believes that through offering an exceptional product and partnering with skilled, innovative and driven channel resellers everyone in the market can benefit from the transition to cloud. Awards such as this offer recognition of star players, which is an important tool in motivating cloud communications resellers to find novel ways of using Virtual Data Centre platforms to deliver services to end-users. We are proud to sponsor the Reseller Cloud Communications Category and we would encourage everyone who believes they are delivering digital transformation to their clients to enter."

Vertical Market Solution Category

Vincent Disneur
Head of Sales & Marketing
Union Street



"The CNAs is unquestionably the channel's most highly anticipated awards ceremony. It's a celebration of outstanding achievement, with each award representing hard work and determination on the part of the winner. We would strongly encourage anyone undecided about whether to enter to get involved. Achieving finalist status is a fantastic achievement, but to win is indescribable. We're very much looking forward to this year's CNAs and, on behalf of myself and the Union Street Team, I would like to wish the best of luck to all this year's entrants."

Event Hospitality

Andy Grant
Managing Director
Bowarrow



"Bowan Arrow are proud to support the 2017 Comms National Awards for a second year as Hospitality Sponsor. These awards recognise excellence in our reseller and vendor communities and they happen to be my favorite evening in the industry event calendar. The award categories provide a diverse range of opportunities for businesses of all types to enter and be acknowledged as the best of the best. We all know the old saying, 'you have to be in it to win it', so what's stopping you; select a category, review your recent customer wins and start your entry. Good luck!"

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How Soper plans to hit £500m

For a man with the unswerving courage of his own convictions, Steve Soper's plan to build Beta Distribution into a £500 million business within five years is entirely plausible.

Soper's longer-term growth strategy confirms what those familiar with Beta Distribution have long known – that the company is a sleeping giant and sooner or later the industry would wake up to its growing influence. According to Soper, that time has come. He grasped the reins as Managing Director in 2008 after a seven year stint in the firm's FD seat, taking over from founder Gary Wilson, now Chairman, who established the company with his wife Irene in 1980 as a fixer of Canon calculators, moving into print distribution. Those days are long gone. "During the past 10 years we've transformed the business from a niche print distributor with revenues of around £30 million into an international operation approaching £220 million," said Soper.

The printer consumables market still accounts for over 50 per cent of Beta's business and gave the company a broader footprint across the reseller channel. Alongside this Beta established a Technology Solutions division to capitalise on the growing data storage market, becoming an authorised distributor for the likes of Fujifilm and Maxell based largely on tape back-up products. "In recent years we have entered the hardware and software side of this market with new distribution agreements," added Soper. "This business has a service led proposition so we now provide VARs

and MSPs with a range of pre and post-sales services through technical experts."

Last year Beta set up Digital Media Solutions which provides end-to-end digital signage solutions, covering the supply of the product through to final installation, and offers a content creation service. "The signage market is set to undergo a significant change in the way it is sold as Samsung, in particular, is targeting a model where users can effectively rent screens through Samsung Capital, allowing hotels, retail outlets and many other verticals to entertain large scale projects on an opex rather than capex basis," noted Soper.

Beta employs circa 140 people and trades with around 3,000 resellers of all descriptions including IT resellers, MSPs and VARs. In particular, Beta is increasing its presence in the data/technology market through new vendor and customer trading relationships and the recruitment of skilled staff such as Solutions Architects. The company is also growing its presence in more regions at home and overseas. "We have expanded into Europe with sales operations in Benelux, France, Germany and Poland, which are all serviced from a warehouse in Maastricht," said Soper. "This European business, that didn't exist three years ago, now generates annual revenues of 40 million euros. In the UK we have our head office in



Steve Soper

Beta Distribution is still one of the industry's best kept secrets. The challenge is to ensure that more resellers fully understand what we can offer to the channel

London and warehouse in Birmingham as well as two recently opened sales offices in Reading and Leeds."

Growth phase

To say that the past three years have been strategically active would be to greatly understate the extent of recent developments at Beta. "We have added 35 more vendors since 2014, largely in the enterprise storage arena," said Soper. "We

have introduced a ten-strong Technology Solutions sales team to provide the expertise needed to support MSPs; and we have completed a number of high profile technology based projects from concept to final installation."

Projects such as this show how IT distributors can do more than simply provide product and credit to the channel, observed Soper. "To survive distributors will

have to look at services and solutions to protect their margin and act as a partner to resellers rather than merely a source of credit," he added. "It's all about services. VARs will need to transition their business and become solution providers and they will expect their distribution suppliers to support them in this transition."

Three focus areas are the new paradigm for Beta



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Distribution – providing print hardware, consumables and data storage to IT resellers; delivering disruptive data storage technologies, products, services and solutions to VARs and MSPs through the Technology Solutions business; and supplying end-to-end digital signage products, services and solutions (plus off the shelf meeting room solutions) to AV specialists and resellers. “Our main focus is on organic growth across the three business areas,” added Soper. “But consolidation is all around us, notably the acquisition of smaller specialist or niche distributors by the big broadliners. We were recently involved in the potential acquisition of Entatech, although ultimately we pulled out. I expect further consolidation to take place and we remain on alert for any future opportunities.”

New models

As well as consolidation, the changing demands of end users and how they purchase has an impact on distribution. “As end users move from capex purchases into various opex models such as consumption, pay-as-you-grow and subscription, resellers want support from their vendors and distributors to ease the financial burden sitting just with them,” Soper explained. “These models are not just confined to cloud-based services. More and more end users, and therefore resellers, have a requirement for hardware, software and services to be wrapped up in monthly payments.

“Vendors have been adapting their finance and leasing models to accommodate this transformation. Samsung Finance is a great example

of how large LFD projects can be deployed in this way. Distribution has to adapt both commercially and operationally to be able to deliver these changing business models with, or on behalf of, the vendor.”

Given a magic wand, Soper would dismantle a market structure that allows tier 1 brands to have a monopoly on what resellers, and ultimately end users, see as the only solution to their problems. “There are so many vendors with great technologies and stories that, given the chance, could enhance the end user experience and resellers’ margin,” he said. “I’ll give you an example, we recently designed and helped install the entire IT infrastructure of a new UK clearing bank. It was given the usual tier 1 options, we gave them an alternative that went over and above the customer’s requirements and saved them over 25 per cent. Technology Solutions will generate growth by bringing disruptive products and technologies to VARs and MSPs in a direct challenge to the tier one vendors.”

Presented with potential new market opportunities such as this, Soper never takes a ‘wait and see’ stance if he senses tangible potential. But while confident about future revenue growth, there is still much to do. “My biggest achievement is growing Beta to its current size, but the job is far from done,” he stated. “Beta Distribution is still one of the industry’s best kept secrets. During the next five years the challenge is to ensure more and more resellers have access to us and fully understand what we can offer to the channel.” ■

Just a minute with Steve Soper...

Tell us something about yourself we don’t know: I am a keep fit enthusiast and ran five consecutive London Marathons from 2007 to 2011

Role model: Ian Botham, who changed the way English cricket was perceived and took calculated risks in his sport – although he sometimes didn’t seem to worry about the consequences!

One example of something you have overcome: At Beta we are constantly trying to overcome the perception that we are still only a print specialist. We are making progress but the job is nowhere close to being complete

What’s the biggest risk you have taken and why? Setting up an operation in Holland and trying to replicate the outsourced logistics model we use in the UK. Three years later we have a 40 million euros business from start-up

Name three ideal dinner guests (past or present): Ian Botham, Alex Ferguson and Steve Jobs

How would you like to be remembered? As someone who always put their family first

Your strengths and what could you improve on? I work hard and lead from the front. What could I work on? Far too many areas to mention!

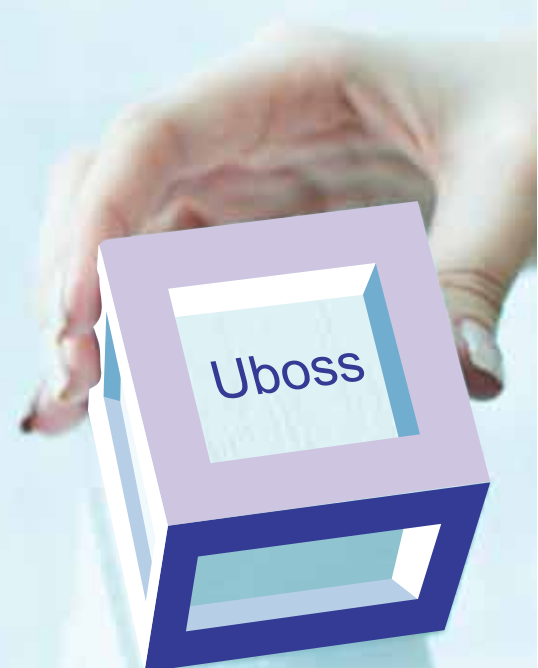
If you weren’t in IT what would you be doing? Something accounting related

Top tip: Listen to customers and help them overcome the problems they are facing

How do you relax? Spending time with my family and exercising



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Liquid Voice in full flow

From school days to nowadays Liquid Voice UK co-founder and Managing Director Chris Berry has shown a resilient entrepreneurial spirit that is reflected in his channel ambitions and sharpened appetite to go head-to-head with major global vendors following new investment.



Chris Berry

Just a minute with Chris Berry...

Role models? I admire selfless and honest people who put the needs of others before their own

What talent do you wish you had? To sing. I'm tone deaf

What do you fear the most? Heights

What are your greatest strengths and what could you work on? I set goals and objectives and am relentless in achieving them, but I could improve on my leadership identity

One example of something you have overcome? The fear of making tough decisions. I now know you can tell someone anything if it's delivered in the right way. Providing your intentions are good and justified most people can deal with it

How would you like to be remembered? As a great businessman who knew his stuff and didn't need to stand on any heads to get to where he wanted to be

Top tip: Pick a niche. Take time to understand the product you are selling and become the expert

In January this year SVL Business Solutions secured a 25 per cent equity interest in channel

partner Liquid Voice, the developer of call recording and contact centre solutions. Following the deal, SVL Business Solutions, a NICE Systems Platinum Partner, plans to set up a new division to offer the Liquid Voice range of products as well as its SmartVoice portfolio of PCI compliance, customer satisfaction and contact centre training solutions. According to Berry, the deal enables Liquid Voice to maximise new business opportunities and extend its presence in the contact centre, financial and public safety markets. "We are working on an arm's length distribution agreement with SVL being our first fully accredited services partner," he said.

Prior to his appointment as Liquid Voice's Managing Director Berry was Sales Director, a post held since the company was first formed. Aside from two brief stints as a corporate employee Berry has spent most of his working life as an owner and Director running his

own businesses. His ambition was evident at an early age having set up his first IT consultancy business mid-way through his A levels. "I spent time as a CTI consultant with Comino/Civica where I was responsible for the design and commissioning of IVR and ACD systems fully integrated with their CRM and EDRM solutions for the public sector," said Berry.

Leeds-based Liquid Voice was established by Berry and Andrew Barrett in 2005 having brought Civica/Comino's suite of computer telephony applications to market. "Our original strategy was to capitalise on the growing demand for contact centre solutions with a focus on call recording, quality management and integration," added Berry. "Liquid Voice fills the space where manufacturers don't do so well in terms of service and delivery, providing added value to customers."

The business has been profitable from the outset and after building the product portfolio and establishing a customer base Liquid Voice switched to an indirect sales model. "The transition presented a number of challenges and we have learnt what a software-based business needs to have in place to support the channel and the attributes of a good channel partner," said Berry. "The move to indirect sales through channel partners with accreditations and distribution models is a key factor in Liquid Voice's success in all countries where we operate."

Raising the bar

He noted that technological evolution is prompting resellers to become SIs that offer a one-stop-shop so customers do not have to deal with multiple suppliers. "There should also be a focus on raising the level of professionalism throughout

the industry with solution sales that meet the ongoing needs of customers rather than only looking for short-term profits based on where the best margin is available," said Berry.

Liquid Voice is now an international operation with offices in the UK and New Zealand and circa 600 customers in a range of market sectors including utilities, retail, financial services, public sector and outsourcing. "I am proud of the way that Liquid Voice has continued to grow despite the uncertainty that the economy has experienced over the last few years," commented Berry. "Liquid Voice has become a well known brand and has the technology and products to effectively compete with the world's largest manufacturers, which presents an opportunity for channel partners to come on board and join us." ■



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Intercity goes global

Intercity Technology has lifted the curtain on a new in-house developed UC platform that CEO Andrew Jackson says will make a mark on the global map as well as the channel landscape.



Andrew Jackson

Just a minute with Andrew Jackson...

Role model? Nick Woodward, a partner at Ernst & Young. He mentored and taught me a huge amount, including the importance of taking an interest in your staff. It's how you get the best out of people

What talent do you wish you had? To speak several languages

What do you fear the most? Not getting on with it. Life is short

Tell us something about yourself we don't know: I hold an International Competition License for motorsport and competed in the British Ford Championship the year after Jenson Button

One example of something you have overcome? A fear of heights. I overcame this by jumping out of a plane at 15,000ft when travelling in New Zealand

How would you like to be remembered? As a genuine person who delivered innovation through technology as part of a talented team

Top tip for resellers: Focus on building long-term mutually beneficial partnerships

How do you relax when not working? Long drives through the countryside

Intercity Technology is an extended family business that has retained its core family values despite undergoing a technology and acquisition driven transformation that encompasses new markets, more people and greater scale. At the helm is CEO Andrew Jackson whose father founded the business in 1985. Based in Birmingham Intercity was one of the early pioneers of the mobile phone industry and signed Vodafone's first UK partnership agreement. The company has since broadened its service portfolio and transformed from a pure-play mobile provider to an IT and communications solutions specialist. Jackson became CEO in 2013 and quickly went on the acquisition trail to build a well rounded internationally competitive technology business.

He joined the company in 2008 following a five year stint working as a senior executive at Ernst & Young where he was heavily involved in M&A. "This experience prepared me for our acquisitions of Imerja and Gage Networks," commented Jackson. "The business had seen 30 years of organic growth when we embarked on our first acquisition so it felt like a

step into the unknown, but it's the best thing I've ever done. Acquisitions always catalyse change and bringing Imerja and Gage into the fold has been no different. But both sets of colleagues have integrated well and we are very much one team. We're a family and all staff at Intercity Technology are treated as valued individuals. The future is looking positive with everyone trying to achieve our shared objectives. Deals like these are often difficult and complex, but as a management team we navigated both incredibly well."

The acquisition of IT services provider Imerja was significant as it expanded Intercity Technology's capabilities and gave it footholds in a number of new vertical markets including the public sector. The company now has 250 employees based in five office locations. Group turnover

is £50 million but Jackson's ambition is to get to £75 million by 2020. "We are still very much on the acquisition trail and will continue to look for opportunities to add capabilities where we feel there is an opportunity for growth," noted Jackson. "We also see the launch of Touch Technology as the start of a new path to growth, based on innovative technology we have developed in-house."

Alternative platform

According to Jackson the introduction of Touch Technology, a global UC platform, is a game changer. "Because this is something we developed in-house it makes us a vendor as well as a services provider," he said. "We've invested £10 million in its development. Touch Technology is a patented alternative to other major players in the market. We are also working on developing Infrastructure as a Service and looking forward

to taking some of these solutions to the channel in the second half of 2017. I can't give too much away, but it's set to take computing on demand to a new level."

Jackson wants to establish Touch Technology as the go-to unified communications platform for growing businesses across the globe, particularly those with international operations or cross border aspirations. "It's an area where we see huge growth potential," he explained. "The Touch Technology platform is our biggest current opportunity. We have so many markets to attack and I'm proud of the team for creating proprietary technology that rivals the very best out there. I want to see Intercity Technology as a credible alternative to the most established IT providers in Europe. With the broad suite of solutions we now offer, coupled with our proprietary technology, we can make a big dent in our target markets."

Intercity Technology's relationships with customers are based on shared long-term goals. That means providing technology solutions that change the way they work for the better. "Many companies are moving traditional IT out of their offices and into data centres giving them the flexibility and scalability to grow," said Jackson. "Intercity Technology's USPs in this area are our in-house data centres, data sovereignty in the UK, expertise, delivery, and removing complexity from the process. I've learnt that businesses succeed when they keep things simple. Clarity is crucial and this is particularly important in the IT and comms industry." ■



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Customer service require



LORRIN WHITE
BAMBOO TECHNOLOGY

“ Delighting customers is about setting expectations, meeting them, exceeding them - or blowing them out of the water! When we say 30 minute SLA, we mean 20 to 30 minutes; service must be about minutes, not days. For the channel, if 20 minutes isn't fast enough, partners can set their own SLAs, managing their base through our self-serve portal. Whether wholesale partner, managed partner, reseller or bureau biller, we offer an array of service functionality to delight every layer. Direct customers enjoy unique monitoring and alert services with the bonus of preselected, (thus automated) service functions. With online billing, asset controls, Helpdesk KPI management, social media, whitepapers and much more, we ask for feedback every month, ensuring continual focus on service development. ”



PAUL DAVIS – AERIAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

“ Aerial Business Communications strives to provide an outstanding customer experience. Our team's core values are based on going beyond the expectations of our clients by delivering exceptional customer service and ongoing support throughout their contract, not just at the point of sale. Each customer has their own dedicated Account Manager they can contact should they have any queries. Our Account Managers pro-actively monitor their customers' usage, analyse bills, email them monthly reports, keep them informed of favourable tariffs and offer quarterly reviews. Aerial aren't tied in to a single provider or system, so as an independent company we can bring together 1000's of combinations of unified communication solutions, offering our customers better value in terms of cost-effectiveness and functionality. ”



CLIFFORD NORTON
CHANNEL TELECOM

“ We attribute our recently achieved CDSMA 'Channel Sales Team of the Year' status entirely to our passion for delivering first-class customer service. Running deep through every vein of our business is the understanding of how paramount customer satisfaction is. A happy customer is the beating heart of any growing company and nurturing these important relationships is key to success. An approachable outlook and willingness to improve goes a long way towards recognising and responding to customer's needs. Over the past 12 months, we have launched various engagement campaigns, introduced a user friendly online pricing portal and more than quadrupled our social media reach. These fuse together with our enthusiastic, hardworking team to produce the type of healthy customer service that wins awards. ”



MARK SAUNDERS
9 WHOLESALE

“ Web chat and shiny new portals are all very well for enhancing customer experience, but at 9, we believe it is the people at the coal face who make the real difference. Working with the feedback from our annual survey, we have trained staff members to be more able to own and resolve issues first time, which our customers appreciate. By taking root cause analysis seriously and reviewing regularly amongst the management team, we drive out gremlins and avoid the repeat errors which customers find so irritating. Better never stops however and our process of listening and continual improvement gives us all confidence that the next customer survey will show how much difference the changes we are making have made. ”

There was a time when comms and IT providers sold people products – maybe phone systems or computers –and then let them get on with integrating them into their way of working. OK, a service contract may have been added in, but fundamentally businesses purchased equipment 'off the shelf' and tailored it to suit their business.

As we all know, that paradigm has changed. In a big way. Now, it's all about understanding customer organisations and the way they work and solving their problems with integrated solutions that truly meet their needs. And when competition is tough and the economy is uncertain, securing a long-term relationship



BEN TAYLOR
NSN

“ In the last 12 months, we have amplified the message of our Affinity program into the NSN channel enabling greater product saturation into the existing customer base. Co-branding a suite of tailored marketing shots we have worked closer with our partners to deliver Cloud IT Solutions and Energy/Utilities Savings; greatly increasing the value experienced by our customers and our partners alike. We have created product vouchers to increase traction at the coal face and free trials to bring customers up to speed with the latest in Cloud IT solutions. With over 20 core value add products the NSN channel offering is delighting partners and customers alike over the medium and increasingly long term as is proven by very low churn levels. ”



NEIL BARRALL
TELECOMS WORLD

“ Telecoms World Customer Service is ever-evolving to support our customers' business and efficiently manage queries and faults. We have implemented various communication channels such as SMS to advise on faults and appointment reminders and we use Trust Pilot for real interaction with our clients to help us improve or continue our business processes. The "My Account Area" gives our customers full, instant access to manage their account 24/7, along with our World Tech department who offer ongoing connectivity and IP installation support. By offering ongoing 1-2-1 training internally and through external training organisations, we have achieved multi-skilled staff across all departments. And we are dedicated in keeping our customers happy whilst maintaining their business operations with minimal disruption. ”



MATT WEAL
NIMANS

“ Customer of everyth this conti developed a core c the customer at eve Account Managers dedicated training, support, coaching a continually increase experience. We hold status too and we' our job to respond and concerns – to them. ”

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with customers is critical to maintain cash flow and business growth.

So, what are they key elements to 'delighting' customers and keep them coming back for more?

Most important is a holistic approach to customer service. Why? Because every single interaction a user has with you, your staff, your website, and your content feeds into their overall experience - and overall impression of your organisation.

Remember what damage American Airlines did to their brand due to the actions of some overzealous cabin crew in forcibly removing a customer who refused to give up his seat when they had overbooked a flight? And the CEO's 'non-apology' increased the damage.

It's not rocket science. The better overall experience customers receive, from receptionist to CEO, the happier they'll be and they'll be more likely to stick around and tell their friends about the great experience your company provides.

The goal in providing and accumulating positive interactions throughout a customer's lifecycle will ultimately help you stand out from your competitors and improve your bottom line.



NEIL WILSON
VIRTUAL 1

“ One of the challenges in our highly competitive market is the constant evolution of what constitutes outstanding service, it needs to move as fast as our technology does. We are working hard to make this a reality with the completion of our fully software defined network. From my time as a channel partner, I know that being in direct control of the services that they provide is critical, and far better than having to back off all services to a supplier. That is why we are giving our partners access to perform many of the configuration changes that they traditionally rely on carrier providers for, such as bandwidth changes and VLAN resizing all via 1Portal, in real-time.



DARREN FARNDEN
ENTANET

“ As a customer centric company we strive to deliver exceptional service at every interaction and have recently: re-developed our synergi partner portal - making it mobile responsive, faster and easier to navigate; conducted a thorough customer satisfaction survey amongst our partners which gathered valuable feedback and has helped us identify key areas of improvement; and created a new role of Customer Relation Manager to enhance our customer experience delivery. We've also just made our synergi-based quoting tool for Ethernet services (EQT - Ethernet Quoting Tool) available to all our partners. Additionally, our support team are available 24/7/365 and our dedicated account managers work closely with our partners to help them grow and develop their businesses.



DARREN GARLAND
PROVU

“ ProVu is built on three core values, which have been designed to help ensure our customers keep coming back: our value-added services – we are constantly developing our systems to exceed our customers' expectations; our team – we have a great set of people who are passionate about the products and services we provide; and our product portfolio which constantly evolves to suit our customers' demands. By providing great products and the highest levels of service, we hope our customers do not have any reason to look elsewhere. Our most recent developments include integrating our systems with 3CX's to create an automated ordering process and integrating Euro pricing for our overseas customers, plus there's much more to come in the pipeline!



TIM HOLWAY
FIDELITY GROUP

“ Relationships are the heart of our business. Creating personal relationships with our partners and our customers is one of the core foundations of our service provision to maintain long-term customers. Our business development managers are problem solvers and will not only listen to the customer's needs, but always search for the ideal solution, and ensure that our customers are empowered with the right technologies for their businesses. We have a dedicated customer relationship team who maintain regular contact with our customers by phone and email. This team ensures that our customers have a personal point of contact should any issues arise and that our customers are aware of the latest developments, promotions or incentives.



DAVID CHASE
8X8

“ Our priority is giving customers cutting-edge technology and great support at a cost-efficient price. But we also constantly delight customers with innovation. For example, we recently enhanced the analytics platform our clients use to view their own customers' journeys. It helps them better understand how a customer gets to the contact centre and what they might be looking for, meaning all call routing is correct and the most appropriately skilled agent speaks to the customer first time. All end users have access to these features, as well as the partners supplying them. This means our partners can fully understand the needs of their end users and they tell us this is a strong unique selling point when engaging with their customers.



CHRISTOPHER OWEN
ICA

“ Having delighted customers for over 20 years, we have found that some of the most effective methods for supporting customers are the simplest to deliver. We place a huge emphasis on acknowledgment which is the cornerstone of any service based strategy. This is achieved through having genuine conversations with our clients, from discussing the services they may have with us, to what their plans might be for the weekend. This works two-fold as it creates a level of familiarity and ensures that we have tight-knit bonds with each of our clients and enables us to enhance the feeling of empathy between ourselves and our clients. It also helps identify those latent needs, that might otherwise go unnoticed without further discussion.



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Firstnet set for growth

With the launch of a state-of-the-art data centre in Leeds Firstnet Solutions's reputation as a fast rising northern powerhouse is assured, according to Managing Director David Cusworth.

Leeds-based Firstnet's new £24 million data centre, launched in March, is not only 'just the job' for channel partners and customers, it is also a boon to job seekers in the local area as the facility is expected to generate around 100 new positions. As well as adding people, the data centre adds colocation, cloud platforms and disaster recovery to Firstnet's services portfolio, including its own cloud solution powered by Nutanix and targeted at SMEs. Cusworth said: "The opportunity to expand and invest in this building to create a certified Tier III facility was too good to miss. Our customers now have access to the latest technology in managed services and a host of additional support, including office space with over 100 desks designed specifically for workplace recovery and relocation needs."

It was in 2014 when Firstnet began to flourish having earned a reputation as the 'go to provider' of IT services in the Leeds city region. That same year Firstnet's profile was raised across the nation when it featured as a finalist in a number of industry awards and scooped the Comms National Award in

the Best Enterprise Mobility Solution category. The company currently has a headcount of 30, circa 250 customers and revenues of around £4 million; while Cusworth's plan to target £20 million turnover by 2020 and 100 jobs is advancing nicely.

"Our growth plans are aggressive but as any business owner knows fast growth poses a whole raft of challenges, but I have a great management team and I know there isn't any obstacle we can't overcome," said Cusworth. "A milestone for us was changing our mindset from a small business to a medium sized operation. We now undertake large scale IT projects and roll outs to the enterprise and corporate marketplace and have established Firstnet Education which provides IT services to schools, while Firstnet Data Centre offers colocation for resellers, cloud for the SMB space and workplace recovery services to the corporate and enterprise market – all fully end-to-end services."

Cusworth 'fell' into IT by chance and fate could have played a hand as he started out at Pipex which, also by chance, was based on the site of Firstnet's new data centre. As an entrepreneur



David Cusworth

and with a successful career in IT sales under his belt Cusworth decided to go it alone having spotted a gap in the market to offer enterprise solutions and services to the SMB marketplace. "I persuaded my wife Angie, who is an exceptional Operations Director, to join me in my vision and we have taken the business from strength to strength every since," he said.

Key trends

The industry trend that most interests Cusworth right now is the high level of acquisitions in the distribution arena which he believes will eventually, sooner rather than later, leave just four or five large distribution players. The role of resellers is also evolving, noted Cusworth, who urges them to partner with their customers. "For resellers

to succeed it is imperative that they understand their clients' businesses and how they can add value to them," he added. "All VARs should help customers change their perception of IT as a cost centre to a profit centre.

"IT is always changing and to be successful you have to be ahead of the curve and able to offer the latest technology. Resellers also need to be aware of the IT landscape. Ten years ago virtualisation was the big thing, then it was the cloud, now it's Business Intelligence, analytics and the Internet of Things. If resellers can't give client's what they want and need someone else will. And as the landscape changes new challenges spring up every day such as GDPR. It is our duty to enable clients and support them and their businesses through these challenges,

so we are working with our customers to ensure they are GDPR compliant and able to maximise the business benefits that BI can provide."

Educating customers is perhaps a VAR's biggest opportunity, backed up by what Cusworth says is Firstnet Solutions' greatest source of potential growth – its new data centre and the associated cloud services it brings. "This facility will enable us to provide a true IT service to our clients," he added. "We have an amazing in-house team and the business wouldn't be where it is without them. Within three years I expect Firstnet to be a £50 million turnover business and the go-to IT company in the north of England. We have grown quickly and will continue to do so – there just doesn't seem enough hours in a day." ■

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King's sold on Virtual1

Optimising the sales operation in a fast growing channel business is no easy task, but Virtual1 Sales Director Jason King has approached the challenge with all his skills as a strategist and business transformer. Here, he also reveals the passions that drive his sales leadership.

When King got wind of Virtual1's plans for a national Software Defined Network roll out and CEO Tom O'Hagan's expansion strategy along with the advance of a job offer to lead the sales effort there was no looking back. "I resigned from my previous company to join the team as soon as possible," stated King. "I thrive in an environment of growth. With my experience of running successful sales teams I knew I could work with Virtual1 on its growth journey, motivating the team and reviewing its sales processes, helping the company to disrupt the marketplace with its national network roll out and portal enhancements."

The character of King's style of management quickly emerged with the introduction of a more disciplined sales structure that maps talent to opportunity. "Working with the wider Virtual1 team we have been able to align and build a clearly defined sales structure, analyse partner trends and identify opportunities to drive new markets," he added. "Remodelling the sales

structure and processes has enabled the entire company to scale up quickly with an agile business model, facilitated by the high levels of automation being brought on line with the national network and SDN capability.

"Ultimately, the software defined network will make life easier for our partners. With the network being automated through 1Portal we're putting our partners in control, allowing them to make adds, moves and configuration changes themselves directly for their customers in real-time. This will enable the sales team to focus on driving incremental growth as the 'Business as usual' becomes automated."

As well as automation, collaboration with marketing alongside recognition and reward programmes for the sales staff have empowered the team to regularly over achieve, explained King. "I have enhanced the processes around governance and added a clear career path supported by core competencies for all team members," he stated. "I was impressed by their energy, passion and enthusiasm.



Jason King

This is something that runs throughout the company which has gained a Two Star accreditation in the Best Companies awards. Communication and understanding with every team member is vital. By understanding what makes each team member tick and ensuring each of them are clear on the part they play in the delivery of the wider strategy, you create an environment of continuous improvement."

Sales pedigree

King is no stranger to fast-growth environments as his previous experience shows. He joined Energis in 1996 when the company generated £40 million turnover. Six years later it was a near £1 billion business. "I enjoyed a similar situation at Colt and was fortunate enough to join Virgin Media Business at the outset," added King. "I've

learned that it's best to have a mixture of characters in the sales team to deliver the best results. But all team members must have drive and ambition. Belief in the Virtual1 proposition, the vision and a willingness for personal growth and development are also key."

King's historical relationships with key carriers are a boon to Virtual1 as it seeks to form new partnerships at the upper level. And King made a point of emphasising the wholesale-only nature of Virtual1's proposition. "We never compete with our partners," he stated. "Our message is one of incremental growth and how we work with partners to drive more business and win through differentiation. For example, we deliver differentiation through our various Exchanges such as SIP Exchange, UC Exchange and Cloud Exchange. Our

levels of automation and API capability overlaid with SDN removes 'brief case time' and errors through re-keying data, reducing the book-to-bill time frame. Also, our regional model gives us a local presence with national capability."

Virtual1 is attracting strong interest by converting business through speed of delivery with greater automation and APIs. "We will be able to drive costs down in markets where there has been a lack of competition as well as enhanced flexibility," said King. "We will be launching a new commercial structure to reward partners for increasing their volume with other multiple benefits through a partner programme featuring tiered pricing, opportunities for MDF and shared marketing resource to name a few. Watch this space to see how we develop our partner ecosystem."

Just a minute with Jason King...

Role model: Barak Obama is a great inspiration, successful against the odds and never believed anything is impossible

Tell us something about yourself we don't know:

I practiced martial arts at senior level and represented the UK in 1998 at the World Shorinji Kempo Championships in Japan where I won a medal

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

Helping under privileged teenagers that show ambition and drive despite facing challenging circumstances. I would like to create a framework for them to turn their lives around

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

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

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

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

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

Speaker line-up



DEMYSTIFYING THE M2M OPPORTUNITY – ANTON LE SAUX, ZEST 4

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



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

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



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

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



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

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



FIND YOUR WAY INTO THE CLOUD – GARY GOULD, SHORETEL

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

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



MARKETING TO MILLENNIALS – ANDY GRANT, BOWAN ARROW

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

Meet New Partners



"ShoreTel is a leading provider of business communications deployed in the cloud, onsite or a hybrid of the two. At this year's MiVaD event, Gary will provide an overview of how ShoreTel works collaboratively with

partners, helping achieve high win rates and industry leading margins. He will also reveal the latest edition of ShoreTel's partner programme that includes innovative and flexible marketing-as-a-service options."

Gary Gould
Shoretel



"Two million ISDN channels are set to be changed out for SIP or hosted applications. 20% expect to be sold in the next 2-3 years and the rest being drip fed until 2023 when

there'll be a surge before the ISDN turn off in 2025. Sales opportunities are enormous. We've launched new SIP Trunk bundles to enable our partners to stay ahead. Find out more at MiVaD."

Paul Taylor
Voiceflex



"The market opportunity in Hosted PBX is enormous, but what are the barriers resellers need to scale to be truly effective in winning business and maximising

sales opportunities? Resellers need smart overlay services that can be added to a base user to address the entire market spectrum. VanillaIP will be addressing what this means for resellers in real terms at MiVaD."

Iain Sinnott
VanillaIP



"Zest4 are delighted to sponsor this year's MiVaD event. We will highlight the huge growth opportunities both now and in the future in the M2M & IoT market. MiVaD is a

great opportunity to meet with key resellers and spend time with partner principals who are actively keen to grow their business and revenues and engage with suppliers to help them meet these objectives."

Mandy Fazelynia
Zest 4



"InvoSys is a new generation carrier - a challenger to the telecoms 'establishment' - providing ground breaking yet simple products and services. At Margin in Voice & Data, we'll

showcase our cloud-based Number Manager portal which allows customers to configure, manage and monitor their services wherever they are, across all devices, as well as our new hosted product."

Peter Crooks
InvoSys



"MiVaD is a great opportunity for us to demonstrate to new and existing partners the range of flexible solutions that Marston's Telecoms can provide to the channel. We

look forward to discussing how our products provide partners with revenue opportunities, underpinned by a solid network platform and affordable pricing."

Rob Derbyshire
Marston's Telecoms



"NTA are proud to be sponsoring this year's MIVAD. We will be demonstrating to all new resellers how our existing partners in the Comms & IT industry are making

margins of 80% plus with our Hosted Telephony platform. Our system is White Labelled even down to the sub domain for log in purposes and has over 500 features as standard."

Justin Blaine
NTA



"We're very much looking forward to attending MiVaD this year; to meeting both new and existing clients and to finding out how we can add value to their businesses.

We'll be showing off some of the latest enhancements to our award winning aBillLity billing software, including some big developments to our cloud infrastructure that makes our solutions an even more attractive proposition for comms providers."

Vincent Disneur
Union Street



"We are delighted to be attending our first MIVAD event and we're looking forward to meeting industry colleagues, sharing our experiences, discussing potential bespoke billing requirements and our feature rich web-based QuickStart platforms. Our objectives are simple, to work together, giving customers freedom of choice with minimal billing limitations and offer maximum functionality and customer care, to maximise return on investment."

Simon Adams
PRD Technologies



"At MiVaD 17 we'll advise resellers how you can grow additional margins from your trusted client relationships. We will help you quickly upskill your business, train your

sales teams in the art of advising on energy, build a marketing plan and give you the tools you need to add energy to your product portfolio."

John Haw
Fidelity Energy



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

Shaun Bodsworth
Inform Billing



"As the training company for the channel, delegates can expect to learn how our services can improve their business but most importantly their people. We have a wide array of

telecoms focused courses ranging from Selling SIP & Hosted through to Regulatory and Compliance certifications. We are also thrilled to be launching Support to Win.tv, a hosted telephony support service for the channel. It allows partners to focus on their strengths while we take care of their customer on-boarding and life's Moves, Adds and Changes.

Julie Mills
Train To Win



"As an adviser, MiVaD helps us understand what's happening at ground level of the sector; how customers are reacting to changes in the market and how this impacts and

influences the vendors and suppliers around them. Whether you are looking to review your strategy, raise finance, considering an acquisition or want to understand more about Exit options, we look forward to meeting you at MiVaD."

Adam Zoldan
Knight CF



"ProVu are looking forward to meeting new Channel Partners at MiVaD and demonstrating how our range of value added services can help reduce the cost of deploy-

ing Customer Premise Equipment. Whether you're looking for quality VoIP hardware or remote installation support, ProVu have the skills and expertise to help. Visit us to discover more about our value-added services and how they fit your requirements."

Darren Garland
ProVu



"Channel Solutions Resource (CSR) enables the channel to engage a wider audience with its 'Support, Maintenance and Proposition' for telephony and data. With

'channel only access' to this service, it empowers the channel to grow revenues, because they can now Acquire, Secure and Migrate customers with existing PBX platforms to their own revenue focused solutions."

Don Moore
Channel Solutions Resource



"Make a difference where it matters most. Our call recording, reporting and evaluation solutions provide vital insights to inform business decisions, help motivate and

support teams, and enhance the customer experience. With more than 30 years' industry experience and 50,000+ systems already installed, we're your ideal partner when it comes to delivering real results."

James Emm
Oak Innovation



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Top marks: Partners bring

Technology is reshaping the education sector and pushing the limits of learning and its delivery. Here's how one channel partnership is harnessing full fibre to remodel the future of education.

The education sector is undergoing a technological transformation and Exa Networks, CityFibre's primary education partner, is at the forefront of this digital transformation. "Education sector requirements have shifted over the last few years with schools increasingly needing higher speed connectivity to get the best out of online teaching resources," said Mark Cowgill, Director and co-founder, Exa Networks. "Meanwhile, the emergence of academies has created a new dynamic in terms of purchasing with more opportunities for educators to seek out service arrangements that fit their particular needs."

As demand for bandwidth-intensive resources grows Cowgill expects more and more schools to introduce gigabit capacity services. "They're choosing connectivity options that offer the flexibility and capability to increase speed to match demands," he added. "Our DarkLight product is suitable for these schools, giving them the ability to increase their bandwidth within minutes at any time and for as long as needed. Schools also want secure connectivity at all times, and they're often looking for high upload speeds to make it easier to use cloud back-up services."

Andy Nash, Head of Public Sector at CityFibre, noted that the alternative provider has been supplying dark fibre

connectivity via its partners to a growing number of universities over the past year. "Demand is driven by the need for higher bandwidth of course, but it's additional benefits such as multiple fibres and full control over scalability for the future that really influence the decision making process," he explained. "We're also seeing more local authorities choosing to include schools in their procurements irrespective of the academisation programme."

Investing in dark fibre infrastructure to serve schools as well as other public sites maximises the benefits of a full fibre network investment. It also leaves schools free to focus their IT budgets on other priorities and serves to improve education across the whole region. That said, many schools are concerned with budgeting and planned cuts, which means that buying new technology isn't necessarily as much of a priority as it has been in recent years, noted Cowgill.

"Many of those wanting to introduce new technology are therefore looking for cost cutting solutions," he commented. "That could mean reducing time spent on things that could be handled quicker by technology. Or, increasingly, reducing what they're paying for various services."

ICT buyers in education face ongoing cost versus bandwidth challenges due to the relentless rise of



Mark Cowgill

Connectivity has become significantly more powerful and less expensive, and we expect things to get even better with the increasing availability of dark fibre

curriculum dependencies on Internet and IT use, and a constant pressure on available budgets. This is prompting them to take a much longer-term view of ICT investment, one that will derive savings over a lifetime and make the entire school or college ecosystem more efficient.

"That's exactly what full fibre solutions can deliver," stated Nash. "By providing easy and affordable access to dark fibre CityFibre gives

partners the choice and control they need to build and deploy services that are tailored to meet the needs of technologically demanding Higher and Further Education establishments, and more budget challenged primary and secondary schools. And of course, as CityFibre continues to accelerate its UK Gigabit City build, so the opportunity for digital transformation deepens right across the education and public sector

as well as for businesses in those same regions."

Fibre services are more important to schools now than ever – and this will only increase, believes Cowgill. "Even before considering the high bandwidth requirements of BYOD and tablet schemes (reliant on wireless connectivity), there's an overwhelming amount of genuinely useful material for students online and we're encouraged by the number



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ing fibre to the classroom

of schools that are actively working to get the best out of these resources," he added. "Over recent years connectivity has become significantly more powerful and less expensive, and we expect things to get even better with the increasing availability of dark fibre."

Future trends will also bring far more coding, applications development as well as distance and cloud-based learning, some of which will take place beyond a typical classroom environment. For these types of activities to be successful across multiple classes simultaneously, high capacity and scalable bandwidth will be increasingly essential, pointed out Nash. "The trend towards learning outside of the classroom using iPads and cloud will continue, leading to a greater dependency on ubiquity, resilience and performance of connectivity," he added.

"Wireless is a way to derive maximum use and flexibility from investments in full fibre and high capacity networks. But it also enables students

to break free from the classroom. This brings enrichment, flexibility and variety to learning for the benefit of all students and staff. Reliable wireless connectivity also opens the door to innovative new technologies and services that can help schools become safer, more efficient and far better managed."

Time to upgrade

A number of school districts are coming to the end of their connectivity contracts with local authorities over the coming months, so many schools will be looking to improve the services they're getting, prioritising higher speeds, increased reliability and better prices. "We also feel that there's going to be an increased focus on value added services such as content filtering, with schools looking to get the best possible offers from their providers," said Cowgill.

"Pure fibre connections, such as our DarkLight service, are a major area of opportunity for those looking to provide to schools. This technology enables the improved speeds that schools are looking



Andy Nash

for, while often allowing resellers to offer schools better pricing than other options – a real no lose situation in a lot of cases."

But getting a foothold in the education sector is a tough task for many resellers. "The main challenges generally relate to a reseller's ability to appear on key public sector framework agreements that universities and schools use to procure ICT services," said Nash. "This tends to restrict some of the smaller players as the costs and accreditations required to get a position

on these frameworks can be expensive."

Cowgill also underlined the challenge faced by smaller players. "It's traditionally quite difficult for resellers to approach schools," he said. "Most schools in any given area see their contracts renew at the same time, so there's a short period of opportunity for those looking to sell to the education sector, particularly considering the relatively long contract periods involved. Beyond that, it's often difficult for schools to actually talk to an unbiased source about the advantages of the various services available to them, so sites like EduGeek are invaluable in this respect."

CityFibre has a powerful message for the education sector. "The CityFibre model is one of inward investment, the stimulation of competition into next generation gigabit capable networks and progressively making fibre solutions available to all," stated Nash. "That starts with the education sector. All of our schools should be able to

benefit from the very best in connectivity and bandwidth speed. We should be equipping schools with the right infrastructure solution to support their needs.

"The JANET framework which procures dark fibre infrastructure has been successful in serving higher education requirements. We understand that this framework will be re-procured this year, potentially giving more companies the opportunity to bid for a secure position on the framework.

"We also encourage local government to procure on behalf of schools. By combining the civic estates of the local authority with the schools or higher education estate, substantial economies of scale and savings can be derived for the public sector. CityFibre has a number of examples where this shared platform proposition has been procured by local government, such as our Gigabit City projects in York, Kirklees and Edinburgh."

Education sector focus continues on page 48

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It's school time in ICT

Here, we talk to Gamma's Hosted Sales Specialist Sean Blackmore to explore how resellers can maximise the business opportunities during this year's peak buying time in the education sector.

Striking the right technology balance for schools and colleges, addressing three key concerns while demonstrating value are the keys to unlocking a market ripe with upgrade opportunities this year, believes Blackmore. "The main concerns for ICT buyers in schools and colleges are resilience, safety, and efficiency," he stated. "This sector is generally cost conscious so ICT solutions need to address these priority areas and hit the right price point. For schools and colleges, buying technology is less about solving problems and more about improvement, streamlining, being more efficient and safer. And resellers must make a proper assessment of these requirements."

Blackmore noted that schools and colleges are more receptive to the idea of investing in the right infrastructure, providing their three main priorities are met. "If this can be achieved at the right price then 2017 will be the year that educational establishments make the move from legacy systems and embrace new technology – so long as value is demonstrated," he added.

A big trend in schools is the rise of parent-teacher contact. Many schools offer parents the opportunity to have regular catch-ups with teachers to check on the progress of their children. By integrating a PC and CRM with a phone system a teacher is able to call parents via click-to-dial and log the topics of conversation in the CRM system. Call recording can also be used to record important parts of the conversation.

"The methods of contacting teachers are also expanding," added Blackmore. "For example, a teacher could be accessed via a soft phone application that supports chat. Or, should they not be at their desk phone, if a voicemail is left they can still pick it up providing the phone system supports voicemail to email. Alternatively, when the teacher leaves the classroom they can turn on mobile twinning, making them available on their mobile while on a school trip for example. These are just some examples of how schools are starting to embrace technology."

For resellers, the education sector also offers exciting



Sean Blackmore

upgrade opportunities for solutions such as a 'safety package' that can be sold as a bolt-on and act as a differentiator when compared to a reseller taking a one-size-fits-all approach. "Schools and colleges are placing a strong emphasis on practical applications, efficiency and productivity, and investing in technology helps them to advance this agenda," commented Blackmore. "In the past school administrators embraced technology to send emails to parents rather than give them printed letters to take home, meaning messages cannot be lost while saving on costs. The same is happening nowadays with telephony.

Flexibility

"Administration teams also see the benefit of an easy to use portal that enables them to make changes should there be an unexpected requirement. Having these conversations with end customers who accept

the benefits, and not just make a decision on price, are the biggest education sector opportunities."

In terms of the size of the opportunity, academies stand out as having more budget to spend, sometimes up to 10 per cent more from receiving funds for support services that used to go to local councils. "This means that many have more capital available for investment in technology and we have seen them adopting Gamma's hosted phone system, Horizon," added Blackmore. "We are making Horizon a more vertical oriented product. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach we have developed a proposition for six verticals, one of them being education, and produced a range of white label marketing material to support our partners in positioning these solutions to the relevant verticals. We can only see this trend continuing."

The main challenges faced by resellers addressing the education sector are cost and striking the right balance between 'overkill versus not enough'. "An all-singing and all-dancing proposition might put resellers out of contention when speaking to a school," he explained. "However, other products may be more affordable but lack the required security or resilience that a school needs. Finding the right balance has always been a challenge for resellers.

"But for those resellers who get it right a shift in the mindset of buyers in schools and colleges will ensure that this market sector continues to grow and present opportunities. At one time technology was viewed as a cost with no real benefits to an educational institute, now it is seen to improve efficiency and safety and deliver cost benefits."

Education sector focus continues on page 50



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Why schools are a playg

Ahead of the education sector's summertime ICT buying period Comms Dealer highlights the areas of opportunity for resellers and spotlights the technologies and integrated solutions under consideration by schools planning their summer break upgrades.

Bound by pressure to keep costs low, many education authorities have a technology agenda that takes the 'more for less' scenario to a new level. "The focus this year is on hardware, security and connectivity," said Phil Scanlon, Commercial Director of IT Services at Elitetele.com. "Online learning and online curriculum activities are also a priority, enabling pupils to study in or outside school and have the same experience, while removing the need for paper trails, physical books and paper study notes for revision. Pupils need access to coursework, notes, revision, tests and help wherever they are, especially outside of school hours."

Scanlon also noted the trend of schools opting to become academies and highlighted the challenges that are associated with this migration. "In becoming an academy a school needs to transition from local authority control into a more commercial-like organisation," he explained. "They need software to manage areas of the organisation that were previously handled by the local authority, such as financial accounts, payroll and property maintenance. We are also seeing a number of academies coming together to form multi-academy Trusts that require the centralised delivery of software applications. As

the number of academies joining multi-academy Trusts grows ICT buying will become a more centralised function with a focus on reducing costs through increased buying power."

When it comes to UK colleges, there is an aim for fewer, larger and more financially resilient organisations. As a result, many colleges are in the midst of a merger or have already merged with another local college, presenting a new opportunity for ICT suppliers. "There is potential for resellers to get in front of colleges during the merging process," explained Daisy's Public Sector Sales Director Justin Collins. "When the time comes to choose one single supplier their name is already in the hat."

Another important trend is distance learning. Colleges have a target to conduct 25 per cent of their teaching online. If they haven't already done so colleges will be looking for the infrastructure to successfully support the ability to interact remotely with large numbers of students. "This opens up talks for BYOD solutions, Wi-Fi and cloud networking, not to mention the security of those networks," added Collins. "And the fast pace of the mobile industry drives a more regular refresh cycle to ensure that the latest devices can be supported by the wireless infrastructure around the sites. We are



Mark Shane

New, faster networks are always needed in schools as the older infrastructure often fails to cope

dealing with Digital Natives here, so high quality connectivity is a must, along with the ability to access the network from wherever students are located and with speeds fast enough to do whatever they need to do."

Another area of focus, which is often underplayed, is a

telephony refresh. Many education sector institutions are sat on 30 year old telephony infrastructures that need replacing, and with BT set to turn off ISDN by 2025 many schools and colleges are doing a SIP migration at the same time. "It's important that their telephony has the ability to scale up and provide

the flexibility to merge services," noted Collins. "This is particularly important when it comes to demanding situations like clearing. That is why the option of Skype for Business is often an attractive one in these cases – it's cost-effective, easy to deploy and does what schools need it to do."

In terms of mobility, schools need staff members to be contactable on and off school grounds and able to access features remotely so that they can ensure parents or guardians are kept up to date. "For example, when a school trip is running late it's important that staff have a method to update the school's main announcement service," pointed out Craig Rimmer, Partner Account Manager, Panasonic Business. "There is more focus on cost saving, but an increased requirement for call recording and mobile integration. The infrastructure behind newer technologies such as mobile integration can be a challenge, and in some cases it's difficult to find cost-effective solutions that meet the requirements of some organisations within education."

Distributor ICON works closely with channel partners in the education space and the recurring theme is connectivity and safeguarding. Schools, teachers and students want to be part of the connected world but the challenge



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round of opportunities

is to meet the network and connectivity needs of all those involved without compromising the duty of care to either party. "ICON worked hard to secure the 4ipnet product simply because of its suitability in tough markets like these," said Mark Shane, Sales Director at ICON. "Not only does 4ipnet provide fast wireless networking and role-based connectivity restrictions, it is also approved for wireless voice which is desirable today."

ICON continues to witness strong demand for wireless communication devices as this sector needs to communicate with the core faster than ever before. There is also high demand

for tablet-based classrooms and e-learning. This will create channel opportunities not just for tablet hardware and support but also for the wireless and fixed network infrastructures. "Schools want to provide students with Internet access but at the same time need to restrict and manage the bandwidth they consume," added Shane. "Some schools want to allow Facebook access during lunch time but not at other times. Because of these complex requirements we have seen growing interest in better Wi-Fi management."

Interest in 4G connectivity also continues to grow and ICON has been consulting with partners and their clients to understand what

they want to achieve from this technology. Wireless networking has also been enhanced with the release of 802.11ac Wave 2.

"New, faster networks are always needed in schools as the older infrastructure often fails to cope with up to 30 students in a small area all turning on notebooks at the same time," commented Shane.

Wireless upgrades

"The initial surge of pulling down their roaming profiles from the network can make a Wi-Fi network grind to a halt. ICON has partners who have sold as many as three wireless network upgrades to the same school as demand for faster more robust wireless networking increases."

The days when a teacher simply regurgitates text books are long gone. "The new approach in many primary and secondary schools is an 8-10 minute screen cast at the beginning of the lesson to outline the learning objectives," commented Shane. "The lesson itself will then use various mediums to support the learning objectives. This is becoming more and more dependent on Wi-Fi and results cannot be achieved without a robust wireless network. We all know the frustration of trying to work in a hotel on a poor Wi-Fi connection, imagine trying to learn while using one."

For reasons such as this there are less schools that

want to buy technology at a low price, and more that want to engage with partners who can help them understand how to achieve their goals. "There is also greater demand for enhanced support and maintenance packages as schools become more dependent on the technologies deployed in them," commented Shane. "Technology will continue to play an important role in education. Purchasers in this sector are becoming more aware that a wait and see approach to technology is not a workable model. Being married to a maths teacher has also opened my eyes to how technology is being used in schools and colleges. It has changed a lot since I was in short trousers." ■

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Intec approach resolves

Full support in the supply of converged communications and IT services, a pioneering new buy-and-build business model and well planned route to exit offered – that's how mobile dealers can benefit from joining the Intec Business Network, according to Chairman Simon Howitt.

There is nothing secret about Howitt's formula for Intec Business Network's future success nor the rationale that underpins his strategy and proposition. Some get carried away with a great idea only to see it falter no matter how well thought out. But Howitt's big ambition is more a reflection of sound strategy than aspiration and optimism, drawing on knowledge gained from hard earned experience. And his plan to introduce to the mobile channel a pioneering new business model could not be more timely.

The importance of striking an equilibrium between bold visions and real world market opportunities was a lesson learnt by Howitt during his time at Outsourcery, a lesson he is putting to good use now with Intec. "I always want to be ahead of the pack and ride the wave of opportunity, but not so far ahead that you get battered when the wave breaks," he stated. "Outsourcery was far too forward and there were too many doubters. We had a great idea, great positioning and great people, but we were too pioneering. The big lesson learnt – no matter how great the idea, don't be too far ahead."

It is with this knowledge and acute sense of optimum timing that Howitt is introducing Intec Business Network to

the mobile channel with great confidence having already piqued the interest of private equity players who form part of the business plan's end game. The objective is to bring a network of mobile dealers together who recognise the need to broaden their portfolios but do not have the resources to achieve their ambitions to become one-stop-shop comms and IT providers. Intec delivers these capabilities through its technology team that operates under the SparkHub banner. Companies using this service alone are called Affiliate partners and by committing over and above less beneficial third party relationships they receive a bigger share of the revenues.

Driving value

But Intec's primary goal is to drive a buy and build strategy and bring strong customer relationships under its wing rather than simply acquiring customer bases with cross sell potential. This way Intec can help dealers engage with customers loyal to them and provide consultancy services. Mobile dealers who become technology services providers will naturally sell a wider set of solutions which means they could double the valuation of their business. Because of this upside the seller gains extra advantages beyond those of a standard disposal.

"We are clear with all partners that our plan is to



Simon Howitt

We are not looking to buy bases. We want access to strong customer relationships

build the network and within a three to five year period we will sell," commented Howitt. "At this point we envisage selling to PE and have discussed our plan with a small number of PE companies that are monitoring our progress. The upside of a PE deal is that 'owned' partners will benefit from enhanced values and PE will be attracted by the potential to scale.

Partners who have helped to grow the business can continue if they wish."

Howitt aims to have six engaged and active partners by the end of the year, three of them owned by Intec. "Next year we want to reach 15 rising to 25 by the end of 2019," he added. "Within six months of pioneering the concept with Hale Communications we

took the proposition to over 25 customers and 15 have already engaged while others are in progress. We appeal to dealers who understand that their customers want more than mobile but they don't have the capabilities to meet this demand. Our proposition enables such dealers to offer a solutions sell that pulls through products naturally. Dealers also need to understand that customers

mobile dealer dilemma

don't expect everything for free and will pay for services if they see value."

Howitt does not want to build a large network of partners, he aims to create a more intimate and hands-on relationship. "We are not looking to buy bases," added Howitt. "We want access to strong customer relationships and the dynamic between the dealer and their customer base is important. A differentiator for those we own is that their identity remains in place and we drive centralised back office synergies."

Building channel relationships that stand the test of time is one of Howitt's long held specialities. His career began in advertising and while working on a number of technology and mobile accounts he was introduced to Yes Telecom. "I joined the company as Sales & Marketing Director and continued for three years following its sale to Vodafone," explained Howitt. "Yes Telecom was acknowledged as a model channel business and its reputation is still an industry talking point. I then joined the team that backed an MBO of Genesis from DSG and was one of four founding shareholders of Outsourcery which launched as a Cloud Services Provider.

"Soon after its IPO in 2013 Finance Director David Burke and myself left. I remained close to David and also Ray Bell who was CTO at Yes Telecom. We collaborated on projects at Outsourcery. The three of us discussed the industry and where it was heading. It was a conversation that gave rise to the Intec concept."

Early last year the trio developed a plan to show how Intec could grow and quietly launched the concept in the summer. "We are now ready to extend our reach to partners who want to remain in their business and drive growth but also have an exit plan that benefits them by taking some value off the table now," added Howitt. "By offering more of a 'club' and collaborative feel they can join something that retains their identity but at the same time they are part of something bigger."

Methodology

According to Bell, Intec's approach is based on a three stage methodology. "Firstly, investing time to understand our clients business, how they operate, their history and their plans for the future," he explained. "Secondly, we include in our scope all business processes and technology solutions from telecoms services to business applications and physical IT infrastructure. Thirdly, we set out a future technology vision and support the process of change with a plan that is achievable, has something in it for everyone and is business case led. By following this process



Ray Bell

we are able to help our clients to make best use of technology and improve the way they work."

But the frustration is that too many dealers have their head in the sand, are wedded to products, not solutions, and engage in price wars that devalue the industry. According to Howitt they need to wake up and smell the coffee. "When Yes Telecom was at the forefront of BlackBerry's surge of 'email on the move' we saw some dealers turn their backs and say 'this will never catch on'. In 2010 and 2011 when Outsourcery shared its vision many dealers and conventional providers thought we had just arrived from another planet. Now everyone is rushing into the cloud and providers who scoffed at cloud services are now building their proposition on them. What was seen as futuristic is now standard. It's no longer about convergence of telecoms, it's about the convergence and integration of all business collaboration and communication needs. It's about the convergence of mobile, voice and IT."

Analysis cited by Howitt suggests that just 20 per cent of a customer's technology spend goes into telecoms, meaning that many mobile dealers are leaving money on the table for more rounded rivals to pick up and potentially swipe the mobile spend from under their nose. The opportunity and risk is plain to see and Intec's intention is to help partners capitalise on the opportunities and de-risk not only from the competition but also from the challenge of recruiting specialist resources into their business

and onto the payroll. For wise dealers there is a strong incentive to join the Intec Business Network and tap into its technology specialist team. "This function is run by Ray and is what the partner takes to their customers," said Howitt. "We will be developing regional centres for SparkHub to make sure we are close to partners throughout the UK."

Once Intec has engaged with a partner the first job is to get them thinking about the concept of solutions versus products and to understand where the real value lies. The majority of partners open up quickly, enabling Intec to identify their obstructing issues. "They come to understand that customers need to see value," explained Howitt. "If dealers can show how technology and their skills can improve business processes companies will pay. Customers want help and advice to ensure they make the right technology decisions. So dealers must not fall into the mobile trap and crash the price assuming that customers will not pay for services that are valuable to them.

"The biggest opportunity is getting SMEs to understand that they can benefit from technology they thought only affordable by larger enterprise and corporate organisations. We can show them the value that technology brings to their business. We energise dealers to generate growth from their base, we motivate them to continue growing and share in greater future value. We have been in mobile, we have been in cloud services, we understand the channel, and we have a great blend of skills and capabilities."

Just a minute with Simon Howitt...

Tell us something about yourself we don't know:

I was a 'visible' extra in a Red Nose day video featuring Tom Jones and Rob Brydon. It got to Number 1

What talent do you wish you had? To be more patient

Role model: I was fortunate enough to work with Martin Sorrell soon after he established WPP. He's a highly intelligent and formidable person, with a clear vision, bags of ambition and also approachable

What do you fear the most? Missing an opportunity

One example of something you have overcome: A life threatening illness. I'm fully recovered

What's the biggest risk you have taken and why? Coming out of my comfort zone and joining Yes Telecom. But it was a great experience and I worked with great people

Name three ideal dinner guests (past or present):

Nelson Mandela for his pure inspiration and accomplishments; Seve Ballesteros, an absolute legend who might give me a short game lesson; and Paul Merton who can see the funny side of anything

How would you like to be remembered? As someone who was good to work with, treated others as I would like to be treated myself, inspired leadership, infused the team with purpose and direction

Your strengths and what could you improve on?

Resilience, belief and determination. I never give up. But I could work on being more patient



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Moore's strategy revamp

The revamp of EMIT's strategic approach has delivered clarity, focus, confidence and growth, says Managing Director Eamon Moore who reveals the thinking behind his expansion plans.

Just a minute with Eamon Moore...

Role model? Richard Branson for the variety of his businesses

What talent do you wish you had? To play the piano

Your biggest career achievement? Collecting the Microsoft Global Partner of the Year award closely followed by lunch with Michael Dell

Something about yourself we don't know: I got 12 hole-in-ones as a junior pitch and putt player

Three ideal dinner guests? Three tech investors!

What do you fear the most? Just a Minute quizzes!

Top tip for resellers: Don't call yourself a reseller

How do you relax when not working? Family, friends and sport

What are your greatest strengths and what could you work on? Networking is probably my main strength. I could work on time management

One thing you could not do without in your job? LinkedIn

What's the biggest risk you have taken and why? Our recent company restructure. It was a gamble based on what we needed to be in the future rather than relying on the past

Describe EMIT's culture: Ambitious, fun, open, driven and focused

What possession could you not live without? My smartphone

In April this year Dublin-based IT services firm EMIT (Eamon Moore IT) acquired the managed services business and customer base of local rival Softech, boosting its customer base to over 3,500 end users across enterprise, SMB and public sector organisations. The deal is expected to add a further two million euros in revenue over the next three years and is the latest step forward in Moore's well planned growth strategy. "EMIT has ambitious business development goals and will drive growth, both organically and through more acquisitions," he confirmed.

Moore established EMIT in 2003 following a solid grounding in the outsourced IT space. His IT career began earlier than most. It started after an introduction to his teacher's brother who ran CSK Software, one of Dermot Desmond's companies. Moore was just 15 at the time and spent his summers and school breaks working in CSK's IT department to learn the trade. During this period he completed a degree in Computer Applications. "In 1999 I was then lucky enough to work under another of Ireland's leading entrepreneurs, Denis O'Brien," commented Moore. "The Head of IT in CSK Software was appointed to launch Esat Clear, O'Brien's first venture into the residential Internet market. I was brought in to help set up the technical support department along with my CSK colleague."



Eamon Moore

It isn't just about going the extra mile for a customer, it's about being alongside them on the journey

In 2002 Moore took a call from Finbarr Crowley, Managing Partner of legal firm Crowley Millar Solicitors (who now sits on the EMIT board as Non-Executive Chairman) requesting consultancy services on IT projects. "I was still working

part-time in Esat but we agreed I would provide these services two days a week," recalled Moore. "The EMIT seed was sown. A few months later after receiving more interest in my outsourced IT model I resigned from Esat. My

week was full and I was officially in business."

The outsourced IT model was a big draw for SMEs. And after a number of years operating this model as a sole trader Moore set up his limited company in 2008



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EMITs beaming prospects

and opened his first office in Park House on the North Circular Road in Dublin. "I hired my first employees to build up a small team and we won a number of outsourced contracts," said Moore. "Businesses also required support and advice outside of our outsourced time so we built an IT support helpdesk service that would support our clients remotely."

This period of development coincided with the market uncertainty of the economic downturn but Moore said EMIT had a 'good recession' as its model and outsourced offering helped many businesses to benefit from a viable IT solution despite not being able to invest in internal resources.

Having shown a resilient business model founded on solid experience Moore then decided to further his prospects by completing a diploma in Cloud Strategy at the Irish Management Institute in Dublin in 2012. "This transformed my thinking around business and the value of focus," he explained. "Our strategy lecturer closed the course by saying, 'with business strategy, it is just as important to be clear about what you won't do as it is about what you will do'. That line has stayed with."

Armed with knowledge and experience and following six months of research and planning Moore revamped his strategy in

2014. "After 10 years of providing consultancy and IT outsourcing services the EMIT board made a decision to move away from this business model which had become too broad and resource intensive," he said.

Four pillars

"We had amassed over 20 industry partnerships which was unmanageable. We also looked at key technology solutions and realigned EMIT to deliver the four pillars of Infrastructure, Cloud, Security and Business Productivity solutions. These are supported by a number of professional services including managed services, helpdesk, support, project management, training and consultancy. We made the

bold decision to significantly reduce our partnerships, with Dell and Microsoft appointed at tier one level."

Moore's business pillars showcase the core technology solutions that he now delivers. The move has resulted in EMIT's most successful period with record growth in turnover and staff headcount (currently 16) as well as a number of industry accolades, the most notable being 2016 Microsoft Global Partner of the Year for SMB Cloud Solutions. "I spend a number of weeks each year with the Microsoft senior leadership team in Redmond," said Moore. "Close relationships with vendors are as vital as having constant

engagements with customers about their business and technology challenges. It isn't just about going the extra mile for a customer, it's about being alongside them on the journey.

"This has led to further investments in our Business Intelligence practice. We want to bring BI to companies of all shapes and sizes to help them understand the true value of data. We will also focus more on technology-based solutions, enhance our security range and increase our software development capabilities. We intend to become a much larger organisation supported by investment and more strategic acquisitions." ■

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Winners all! What a celebration for channel sales and marketing stars

There can never be any doubt that the UK's top channel teams know how to celebrate success and they did so in style at this year's 'biggest and best' Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards.



KCOM's Henry West set the tone for the afternoon

The ballroom at the glamorous Park Lane Hotel in London's Mayfair was bursting at the seams as 400 channel stars assembled to acknowledge the channel's top revenue generating teams from the distribution, vendor and reseller sectors of the channel.

Sponsored by KCOM, the annual awards were presented by Radio Five Live's Colin Murray who was the consummate host for a very special afternoon event that gave the channel's brightest stars the chance to acknowledge the amazing work carried out, day in day out, by their hard-working sales and marketing teams.

Stand-out winners were Entanet and ProVu who both scooped a brace of awards and Pure Telecom who collected SME Sales Team of the Year trophy along with the coveted overall Comms Dealer Channel Team of the Year award.

This year's event also saw the debut of two new awards, Best Apprenticeship Scheme and Best Company to Work For, picked up by Lily Comms and Berry Telecom respectively.

"Channel sales are as good as they have ever been as the record breaking Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards has underlined," stated Comms Dealer Editorial Director Nigel Sergent. "All of our finalists are to be congratulated on their achievements and deserve wide recognition for their hard work."

Awards judge Lee Shorten added: "Entries this year were exceptional. The quality and breadth of the submissions has shown me that channel companies are upping their game and developing top notch sales and marketing teams which are ignoring the economic news and smashing targets via resilient selling and creative marketing."



Host Colin Murray was an audience winner

WINNERS' QUOTES

"It was evident from the outset that this was a first-class event. Colin Murray was right on point with a great mixture of humour and kept the whole event flowing at the right pace. Pure were over the moon to not just pick up the award we entered but also the covered Team of The Year Award."

MATT SANDFORD – PURE TELECOM

"Winning the award has been a real boost to Berry, it's all very well us thinking we're the best place to work at but to have it confirmed via a national award is very humbling."

SIMON LANGFORD – BERRY TELECOM

"The Comms Dealer Sales and Marketing awards ceremony this year was by far and away the best to date. Colin Murray was engaging, warm and extremely funny."

STEVE YATES – CHANNEL TELECOM

"We work hard to disrupt the IT space with creative and innovative marketing campaigns. The awards ceremony was fantastic and we were proud to win Best Reseller Marketing Campaign."

HANNAH CUNNINGHAM – CISILION

"It was evident from the outset that this was a first-class event. Colin Murray was right on point with a great mixture of humour and kept the whole event flowing at the right pace. Pure were over the moon to not just pick up the award we entered but also the cover."

DARREN FARNDEN – ENTANET

"Everyone at Exsel Group is absolutely delighted with our recent Comms Dealer Sales Award win which provides huge motivation for everyone. The event was superb and made great by a fantastically funny Collin Murray."

TOM MCDONALD – EXSEL

"The Comms Dealer Sales & Marketing Awards just keep getting bigger and more impressive with every year. Colin Murray was the perfect host, hilarious and enthusiastic and being the inaugural winners of Best Apprenticeship Scheme is a tremendous honour."

CHRIS MORRISEY - LILY COMMS

"The Comms Dealer Sales and Marketing Awards are always a great event to attend. This year was particularly entertaining with Colin Murray as host. Having scooped two awards, it was great for our team to receive such recognition in front of industry peers."

DARREN GARLAND – PROVU

"What a fantastic event with a great host in Colin Murray. To collect the award for Large Reseller Sales Team of the Year in front of all our industry peers was the perfect way to spend an afternoon."

DANIEL FULLER-SMITH - SWCOMMS

The awards, hosted to perfection by Colin Murray, were a great celebration of the effort put in by the many sales and marketing teams in the industry. Our Best Vendor Partner Programme Award provides us with the perfect springboard to develop our partner activity even further."

MARK ELWOOD – TELEWARE



ROLL OF HONOUR



Distributor Channel Sales Team of the Year – ProVu Communications



Distributor Channel Marketing Team of the Year – Pragma



Distributor Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year – ProVu Communications



Service Provider Channel Sales Team of the Year – Channel Telecom



Service Provider Channel Marketing Team of the Year – Fidelity Group



Service Provider Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year – Assembly Channel Services



Vendor Channel Sales Team of the Year – Entanet



Vendor Channel Marketing Team of the Year – Entanet



Vendor Channel Marketing Campaign of the Year – Union Street



Best Vendor Partner Programme – TeleWare



Reseller Sales Team of the Year with a turnover up to £2.5m – Pure Telecom



Reseller Sales Team of the Year with a turnover between £2.5m & £5m – Exsel Group



Reseller Sales Team of the Year with a turnover of above £5m – SWComms



Reseller Best Marketing Campaign – Cisilion



Best Partner or Customer Event – Gamma



Best Partner or Customer Portal – Daisy Wholesale



Best Apprenticeship Scheme – Lily Comms



Best Company to Work for – Berry Telecom



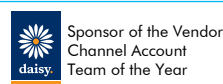
The Comms Dealer Team of the Year – PureTelecom



Union Street Head of Sales & Marketing Vincent Disneur donated the 5-star holiday he won in the Sparks Charity draw to his marketing manager Gareth Pritchard.

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Metronet's key hire



Mike Darcey

LIVINGBRIDGE-backed Metronet (UK) has appointed Mike Darcey as Chairman. The move coincides with a rebrand of Metronet (UK) to M24Seven following the acquisition of Venus in March. Darcey was formerly CEO at News UK from 2013 to 2015 following a 15 year stint at BSkyB where he was Head of Strategy and latterly COO. He has also held a number of Non-Exec Director roles at PA Group and Home Retail Group.

Darcey commented: "In the UK, M24Seven has a proprietary wireless network and access to local loop unbundled fibre, particularly in London. This is a differentiated proposition in a crowded market. Globally, M24Seven has an IXP network across 16 cities which is only just beginning to be exploited. I will work with the team to shape the strategy and see what we can achieve together."

CEO Lee Perkins added: "Mike joins the team at an integral point where we bring so much hard work to life, especially our brand. At M24Seven, we believe that well-connected businesses are more productive and our new brand reflects our ability to support our customers around the clock, enabling them to get more done, 24-seven."

Zest4 brings in IoT whizz

ZEST4 has enlisted Ian Davis as M2M & IoT Business Development Manager to work alongside Anton Le Saux who was appointed Head of M2M in September 2016. Davis brings over 20



Ian Davis

years mobile industry experience and has notable stints at Ericsson and Exertis under his belt.

He also worked at 3A Telecom and Yes Telecom, both companies established by Zest4 founder Freddie Fazelynia. Davis' new remit is to help grow the network of Zest4 partners offering M2M solutions to end customers. He said: "We have clear targets and a robust strategy for the M2M and IoT market. It's an exciting time to join Zest4 and help build the future of a growing company."

Mandy Fazelynia, Operations & Business Development Director, commented: "Adding an additional member to our team will enable us to further achieve our ambitions."

Also on the move...



Dave Hudson

THE appointment of Dave Hudson as Managing Director of Zen's Wholesale division is the culmination of the firm's strategy to establish a separate Wholesale business. "We need to have the mentality of a start-up because

what we're doing is new for the company," said Hudson. "We want to put Zen on the map in the wholesale space and have the skills and the infrastructure to become a major player. The next few years will see much wider adoption of ultrafast technologies such as FTTP and G.Fast, while FTTC will replace ADSL in becoming the norm."

FORMER Brightstar VP for OEM in EMEA Richard Ferguson has joined distributor Exertis as Head of Commercial. Prior to his three stint at Brightstar he spent eight years with Vodafone as Commercial



Richard Ferguson

Director. Previous roles include senior management positions with T-Mobile and BT. "It's an exciting time at Exertis," said Ferguson. "I was attracted by the ambition of the company and am looking forward to working with vendors to drive incremental business for our customers."

NG Bailey's IT MD recruited



Peter Jones

NG BAILEY has recruited Peter Jones as Managing Director of its IT Services division, taking over from Bob Dunnett who has retired. Jones reports directly to CEO David Hurcomb and joins from G4S where he was Managing Director of Facilities Management UK and Ireland. He

has also held senior leadership positions at CBRE and Carillion. Hurcomb said: "Bob has done a great job and leaves us with a strong client base and an expanding pipeline of new business opportunities. I now look forward to working closely with Peter to continue the development of the division. He has a well deserved reputation and a deep understanding of providing complex services to both the private and public sector."

Jones added: "Developments in Smart Buildings, the Internet of Things and increased digitisation of client businesses are all creating significant demand for our core structured cabling and managed services solutions, both within new build and major refurbishment programmes. I look forward to leading the IT Services business at this pivotal time."

Logicalis names Radcliffe as FD

LOGICALIS UK has welcomed Stuart Radcliffe as its new Finance Director, replacing Paul Crilly who has taken on a new role within a Datatec Group firm in Australia.

Radcliffe brings over 20 years experience and joins Logicalis UK from Unify where he was CFO responsible for the governance of various territories within APAC, EMEA and Russia, managing a combined business turnover exceeding 400 million euros. Prior to this, Radcliffe held Finance Director positions at Acentic, Affiniti and Omnetica.

Radcliffe reports directly to Managing Director Bob Swallow who said: "Stuart's knowledge and experience will enable him to contribute to our strategy of putting our customers at the centre of everything we do, giving them access to the full portfolio of Logicalis solutions."



Stuart Radcliffe

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Our partners benefit from the highest levels of support, customer service and choice, enabling them to drive efficiencies, improve productivity and profitability within their business. This flexible approach, constant innovation and new product development programmes have placed Daisy Wholesale at the forefront of its field and made it the natural choice for the channel.

WDP_{co}

We buy Cisco equipment

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